Gastonia 2025 Comprehensive Plan

Our Place in the Future

GASTONIA 2025
our place in the future

Gastonia 2025 Comprehensive Plan

Adopted May 17, 2011

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- Regional Planning
- Utilities and Urban Services
- Transportation and Land Use Patterns
- Environmental Quality
- Open Space, Parks and Recreation
- Neighborhoods
- The Center City
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- The Photo Assignment
- Community Character Survey

Gastonia 2025:
Our Place in the Future

Key Guiding Principles

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A

KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Executive Summary

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 our city to become, as a tool for making decisions to achieve that vision, and as a specific program of action for reaching the stated objectives.

City Council adopted Gastonia's first comprehensive plan, CityVision 2010, in July 1995. Divided into three sections, the plan begins with Gastonia's history, then discusses ten specific planning subjects and finishes with an in-depth plan for the six sectors of the City. It incorporated and built upon many previous small area and corridor plans. Since its adoption, the City has successfully implemented many of the goals and objectives, such as a "sphere-of-influence" agreement with Dallas, the new Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway, and the Gateway Corridor Overlay. New small area plans that reflect changes in growth and policy directives, such as the Southeast Plan and the Smyre Plan were written, adopted and incorporated into the current plan.

In January 2001, the City began the update of the current comprehensive plan. The process to develop the new plan, Gastonia 2025: Our Place in the Future has two phases. The first phase was to formulate 8-12 "key guiding principles" that will become the plan's foundation as it is written. The second stage is writing the actual plan, which includes goals and objectives to achieve the key guiding principles. A subcommittee of 30 people from throughout the community and representing various City committees has been involved with the process, receiving technical support from the Planning Department.

Planning staff organized three brainstorming and information gathering activities to help the community envision how Gastonia should grow and develop. A symposium series invited experts from around the city, region and state to discuss various planning and development issues. The second visioning session was a photo assignment given to members of the steering committee. The purpose of this exercise was to encourage the group to take notice of current conditions and visualize how Gastonia could develop in the future. The final exercise was the Community Character Survey. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section was a questionnaire to gather the participant's ideas about general development concepts. The second section was a visual survey that required the participants to rate how appropriate various images would be for the future of Gastonia.

From these three sessions, eleven key guiding principles emerged. These principles will lead the development of the plan when writing the goals and objectives of each section. Each principle does not function alone; rather in many cases, they overlap. For instance, when writing goals and objectives for transportation and land use planning, the principles of growth patterns, regional planning and environmental quality is also considered.

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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.

Key Issues and Guiding Principles – In Depth

Growth Patterns and Directions

The City of Gastonia continues to grow in both population and geographic area. During the 1990's, our population increased 21%, and through annexations, the city's physical size went from 30.40 square miles to 46.06 square miles. A growing population creates a demand for additional residential and retail development. The residential component of this growth has been mostly in the form of low density single family housing. New commercial outlets that have spread along major corridors quickly followed. This land use pattern has contributed to increased traffic congestion, the elimination of natural areas, and increased municipal costs. A positive growth rate is necessary for fiscal stability, therefore, Gastonia will continue to welcome new residents both within its current boundaries, and within any newly annexed areas. With a finite amount of land available for growth, policies and agreements are necessary to protect our future growth areas and to ensure an expanding revenue base for years to come. **Over the next twenty years, the City will stimulate a development pattern that will allow it to operate as a fiscally responsible entity.** Emphasis will be placed on the redevelopment of existing properties, new development where services already exist and more cost-effective development styles: thus allowing the City to efficiently serve a larger population.

It has been a long time goal that all parts of our city should enjoy growth. With the size and influence of Charlotte, this will be difficult without the continued interjection of public policy and private investment. Economic forces pull development towards the southeast, while disinvestments push development away from the central and western portions of the City. The enactment of an aggressive code enforcement plan to improve the westside's visual appearance and the construction of a new sewer outfall to allow additional development are two examples of public policy that have affected growth patterns. As a result, new suburban style housing developments have begun to pop up along Carson and Oates Roads. Additionally, the Wal-Mart planned for the abandoned Nichols site is the first large commercial development for this area in a decade. Many acres of Gastonia's most scenic land remain undeveloped in the City's western portion and the opportunity still exists to capitalize on this asset. The adoption of and compliance with effective plans and policies, will help this area develop fiscally sustainable, with coordinated land uses and with the continuation of some of Gastonia's most beautiful vistas.

Economic Development

The textile industry built, grew, and sustained Gastonia for many years. Because of the available labor force, infrastructure and cultural climate Gastonia easily added other industries to its employment mix over a 40-year period. However, even with these additions the principal employment sector continued to be heavy industry. As these heavier industries shut down or became less labor intensive, they no longer supplied the strong employment base for the community nor the tax and utility revenues to the city. Gastonia will continue to support its existing businesses while recruiting new ones. However, for the future Gastonia will take a broader perspective to how it defines economic development. Without restructuring its own economic base, Gastonia could evolve into a bedroom community of Charlotte. **To ensure its long-term economic prosperity, Gastonia of the future will focus to develop a diverse economic base.**

Previously the formula for business recruitment played heavily on a city's water, sewer and road systems. While all of these remain important, today's knowledge based economy has added two other elements to the mix - quality of life and education. Many location recruiters give high scores to amenities such as entertainment, recreation, and cultural events. Gastonia should be proud of its current facilities such as the Schiele Museum of Natural History and Planetarium, nearby Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens and Crowder's Mountain. Local leaders should emphasize all these points of interest and activity during business recruiting. Future amenities to

add to the mix are performing arts groups, a vibrant downtown and new recreational facilities. Sufficient education and training are the foundation for the knowledge based economy, requiring businesses looking for new locations to consider the educational level of the potential work force. Not only do recruiters want a well-educated work force, but they also appraise a community's ability to provide lifelong learning opportunities. Streamlining the development approval process can also help the business community and support entrepreneurship. Competing with Charlotte, Hickory and other communities for new businesses is a challenging responsibility, which requires an aggressive marketing effort. A concerted, sustained and financed effort to promote Gastonia and to reinforce a positive image is essential.

Human Resource Development

Skilled and flexible workers are a very important asset for companies and communities. Competitive firms need workers who can easily adjust to new product ideas, who can be trained in new technology, and who can produce more efficiently. According to ***Gaston 2012 – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy***, the single biggest challenge facing our community is the relative lack of preparedness of the workforce to cope with the new economic realities. When comparing the educational measures of Gaston County with national and state levels, Gaston has a lower percentage of adults with college degrees, lower levels of high school attainment, lower mean SAT scores, higher dropout rates, and lower per pupil spending on K-12 education. Human resource development is primarily the function of the county and state, carried out through their formal education and social services programs. The city's role is to ensure their policies are consistent with and supportive of the goals of the agencies whose mission is the development and training of our human capital. **Gastonia will work with local leaders to help carry out the goals of state and county agencies to educate and train the community.**

Regional Planning

The City is a member of the Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) - linked together by transportation, economies and natural environments. As the region continues to grow and political boundaries become less important, it is critical to remain active in regional planning efforts. Many organizations exist to provide a forum to discuss the region's interests such as the Gastonia led Charlotte Regional Alliance for Transportation (CRAFT), the Centralina Council of Governments' Sustainable Environment for Quality of Life (SEQL), and Voices and Choices. All of these organizations have been very productive in their education, discussion and planning efforts. Statewide legislation to provide for regional land use coordination would improve the implementation process and further the success of these groups. Without that mandate and without a commitment from all regional players it is difficult for each entity to remain steadfast to the region's goals. Nevertheless, we can continue to share information and coordinate with our regional partners to make the best use of our limited resources.

Gastonia also participates within a smaller regional entity – Gaston County and the other local municipalities. The City took part in the County's recently adopted land use plan and Gaston 2012 – a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. It also functions as the lead agency of the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, which has been successful in protecting right of way corridors for countywide future transportation projects. **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.**

Utilities and Urban Services

The City provides and maintains public services and facilities such as sewer, water, parks, fire, and police. It is also a regional provider of water and sewer services to other Gaston County municipalities and northern York County, SC. These facilities and services expanded as our population increased from both new construction and annexation. In the recent past, to meet the wants and needs of the community the City built a Police Station, four Fire Stations, and two award-winning projects, Martha Rivers Park and the Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenways.

Over the past decade, the strongest demand for new construction has been in the southeast. However, this is also the area with the least amount of available sewer capacity. Regardless of the availability of water and sewer lines, development will occur where the demand is, even if this results in more wells and septic tanks. The design of new public facilities such as water and sewer should support the land use proposed by the Plan. Additionally, the Plan must consider the cost of water and sewer services when recommending future land use. **The City will provide adequate, reliable, and affordable 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.**

Transportation and Land Use Patterns

The overall movement of vehicles across the city is well managed. Previous bond packages have provided the funding for construction of new cross-town roads in the growing southern section. However, over time the established land use pattern of low density, single family developments disconnected from retail, work and school will lead to congestion. It can be argued that this configuration, in conjunction with the strong personal preference of individual automobile use and the lack of transportation alternatives, has caused the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) to increase more than three times the rate of population growth. Improving and expanding transit options along with land use patterns that support public transportation will help reduce this trend. The future Garden Parkway is an example of a new road that will provide an opportunity for cross county transportation, economic development and congestion relief for I-85. However, without a proactive development policy, one-acre residential lots built on septic tanks, tucked in between, but not connected to other land uses, will surround the Parkway. The key is to balance the road's functionality with its potential for needed economic development.

In 1990, 64,000 Gaston County residents worked within the county. Ten years later, even with a larger population, only 56,000 Gaston County residents worked within the county. That equates to a 13% decrease of people who both lived and worked within the county. During that same period 39% more of Gaston County residents commuted to Mecklenburg County. Chances are a large majority did so using I-85. While this corridor currently offers one the best commuting times to Charlotte, this will not continue. One solution is transit. Whether in the form of bus rapid transit or rail, a future corridor should be determined, preserved and developed appropriately. **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.**

Environmental Quality

An aerial tour of Gastonia would reveal the City's clean air, flowing streams and lush tree canopy. While these natural amenities still dominate the landscape, our, and the greater region's, sprawling growth pattern and increasing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) have put our environment at risk. Although transportation accounts for a significant portion of emissions, it is also where the most improvement has taken place since 1970. Federally initiated technological changes such as reformulated gasoline, more efficient engines, on-board diagnostic systems and catalytic converters have reduced emissions. However, the rate of reduction may slow because of the increasing VMT. To further reduce emissions on a local level, we can promote carpooling, walking and bicycling. Encouraging new land use patterns such as compact mixed use and transit oriented developments may also result in fewer vehicles miles traveled and better air quality. Another environmental concern is the health of our waterways. The increasing amount of impervious surfaces such as parking lots, rooftops and roads has worsened our stream conditions, making the protection of our watersheds critical. Finally, acres consumed by development have reduced forests and grasslands and eliminated many natural habitat corridors. Our land, air and water are our most precious resources and we must take care of them. **Gastonia will lead and cooperate with the region to establish policies that preserve and enhance our natural environment.**

Open Space, Parks and Recreation

Our moderate growth rate does have its benefits. Not only can we learn from others, but we also have large tracts of land still available for open space

preservation and future recreation needs. These large tracts, combined with Crowder's Mountain State Park, existing local parks, potential greenways along our creek corridors, nearby Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens, and recent conservancy acquisitions all provide the elements for Gastonia to be known as the "Green Community." Creating linkages and connections to these places will draw attention to them, make their use easy and help ensure their success. If marketed properly, these assets could make us stand out throughout the region, attracting people and businesses to Gastonia, and making Gastonia a great place to visit. **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.**

Neighborhoods

Our current growth pattern has resulted in indistinguishable, isolated and auto-dependent neighborhoods. Neighborhoods built without sidewalks and public gathering spaces have reduced the opportunities for interaction and have eroded our sense of community. Changes made to the Zoning Ordinance encourage new developments to install sidewalks and open space amenities. Another way to create a sense of community is through well-planned developments that utilize smart growth principles. Ideas such as: a variety of housing styles, a mixture of land uses, walkability and connectivity, and compact building design all help foster strong and socially connected neighborhoods. According to the 2000 census, there are 25,891 households within the Gastonia city limits. Of those, only 5,391 or 20.8% of the households contain the traditional married couple with children. That leaves 80 percent of the households as some other mix – single, divorced with children, empty nesters. No single type of housing unit can serve the varied needs of today's diverse households. Yet, single family houses still dominate new residential construction in Gastonia. **New and existing Gastonia neighborhoods will encourage a sense of community, offer a variety of residential alternatives, and provide easy access to daily activities.**

The Center City

Work is underway to redevelop the downtown, its surrounding neighborhoods, and nearby mill villages. Recent projects include listing the Loray Mill Village on the National Register of Historic Places, the formation and strong presence of the Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation, and the renovation of the historic county court house. New businesses have begun to locate in the downtown area and City Council passed ordinances allowing outdoor dining and sidewalk vending. However, the central city continues to lack basic retail services and is yet to be a vibrant place where people congregate. This weakens our ability to attract new businesses, frustrates the current populace, and harms the community image and identity. A large residential population is an important element of a central city's success and is often the catalyst new retail development demands. The current housing stock lacks opportunities that appeal to all social and economic demographic groups. An attractive alternative to typical suburban development, that emphasizes "move-up" housing, would return folks to the center city and discourage additional flight. The success of Gastonia is closely tied to the success of downtown and its surrounding older neighborhoods. However, it has proven to be very difficult to compete with the residential and retail forces of suburban style development. New City sponsored programs and policies that make infill development more financially attractive than new greenfield development will encourage the renovation of 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.**

Community Appearance and Identity

Through zoning code compliance and the efforts of many City departments, the visual image along major corridors has improved. However, acres of junk cars and abandoned or underutilized strip shopping centers still lead newcomers into the city and harm Gastonia's image. Since a good appearance is a reflection of a community's pride, Gastonia should strive for well-designed roadways that have ample landscaping, sidewalks that are in good repair, and attractive signage. Commercial centers need well-

maintained buildings and parking lots that provide pedestrian friendly access and internal connectivity. Community appearance is also important at the neighborhood level. The City's Code Enforcement Department has made great strides in removing junk cars and repairing or demolishing neglected homes. Additionally, the programs of Keep Gastonia Beautiful help educate and promote the importance of community appearance. Design guidelines that encourage innovative developments with focal points and gathering spaces can help to create a pleasing, livable community. Gastonia's visual appearance will demonstrate its community pride with economically vibrant and visually pleasing corridors, gateways, commercial areas and neighborhoods.

For many years, Gastonia derived its image and sense of place from the mills for employment and the downtown for entertainment. With both of these in decline, Gastonia is at a loss to define its community identity. Like many others, we are becoming a city of chain stores with their accompanying commonplace franchise architecture. Our current development pattern does not support a sense of community. It lacks gathering places, walkability, focal points and identities. Yet, we have many special attributes to be proud of, natural areas such as Crowder's Mountain State Park, historic buildings such as Loray Mill, and strong neighborhoods such as Gardner Park. **Gastonia will guard and build upon its assets to retain its distinctive character and enhance its community identity.**

Appendix

2002 Symposium Series

Smart Growth

This symposium focused on smart growth as it affects communities across North Carolina. Bill Duston, Planning Director of Centralina Council of Governments presented a slide show developed by the NC chapter of the American Planning Association. It discussed the consequences of our current growth pattern on traffic, air quality, loss of green space and growing infrastructure needs. The program presented eight principles of smart growth and how each could shape how we grow. Next, Tancred Miller discussed the current NC legislative plans to address smart growth issues. Mr. Miller, the North Carolina Coordinator of Sierra Club's Solution to Sprawl campaign, encouraged listeners to organize grass root efforts locally, as support from Raleigh will be slow. Dennis Rash, Executive-In-Residence at UNCC's Center of Transportation Policy, discussed the impact of smart growth on the private sector. Using two projects he was closely involved with, Fourth Ward and Gateway Village, he demonstrated how smart growth principles such as mixed use and infill developments can benefit developers because of lower infrastructure costs.

Walkable Communities

The second symposium included four presenters who spoke about the importance of including other modes of transportation, most notably walking, when planning communities. Mary Newsom, Associate Editor at The Charlotte Observer, discussed what most pedestrians currently encounter as they travel without a car. Obstacles such as sidewalks that end for no apparent reason, few easily accessible destination points, sidewalks in poor condition and crowded by overgrown landscaping, and too little separation between the sidewalk and passing traffic all discourage those wanting to or having to travel as a pedestrian. Susan Bailey of the Gaston County Health

Department followed with a presentation of the health problems associated with engineering physical activity out of our daily lives. As the number of vehicle trips and their distances have increased the opportunity to be physically active has decreased. This has contributed to an increase in obesity, diabetes and asthma related disease. The final two presenters, Mike Bush of Connect Gaston and Steve Hancock of the City of Charlotte, spoke of their organization's efforts to encourage other modes of transportation. Mr. Bush discussed his experience with the grass roots organization to educate and promote the importance of building Gastonia's first greenway. Mr. Hancock reviewed Charlotte's bicycle transportation plan, which establishes policies and institutional framework, sets forth design issues, and indicates necessary roadway improvements.

The Transportation and Land Use Connection

At the next symposium, State Senator David Hoyle, spoke of the future of transportation funding in North Carolina. The senator discussed the statewide financial crisis and its impact on the general fund and transportation funding. Harrison Marshall, a planner with the Statewide Planning Branch of NCDOT, followed with a discussion of how transportation and land development patterns affect the fundamental character of communities. Our highway and auto oriented transportation system combined with conventional single use zoning tends to create a development pattern commonly known as sprawl. Mr. Marshall recommended that creating affordable, livable and sustainable development patterns and transportation networks by integrating land use and transportation planning will help communities avoid sprawl. Next on the agenda was Bob Cook, of the Charlotte Area Transit System. Mr. Cook discussed the land use policies necessary to make transit possible in Gastonia. He provided examples of transit supportive developments and boldly stated that for transit to be financially successful, the community must accept higher densities in areas designated as future transit corridors. This symposium's final speaker was Burt Tasaico a project administrator with NCDOT. Mr. Tasaico reiterated the importance of linking land use and transportation, and offered the concepts of better access management and improved environmental stewardship as methods to enhance the transportation system as a whole.

Open Space Planning

The fourth symposium, held at Camp Rotary near Crowder's Mountain, focused on open space planning. Vicki Bowman of UNCC Urban Institute provided an overview of open space planning. Her presentation included the benefits, methods, and major players of open space protection. Her discussion included a review of recent planning initiatives such as the Catawba River Basin Easement Fund and the Strategic Regional Open Space Framework. David Fogarty of NC Cooperative Extension Services added even more of a Gaston County perspective with his discussion of the South Fork Watershed Study, which gathered information about soil erosion, water intake locations, wetlands and impervious surface in the watershed. Staff mapped and analyzed the information to highlight and prioritize areas for land protection. Mr. Fogarty also spoke of Quality Natural Resources Commission (QNRC) priorities such as erosion and sediment control, Phase II stormwater rules and wetland protection. The final speaker of the evening was Warren Burgess, Planning Director for the Town of Davidson. To stabilize the downtown and minimize the amount of land consumed by sprawl type development, Davidson passed a new open space protection ordinance. Administration of the new ordinance required the town to catalog its vacant land into primary and secondary conservation areas. The classification criteria were determined during a weeklong charrette that included a detailed land survey of trees, water, grassy areas, and slopes. The result was a map of areas to be set aside as open space and areas allowed for development.

Neighborhood Design Trends

The purpose of this symposium was to discuss current trends in urban and suburban development. It began with an overview of new urbanism by David Walters, professor of architecture at UNCC. Mr. Walters emphasized the importance of reflecting on cities of the past, putting people first when designing communities, and considering both form and function in the design process. He also stated that a true new urbanist development includes a mixture of land uses as well as social-economic groups, pointing out that new communities such as Vermillion and Baxter offer little opportunity for

the lower income market. Next, Brad Davis of LandDesign spoke of his experience creating a plan for Charlotte's Second Ward. The vision was to transform a stark, largely institutional area of over 100 acres into a livable and memorable urban neighborhood through a mixture of land uses, diversity of architecture and housing types, unique infrastructure and a hierarchy of open spaces. The goal of the plan was to support a diverse population of differing ages and socio-economic backgrounds through a community-based process. The final presenter of this evening was James Traynor of Clear Springs Development Company, the developer of Fort Mill's Baxter. One of the company's key planning beliefs was that growth does not result in the destruction of things you love. Instead, they chose to balance growth with environmental stewardship, which resulted in community livability. This 1033- acre development includes a mix of residential, retail, medical, civic, recreation and open space uses.

Center City Development

Center City Development symposium featured two speakers, Jack Newman of the Division of Community Assistance and Brian Borne of Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation (GDDC). Mr. Newman gave on overview of the Main Street Approach developed by the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The goal of the Main Street program is to improve all aspects of the downtown or central business district, producing both tangible and intangible benefits. Improving economic management, strengthening public participation, and making downtown a fun place to visit are as critical to Main Street's future as recruiting new businesses, rehabilitating buildings, and expanding parking. Building on downtown's inherent assets -- rich architecture, personal service, and traditional values and most of all, a sense of place -- the Main Street approach has rekindled entrepreneurship, downtown cooperation and civic concern. The Main Street methodology addresses the following four areas of concern and combines activities in these areas to develop a community's individual strategy for redeveloping downtown; organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring. Mr. Borne followed with an overview of the past, present and future of Gastonia's downtown. He listed a number of companies new to the downtown over the past year and the amount of economic investment they have infused into the community. He offered an overview of the work plan formulated by the various GDDC committees, which has since been completed and presented to City Council.

The Dollars and Sense of Smart Growth

The final symposium was a discussion of the costs of smart growth for both the developer and the municipality. Speaking that night were Bob Clay of Pharr Yarns, local developer Jake Terzo, and Al Sharp of Centralina Council of Governments. Mr. Clay began the evening with a financial comparison of smart growth and traditional development. He mentioned some of the difficulties that encountered when dealing with the conflicting goals of a municipality and a developer. One example he offered involved a Charlotte neighborhood that installed small-scale decorative lighting along a collector street, which also functioned as the development's rear border. The City then installed tall cobra style lighting to better illuminate the street. Not only is this not aesthetically pleasing, but the developer essentially wasted thousands of dollars on unnecessary lights. Jake Terzo followed with a discussion of how smart growth principles work for a small developer. Mr. Terzo discussed the various smart growth principles utilized by his proposed development on Armstrong Circle. For Terzo and the City, this compact, infill development did not require new city services and allowed him to build up-scale homes on unproductive vacant land in an already established neighborhood. His representative elevations included homes with small setbacks and large front porches creating a strong sense of place. Al Sharp offered another perspective of the financial costs of growth: those that impact the municipality. He stated that we as a society have a faith and dependence on growth. We believe that bigger is better. The cost of this growth, especially if on a city's outskirts, is an increase in service delivery needs, which equates to more money spent on water, sewer, police and fire. Mr. Sharp stated that to be successful there must be a balance between public and private investments and a strong political will.

The Photo Assignment

The second visioning session was a photo assignment given to members of the steering committee. The purpose of this exercise was to encourage the group to take notice of current conditions and visualize how Gastonia could develop in the future. They carried a camera while running errands, commuting to work, or visiting friends. They examined the built environment around them and took pictures of things that worked well and things that did not. Each photo included text to describe the sentiment captured. Planning Department staff grouped the photos into thirteen categories and organized a group discussion at the Loray Mill, facilitated by Dr. Garry Cooper from Appalachian State University. The participants answered three questions for each of the categories. The first question was to identify the root problems and the keys to community character found in each photo. Next, they offered suggestions to correct the problems and how these would help build a sense of place. Finally, they circled words or phrases from the picture's corresponding text that strongly represented the image. After all the participants visited each photo station, they used dots to select the recommendation that they believed would be most effective in correcting the problem. Staff totaled the dots and reported the results for a group discussion. The following are the top three recommendations from the thirteen categories.

Quality of Life/Community Pride/Local Treasures

- Focus preserving efforts on areas as well as individual buildings [prominent intersections (South and Franklin), whole neighborhoods (Firestone, Smyre)] (10)
- Develop corridor design standards for all major gateways (7)
- Partner with PNC to create civic center in Loray Mill or other place in downtown (6)

Design

- Re-use and rehabilitate where possible existing residential and commercial stock that has historic merit, character, or individuality. (15)
- Develop standards/DBJ for community appearance (8)
- Move parking to rear of buildings (7)

Economic Development

- Adaptively reuse buildings and preserve architectural character (12)
- Encourage diversification of economy (tech, industry, arts) (10)
- Encourage through: tax incentives, secretary of interior standards, façade grants (7)

Residential

- Promote/develop stable/diverse neighborhood, with housing opportunities for all socio-economic groups (10)
- Encourage housing downtown (8)
- Encourage adaptive re-use (7)

Downtown

- Develop design guidelines preserving architectural character that require certain actions (8)
- Establish satellite school/college in downtown (UNCC, Gaston College, etc) (8)
- 4 step program to revitalize downtown (6)

Commercial Use

- Encourage mixed/sharing of parking for uses who have different operating hours. Design parking lots as pedestrian/transit friendly and put focus on people not vehicles. Design parking lots for average volume not for Christmas shopping season (8)
- Encourage community uses that support neighborhood needs and demonstrate good design (7)
- Encourage/promote/finance mixed use/rehab development (6)
- Develop pedestrian-friendly shopping areas – maybe downtown (6)

Code Enforcement Issues

- Create "investment zone" to encourage residential investment and prideful ownership (11)
- Timely code enforcement to prevent further disrepair (8)
- Enforce current standards (8)

Transportation/Transit

- Promote development that reduces dependence on vehicle and relies on alternative modes of transportation (8)
- Require traffic plan before development (7)
- Encourage higher density/mixed use along major corridors to make transit work in the future (6)

Landscaping

- New developments get tree credits -old trees in lieu of new planting takes into consideration cost to consumer while protecting the environment. Drawbacks – expands staff and impacts tax dollars (16)
- Educate public / encourage utility companies appropriate tree pruning techniques (6)
- Preserve trees in subdivision process (4)
- Adopt a tree preservation ordinance for mature trees (4)

Open Space

- Urban growth boundary (13)
- Impose design requirements regarding open space on developers (8)
- Fund open space (5)

Signage

- Encourage signage standards for individual neighborhoods/districts based on the history/aesthetics/character (14)
- Define policy, follow it, do not revise every month (9)
- Remove old signs (6)

Recreation

- Create master plan network of pedestrian/bicycle routes/paths/trails (13)
- Build "pocket" parks in downtown Gastonia with cascading fountains like Thomas Polk Park in uptown Charlotte (6)
- Update outdated recreational facilities (6)

Sidewalks

- Require wide planting strips adjacent to street so that pedestrian feels safer (10)
- Require sidewalks within shopping centers (6)
- Make sidewalks sufficiently wide with trees and grassy buffer next to street (5)

Community Character Survey

The final session was the Community Character Survey. Planning Department staff utilized the concept developed by A. Nelessen Associates who has administered hundreds of surveys for cities and towns across the nation with issues and concerns similar to Gastonia's. The survey consisted of two sections. The first section was a questionnaire to gather the participant's ideas about general development concepts. The participants responded to such things as their land use priorities, preferred revenue source for public improvements, and essential downtown amenities. The second section was a visual survey where the participants rated how appropriate various images would be for the future of Gastonia. Survey participants viewed 160 images from the following nine categories: residential, commercial, mixed-use, industrial, office, public realm, facilities, parking and street types. Each image was rated on a scale of negative 5 to positive 5 based on the question, "is the image you are viewing appropriate or inappropriate for Gastonia," with positive being appropriate and negative not appropriate. After compiling the survey forms, the average rating and standard deviation of each image was calculated. The intensity of negative or positive reactions to the various images provides direction for future planning and development. Lower standard deviations indicate a strong agreement between survey participants. Therefore, images with high average score and low standard deviations provide clear direction for the future.

The department hosted six evening and one Saturday afternoon public input sessions. Invitations to conduct the survey for civic groups such as the Jaycees, an Optimist Club and a book club were received and accepted. In the end, 128 individuals participated. Seventy-three percent of the participants lived within Gastonia's city limits and the average number of years lived here was 26, with 16 people having lived in Gastonia for 50 or more years. The respondents top three priorities for new development are single family housing, bike and greenway trails, and parks and open space. Mixed-use buildings ranked a close fourth, which is affirmed by the 92%, who agree that different land uses can be compatible to one another if good design is incorporated into the development. Further, eighty–two percent agree that the design criteria should be a part of city code. Any new commercial development should be distributed evenly across the city, kept away from natural area and be located close to neighborhoods. The least supported development pattern was to locate all new retail and office development along New Hope Road. According to the participants, areas that need improvement are Gastonia's visual appearance, local schools and traffic. When asked how to pay for future public improvements 25% of the applicants were in favor of general tax increases, 22% supported user fees, and 15% would not support any property tax increase.

The participants viewed images of single family homes, townhomes and apartments. The highest rated single family neighborhoods and townhomes featured street trees, adjacent green space and sidewalks. A common element in the lowest scoring images of this category was the lack of sidewalks. Multi family developments with large parking lots and minimal design features rated low while those with internal courtyards and landscaping scored high. Commercial areas that included water features, decorative window displays, and brick crosswalks received the highest score while auto-oriented, strip commercial centers with large parking lots were poorly received.

The participants rated the public areas with broken or incomplete sidewalks and large blank walls lower than areas with spray fountains and benches located amongst homes and retail outlets. Commercial parking lots with internal sidewalks scored higher than those without. Survey participants preferred small shopping centers with parking on the side rather than parking in the front. In residential areas, streets lined with trees scored a strong positive while those without scored a high negative.

While the ratings and scores may not be surprising, the survey accomplishes two main goals. It adds a degree of preference and dissatisfaction and it quantifies what may have been considered intuitive. Planners can include elements from highly scored images in a Design Guidelines Manual or developers can consider the local community's preferences when designing a new subdivision or commercial center. Typically used early in the planning process, Community Character Surveys help stimulate conversation and awareness of the built environment and garner public input. The next step is to use the survey results to develop goals and policy statements within the Comprehensive Plan.

GASTONIA 2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Introduction

What is a Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is a collection of text and maps that sets forth goals and objectives for guiding future land use and development in the City of Gastonia and the planning area. The goals define the vision of the City and the objectives provide a way to achieve the vision. The plan addresses many issues, such as transportation, economic development, neighborhoods, environmental quality, parks and recreation, and community character, to name a few.

The plan uses these goals and objectives to define how land throughout the City should develop in the future and identifies what areas are best suited for development and which should be left in their natural state. It determines where to locate new housing, industry and commercial uses and how each of these can effect our natural environment. It also considers how the community should look and discusses the importance of how a building is sited, the use of focal points and gathering places, and the relationship between appearance and community pride. It must be emphasized that unlike a zoning ordinance, the plan is not law and does not impose any special regulations on any person or their property. It is a tool, albeit a powerful tool, that provides many benefits to the community, including benefits to existing and future residents and those wishing to invest in our community. Planning Commissioners and City Council members rely upon the plan as they make decisions on Gastonia's growth and development. In addition to providing land use recommendations for consideration, the plan serves as a guide for consistent decision making. Citizens rely on the plan when determining where to live, work, and make property investments. The location of future roads, industries, and commercial areas are critical to these important decisions. Planners use the plan to assist citizens and the development community by communicating the City's preferred growth patterns and preferred type of growth, prior to investment related decisions. Having a solid comprehensive plan also communicates to the world that "the City of Gastonia has vision, focus and a plan of action." For those wishing to make investments in our community, the efficiency, stability, and strength communicated by the comprehensive plan are important.

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.

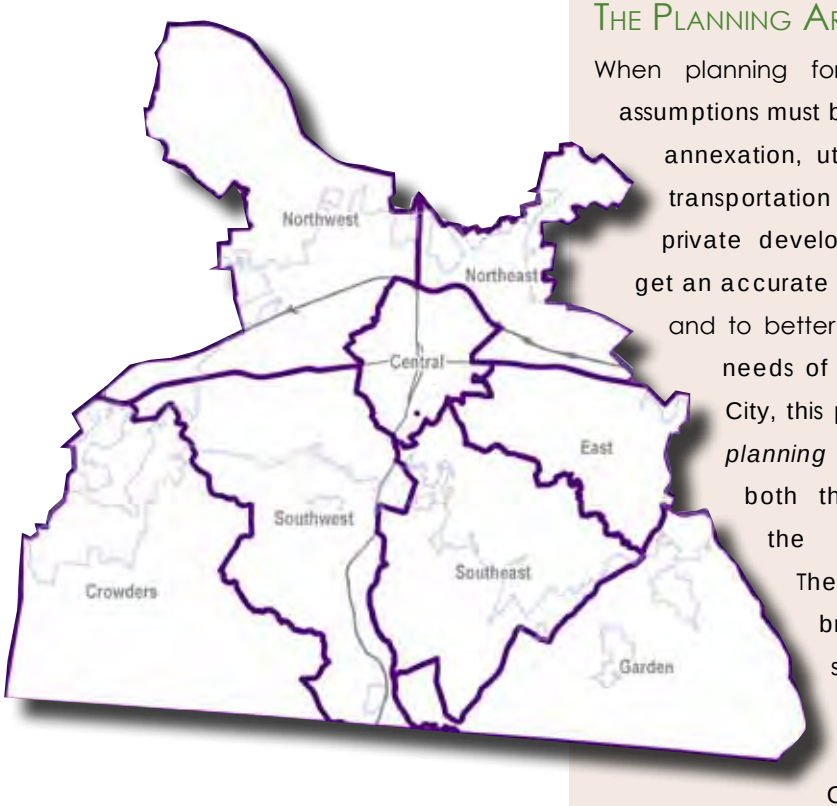
Why do we need to update the Plan?

Gastonia adopted its first Comprehensive Plan, *CityVision 2010* in 1995. Since 1995, the City has successfully implemented many of the goals and objectives outlined in the plan. This plan has helped to support successful projects such as the "sphere-of-influence" agreement with Dallas, the Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway, and the Gateway Corridor Overlay Zone. New small area plans that reflect changes in growth and policy directives, such as the Southeast Plan and the Smyre Plan were written and adopted (since 1995) and these plans have been incorporated into the *Gastonia 2025* plan. The world is constantly changing and the future as we saw it in 1995, was based on different realities. Issues that were never imagined take center stage and new policies must be written and adopted to address them. Populations shift, industries change and new residents with new needs move in. Additionally, technology has improved and we can produce a more user-friendly plan with new maps to better illustrate the vision. All of these points make it necessary and possible to re-evaluate who we are and how we want to accommodate our growth.

How will it affect me?

The Comprehensive Plan may affect the way key properties in your neighborhood and across the City are developed during the coming years. Because it guides how and where we will grow, the plan influences the future look and feel of our community. The plan will be used to guide investment in new public facilities like recreation centers and water and sewer extensions. The way we plan our city can have a tremendous impact on our lives. For example, we can decide that only certain types of businesses should operate and certain types of housing be built in specific neighborhoods. We can decide where additional green space, playgrounds and parks are desirable or develop guidelines that foster small, local businesses or help attract more stores and restaurants to the business districts nearest residential neighborhoods. Being proactive and planning for these quality of life issues may directly influence the value of your home and how you live your life. The many citizens that have participated in this process have helped determine the future of the City of Gastonia.

If you don't know where you're going, you might end up someplace else."
– Casey Stengel



The 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 relocated 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 2025 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 2025 planning area is much larger than the 2010 planning area and includes two additional sectors to the south: Garden and Crowders.

The Vision

In the year 2025, 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 preserved 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 2025 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.

Organization of the Plan

This plan is organized in two major sections. The initial section lays out the context of Gastonia and this plan, with the chapters on Gastonia's community setting, growth & change, and development issues.

The second section includes eleven chapters covering specific planning subjects each with a series of goals and policies that encompass the future visions for the City. Each chapter 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. Each chapter includes a set of major issues, objectives to address the major issues, and specific tools that may be used. Objectives are statements of policy, recommended changes to the City's ordinances, or priorities for City programs. Tools are actions that could be taken to implement the objectives. The Chapters are:

Housing & Neighborhoods

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.

Public Utilities & Community Services

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.

Economic & Human Development

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.

Open Space, Parks & Recreation

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.

The Center City

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.

Franklin Boulevard Corridor

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.

Regional Planning & Interjurisdictional Coordination

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.

Environmental Quality

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.

Community Appearance & Identity

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.

Transportation

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.

Land Use & Development

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.

The Planning Process

In January 2002, the City began the process to update the *CityVision 2010* plan. The new plan would be called *Gastonia 2025*. The process consisted of a two-pronged approach: (1) Formulate 8-12 "key guiding principles" to become the plan's foundation as it was written, and (2) write the plan (which includes goals and objectives to achieve the key guiding principles). The steering committee, a subcommittee of 30 people from throughout the community and representing various City committees has been involved with the process, receiving technical support from the Planning Department.

Phase I – Formulating the Key Guiding Principles

Three brainstorming and information gathering activities were used to help the community envision how Gastonia should grow and develop: a symposium series, a steering committee photo assignment, and a community character survey.

A **symposium series** invited experts from the region and state to discuss various planning and development issues. Each symposium focused on a planning and/or development related topic and included multiple speakers. Symposium topics included:

- Smart Growth
- Walkable Communities
- The Transportation and Land Use Connection
- Open Space Planning
- Neighborhood Design Trends
- Center City Development
- The Dollars and Sense of Smart Growth.

The second visioning exercise included a **photo assignment** given to members of the steering committee. The purpose of this exercise was to encourage the group to take notice of current conditions and visualize how Gastonia could develop in the future. Committee members carried a camera while running errands, commuting to work, or visiting friends. They examined the built environment around them and took pictures of things that worked well and things that did not. Photos were grouped into categories and through group discussion participants identified the root problems or key community character issues in each photo. Next, they offered suggestions on correcting problems and building a sense of place. After all the participants visited each photo station, they used dots to select the recommendations that they believed would be most effective in correcting the problem.

The final exercise was the **community character survey**. Utilizing the concept developed by A. Nelessen Associates, who has administered hundreds of surveys for cities and towns across the nation, the City of Gastonia used a survey and photo exercise to identify issues and concerns in the community and provide relative weight to each. The Planning Department hosted seven (six evening and one Saturday afternoon) public input sessions. In addition, invitations to conduct the survey for civic groups such as the Jaycees, an Optimist Club and a book club were received and accepted. In the end, 128 individuals participated. Seventy-three percent of the participants lived within Gastonia's city limits and the average number of years lived here was 26, with 16 people having lived in Gastonia for 50 or more years.

The survey included a questionnaire to gather the participant's ideas about general development concepts. Participants responded to such things as their land use priorities, preferred revenue source for public improvements, and essential downtown amenities. In addition, to the

questionnaire, a visual survey allowed participants to rate images based on whether or not they were appropriate for the "future Gastonia." Survey participants viewed 160 images from the following nine categories: residential, commercial, mixed-use, industrial, office, public realm, facilities, parking and street types. Each image was rated on a scale of negative 5 to positive 5 based on the question, "is the image you are viewing appropriate or inappropriate for Gastonia." The average rating and standard deviation of each image was calculated and the intensity of negative or positive reactions to the various images provides direction for future planning and development. Lower standard deviations indicate a strong agreement between survey participants, therefore, images with high average score and low standard deviations provide clear direction for the future. The Community Character Survey helped to stimulate conversation and awareness about the built environment. Survey results were used to develop goals and policy statements within the Comprehensive Plan.

From these three public input exercises (the symposium series, the photo assignment, and the community character survey) eleven key guiding principles emerged and were adopted by City Council in February 2004. These principles served as the framework for the plan, with the goals and objectives of each section referring back to the key guiding principle. Each principle does not function alone; rather in many cases, they overlap. For instance, when writing the goals and objectives for transportation and land use planning, the principles of growth patterns, regional planning and environmental quality were considered.

Phase II – Developing the Goals and Objectives

The second phase of the planning process consisted of writing the actual plan, including the goals and objectives to achieve the key guiding principles. Beginning in August 2004, the steering committee held at least two meetings to discuss each principle. During these meetings, the Planning Department used a consensus building method to determine the issues surrounding each principle area, providing the information needed to develop the goals, objectives and tools for the plan. During the second meeting on each topic, the steering committee reviewed, amended and approved all the goals, objectives and tools. The steering committee finished this segment of work in August 2005.

The next step in the process was to address future land use in light of the goals established by the committee. To better address the specific needs of different parts of the City, staff conducted seven community meetings during October and November 2005 to address land use issues

within the eight sectors. Each meeting consisted of small group discussion and larger group discussions related to land use in that particular sector. Comments from the neighborhood meetings were combined and related to a future land use map.

To solicit further input from the public, staff mailed Over 115 people responded to a utility bill insert sent in August 2006. These interested citizens were added to a master list and contacted each time a draft chapter was placed on the City's website. Citizens were able to view and print the information and provide comments to staff via the web or by contacting staff directly.

After the goals, objectives and strategies were drafted, staff began writing the individual chapters of the plan. The chapters are based on the wealth of information collected during earlier parts of the planning process. As each chapter was developed the drafts were placed on the web for public comment. Upon the completion of drafting each chapter, the formal adoption process began.

Adoption & Implementation

Gastonia 2025 was adopted by Gastonia City Council on XX and it is both a statement of policy and a guide to future decision-making. Unlike a zoning ordinance, the plan is not law, and it places no specific restrictions on any person or their property.

The plan is expected to be revised over time, with minor changes made on an annual basis, and a thorough update every five years. The Development Services Department will also prepare an annual implementation guide, which will be used to monitor the progress in implementing the plan.

We hope you find the plan both informative and helpful.

2

Growth of a Region

Population Growth & Distribution

Population Trends

Population Projections

Growth Patterns & Direction

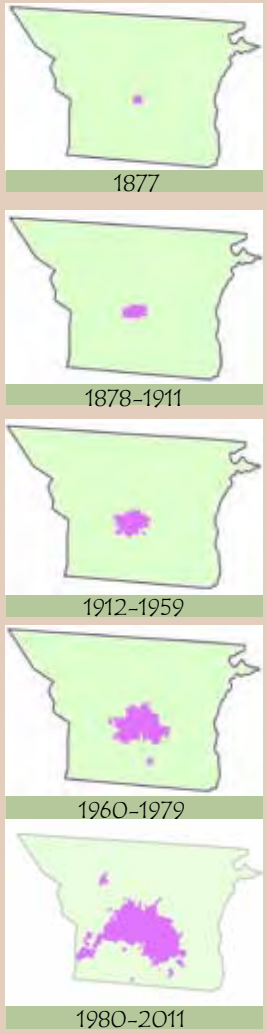


Figure 2-1: Growth through Annexation

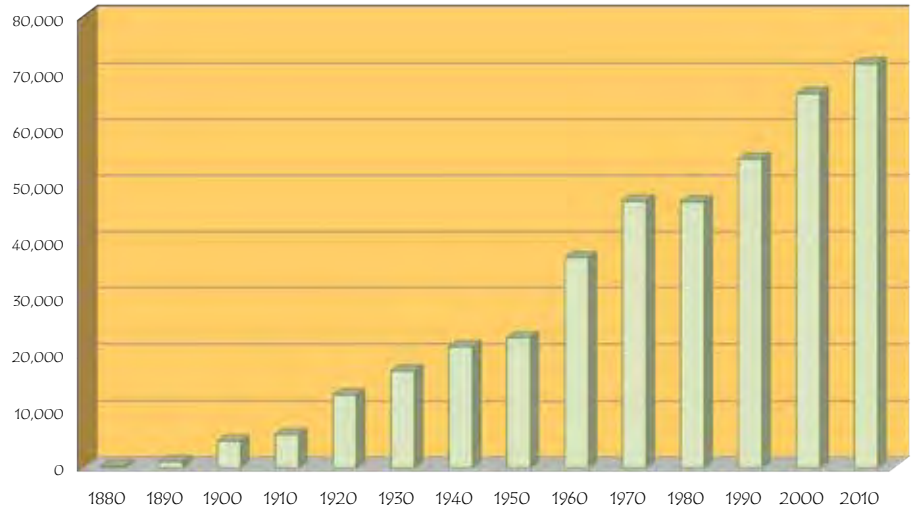
Growth, Population & Demographic Trends

When Gaston County was formed from the southern portion of Lincoln County in 1846, it had a population of 9,000 with growth centers developing naturally along the waters of the Catawba and the South Fork Rivers. Gastonia, located in the middle of Gaston County, began as a railroad junction settlement between the Charlotte and Atlanta Airline Railroad (now the Southern Railway) and the Chester and Lenoir Narrow Gauge line. By 1876, a population of a little more than 200 people had settled in the junction crossroad known as Gastonia Station. Between 1880 and 1910, Gastonia had a relatively modest growth rate, transitioning from a crossroads community into a town. Increases in population, employment, and social opportunities prompted the community to petition the North Carolina General Assembly to grant a charter of incorporation. On January 26, 1877, Gastonia incorporated with its limits extending 1/2 mile from the railroad junction.

Gastonia's growth through the years is evidenced by Figures 2-1 and 2-2, which show Gastonia's growth through annexation and historical population growth. By 1910, Gastonia was home to 11 cotton mills, a public school system, electricity, and paved roads. Gastonia grew rapidly and it eventually became the central hub of political and social activity in Gaston County, replacing Dallas as the county seat in 1911. The period between 1910 and 1950 saw significant population increases as most of Gastonia's textile industry and the City's older neighborhoods were formed during this period. Growth also occurred by using annexation as a tool to incorporate surrounding land into the City. In 1911, Gastonia doubled its size when it annexed the huge Loray Mill and its surrounding settlements. The mill petitioned the legislature to incorporate as an independent town, although Gastonia, in its new position as the county seat, quickly acted to defeat the move and annexed the area itself. By 1930, the population had increased to 17,093 with about 22% of that population employed in the textile mills.

The next 20 years, 1950-1970, were boom times for Gastonia. The City had the fastest population growth in its history during this time. Not coincidentally, these were also years of growth and prosperity for the Charlotte region, North Carolina and the United States as well. In addition, there was a historic reversal of out-migration throughout the South from the post-Civil War period to the 1950s and the regional housing market was made possible by improvements to the regional transportation network,

Figure 2-2: City of Gastonia Population 1880-2010



fueling suburban housing growth in Gastonia. A significant annexation occurred in 1964 when the city annexed a large tract of land to the east and increased its size by about one-half. This area includes what is now the retail center for the County.

Between 1970 and the mid 1980s, population growth was more modest than in the previous period, due to the City's cautious annexation policy, job losses, and a generally poor economy during parts of the 1970s and 1980s. Gastonia became more aggressive with annexation in the late eighties, boosting Gastonia's population by 7,000 and annexing the airport in the southeast and the industrial area of the northwest. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the City annexed large residential areas, primarily in the southeast. Major annexations included the Southwoods and the South New Hope Road annexation. Annexation remains a significant tool for growth, allowing the City to expand its tax base, extend utilities and gain customers, provide input on development standards, and increase demand for new retail and industry.

From 2000 to 2007, residential growth rivaled that of the post war era. Population also increased by some 7% during this time. Between 1998 and 2007, roughly 7,570 dwelling units were approved through the rezoning process, with 5,815 of those units being approved since 2002. A new courthouse, police station, four fire stations, an industrial park and many transportation and utility improvements were constructed in response to the increasing demands caused by growth. During this time, Gaston County and Gastonia became popular for large residential developments, the City annexed residential subdivisions on the outskirts of the planning area, prior to construction. These developments sought annexation to gain the urban utilities provided by the City, including water, sewer, and electricity. It was expected that the City's population would continue to grow at level experienced during the 1990s and earlier parts of 2000, primarily through in-migration as a result of the new households. But then the housing market bubble burst and the financial market collapsed when many homebuyers who had purchased homes they could not afford, particularly with subprime mortgages, went into foreclosure, thus halting construction and slowing population growth. While the City issued 522 residential building permits in 2007, by 2010 the number of permits issued had decreased to 101, a decline of over 400%. A high unemployment rate and continuing wave of foreclosures will continue to hamper the housing market, thus slowing population growth. 2010 Census data indicates that the City's population grew by approximately 8% since 2000. This indicates that the growth trend has continued, but the pace has slowed somewhat.

Figure 2-3 shows the growth in land area (in square miles) and percentage change between 1980 and 2011. In 2011, Gastonia's City limits encompassed 51.69 square miles. The planning area can be expanded up to three miles from the City limits, an effective measure that helps to ensure comparable development standards in areas that might be annexed in the future. Careful integration of new development with existing uses and a thoughtful and informed approach to long and short range goals will provide a future of opportunities for Gastonia's residents.

Figure 2-3: Land Area in Square Miles				
1980	1990	2000	2005	2011
21.1	30.62	46.06	48.79	51.69
Percentage Change				
1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2005	2005-2011	1980-2011
45.12%	50.42%	5.95%	5.94%	144.98%

New Residential Development

The recently renovated courthouse for City offices

Gastonia is an employment and retailing center as well as a transportation hub.

Growth of a Region

Gastonia is part of the Charlotte region or the Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The Charlotte MSA is a metropolitan area/region of North and South Carolina within and surrounding the city of Charlotte. The two cities, Charlotte and Gastonia are only twenty miles apart, and they have a strong economic and social relationship. Charlotte is the primary city in the region, with three second-tier cities: Gastonia, Rock Hill and Concord-Kannapolis. Each of these second tier cities is the center of its own smaller area-of-influence within the Charlotte region. Gastonia is the center of a sub-region, comprised of Gaston, Lincoln, Cleveland and northern York Counties. It is an employment and retailing center as well as a transportation hub. The trend, however, is toward greater integration with the Charlotte region. Housing, employment, shopping, and transportation are issues which must be viewed in a regional context. In addition, the various cities of the Charlotte region are expanding geographically and by 2030 the region is expected to become a single urban mass, with annexation opportunities curtailed as the unincorporated areas between the cities dwindle. A sustainable, functional urban environment can be achieved in this urban mass through planning, good site design, and regional cooperation.

When looking at historical and future regional growth, the provides the best source of information and most statistical reports are based on Census defined geography. The basic component of the Census definition is the metropolitan statistical area (MSA). A MSA includes a county with a population of at least 50,000 residents and other counties surrounding the urban core are added if the level of commuting between them and the core represent at least 25% of the labor force. The concept of a cohesive Charlotte urban region has evolved over time, as the population has grown and Census defined regions were adjusted.

In 1960, the Census definition of the Charlotte MSA included only Mecklenburg and Union Counties. In 1970, Gaston County was added to the Charlotte MSA. In 1972, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, in the *Metrolina Atlas,* endorsed a broad definition of the Charlotte region, which included all of the Census counties as well as Cleveland, Catawba, Iredell, Lancaster, Stanly and Anson Counties. This is generally considered the most inclusive definition of the region. The greatest change in Census defined boundaries came in 1980, when the MSA definition was expanded to include Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Union counties in NC and York County in SC. Before 1980, Cabarrus and Rowan Counties were treated by the Census as a separate metro area, even though their economic and social ties to Charlotte had been identified since the late 1960s.

After the 2000 Census, the Federal government developed a two-tier system. The first tier includes more narrowly defined MSAs and micropolitan statistical areas, which include non-MSA counties with at least one urban cluster with a population of 10,000-50,000 and adjacent counties with a high degree of social and economic integration with the core county. All other counties not within one of these

two definitions are considered rural. In the new definition, the Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA lost Rowan and Lincoln counties and gained Anson County. **Regional demographic information included in the plan represents the 2000 and 2010 Census defined MSA boundaries of the region** (Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Mecklenburg, Union, and York counties) as shown on Figure 2-4, as well as 2007 and 2009 US Census American Community Survey estimates.

Figure 2-4: Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC MSA

The second Census defined tier includes combined statistical areas, which include MSAs and adjacent micropolitan statistical areas. Gastonia is within the Charlotte-Gastonia-Salisbury combined statistical area. This is a larger view of the region that provides another level of analysis for regional studies, especially in the fields of transportation and economic development. As the region grows, other now suburban counties, will become important factors in the growth of the region's population and economy.

The Charlotte region is a region of rapid growth. Figure 2-5 shows the growth of the Charlotte MSA over the past forty years. Since 1970, the population of the region has grown by 116%, increasing from 1,330,439 to 1,751,423 people. The region increased by almost 32% between 2000 and 2010, adding 420,984 people in just a decade. Figure 2-6 indicates each county's share of the regional population during each decade. Only Mecklenburg and Union counties have increased their share of the regional population since 1970. Gaston County has grown over the time, but the growth has not been as explosive as in some

Figure 2-5: Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC MSA, Population, 1970-2010

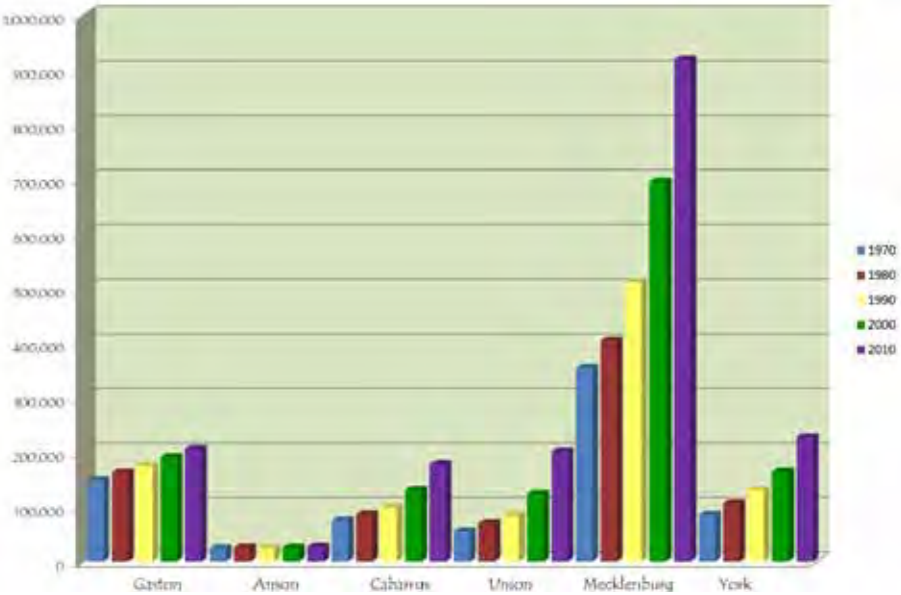
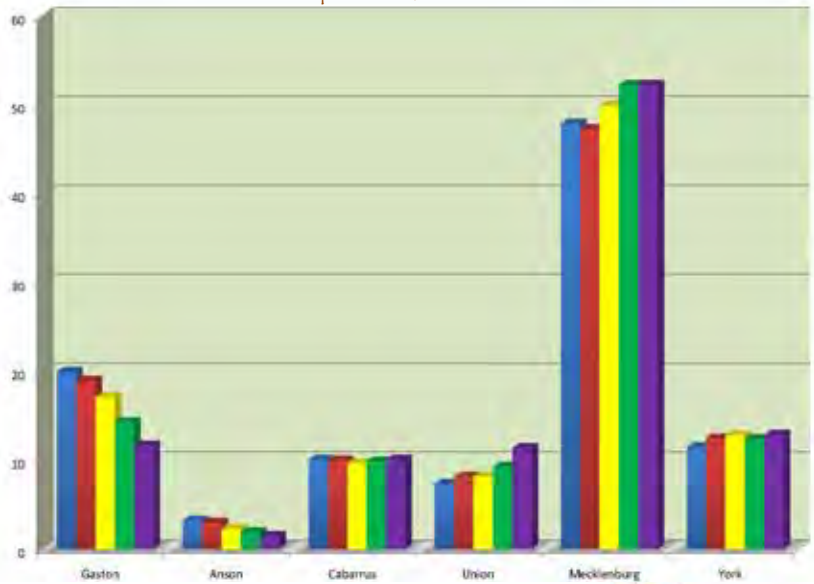


Figure 2-6: Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC MSA, Share of Population, 1970-2010



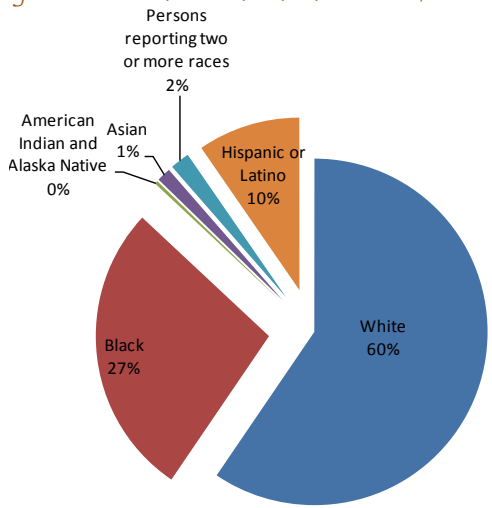
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2-7: City & County Population Growth

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

of the other counties surrounding Charlotte. Between 2000 and 2010, Gaston County's population increased by 8.7%. In comparison, within the same period York County grew by 25%, Cabarrus County by 32.5%, Iredell County by 32%, and Union County by a whopping 46.9%. This pattern reflects the City of Charlotte's directional growth over that same period with the bulk of growth occurring toward the south (York) and southeast (Union) counties as well as counties to the north (Cabarrus and Iredell), with relatively little growth in counties to the west (Gaston). As Figure 2-7 indicates, Gastonia and Gaston County have grown at a more sustainable pace allowing more effective implementation of long range plans that protect our resources and quality of life.

Figure 2-8: Gastonia Racial Profile, 2010



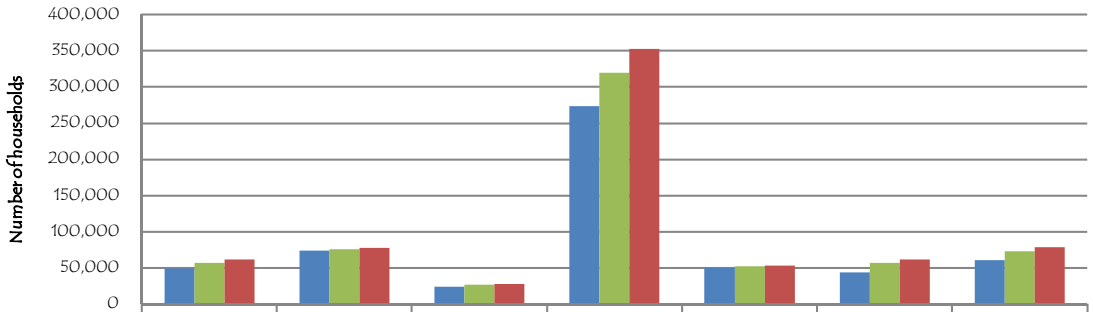
Another way to look at regional growth is through the number of households in each county. Over the past 20 years, the number of households has increased in every county, with the majority of the growth occurring between 2000 and 2009, during which time the region saw a tremendous influx of residential development. Figure 2-9 shows the City of Gastonia's population change.

Figure 2-9: City of Gastonia, Population Change

1980 Population	47,218
1990 Population	54,725
2000 Population	66,355
2010 Population	71,741
% Change 1980-1990	15.90%
%Change 1990-2000	21.25%
% Change 2000-2010	8.12%
% Change 1980-2010	51.94%

Source: US Census Bureau
*Based on preliminary 2010 data

Figure 2-10: Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC MSA, Households 2000 - 2009

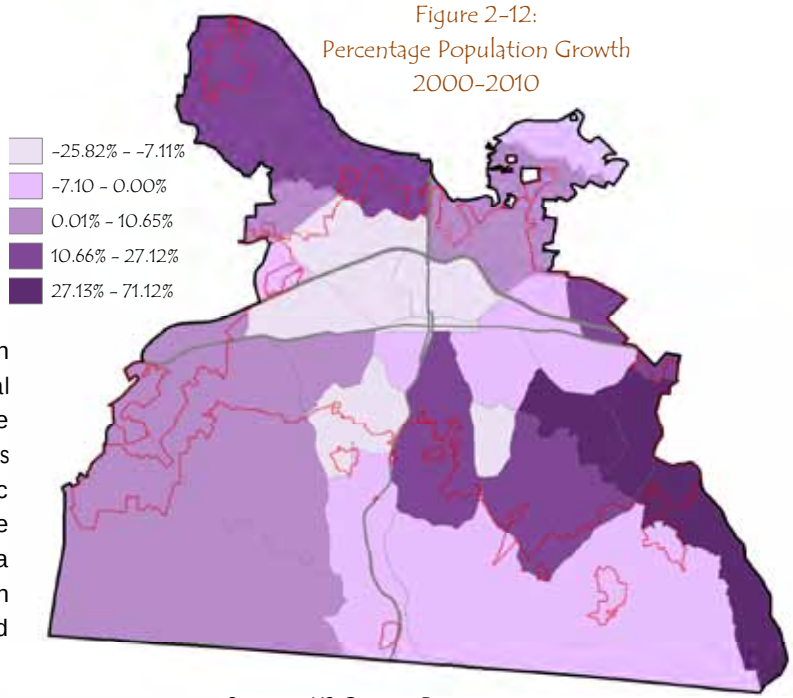


	Cabarrus	Gaston	Lincoln	Mecklenburg	Rowan	Union	York
2000	49,519	73,936	24,041	273,416	49,940	43,390	61,051
2005	57009	75907	26553	320229	52380	56729	72531
2009	61,504	77,212	27,873	352,540	52,989	62,005	78,451

Population Growth and Distribution

An historic analysis of Gastonia's population growth indicates that population has grown through natural increase, net migration, and annexation. Natural increase is the difference between the number of births and deaths within the population. Net migration is the most dynamic element of the population change, being the difference between the number of people moving into the area and the number moving out. Annexation is the extension of municipal boundaries to encompass more area (and people).

Figure 2-12: Percentage Population Growth 2000-2010



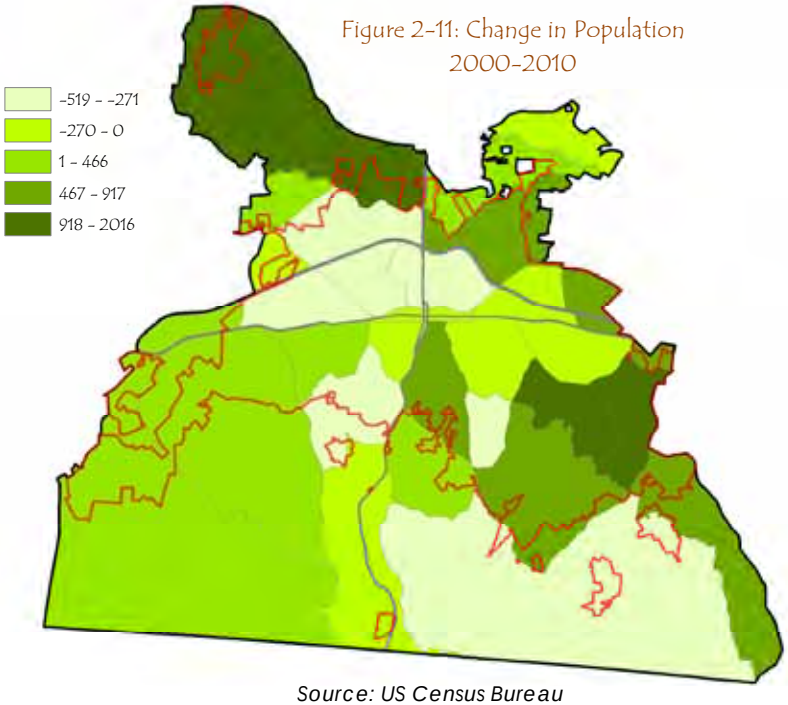
Source: US Census Bureau

Population Distribution

Population growth has not been equal throughout all areas of the planning area. Figures 2-11 and 2-12 show the population change for Gastonia and adjacent Census tracts between 2000 and 2010 using the most recent available data at the Census block group level. Figure 2-11 shows a net gain or loss of population and Figure 2-12 shows the gain or loss of population from 2000 to 2010 as a percentage of the population residing there in 2000.

These maps show that population growth during the ten year period from 2000 to 2010 followed a suburbanization model, whereby most of the population gains are occurring several miles from the City's core, particularly in the southeastern part of Gastonia and areas outside of Gastonia's southern city limits. Both net and percentage population losses have occurred in the older neighborhoods closer to the City's core. Many areas that show a loss are the textile mill neighborhoods that have lost jobs.

Figure 2-11: Change in Population 2000-2010



Source: US Census Bureau

Population Trends

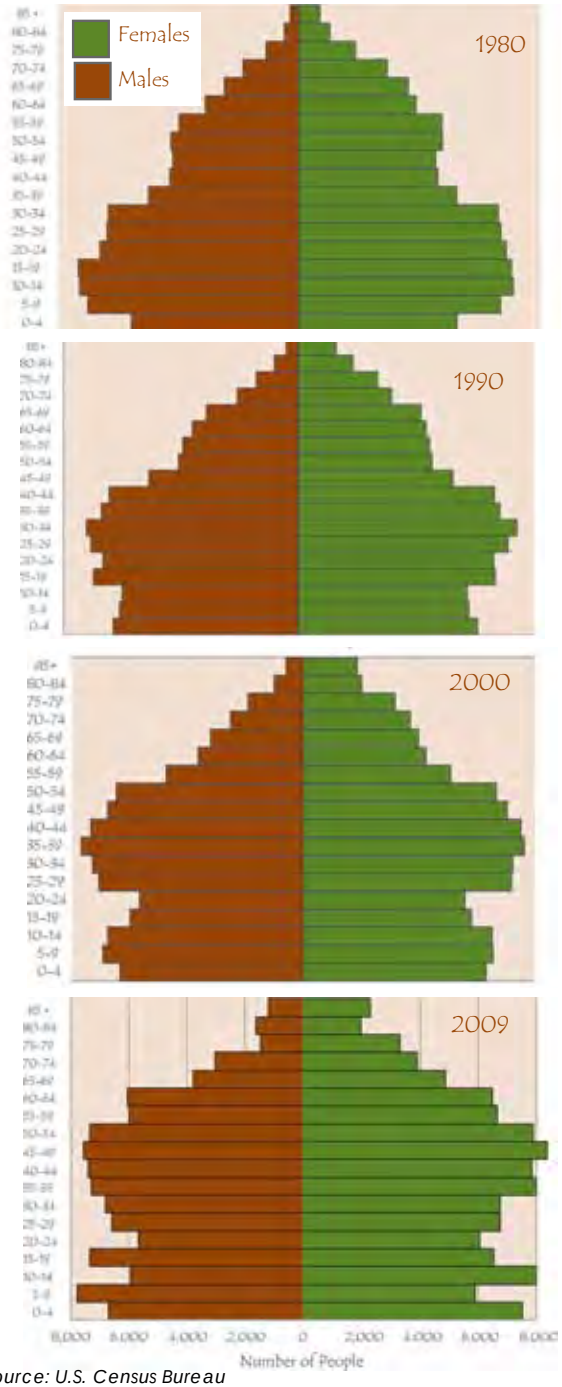
By looking at Census information, we can determine certain trends that are occurring in the region, state, and nation. Examining trends in as age of population, racial composition, educational attainment, housing, and income can help us plan for a changing population.

Age and Gender

In 2009, the Census Bureau estimated the median age in Gaston County to be 38.8 years old, which was higher than the median age in North Carolina, which was 36.9. It is interesting to note that between 1980 and 2009 the Gaston County population between ages 0-15 decreased 9.4% from 46,473 to 42,051, while the 55+ population during the same time period increased 69.9% from 24,544 to 41,719. This reflects the general "graying" of the US and state population, which is usually attributed to advances in health care. On the state level, the number of persons 65 and older is projected to rise from just over 10% of the total North Carolina population in 1980 to about 18% by 2030.

In consequence, all other age cohorts are expected to decline in their proportions of the state total. In addition, a large number of baby boomers, the first of whom reached 60 years old in 2006, are now retiring and will possibly be attracted to the warmer climates and lower cost of housing in the South. Thus, southern cities, specifically Gastonia and those in the Charlotte region, should plan for the special needs of the increasing numbers of senior citizens, such as the need for increased healthcare facilities, recreational facilities, housing and transportation, and social services.

Figure 2-13: Population by Age & Sex, Gaston County 1980-2009



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

> A large number of baby boomers, the first of whom reached 60 years old in 2006, are now retiring and will possibly be attracted to the warmer climates and lower cost of housing in the South.

Conversely, metro areas, such as the Charlotte region, tend to attract younger cohorts in search of education, jobs, entertainment, recreation, and culture. Currently Mecklenburg County has one of the lowest median ages in the State (less than 34 years old). Gastonia will need an influx of younger generations for long-term community survival and we could capture some in-migration of this younger adult cohort from Mecklenburg County, given our recreational amenities such as Crowders Mountain State Park and our greenway system. Expanding opportunities for this cohort will become crucial in the next twenty years.

The age and sex population pyramid is a graphical technique for showing the distribution of the population in specified increments, divided by male and female. The pyramids use five year age ranges.

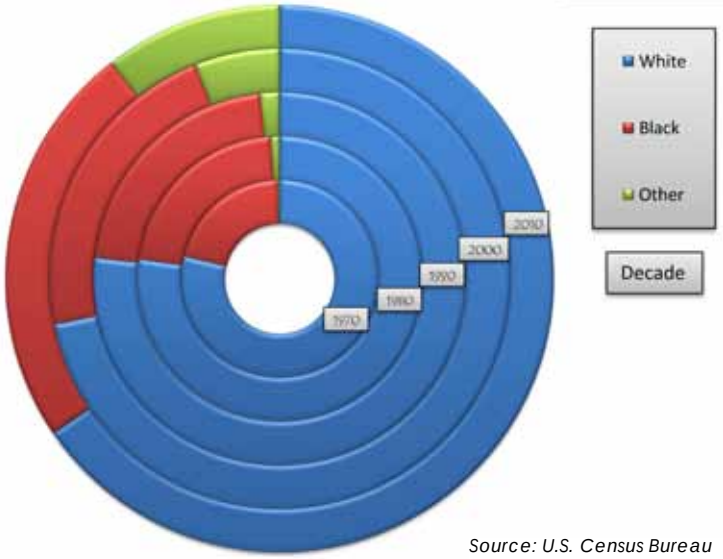
The most striking historic trend is the aging of the baby-boom generation, shown in Figure 2-13 as a bulge in the pyramid rising steadily in age from 1980-2009 and the relatively small number of younger cohorts to fill the gap. These factors will have implications on many aspects of our community, society, and culture in years to come.

Race and Ethnicity

One of the most dramatic changes in Gaston County's demographic history is the rapid change in ethnic composition. For decades the County has been characterized by a population dominated by whites and a smaller, but substantial, proportion of Blacks, and a very small concentration of other races (Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, etc.). Figure 2-14 shows the racial composition of the region between 1970 and 2010.

Between 1990 and 2000, the white (non-Hispanic) population in Gaston County grew by 4.5%, while the black (non-Hispanic) population grew by 17.3%, and those of other races grew by 297%. Recently released 2010 Census racial demographic data suggest that the City is following both a regional and state trend and becoming more diverse. Non-white persons represent 40% of the City population, as compared to 33% in 2000. Most of this increase is due to the tremendous growth in the Hispanic population (those white, black, or other races that also identified themselves as Hispanic).

Figure 2-14: Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC, MSA Race by Region, 1970-2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

To address the nation's growing diversity, the 2000 Census allowed respondents to identify themselves as belonging to more than one race and indicate their ethnicity: 1) Hispanic or Latino and 2) Not Hispanic or Latino. Hispanics are a cultural group, not a race, and in fact many Hispanics are white or black. However, they are distinctive because of their Latino culture, including surnames, language and diet. The migration of Hispanics into the region began in the 1990s and continues today. In 2000, Gastonia's Hispanic population represented 5.5% of the population. In one decade this percentage has grown to 9.6% persons. In fact, 65% of the County's Hispanic population lives in Gastonia. This dramatic 561% increase in Hispanic population between 1990 to 2000 was primarily the result of net migration and not natural growth. Over the past decade, increases in the Hispanic population can be attributed to immigration coupled with high fertility rates. North Carolina's Hispanic population has doubled in the last decade. Of the 33 states with 2010 Census data reported so far, only Alabama experienced an Hispanic increase larger than North Carolina's 111% Hispanic growth. Attracted by the robust economy, the Charlotte MSA ranked second nationally with a 49.8% growth rate in its Hispanic population. Despite this tremendous amount of growth, Hispanics still only make up 5.1% of the region's population.

This trend is very important in determining resources that will be required to meet the special needs (language barriers, cultural differences, etc.) and issues facing the growing Hispanic population within Gastonia, Gaston County, and the Charlotte region, including housing and housing related services, bilingual services, school curriculum and programs, and cultural, social, and employment services.

Attracted by the robust economy, Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC MSA ranked second nationally with a 49.8% growth rate in its Hispanic population. Despite this tremendous amount of growth, Hispanics still only make up 5.1% of the region's population

In North Carolina, Hispanics are growing eight times faster than the non-Hispanic population. The Hispanic population rose 111.1 percent from 2000 to 2010, and the ethnic group now accounts for 8.4 percent of the state's population, compared with 4.7 percent in 2000, according to the census data

The growth in the number of minorities living in Gaston County is expected to mirror the growth rate of the state over the next decade as the region urbanizes more.

Also, following the regional trend, Gastonia will continue to become more diverse, with increases in the black, Asian, and Hispanic populations providing the most noticeable growth.

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is an important factor to consider as the City attempts to diversify its economy and develop programs that will educate the community's workforce. Figure 2-15 indicates the 2009 educational attainment in the Gaston County. Recent estimates show that 26% of the City's population 25 years and older have obtained a high school diploma, which is 2% higher than 1990 figures. Figure 2-16 shows that the entire planning area has seen gains in the percentage of high graduates, with the southeast quarter of the 2025 area showing the highest percentages.

Over the past 30 years, the number of people with both high school degrees and college degrees increased steadily, reflecting the greater demands of the workplace as well as the increasing change from a blue-collar manufacturing and agricultural region to a white-collar service and knowledge-based economy. In Gastonia, the percentage of the population with a high school diploma or higher level of education increased from 72% to 77% between 2000 and 2009 (see Figure 2-17). During the same time period, there was a corresponding increase in the percentage of the population holding a bachelor's degree or higher degree, which went from 20% to 21%. Although these numbers continue to increase, they are still somewhat lagging behind the national averages.

Figure 2-15: High School Graduates in the Region, 1970-2009

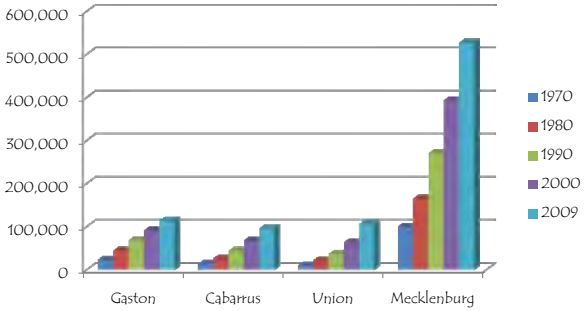


Figure 2-16: High School Graduates, 2000 & 2009

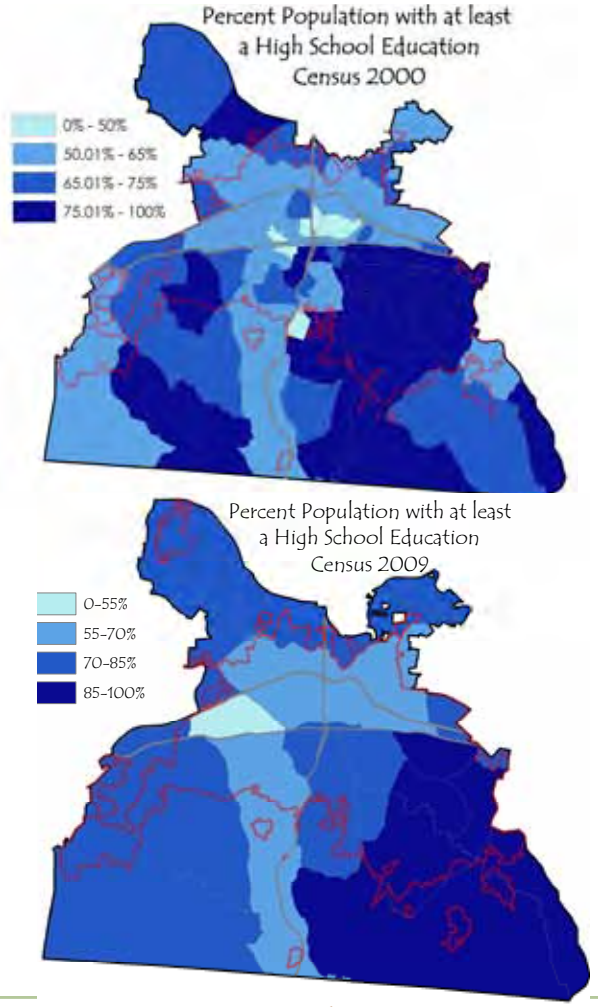


Figure 2-17: Percentage of Population with a High School Diploma or Greater 1990 - 2009

Year	1990	2000	2009*
H.S. or greater	62%	72%	77%
B.A. or greater	16%	20%	21%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Historic housing Trends

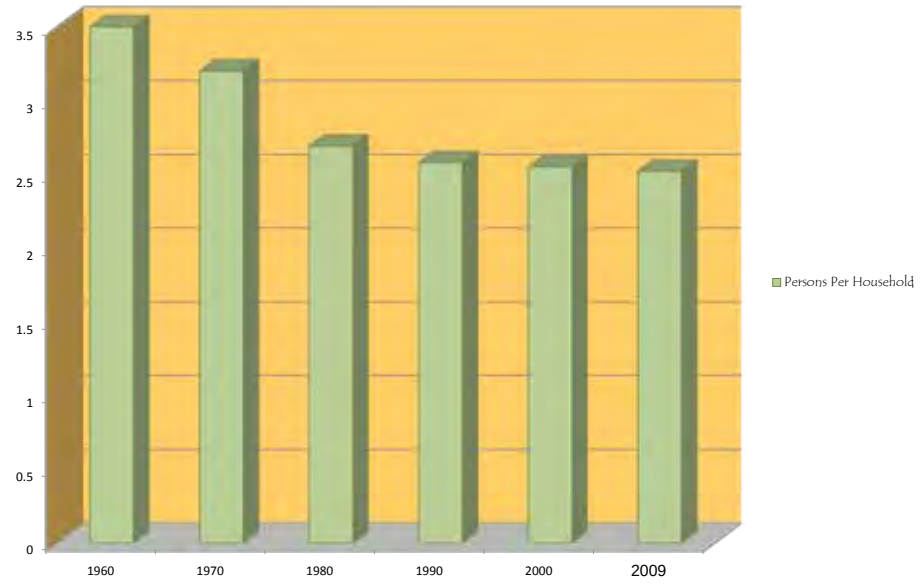
Following national trends, household size has fallen in the region since the 1960s. Figure 2-18 indicates that average household size decreased from 3.49 persons in 1960 to 2.5 persons in 2010 reflecting a dramatic change in the composition of the average household.

The housing market has also been affected, with an increase in new housing suitable for smaller families, such as apartments, condominiums and townhouses.

Housing ownership has increased in the Charlotte region over the last thirty years. The percentage of owner-occupied housing, as apposed to rental housing, has a spatial trend within the region, with greater owner occupancy rates in counties outside of Mecklenburg.

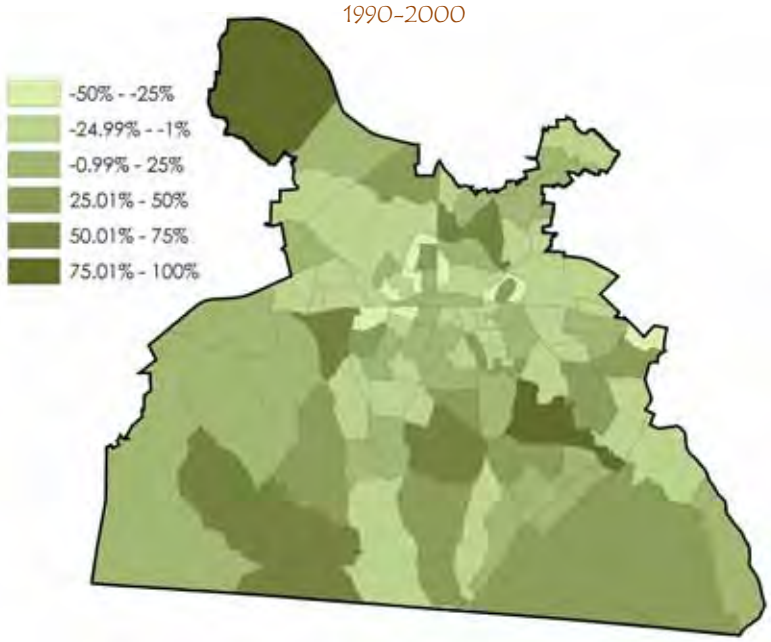
During this time Mecklenburg County's owner occupancy rate has held steady at 60%, but the outlying counties have a somewhat higher owner-occupancy rate, which has increased over time. One reason for the greater owner-occupancy rate outside of Mecklenburg is the more suburban nature of the surrounding counties. Indeed, much of the growth in counties such as Union and Cabarrus has been due to the strong growth outward from the City of Charlotte. This suburban growth has favored

Figure 2-18: Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC MSA, Average Household Size, 1960-2009



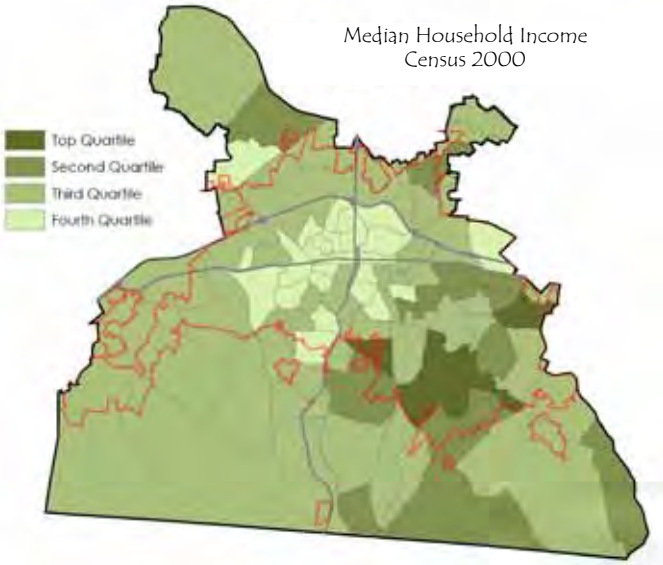
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

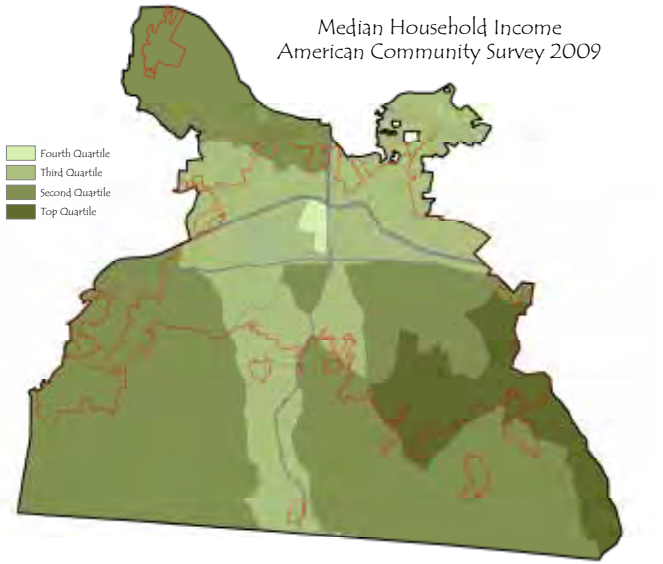
Figure 2-19: Percent Increase in Owner Occupied Housing, 1990-2000



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2-20: Median Household Income, 2000 & 2009





single-family housing, which is typically owner-occupied (see Figure 2-19). In Gastonia, the regional demand for housing has contributed to the growth of new housing developments.

Income

In 2009, the estimated median household income in Gastonia was $38,826, a 5% increase from 2000. Increases in Gastonia median household income were most likely due to the increased growth of affluence in the Southeast sector of the City, steady increases in educational attainment and a greater number of Gastonia residents employed in management positions. While Gastonia's median household income fell below the State and the Charlotte MSA median household incomes, the percentage change from 1990 to 2000 is relatively consistent.

Rather than show the actual income, Figure 2-20 indicates the distribution of the 2000 to 2009 median by income quartiles (25%), by showing the position of each block group relative to the remainder of the County. Those block groups in the top quartile indicate a median household income in the highest 25% for Gaston County for each year.

Figure 2-21: Median Household Income, 2000 and 2009

	2000	2009
Gastonia	$36,924	$38,826
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	$46,119	$53,452
North Carolina	$39,184	$45,069

Source: US Census 2000, American Factfinder 2005-2009

Another way to gauge income is to look at poverty, which is the condition of people whose annual family income is less than the poverty line. The poverty line is set at approximately three times the annual cost of a nutritionally adequate diet, varies by family size, and is updated yearly to reflect changes in the consumer price index.

Figure 2-22 indicates the percentage of individuals and families below the poverty level in 2009 for Gastonia and other selected jurisdictions within the region. Gastonia has a comparatively high percentage of people and families living below the poverty level, possibly due to a combination of factors including the loss of textile employment, high to moderate unemployment rates within the last ten years, trends in low educational attainment, and a lower than average median household income. Also, as shown in Figure 2-23 the overall percent of Hispanics living below the poverty level steadily increased from 2000 to 2010.

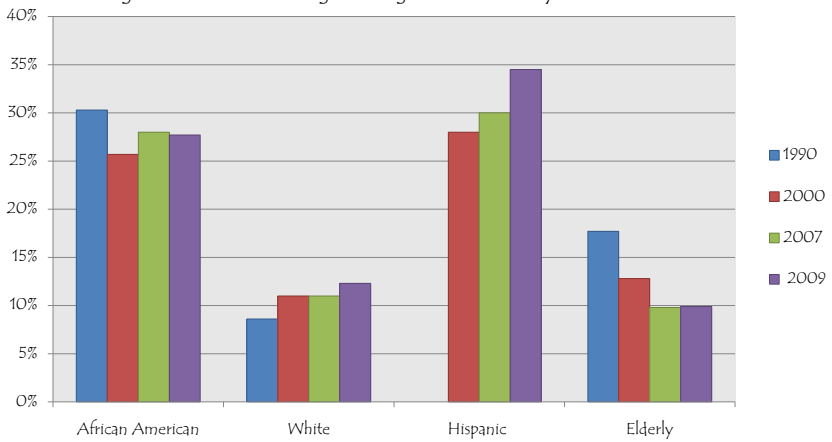
These figures suggest that the City should continue to advance the need for increased secondary education and workforce training as well as promote child-care friendly land use policies.

Figure 2-22: Regional Poverty Status: Percent Below Poverty Level, 2009

Place	Individuals	Families	Female-headed households w/ no husband present	Female-headed households (w/no husband present) with related children under 5 years
Gastonia	18.4%	14.8%	32.3%	55%
Gaston County	15%	11.3%	29.4%	47.3%
Charlotte	12.8%	9.4%	24.8%	34.5%
Concord	11.2%	81%	20.2%	23.4%
Monroe	24.9%	20.1%	48.5%	65.1%
Hickory	16.9%	12.1%	28.2%	35.7%
Shelby	22.2%	17.4%	51.3%	86.5%
Rock Hill, SC	18%	13.3%	32.2%	56.4%

Source: US Census, American Community Survey, 2005-2009

Figure 2-23: Percentage Living Below Poverty Level, Gastonia



Source: US Census Bureau

Figure 2-24: Individuals Below Poverty Level

Gastonia	18.4%
Gaston County	15.6%
Charlotte	12.8%
Concord	11.2%
Monroe	24.9%
Hickory	16.9%
Shelby	22.2%
Rock Hill, SC	18.0%

Source: American Community Survey, 2009

Population Projections: How are they Calculated?

Population projections for Gastonia and the 2025 planning area were obtained using a "step-down/step up" method. This included taking population information for a larger geographic area and allocating that population to smaller geographic areas, and taking known population data at the smallest geographic levels and working upward to settle on realistic population projections.

The projections were created as a first step in developing a regional travel demand model, which became necessary to combat regional air quality issues. The Charlotte Regional Alliance for Transportation (CRAFT) is an entity consisting of regional transportation agencies (metropolitan planning organizations) serving the Cabarrus-Rowan Urban Area, Gaston Urban Area, Mecklenburg-Union Urban Area, Rock Hill-Fort Mill Area, and the Lake Norman and Rocky River rural planning organizations. The Planning Department, in conjunction with CRAFT, prepared the projections based on the geography known as traffic analysis zones (TAZ). TAZs are primarily used to project future traffic levels and flows (vehicle miles traveled) to determine both future transportation needs (roads, transit, etc.) and future air pollution from motor vehicles.

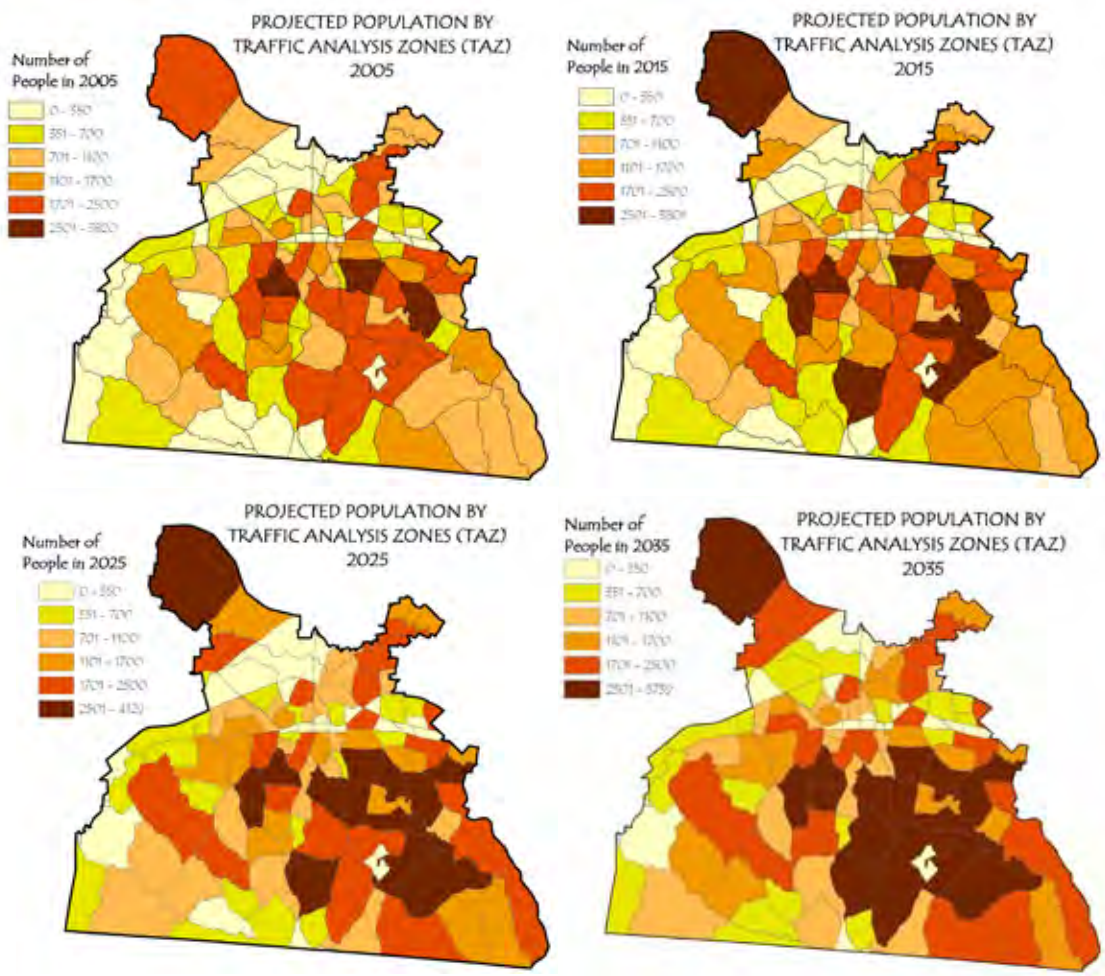
Because these projections will be subject to scrutiny by governmental agencies, environmental groups, the development community, and the public, considerable effort went into making sure the projections are as accurate as possible. CRAFT hired a consultant demographer to develop an updated population for the region using national and sub-national demographic and economic trends. The regional total was "stepped down" to provide county totals. Simultaneously, each MPO generated new traffic analysis zones and created their own county totals by "stepping up" the future population of each TAZ, based on historic projections, trends, and current development and building permit information, founded on their local knowledge. As part of this process, each MPO brought in experts from the public and private sectors, such as real estate brokers, builders, developers, and local permitting officers, to provide input on the projections, as land availability and real estate trends were important considerations. Through careful examination, critique, and additional research, reconciliation was eventually reached between the county totals produced by the MPOs and the county totals produced by the consultant demographer. The TAZ totals were adjusted accordingly to match the reconciled county total.

Population Projections

It should be noted that any population projection is a prediction of the future based upon what we know now. Projections are subject to a number of variables. Population growth can be enhanced through concentrated effort and investment, such as through the extension of water and sewer lines, road improvements, the location of major employers, and community marketing. Conversely, a major downturn in the economy or local decisions that create missed opportunities, can depress the rate of growth. The key to population projections is to make an educated prediction, based on trends in the city, region, and nation, while taking into account the possibility of a departure from those trends.

Figure 2-25 depicts the population in 2000 and population growth projections for years 2010, 2020, and 2030. The maps indicate several future growth trends. First, it is clear that we can expect that Gastonia's greatest rate of growth will continue in a suburban manner in the southeastern part of the Gastonia area, as has been the case for the last 30 or more years. Although City efforts to shift some growth to other sectors of the City will continue to be successful, it is doubtful that our inherent tendency to grow toward Charlotte will be reversed, barring the complete exhaustion of land and growth-supporting public facilities. Second, the area between Union Road and US 321 South will grow rapidly over the next ten years. Third, the area closer into the City between Garrison and Hudson Boulevards will increase dramatically in population, followed by the next outer ring, fanning out in an arc between Union Road and Lowell-Bethesda Road. Finally, areas between New Hope Road, Kendrick Road and Beaty/Union-New Hope Road will continue to grow and fill in. Other parts of the planning area that will receive moderate rates of growth include: areas near Crowders Mountain, areas between Gastonia and Bessemer City and west of NC 275, and areas northeast of the City along Long Creek.

Figure 2-25: Population Change by TAZ, 2005 to 2035



Sector Population Projections

The planning area is divided into eight sectors in order to focus on smaller areas for land use study and planning. These sectors, as seen in Figure 2-26, are: Central, Northwest, Southwest, Southeast, East, Northeast, Garden, and Crowders. The population projections for these areas are shown in Figures 2-26 and 2-27.

Figure 2-26: Planning Area Sectors

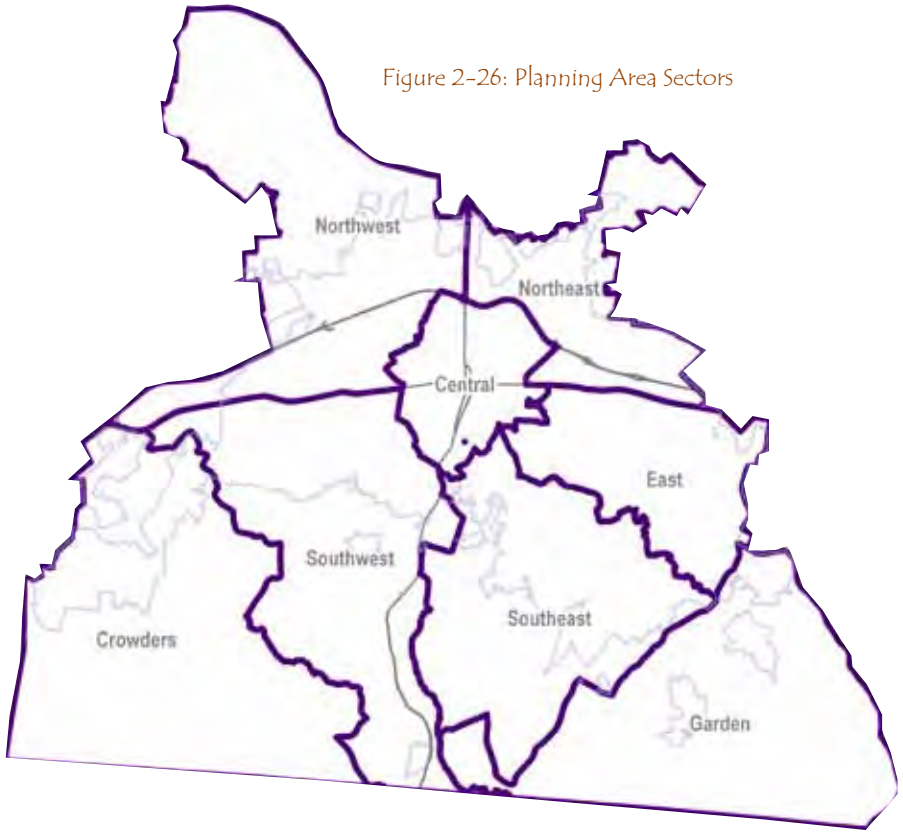


Figure 2-26: Sector Population Projections

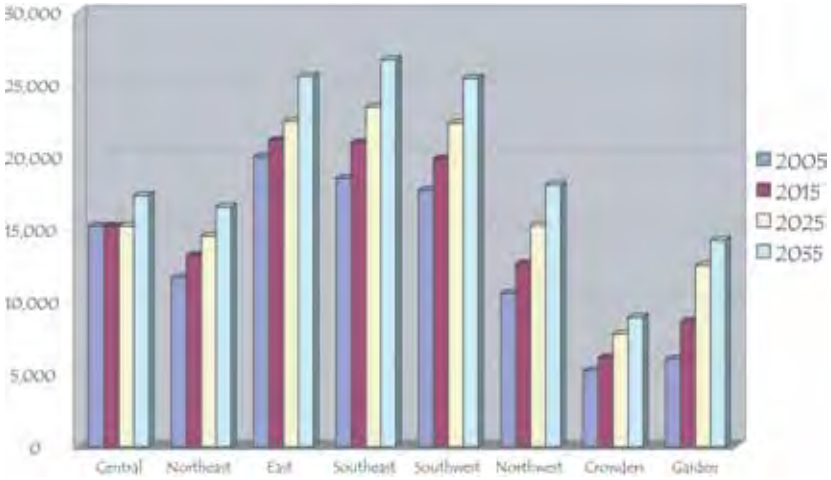


Figure 2-27: Sector Population Projections

	2005	2015	2025	2035	% Growth 2005-2035
Central	15,221	15,200	15,219	17,330	14%
Northeast	11,674	13,204	14,546	16,564	42%
East	20,013	21,151	22,459	25,575	28%
Southeast	18,514	20,978	23,454	26,708	44%
Southwest	17,691	19,870	22,327	25,424	44%
Northwest	10,578	12,612	15,264	18,048	71%
Crowders	5,224	6,136	7,789	8,927	71%
Garden	6,040	8,628	12,509	14,244	136%

3

Neighborhoods, Why are they Important?

Neighborhood Characteristics

Existing Housing Stock

Future Trends & Needs

Issues

Objectives & Tools

Housing & Neighborhoods

GASTONIA 2025
our place in the future

Housing & Neighborhoods

Housing & Neighborhoods 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.

Neighborhoods, why are they Important?

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. Make no mistake, neighborhoods do not become or remain healthy by accident. Creating a city of healthy sustainable neighborhoods takes a conscious, proactive decision by community leaders, government and private sector partners.

Of all the elements that determine a neighborhood's stability, homes are by far the most influential. Good housing only exists in the context of good neighborhoods. For instance, the types and condition of a neighborhood's homes – whether houses or apartments, owned or rented – determine whether the resident will live in comfort and safety. The value and change in value of a neighborhood's housing directly influences the financial condition of the occupants by providing more or less expensive shelter and in the case of homeowners, increasing or decreasing the investment in the home.

Housing and neighborhoods are an important part of Gastonia's land use and economy. The type, location, availability, affordability, and quality of housing will determine what kinds of neighborhoods are contained in Gastonia in future years. Dilapidated housing can depress entire neighborhoods, as well as provide a location for illegal activities and create ideal conditions negative environmental and social issues. On the other hand, attractive, well-designed neighborhoods can foster strong communities and are an asset to the residents of the City of Gastonia.

Housing can also impact economic development. Traditionally, commercial development generally follows rooftops, and most employers are concerned about having an available workforce that is reasonably close to the job site. New residential construction as well as improvement of existing units helps to create jobs and foster spending for construction materials and other home furnishings related retail. While the housing industry creates positive economic activity, those housing rooftops also represent new demands for government services. New residential development can exacerbate existing traffic and pollution problems, and create additional costs to local government for services such as police, water, streets, schools and other infrastructure. On the other hand, reinvestment in neighborhoods located in the

center city can serve as a smart growth tool that enhance the quality of life for a community by allowing for more efficient use of the land and infrastructure by re-absorbing growth back into existing communities. This reduces the amount of traffic, pollution, and strain on public services.

A future resident's 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 by *ensuring that new and existing neighborhoods are sustainable and provide a sense of community, offer a variety of quality residential alternatives, contain strong neighborhood institutions, and provide easy access to daily activities.* This vision and guiding principle provide the frameworks for the housing and neighborhood chapter of the comprehensive plan.

The housing and neighborhood chapter provides the City of Gastonia an inventory of the existing housing stock and its conditions, occupancy and affordability characteristics; an assessment of its adequacy and suitability for serving current and future population and economic development needs; an articulation of community housing goals; and a strategy to ensure adequate provision of housing for all sectors of the population.

Background

Historically, neighborhoods were woven into the dense urban fabric of the community, arranged around a grid street network close to businesses and employers, and included public gathering spaces as an integral component. Like most places within the region, state, and nation, Gastonia's neighborhoods developed along this same premise. In fact, prior to World War II when cars were less affordable and less common, Gastonia's neighborhoods tended to be relatively dense and close to the commercial and political center of the City. People were able to walk or bicycle to places of employment, businesses, and local amenities.

During the 1890s and late 1900s textile mills built housing for their workers, and these mill villages were almost always within walking distance of the mill. Larger communities, such as the Loray (Firestone) Mill village, had their own shopping areas as well. These communities varied in size layout and ornamentation of individual houses. They were not concentrated in one particular section of the City, but several mills and their villages were often built near one another. Neighborhoods located south of the commercial district and toward the eastern end of Gastonia were primarily occupied by non-textile workers, small businessmen, and City employees. The City's African-American community formed north of the railroad tracks, centered around Chester Street and York Street. The City's professional, commercial, and industrial leaders built their homes near Franklin Street and York Street in order to be close to the commercial center.

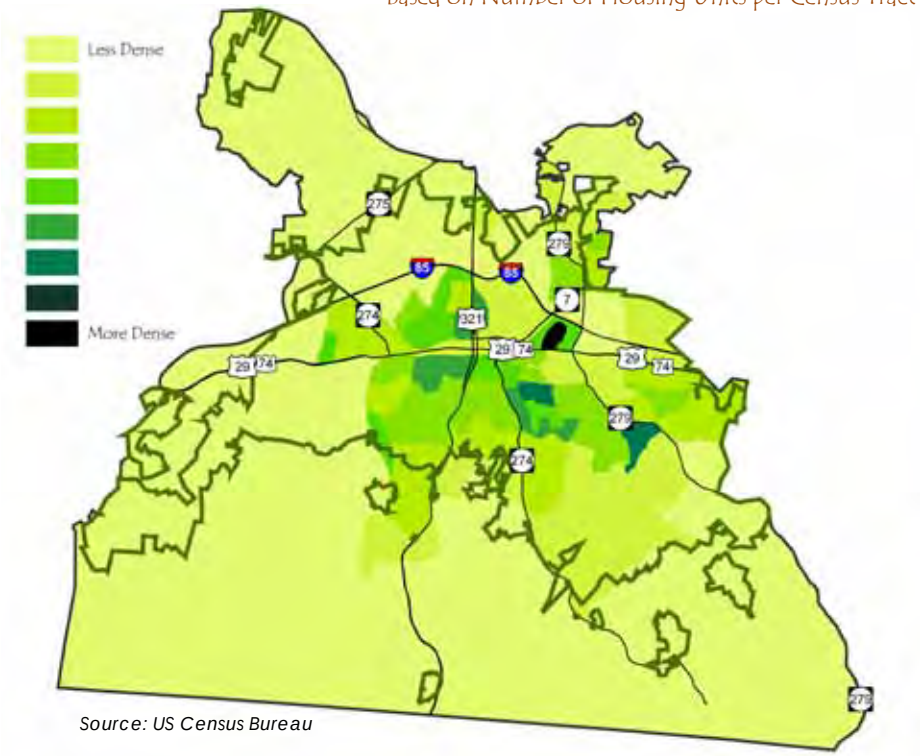
After World War II, cars became more readily available, public transportation began its decline, and most mills sold

Loray Mill with playground

During the 1890s and late 1900s, textile mills built housing for their workers and some provided extra amenities, such as an on-site playground.

Prior to WWII when cars were affordable and less common, Gastonia's neighborhoods tended to be relatively dense and close to the commercial and political center of the city.

Figure 3-1: Density of Housing Within 2025 Planning Area
Based on Number of Housing Units per Census Tract



Source: US Census Bureau

their housing. The return of soldiers and the subsequent baby boom combined with the war also created a housing shortage in the late 1940s followed by a construction boom in the 1950s and 1960s. The character of the housing built in this period was different from the pre-war variety. Larger lots, fewer sidewalks and more self-contained neighborhoods characterized the newer developments. Shopping centers such as Akers Center, Dixie Village and Gaston Mall were also new to the post-war era, and they generally required a car to reach them. Thus, the shift in Gastonia was from an urban style of living before the war to a more suburban style after the war.

Post WWII growth patterns combined with the increased use of the automobile negatively affected neighborhoods: increased mobility allowed people to move further out of the cities, into less dense areas of the city, called "suburbs." As you move away from the urban core, neighborhoods in Gastonia tend to mirror the image of a typical suburban development, many of are low-density, auto-oriented neighborhoods built on a cul-de-sac street grid that lack public spaces and have left neighborhoods divided and self-contained with no connections to businesses, parks and recreation, goods or services. Figure 3-1 illustrates the level of density throughout the City.

TRADITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

TYPICAL SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT

Neighborhood Characteristics

As defined earlier, neighborhoods are dynamic social and economic entities with unique characteristics. A traditional neighborhood in Gastonia's Center City can be defined by a common identity generally focused around a physical or social characteristic, which distinguishes it from other community areas. For example, the Loray Mill Village neighborhood is very dense with mill housing

surrounding the now vacant mill site. In areas outside of the Center City, zoning and land use patterns in Gastonia have largely separated the single-family residential areas from non-residential uses. Therefore, with the exception of its historic neighborhoods and few remaining rural areas, the Gastonia we see today is predominantly a collection of subdivisions and planned communities. It is the classic post-World War II, single-family residential, suburban development that typifies most of Gaston County.

Generally, neighborhood development in Gastonia can be categorized as:

- Pre-World War II development (1,114 units; 3.5%) Original historic settlement defined by characteristics it shares with near by commercial business centers, or a public space within walking distance of the homes and are distinguishable by the composition of the households
- Post-World War II suburban development, built prior to 1970 (14,373 units; 45%)
- Development built after 1970 (16,512 units; 52%) Independently developed subdivisions and Master Planned Communities such as Catawba Hills, Willow Creek, Glenwood Acres, Autumn Acres, and Heritage Woods. These subdivisions have definable boundaries.

Existing Housing Stock

2000 Census data indicates that there were 42,885 housing units in the planning area. Also, as shown in Figure 3-2, recent building permit records indicate that 1806 new housing units have been built, bringing the estimated total housing units to 45,284. This increase reflects a steady growth in the number of households in Gastonia and the surrounding area. This housing data comes from several sources including; US Census, 2010 Comprehensive Plan, building permit information, and the 2005-2010 Consolidated Housing Plan. The following is an analysis of the existing housing stock in Gastonia by age, condition, variety and affordability.

Age of Housing

Determining the age of housing can help a community anticipate future maintenance needs. Mechanical equipment, such as furnaces, water heaters and plumbing facilities, has a limited has a limited life span, as do roofs, windows and siding. Preventative maintenance can extend the life of a home and improve its functionality and appearance.

Gaston County has the largest percentage of aged housing stock in the region. It is projected that by 2015 Gaston County may have as many as 8,000 housing units that are 35 or more years old, more than 50% of the housing stock. Figure 3-3 shows that 46.6% of Gaston County's housing is 35+ years old, which is the highest in the region.

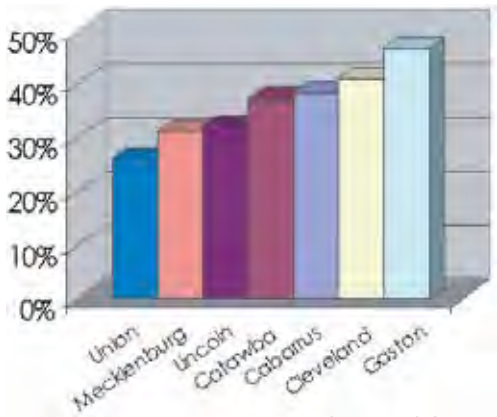
Also, the City of Gastonia has the largest percentage of aged housing stock for a jurisdiction within the region. The median age of the housing within the City of Gastonia is 39 years. Approximately 33% of the City's housing, or 23,878 units were built prior to 1960. Almost half (48%) of the housing units in Gastonia, or 15,487 units, was built in or before 1970. Many of these units are located in neighborhoods in the central sector and will likely be in need of more significant improvements including windows, roofs, furnaces, and water heaters and siding in the near future.

Figure 3-2: Gastonia Residential Building Permits, 2005-2010

Year	Single Family	Multi-Family	Total
2005	340	10	350
2006	462	6	468
2007	522	1	523
2008	225	6	231
2009	123	5	128
2010	105	1	106
6 year total	1777	13	1806

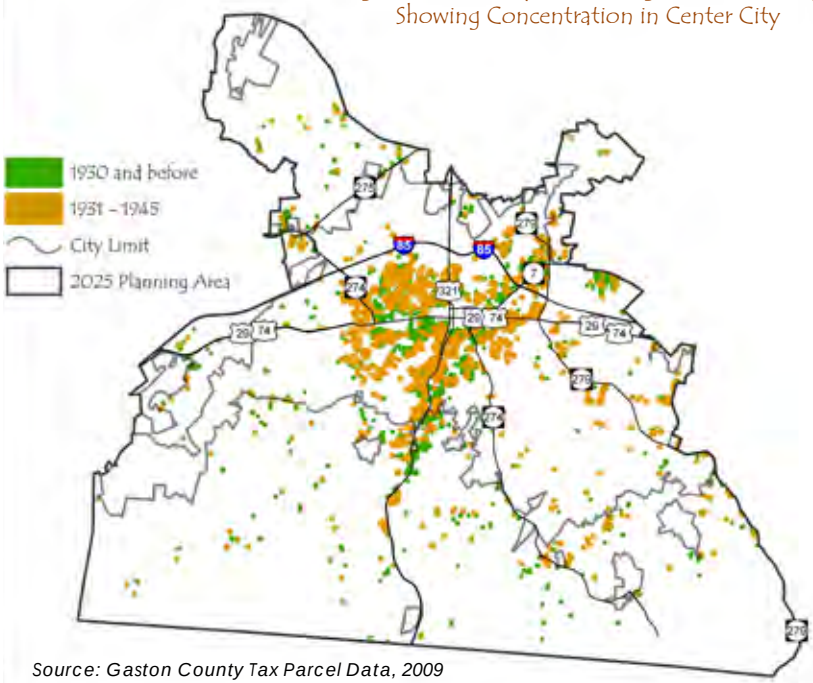
Source: City of Gastonia, Building Permits & Inspections Division, January 2011

Figure 3-3: Percent of Housing 35 Years and Older in 2010



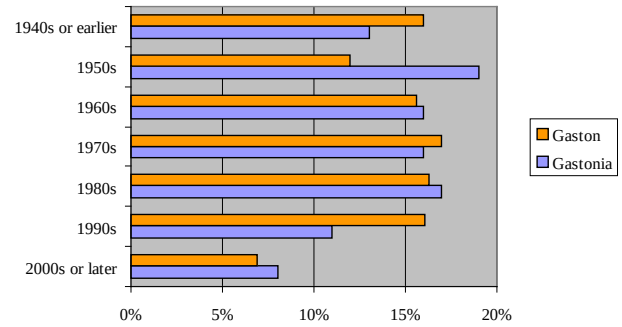
Source: US Census

Figure 3-4: Density of Housing 50+ Years of Age Showing Concentration in Center City



Source: Gaston County Tax Parcel Data, 2009

Figure 3-5: Age of Housing Units



Source: American Community Survey, 2009

Housing Condition

Substandard housing can be defined in a number of ways. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development bases its definition on plumbing and overcrowding: houses without complete plumbing or with more than one person per room in the house are considered to be substandard. A broader definition of substandard housing would include houses or apartments that are in need of substantial repair. Factors affecting the safety and cleanliness of a house are particularly important. Leaking roofs, exposed wiring, subsiding foundations and rodent infestations are indications of a substandard condition. Substandard housing needs major improvements, beyond normal maintenance, to bring it into good repair.

1950s housing stock, Gastonia

Fortunately, unlike many older urban areas throughout the region, the City had only a limited number of isolated neighborhood pockets that would be considered blighted or deteriorating. A blighted or deteriorating neighborhood is one which exhibits a high percentage of structures which objectively determinable signs of deterioration sufficient to constitute a threat to human health, safety, and public welfare. These areas were typically in the older mill village communities where limited income made housing maintenance difficult. The 2005–2010 Gastonia Consolidated Plan, a five-year plan to guide housing assistance, estimates that 1% of the housing units are without complete kitchens, plumbing or fuel. A conservative estimate is that another 10% of housing units may have one or more additional structural issues not specifically identified, particularly lead-based paint hazards in houses built prior to 1978.

Most of the City's streets in the established residential neighborhoods are in good condition, although many of them were constructed nearly 30 years ago. Most streets have curbing but in only limited instances sidewalks are available. Street tree canopies are prevalent in the older neighborhoods but noticeably absent in newer developments. Neighborhood yards tended to be better maintained in developments built since 1970, perhaps

an indication of older residents with less physical or fiscal ability to undertake yard work. Areas of the City with a large number of housing units built prior to 1970 also had higher percentages of rental properties. Typically, only those neighborhoods developed as planned communities offered recreational opportunities that were integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood. Other developments were dependent upon City-sponsored recreation facilities that were not planned for walking to and from the neighborhoods. Other places for gathering, such as churches and schools, were only infrequently a part of the City's neighborhood context. A notable exception was within central sector where churches and schools were a very large part of the neighborhood. In fact, very expansive worship facilities or schools consumed a significant amount of land within the central sector neighborhood area.

Housing Mixture

There are two very important categories that reflect the mixture of housing in the community. These categories are important because they serve different segments of the population and contribute to a community's ability to sustain a population by providing life-cycle housing. The idea behind life-cycle housing is that people can, theoretically, remain in or near their neighborhood their whole life, as they age and go through different demographic cycles of their lives. The first category is the type of units available. Architectural style, regional vernaculars, climate, geography, local tradition, and economics are all factors that shape the type of residential development in a community. The variety of housing types that has evolved since Gastonia was first settled provides an understanding of those factors and a housing environment that distinguishes Gastonia from other jurisdictions in the region.

Street tree canopies along residential streets

From the 1850s through the early 1980s, Gastonia's single-family detached units were the predominant new residential construction type. However, in the early 1990s new residential housing market shifted from single-family to multi-family housing. By the early 1900s, multi-family residential housing was the leading type of new housing in Gastonia. During this time, multi-family housing increased from 11.8% of total housing to 27%. This trend, however, slowed during the first part of the 21st century, as new single-family units once again became the more predominant residential type.

As illustrated in Figure 3-6, US Census Bureau data reports that in 2009 there were approximately 31,500 dwelling units in Gastonia. Of those 32,000 dwelling units 68% were single-family detached structures, 6% were single-family attached, 22% are multi-unit structures, and 4% are mobile home units. While there is has been an increase in the number of single-family units and a decline in the number of new multi-family units, the vacancy rates for rental units is significantly lower than the vacancy rate for homeowner-occupied units. This indicates a greater demand for multiple family units than for single-family units.

Multi-Family Homes

Single Family Homes

The number of households in Gastonia grew by over 4900 since 1990; however, the percent of married-couple family households decreased.

Figure 3-6: Housing Type by Type of Structure

Housing Type	Number	Percent of Total
Single-Family Detached	21,492	68%
Single-Family Attached (Townhouses and Duplexes)	1,981	6%
Multi-Family (Condos and Apartments)	6,897	22%
Mobile homes	1,143	4%
Total	**31,513**	**100%**

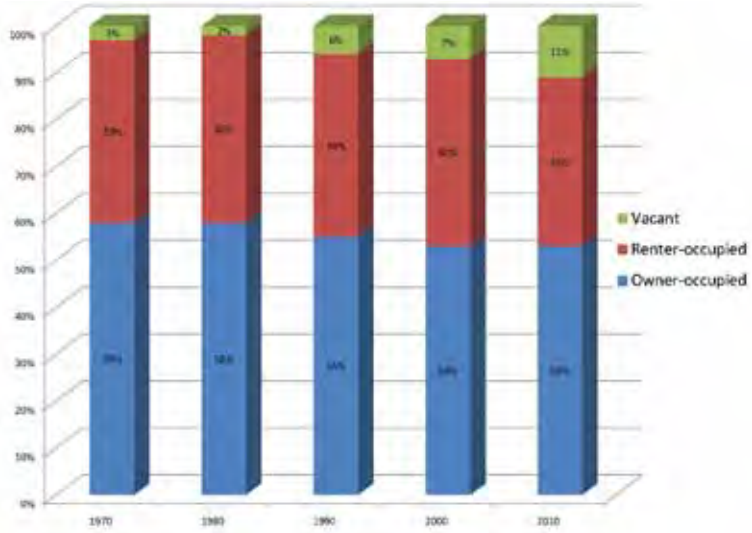
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

The second important component of life-cycle housing relates to housing tenure. Tenure refers to length or duration of occupancy, and in the context of housing units refers to whether such units are owner-occupied or renter- occupied. A consistent trend in housing since the 1970s in Gastonia has been the increase in the percentage of vacant housing, up 5% since 1970. This may be attributed to the aging of people and housing and sub-prime lending practices, which have resulted in unprecedented foreclosure rates throughout the MSA area.

Another trend that is significant to the community's ability to provide life-cycle housing for future generations is the steady decrease in the percentage of housing units that are owner-occupied. Figure 3-7 provides occupancy by tenure for the City, for the period 1970 through 2010. In 1970 58% of the residential dwelling units were owner-occupied. That percentage has since decreased by 5% in 20010 where of the more than 31,513 housing units in Gastonia, approximately 53% are owner-occupied. This figure lags behind both the county and the state as shown in Figure 3-8. Nearly 65% of all North Carolina's households are owner-occupied.

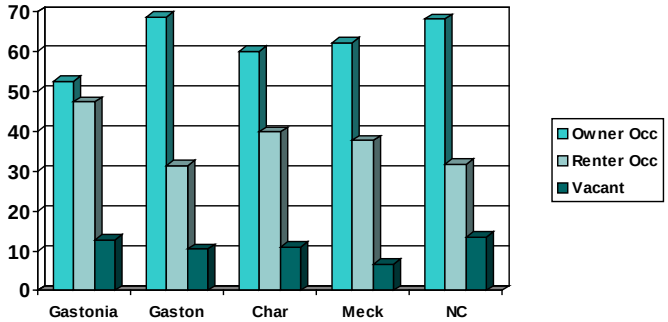
The same is true in Gaston County, where homeownership rates increased from half of the occupied units in 1970 to close to 69% in 2010. Homeownership has been a long-standing measure of neighborhood stability as neighborhoods benefit from the presence of stable, long-term homeowners. Therefore, it is essential for Gastonia to promote homeownership as a tool to create sustainable neighborhoods.

Figure 3-7: Gastonia Housing Tenure: 1970 to 2010



Source: U.S. Census, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2010

Figure 3-8: Comparison of Housing Occupancy Status, 2009



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

Household Composition

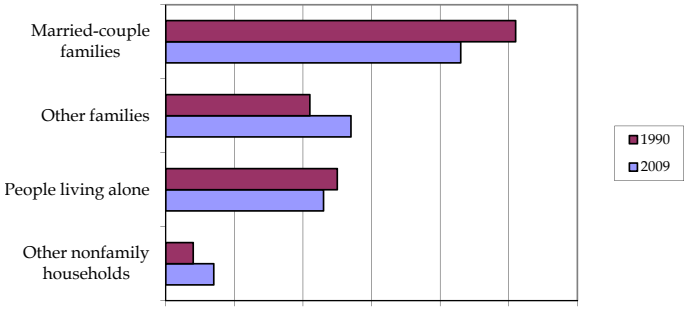
A "household" is a person or group of people who occupy a housing unit. Knowing the trends in household composition helps a community predict the type of housing needed to support the various needs of each household type. While family households have remained the most dominant household type within the region and state as a whole, over the past decade decreases in the number of married-couple households indicate a need to plan for a more diverse housing type to meet the demands of a more diverse community. Overall, the number of households in Gaston County increased by 4%, in 2009. The number of households in Gastonia also increased by 19% during this time. Families make up 70% of the households in Gastonia. This figure includes both married-couple families (43%) and other families (27%).

Figure 3-9 shows that the vast majority of family households in 2005, households containing at least one person related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption were married-couple households. While there was a 15% increase in the number of family households since 1990, data also show a decrease in the percent of married-couple households and an increase in the percent of other family households. Other family households are typically single-parent households and therefore, this suggests that there is an increase in the number of single parent households within the City. Non-family households made up 30% of all households in Gastonia. Most of the non-family households were people living alone, but some were comprised of people living in households in which no one was related to the householder.

As seen in Figure 3-10, as compared to Gastonia and Gaston County, Charlotte has a larger percentage of single-person households; however, Gastonia has a larger percentage of non-married family households than Charlotte or Gaston County. Census figures also indicate a growing trend in the number of households within the region that have one or more persons 65 years and older. These households tend to have a greater need for services.

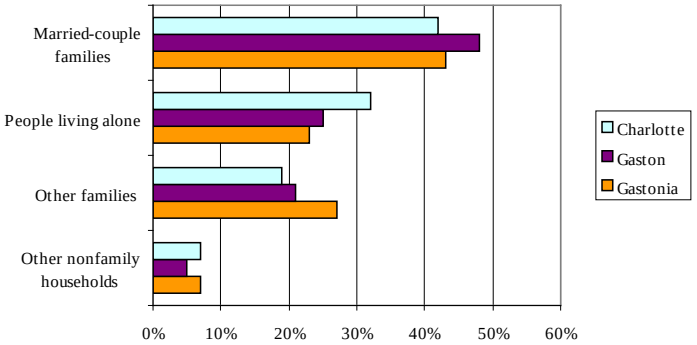
While the number of households in Gaston County has increased by 13.1% since 1990, the average size of theses households declined from 2.64 to 2.54 persons. The average size of a household in Gastonia is 2.6 persons, slightly above the county and regional average. Household size is shrinking as married couples without children at home and single-person households each outnumber "traditional" family households. Among other things, this trend is undermining old assumptions about age-based choices of city versus suburban housing.

Figure 3-9: Gastonia Types of Households 1990 - 2009



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

Figure 3-10: Types of Households in the Region



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

Single-parent households and single-person households are on the increase.

According to the North Carolina Justice Center analysis, about 1 in 63 housing units in North Carolina were in foreclosure during 2010.

Source for photo: http://www.buyforeclosedhomesx.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/buy-foreclosed-homes-make-money.jpg

Housing Values

Over the past twenty years, Gaston County had a 6.3% realized gain in median income, and the City of Gastonia had an 8% increase. For both Gaston County and Gastonia, the median value of owner-occupied housing increased by more than 50%. Given the increase in housing value, the increase in homeownership and the decrease in realized gain in are median income, what has occurred is a higher rate of risky, non-traditional mortgages with higher foreclosure rates and higher rates of vacant housing units. Figure 3-11 shows the home value and median monthly rent for Gastonia from 1960 to 2009. Median house values increased significantly over the past twenty years, from $59,300 in 1990 to an estimated $124,500 in 2009. This trend is consistent with other jurisdictions within the region. This indicates that owner-occupied housing units have increased in value at a faster rate than increases in median income, particularly taking into account the effect of the CPI on real income. According to tax valuation trends, owner occupied housing will continue to increase by a minimum of 35% to 40% over the next 20 years.

During the same period, monthly contracts for rental housing increased from $431 to $681, or 58%. While the 2009 data is based on estimates, this represents a significant increase in the rental prices. This increase maybe due to an increase in single-family housing unit foreclosures. After 2007, a large number of owner-occupied units and units that would have otherwise been sold have converted to rental units. Historically, renter households have median incomes somewhat lower than homeowner households; therefore, the housing cost burden for renters is greater than the housing cost burden for homeowners in Gastonia. A good indicator is that the Housing Choice Voucher program, in particular the Gastonia Housing Authority, has gone from a one year wait in 2005 to an almost three year wait in 2010.

Figure 3-11: Cost of Housing

	Median Home Value	Median Monthly Rent
1970	$12,500	$56
1980	$32,500	$117
1990	$59,300	$378
2000	$92,100	$431
2009	$133,200	$528

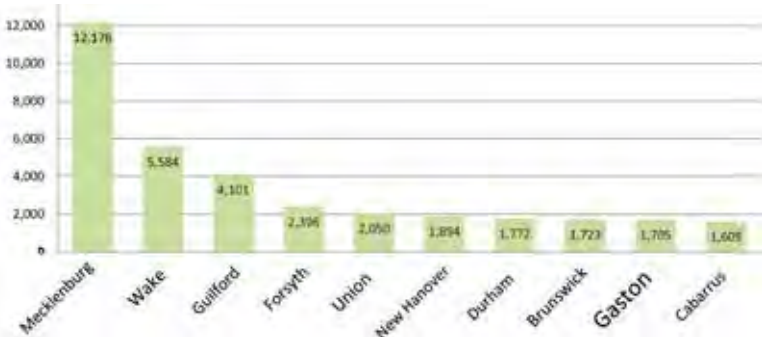
Source: US Census Bureau

Housing values are expected to decrease after housing are accessed to account for market changes which occurred after the housing meltdown. New residential construction began to slow after 2007 as the commercial and residential real estate market declined and led to excess. This excess had triggered the first sharp declines in residential real estate especially in the US south. Current building permit data indicates that this trend will continue. The number of residential foreclosures have had a significant impact on the values of housing around the state and the region. A recent study conducted by the North Carolina Justice Center found that Mecklenburg and Union counties had the highest rate of foreclosure within the state. During 2010, about one in 34 housing units in those counties were in foreclosure, while the rate for Gaston county was one in 52 housing units. As seen on Figure 3-12, Gaston County foreclosure rate was the ninth highest in the state.

Housing Affordability

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has determined that households should spend no more than 30% of their income on housing. Using definitions established by HUD, cost burden is calculated as gross housing costs, including utility costs, as a percentage of gross income. Households that pay more than 30% of their

Figure 3-12: Top 10 Counties in North Carolina, Number of Foreclosures, 2010



Source: NC North Carolina Justice Center, 2010

incomes on housing are considered to be cost burdened. Cost burdened households will find it difficult to meet all their household's needs. By considering the number and characteristics of these households, the community can more easily develop a response to the need. An analysis of the cost of housing compared to household income can provide valuable information on the availability of housing that is affordable to the workforce.

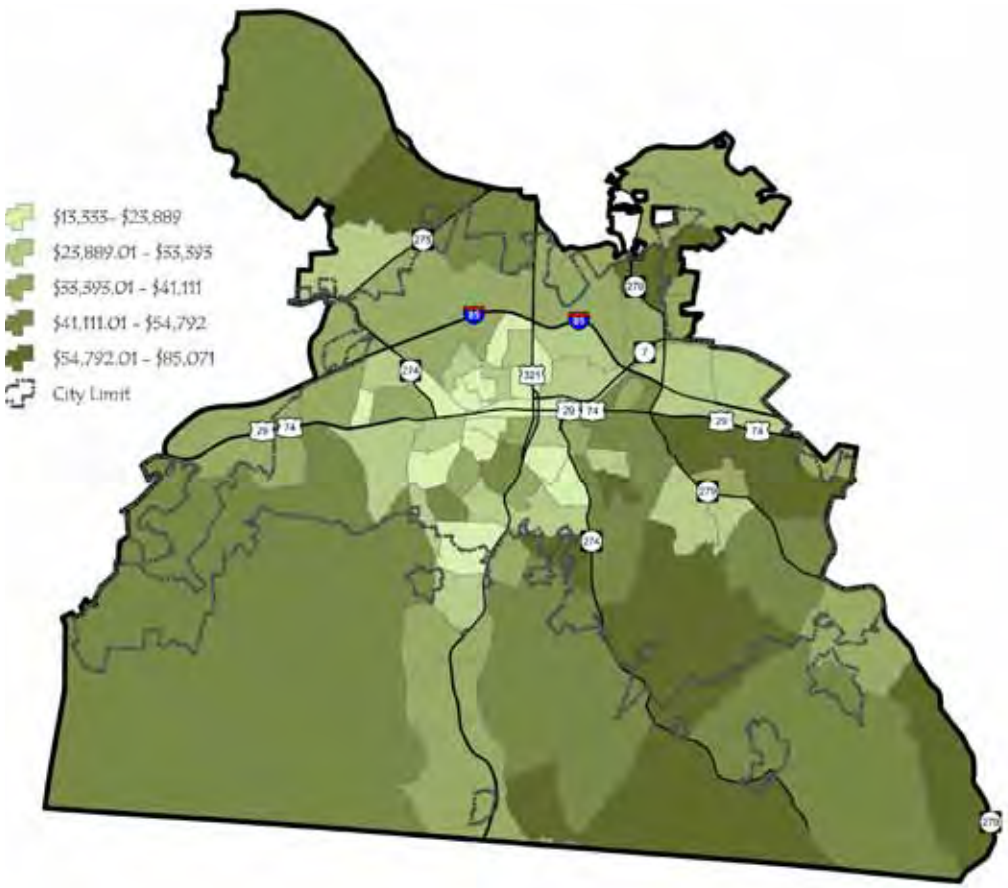
Household income affects the ability of a household to afford available housing in a community. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has recommended that a household pay no more than 30% of their income on housing. According to the North Carolina Low Income Coalition, 31.5% of people living in Gaston County pay more than 30% of their income on housing. Payments for housing include rent and mortgage payments, utilities, homeowners insurance and property taxes. 2009 Census figures show 30% of owners with mortgages, 24% of owners without mortgages, and 43% of renters in Gastonia spent 30% or more of household income on housing. Figure 3-13 provides a comparison by percent of cost burdened households for owner occupied and renter occupied housing units for Gaston County, Gastonia, Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

Figure 3-13: Gaston County Median Monthly Housing Cost, 2009

	Gastonia	Gaston	Charlotte	Mecklenburg
Owners with mortgage	$1,209	$1,007	$1,248	$1,277
Owners without mortgage	$308	$311	$396	$392
Renters	$681	$584	$732	$738

Source: 2009 American Community Survey

Figure 3-14: Median Value, Owner Occupied Housing, Yr 2000



Source: US Census Bureau

Homes in the Historic Districts

Ashley Arms

As illustrated, Gastonia has a higher percentage of cost burdened owners without mortgages. These owners tend to be elderly and on fixed incomes.

As seen in Figure 3-13, the median monthly housing cost for owners with and without mortgages is slightly higher in Gastonia than Gaston County, but slightly less than Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Gastonia's median monthly housing cost for renters was the lowest among those compared. Figure 3-14 illustrates the 2000 median value in dollars for all owner-occupied housing units by Census Block Group in the 2025 planning area. The figure does not reflect units built since 2000. The current recession and down turn in the housing market will undoubtedly result in reappraisals and in some areas of the planning area, a lowering of median home values.

Unemployment Rates/Job Growth

Like many parts of the country, Gastonia has experienced double digit unemployment rates in the past three years. Employers are experiencing economic downturns that create workforce downsizing and business closings. Historically, Gaston County has experienced a higher unemployment rate than statewide due to loss of manufacturing jobs, in particular textiles, to foreign countries.

The Gaston County Economic Development Commission works to develop new and diverse industries countywide. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Gaston County has a civilian workforce population of 94,629 (16 years and older). Almost 84% are private wage and salary workers, 11.7% are government workers and 4.5% are self-employed. The largest employment industries are:

- Education, Health Care & Social Services 19.6%
- Manufacturing 18.7%
- Retail Trade 11.3%
- Construction 8.7%
- Professional, Scientific, Management, Admin. 7.3%
- Arts, Entertainment, Food Service 7.2%
- Transportation, Warehouse, Utilities 6.4%
- Finance, Insurance and Real Estate 6.1%

The Gaston County Economic Development Commission's (EDC) study, 2005 Target Industry Sector Analysis by Strategic Location Group, identified six primary industry targets hat would provide the best economic development opportunities based upon the current resources of land, buildings and work force. The six targeted industries are:

1. Fabricated metal structural products;
2. Miscellaneous plastic products;
3. General industrial machinery;
4. Miscellaneous furniture and fixtures;
5. Medical equipment and supplies manufacturing; and
6. Ventilation, heating, air conditioning and commercial refrigeration equipment and manufacturing.

The County's EDC works with the N.C. Dept. of Commerce to implement recommendations from the study.

Special Needs

Persons with special needs have been leading independent lives in greater numbers. Housing that is suitable for persons with special needs is characterized by an absence of physical barriers. Special needs housing includes housing for persons with physical and/or mental disabilities. New and rehabilitated housing should be routinely constructed with as few architectural barriers as possible. Apartment

complexes must now meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and greater awareness of barrier-free design is evident in house construction. Location near bus routes and shopping areas would help facilitate the transportation needs of some disabled people.

A national trend indicates continued growth in the senior population due to increases in life spans due to improvements in the health care system. Housing options for the senior population have increased in the past 10 years. The November 1999 Housing Market Survey by Tremont Consultants indicates a moderate need for an increase in elderly housing. Two non-profit organizations, Mercy Housing Southeast and the Salvation Army each received awards to construct HUD Section 202 apartments, resulting in 122 new units of elderly housing. There still remains a need for elderly housing based upon the trend in population growth of the senior population, and the number of seniors on the current public housing waiting lists. Anticipated need is minimum 400 additional housing units for low and very-low income seniors.

A recent survey by the City of Gastonia's Community Development Division indicated a waiting list of more than 300 households in need of special needs housing. According to Gaston Residential Services a contractor of Pathways Area Authority, 52 non-homeless people are currently on the waiting list for special needs housing. Additionally, there are 122 families or individuals with special needs on the Public Housing Authority's waiting list.

In addition to housing for seniors and persons with special needs, there is a need to provide housing for the homeless population. Beginning in 2008, the economic crisis drove requests for help from homeless individuals and families higher than previously reported. According to the latest Continuum of Care (CoC) Annual Point-in-Time Count (PIT) conducted on January 27, 2010, 250 people were identified as homeless and another 126 homeless people were living in HUD-sponsored permanent supportive housing. Of the 250 homeless, 113 were unsheltered as identified by a service-based count. In addition, the PIT count identified an additional 119 persons at-risk of becoming homeless. The at-risk count was a service-based count of individuals who self-identified living doubled up with friends or relatives. According to CoC's HMIS there is a disproportionate share of African-American homeless persons (40%+) in ratio to the total population of the Gastonia Consortium area. Service to the homeless is provided by several local agencies, such as the Salvation Army and Cornerstone Christian Ministries. It is estimated that approximately 35% of the homeless are individuals or families in transition, who want and need permanent housing, but are homeless it due to financial crisis. This group also includes women and children escaping abusive situations. Vouchers are offered to the homeless, enabling them to go to hotels and motels when beds were unavailable.

Figure 3-15: Gaston County Homeless Population, 2007-2010

	Total Homeless	Total Chronic Homeless
2007	250	36
2008	493	26
2009	833*	102
2010	568	154

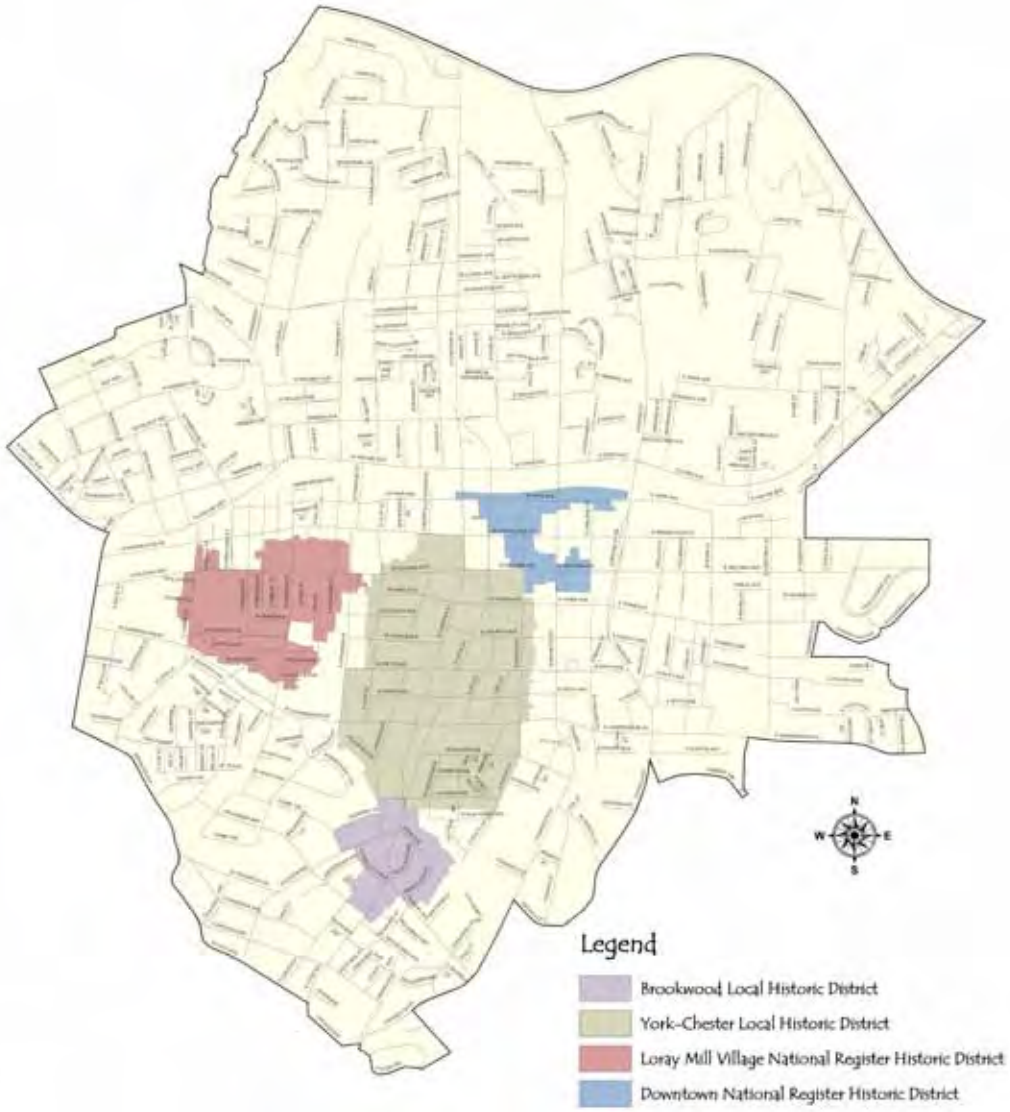
*Note: After completing 2008 PIT review of one agency, showed count of at-risk doubled-up as homeless.

Source: City of Gastonia Five Year Consolidated Plan, 2010

Historic Housing

Gastonia's rapid growth and prosperity in the early part of the century has left the City with a legacy of historic housing, ranging from modest bungalows to grand

Figure 3-16: Historic Districts



mansions. Gastonia has two local historic districts as shown in Figure 3-16. Preservation and conservation foster civic beauty, enhance property values within the district and Gastonia as a whole, and improve the general welfare of the City and its residents. City of Gastonia historic districts are distinctive areas. They are places of singular historical flavor characterized by the streets, buildings, trees, architectural design, and landscape features. Historic district designation protects and enhances the existing character of a community. The districts are also a legacy, linking present and future generations with their heritage and providing diversity vital to the City's future quality of life. Exterior alterations, construction of new buildings or signs, and removal of large trees are some of the activities that must first be approved by the Gastonia Historic District Commission. The purpose of such guidelines is to stabilize the neighborhood and maintain its historic integrity. In order to be approved, these changes must contribute to the unique aesthetics and historic environment of the neighborhood.

The York-Chester Historic District is the City's oldest community and consequently the City's first historic district. The district was created in 1988 and has the largest concentration of historic housing, located south of downtown in the York-Chester neighborhood. York-Chester consists of over 540 structures, with many of the homes dating back to the early 1920s. The architecture of the district is a mixture of many styles, including Bungalow, Italianate, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Neo Classical, New England Saltbox, Farmhouse, Colonial, and Georgian Revival.

The Brookwood Historic District is also one of the City's oldest communities and Gastonia's second historic district. Created in 1997, the Brookwood Neighborhood consists of over 106 structures. The majority of homes in the district were constructed in the mid-1930s to late 1940s.

Predominate architectural styles vary between Craftsman, Tudor, Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional. As other neighborhoods age, they too may be considered for historic designation. Neighborhoods that have possible historic merit include: Fairmount Park, Old Country Club, Hillcrest, and the Firestone Mill Village.

In addition to the homes within designated and potential historic districts, several landmark and historic buildings are scattered throughout Gastonia. Some of these properties may be eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places, a list maintained by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Figure 3-17 shows the properties in Gastonia that have been placed on the National Register.

The National Register does not protect properties through building and land use guidelines like local historic district or historic properties designation does. Placement on the Register will, however, forbid the use of federal funds in projects (such as road construction) that would cause the house to be torn down. Additionally, federal tax credits are available in conjunction with renovation of National Register properties.

Figure 3-17: Gastonia Residential Properties on the National Register

Name	Address	Built
Cephas Stroup House	2206 Armstrong Park Road	1865
David Jenkins House	1017 E. Airline Ave	1876
Ashley Arms	800 S. York St	1922

Future Trends & Needs

Future housing demand to satisfy projected population growth is a critical component of the comprehensive plan. Housing development is typically market driven, but the market may not be providing the right types of housing for various sectors of the population or the market may be straining the local government revenue stream by providing too much of a single type of housing. Also, low interest rates and easy lending standards prior to the collapse of the housing market led to a situation where many people became homeowners that weren't in a financial position to sustain their payments resulting in foreclosures, short sales, and other housing problems. These effects will likely continue for at least the next few years.

Census figures suggest that housing costs are rising at higher rate than household incomes. In fact a larger percentage of households are cost burdened. While the recent adoption of the unified development ordinance allows the developers to build more innovative residential developments that encourage traditional design elements in the neighborhood, further efforts are needed to establish policy to ensure additional dwelling units include a greater level of diversity. There are deficiencies in terms of affordability in both new residential development as well as rental units. In fact, in a comparative study of market and rental rates from November 1999 and January 2005 it was found that rents increased 7.1% for a one bedroom unit, 9% for a two bedroom unit and 12.1% for a three bedroom unit.

Gastonia's current land use patterns, zoning, subdivision ordinances, and infrastructure result in a challenging environment for the development of affordable, renter occupied housing units. Current improvements to the water and sewer system will provide additional opportunities to develop outside of the traditional large lot, single-family housing product. While this will allow a greater number of opportunities for affordable rental units, the City must be cautious of future development that would be poorly

The location of housing is important. New housing developed far removed from existing urban services and employment centers forces residents to drive to work, contributing to a number of environmental and quality of life issues. Good access to everyday goods and services will offer more opportunities to older residents and younger families.

served by other infrastructure or make inefficient use of City infrastructure.

Also decades of demographic, economic and social change will affect the size, style and density of housing that will be built over the next twenty years. Average household sizes in Gastonia have decreased at a steady rate over the last 20 years and it is expected to drop to 2.3 persons per household by 2025. Census forecast a future population with more married couples without children, more singles, more single-parent households, and more "other" types of households (mainly unrelated roommates), but fewer traditional married couples with children. The new family types are expected to demand affordable rental units and housing with smaller square footages than the typical housing developments of the last two-three decades. Seniors and empty-nesters are also interested in the same things.

Another trend is the increasing proportion of elderly in the population due to longer life expectancy and the size of the baby-boom generation. The oldest baby-boomers, born in 1946 were eligible for retirement benefits beginning in January 2008, leading what is often referred to as America's silver tsunami. Over the next two decades, nearly 80 million Americans will enter into retirement and studies indicate that a large number will possibly be attracted to warmer climates and the lower cost of housing in the South. Seniors have a greater demand for condominiums, small homes and congregate living facilities. Neighborhoods that provide close access to everyday goods and services will offer more opportunities to older residents who are no longer comfortable driving in traffic.

A third trend in housing is the dwindling supply of developable land. One-story dwellings with minimal outdoor maintenance requirements will likely become more desirable. As land becomes more scarce and more costly, innovative solutions combining higher densities with good design will be needed. These trends all point toward the single-family, large-lot, detached home becoming less common, although by no means extinct, in the future. As the region's population ages, there will be an increased demand for housing that accommodates the associated change in lifestyle. Given the dwindling amount of vacant land in the planning area, the construction of new housing on a large scale may not be possible. Therefore, it is imperative that Gastonia promote infill housing strategies that encourage compatibility with the existing housing stock while providing alternatives to traditional development.

Finally, financing for housing will be more responsible: For years, the name of the game was getting a payment as low as possible to support a home as expensive as possible. Interest only loans and adjustable-rate mortgages became the norm rather than the exception to the rule and the model proved to be unsustainable. Mortgages will be granted in the future primarily to owners in a financial position strong enough to support their moderate mortgage payment.

The demographic context for Gastonia's housing needs can be expected to change considerably during the next 20 years. Yet while demographic trends push the region in new directions, longstanding preferences continue to shape housing choices. This interaction between changing demographics and persistent wants will heighten the need for Gastonia to continue to monitor evolving housing patterns and verify housing preferences, so that policy can be drafted based on new realities rather than old assumptions.

Issues

- Recent growth patterns in the region have lead to indistinguishable, isolated and auto-dependent neighborhoods. Many neighborhoods are not pedestrian friendly and fail to connect to key destinations such as shopping, employment centers, and public gathering spaces as well as local public transit. It is essential that we use smart growth principles to preserve and create compact interconnected mixed-use neighborhoods that help to bring people together and creates a closer connection between neighborhoods, key shopping areas, and public gathering spaces.

- A large amount of Gastonia's single-family detached owner-occupied and rental units are concentrated in the central sector and are at least 20 years old. Some are in need of either minor repair or substantial rehabilitation. Also federal lead-based-paint rules now impose disclosure and certification requirements on almost any person who does work on a pre-1978 house. EPA calls the new regulation the "Renovation, Repair, and Painting" (RRP) rule. Since a large amount of Gastonia's housing was built prior to 1978 and may require substantial rehabilitation this rule may impact housing rehabilitation cost. Adequate maintenance of these units is essential to meet the demand for life-cycle housing options.

- New high-density neighborhoods in the east and southeast sectors lack distinct character (e.g. no creativity in housing styles). There is a need to achieve a balance and mix of dwelling types, styles, sizes, and prices in order to meet the diverse needs of the community.

- While the east and southeast sectors are in a building boom, which is being fueled by the regional job market and the proximity to area amenities, areas in the west have seen little new residential development. The current is aging and increasingly low-income population. The City must encourage a greater balance of residential development.

- Some older, established neighborhoods face encroachment from nonresidential development. There is a need to protect neighborhoods close to high commercial uses through the promotion of development design standards.

- Shifting demographics are driving markets to provide alternatives to detached single-family dwellings. The City will need to accommodate this demand for different housing types by exploring opportunities to increase the supply of life-cycle rental housing and fill special needs such as senior housing.

- Gastonia must continue to protect areas of local historical importance by identifying potential historic districts.

- Many neighborhoods lack a sense of identity. A sense of identity can be established by incorporating neighborhood gateway signage in older neighborhoods, especially in the historic district.

- There is a growing segregation of neighborhoods by income class as a result of long-term local and federal regulatory practices. While there are affordable housing opportunities throughout the City, they tend to be concentrated in select areas of the community with a concurrent concentration of social/economic problems.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Objectives and Tools

Objective 1

Encourage well-planned neighborhoods that have a sense of community.

Tools

a. Create opportunities for community interaction.
b. Promote active and secure open space areas, such as pocket parks, greenways, plazas, and squares, which foster a strong sense of place.
c. Define communities and neighborhoods with focal points to help visitors and residents distinguish one area from another.
d. Develop guidelines so that streets, buildings, and public areas function together.
e. Promote connectivity throughout neighborhoods and between developments.
f. Work with other public agencies to promote strong, active neighborhood leadership through programs such as Community Watch.
g. Promote neighborhood institutions, such as schools and churches, to help define local neighborhoods.

Objective 2

Ensure a variety of housing opportunities and choices for all income levels.

Tools

a. Educate the community about the positive aspects of providing a wide mix of housing opportunities and blending housing types within neighborhoods.
b. Continually evaluate current housing values to ensure a mix consistent with similar-sized North Carolina cities.
c. Encourage well designed mixed-use developments.
d. Encourage developments that allow seniors to age in place.
e. Continue to provide, community development assistance to homeowners and potential first-time homebuyers, and expand the number of housing programs available to defray the costs or housing rehablitation.

Objective 3

Ensure new neighborhoods provide public spaces, pedestrian connections and a variety of landscaping.

Tools

a. Consider adopting general development policies to provide guidelines for residential location and design, balanced land use patterns, connectivity and mixed use development.
b. Elevate building standards to promote the use of a variety of materials that allow for a mix of housing types.
c. Ensure new residential developments contain inviting and convenient recreational spaces.
d. Residential areas and adjacent retail and service areas shall have streets that are pedestrian friendly and fully functional for a variety of modes of travel.
f. Enact and maintain regulations and standards which require proper landscaping and tree protection in residential areas.

Objective 4

Strengthen the urban core by protecting and enhancing older established neighborhoods.

Tools

a. Promote and support infill development that uses current infrastructure and sparks redevelopment

within older neighborhoods.

b. Construct pocket parks, greenway trails and sidewalks in existing neighborhoods

c. Use incentive programs to create new markets for redevelopment in existing neighborhoods.

d. Strengthen code enforcement activities and policies to minimize areas of blight.

e. Discourage a sprawling development pattern that weakens older inner City neighborhoods.

Objective 5

Preserve and conserve Gastonia's cultural and natural heritage.

Tools

a. Establish polices that protect cultural and natural resources.

b. Encourage the protection of land and open space through foundations and land trusts.

c. Review older neighborhoods for possible new local historic district designation.

d. Provide technical assistance to property owners in applying for and utilizing state and federal assistance programs to restore and renovate historic dwellings.

f. Encourage revitalization and restoration of existing mill villages.

4

Trends & Future Direction

Human Resource Development

Business & Industrial Outlook

Issues

Objectives & Tools

Economic & Human Development

GASTONIA 2025

Economic & Human Development

Economic Development 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.

Analyzing the economic characteristics of a community and the potential for economic development is a key element in comprehensive planning. Economic growth and prosperity is vital to the quality of life of the residents of Gastonia and Gaston County. A strong, healthy economy will ensure that the community is sustainable and continues to thrive as an attractive place to live, work, and play. Though Gastonia's economy has historically been dominated by textile manufacturing, community leaders have long recognized the need for economic diversification in order to maintain economic stability during periods of downturns. Nationally, there has been a shift from an emphasis on blue-collar manufacturing jobs to the white-collar knowledge based economy. As the economy transitions, Gastonia must restructure it's economic plan to meet the realities of the "New Economy". While preparing for this transition, the community is committed to retaining existing business and helping local businesses to grow and prosper, through financial incentives, workforce training, and streamlined development processes.

This chapter of the Plan contains information, goals, and recommended strategies and tools to promote the retention and stabilization of the economic base in Gastonia. This chapter assesses national, regional, and local trends, the City's economic development strengths and weaknesses and evaluates the types of new businesses and industries that are desired for the City.

Because a successful economic development strategy must consider a community's position within a broader economic and geographic region, this chapter was developed with the Charlotte Metropolitan in mind and focuses on the following action steps: 1) support industry clusters; 2) co-invest in the developing a skilled workforce; 3) co-invest in an infrastructure for innovation: 4) boost quality of life: and 5) Encourage and promote growth and development of small business enterprise; 6) focus on the quality, not just the number of jobs created.

Trends and Future Direction

The Changing Economy

Historically, the area's economy has been centered on textiles. Gaston County and Gastonia were leaders in textile processing and manufacturing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At its peak in 1970, the textile manufacturing industry employed 27,880 people in Gaston County. As of 2000, the textile

industry employed 9,265 people in Gaston County. More recent estimates from the Gaston County Economic Development Corporation show that employment has since decreased to approximately 5,000. This trend follows a national decline as the textile industry has shifted much of its operations to other countries and it is projected that this facet of the economy will continue to decline in both facilities and investment at the local level. Figure 4-1 shows the decline in the textile industry throughout the US.

Though the textile industry declined significantly in the 1990s, the non-textile manufacturing sector experienced moderate growth from 2001 - 2007 and increasingly locating operations within Gaston County. For example, in 2005 Dole Foods decided to invest in a $54 million bagged salad plant in nearby Bessemer City that is projected to employ 900 employees by 2016. Other new industrial plants include Atkinson International Inc.'s brake shoe plant on Olney Church Road in Gastonia and Milanco Industrial Chemicals is moving its headquarters and principal manufacturing plant from Charlotte to Bulb Avenue in Gastonia.

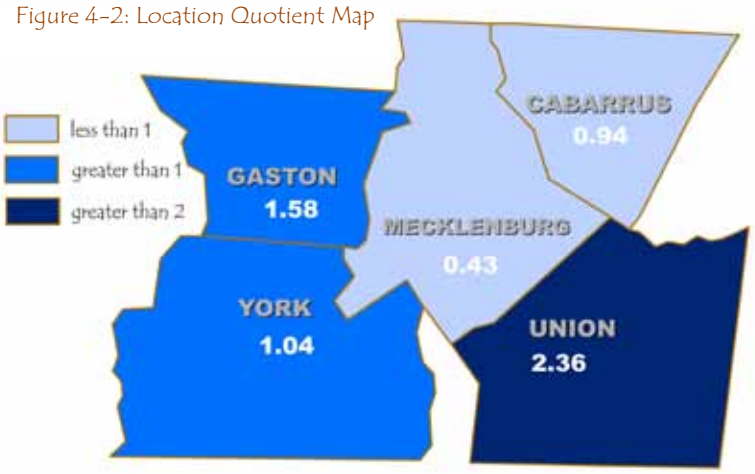
Manufacturing has for many years been the backbone of the state's economy and despite the reports of a rapidly declining industry, the sector still employs one in four North Carolinians. Furthermore, manufacturing as a general industrial category, is the largest employment sector in most counties in the Charlotte Metropolitan Statistical Area. One way of gauging basic industry is through the use of the location quotient, a technique that measures the concentration of an industry in Gaston County by comparing local employment to regional employment. Location Quotient measures the share of manufacturing industry's employment in the state to its share of total national employment. As indicated in Figure 4-2, three out of the five counties in the Charlotte MSA have a location quotient greater than 1 indicating that these counties are specialized in manufacturing and have a share of employees greater than the state average employment in the manufacturing sector. However so, state estimates project a negative growth rate for the manufacturing industry through 2016, which will result in a growth rate of –1.5 for manufacturing in Gaston County. This suggest that while many Gaston county residents are currently employed in manufacturing many will be faced with layoffs in the near future. Many of those job losses will occur in the traditional manufacturing industries of textile/apparel, lumber, furniture and metalworking. However, state data suggest that the traditional "blue collar" manufacturing jobs will be replaced by the emerging "high-tech" manufacturing and services. Nevertheless, because manufacturing jobs are projected to continue to decrease both nationally and locally, the need for economic diversification in Gaston County and Gastonia continues to be relevant.

Figure 4-1: Employment by Industry, 1994, 2004, 2006 and Projected 2016 in U.S.

Employment				
Industry	Thousands of jobs			
	1994	2004	2006	2016 Projected
Manufacturing	17,020	14,330	14,197	12,695
Textile Mills	478	239	196	134
Fiber, yarn, and thread mills	96	54	48	38
Fabric mills	252	116	90	61
Textile and fabric finishing and fabric coating mills	130	69	58	34
Textile product mills	219	178	161	141
Textile furnishing mills	129	103	90	79
Other textile product mills	90	75	71	62

Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 4-2: Location Quotient Map



Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

The knowledge economy is focused on the management of knowledge or information and includes such fields as computers and technology, Internet services, telecommunications, and education and research.

The transition away from the area's historic dependence on manufacturing should be the central thrust of economic development efforts in Gaston County. Facing technological advances, an increase in exports and new markets overseas, the state's manufacturers must adapt to a new and fiercely competitive climate. While site development and promotion is important, Gastonia must diversify the local economy and place more resources toward developing a highly skilled workforce through education and workforce training programs, so that we can compete more successfully in the modern economy.

Knowledge Based Economy

In today's global economy, cities throughout the United States are finding it increasingly difficult to develop a competitive advantage and attract businesses and industries, skilled workers, and innovative technology to their communities. Previously the formula for business recruitment relied heavily on a city's water, sewer and road systems. While all these remain important, today's knowledge-based economy has added other elements to the mix. This new economy is focused on the management of knowledge or information and includes such fields as computers and technology, Internet services, telecommunications, education and research, not material products.

Location recruiters who scout for knowledge based companies give high scores to amenities such as entertainment, recreation, and cultural events. Gastonia is proud of its current facilities such as the Schiele Museum of Natural History and Planetarium, nearby Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens and Crowders Mountain. However, to remain a competitive location for future business and industry, Gastonia must protect and enhance quality of life factors in the community. Future amenities to add to the mix include performing arts groups, a vibrant downtown and new recreational facilities, as well as protecting our natural resources.

Sufficient education and training are the foundation of the knowledge-based economy, requiring businesses looking for new locations to consider the educational level of the potential work force. Not only do recruiters want a well-educated workforce, but they also appraise a community's ability to provide lifelong learning opportunities. Now that economic development is more than land and utilities, it is imperative that the City and the County work together to improve the area's image as a place to live, work, and play. This is necessary to retain existing workers, as well as to attract workers from other places. New workers bring their knowledge, expertise, disposable income, ideas and potential for innovation to the areas where they live and work.

Business versus Residential Development

Many manufacturing plants are heavy water and electricity users; therefore, a plant closing not only affects the local unemployment rate, but also creates hardship for the local government budget, which depends on business and industry to provide needed services and keep the tax rates and utility rates in check. Since 2000, residential development has boomed in Gastonia and the eastern half of Gaston County. While a majority of this growth has been beneficial to the community, residential development by itself is not fiscally sustainable for the City's public services and facilities. New residential developments, especially those built at the fringes of a community, require new infrastructure such as utility extensions, road improvements, schools, fire and police stations. Generally, the taxes and utility fees derived from these residents is not enough to balance the costs that the community incurs to provide these additional services. Thus, a fiscally sound community requires a strong mix of housing

and commercial, office, and industrial development. Businesses strengthen the tax base, pay more in utility fees, and generally bear the cost of providing new community infrastructure in coordination with the development of their facilities. Without restructuring its own economic base, Gastonia could evolve into a bedroom community of Charlotte, which would be detrimental to the long-term economic prosperity of the community. Developing a diverse economic base is crucial.

Regional Economy & Commuting Patterns

Modern local economies rarely coincide with administrative boundaries as people cross county and state lines to work, shop, and recreate. The MSA is the main competitive unit, and it is vital that communities work together and understand how each fits in and contributes to the regional economy. Nevertheless, Gaston County needs to have jobs within its borders to maintain its viability.

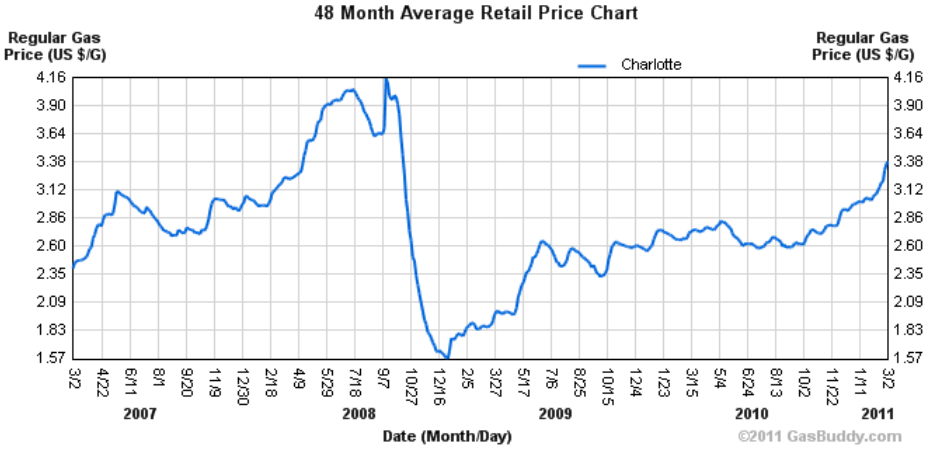
As the metropolitan area develops, strategic transportation planning becomes more crucial to address problems related to lengthy commute times. Each year congestion, energy prices, pollution and loss of open spaces increases. The funding and building of bigger highway projects have in the past been the responsibility of the federal government. However, state and local governments have become more involved because of funding reductions and rapid urbanization. Management of transportation funds has been and will continue to be critical to the success of the region.

The volatility in gas pricing has also impacted transportation revenue. Traditionally, the spring and summer months reveal higher gasoline prices because of the cost associated with producing "summer-grade" fuel. Higher fuel prices in the spring and summer months contributes to higher retail prices , energy prices and overall living increase. Figure 4-3 reflects North Carolina gasoline prices for 2007 and thru March 2011.

In 1990, 62.4% of Gastonia workers lived within 20 minutes of their workplace. However, by 2000, that figure decreased to 51.5%. 2009 Census estimates indicate that on average it takes 23 minutes for Gastonia workers to commute to work each day. Gastonia residents are traveling for longer periods of time to get to their jobs due to the job/housing imbalance in Gastonia, ease of commuting due to expansion, and/or improvements to major highways such as I-85, US321, and I-485, as well as expansions to major Gastonia thoroughfares through a $35 million bond passed in the 1990s.

Commuting patterns show the need to attract jobs to Gaston County, to reduce the out-migration of workers to

Figure 4-3: North Carolina Gasoline Prices, August 2007 - March 2011



The fact that almost half of Gaston County's workforce works outside of the County is notable for several reasons.

- contributes to increased traffic and congestion
- contributes to a "brain drain" in the County
- We need our own employment centers to be a place to live, work and play
- Increases environmental issues such as ozone damage and poor air quality

Figure 4-4: Travel Time to Work from Gastonia, 2000 and 2009

Travel Time	2000	Percent	2009	Percent	Percent Change
Workers who did not work at home	29,025	100%	30,261	100%	4.3%
Less than 10 minutes	3,488	12.0%	3,202	10.6%	-8.2%
10 to 14 minutes	5,929	20.4%	3,855	12.7%	-35.0%
15 to 19 minutes	5,544	19.1%	6,153	20.3%	11.0%
20 to 24 minutes	3,806	13.1%	4,598	15.2%	20.8%
25 to 29 minutes	1,539	5.3%	2,046	6.8%	32.9%
30 to 34 minutes	3,661	12.6%	4,166	13.8%	13.8%
35 to 44 minutes	1,953	6.7%	1,918	6.3%	-1.8%
45 to 59 minutes	2,007	6.9%	2,700	8.9%	34.5%
60 to 89 minutes	659	2.3%	1,260	4.2%	91.2%
90 or more minutes	439	1.5%	363	1.2%	-17.3%

Source: U.S. Census 2000, Journey to Work QT-P23, American Community Survey, 2009

other communities on a daily basis. Indicated in Figure 4-4 and following national trends, the work commute for Gastonia residents has gotten longer as more people are willing to live further and further away from their workplace in an effort to obtain inexpensive housing, quality schools, access to goods and services, and suburban life. With a high percentage of workers employed outside of the County and the average worker driving over 23 minutes, it is evident that there is a large imbalance in the number of local jobs offered within Gaston County. This imbalance places a heavy burden on the County's roads, contribute to poor air quality, wastes the value of time of residents, and ultimately deprives social and political institutions of talent it would otherwise be available to them. These conditions underscore the need for an economic development program that strengthens sustainable.

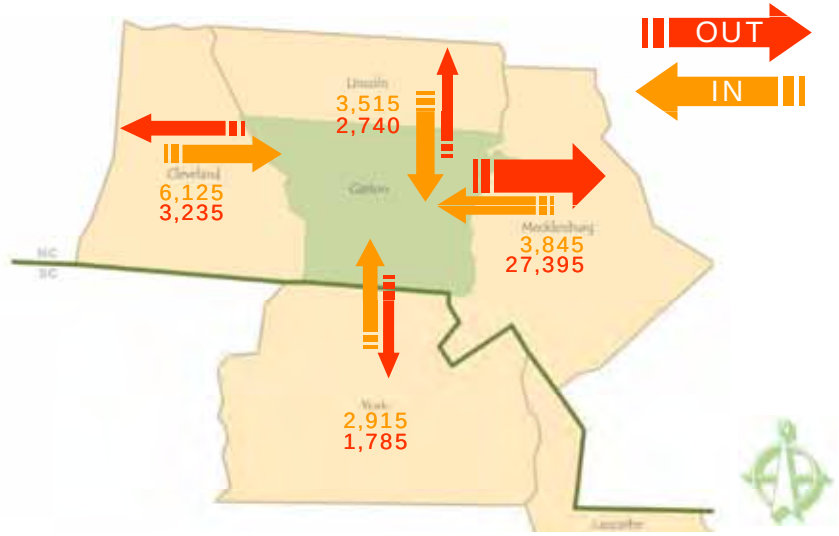
Employment Location

Where are these people driving? The majority of Gaston County residents work right here within Gaston County, and 23,101, or 41% of Gaston County residents work in Mecklenburg County, indicated in Figure 4-5 on the next page. The commuting pattern that has become prevalent across the United States is one where workers live at the outer fringes of a large urban city and commute, predominately by automobile, to their jobs in the urban core or suburban employment centers. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg commuting pattern is an example of this trend, where Charlotte is the employment center of the region and most workers live either at the fringes of the City of Charlotte in adjacent cities within Mecklenburg County, or in surrounding counties, including Gaston. This commuting pattern is predicted to worsen as residential neighborhoods are developed further and further away from the urban Charlotte core and workers become accustomed to longer work commutes.

The fact that almost half of Gaston County's workforce works outside of the County is notable for several reasons:

- Commuting patterns contribute to increased traffic and congestion on major highways and thoroughfares during peak times.
- Gaston County residents working outside of the County contribute to a "brain drain" in the County as they take their knowledge and expertise to jobs in other communities.
- Gastonia cannot survive long-term as a bedroom community of Charlotte. We need our own employment centers in order to be a place to live, work and play.
- Increased traffic and congestion increases environmental problems such as littering, ozone and poor air quality.

Figure 4-5: Residence County to Workplace: County Commuter Flows for North Carolina, Number of Workers 16 years old and Over, 2008



Source: American Community Survey, 2006-2008, County-to-County Worker Flow Files

Therefore, a good mix of residential, office, commercial, and industrial development is essential to the future of Gastonia and Gaston County.

To combat the negative effects created by increased commute times and out-migration, the community can plan for new or revitalized employment centers close to home. This can include locating employment centers throughout the planning area (not just in one area or sector) and encouraging mixed-use development. Both strategies can integrate employment into the community and offer benefits to employees and surrounding neighborhoods. Mixed-use 'campuses' often include neighborhood scale services such as retail shops, restaurants, housing, grocery stores, parks, playgrounds, and green spaces. Designed at a pedestrian scale, these developments promote connectivity, walkability and access to public transportation. Mixed-use employment centers located throughout the community can help the City achieve its goal of keeping residential and employment centers close together in addition to providing residents with enhanced accessibility to employment, housing, goods and services, recreation, and a better quality of life.

Other Economic Sector Trends

Technology

The lifespan of technological innovation – the time that elapses before it is replaced by the next advance – is getting shorter and shorter. Moreover, technology moves very quickly across state and national boundaries, and businesses can readily buy or copy innovations developed by competitors anywhere across the world. This means that for companies to stay competitive they need to know about, and use, the latest advances, Without continuous improvement, their competitive edge can be quickly eroded.

Aging Population

Between 1990 and 2000, Gaston County saw an increase in investment and employment in the educational, health, and social services fields. Employment in this sector increased 68% (or more than 2,000 employees) during this time period. Much of the growth in this employment sector is due to the growth of the CaroMont Healthcare System, significant investments in Gaston Memorial Hospital, and the development of The Summit Medical Office Park as

Drawing of a conceptual mixed-use development in downtown Gastonia. Concept includes a farmers' market, restaurants, greenspace, and housing along with office space and retail.

Just about every business, including many service industries, is facing unprecedented competition from home and abroad. It is essential that all companies and communities see themselves as part of the global marketplace.

well as adjacent medical office space. As the baby boom generation ages, the need for medical related services will continue to increase. In order to ensure that this medical economy continues to grow in Gastonia, land adjacent to and nearby the hospital should be dedicated to medical office growth on the Future Land Use Map. In addition, medical office sites should be encouraged throughout the City.

Global Competition

Although the U.S. has the world's largest and most dynamic economy, it is by no means immune to competition. In terms of value of imports, the European Union, Canada, Mexico, China, and Japan represent the major competition, with other countries in South America and Asia rising fast. Just about every business, including many service industries, is facing unprecedented competition from home and abroad. It is essential that all companies and communities see themselves as part of the global marketplace.

White Collar Jobs

The percentage of Gastonia employees in management, professional and related positions increased by 38.5% between 1990 and 2000 , indicating that more Gastonia residents are working in high-level management positions. This is likely a factor in the increase seen in Gastonia's median household income between 1990 and 2000 since those in management positions generally earn more than low-level employees.

Positive Outlook

Overall, Gastonia is poised for future growth and development. Massive investments in downtown and in expanding industry are set to stimulate economic growth through 2025. Furthermore, an increase in jobs and ongoing recovery of various markets are sure to strengthen the economy. In addition, Gastonia's convenient location within the heart of the fast-growing Charlotte region will play a pivotal role in its ability to attract businesses and people to the City.

Employment & Industry Conditions

The number of people employed in a given industry is often used as an indicator of an economy's composition and diversity. Gastonia is home to some large and high performing companies. According to the Employment and Securities Commission, Gaston County has a workforce of approximately 100,223 of which 92,303 are employed. Figure 4-6 lists & Figure 4-7 maps the City's twenty-five largest employers. As shown, the majority of Gaston County's top 25 employers consist of education/ health service, manufacturing, trade, transportation and utilities sector. Gaston County Schools is the largest employer within the county and the seventh largest school district in the state. The second largest employer is CaroMont Health. The 435-bed Gaston Memorial Hospital is now the anchor for CaroMont Health, an independent, not-for-profit health care system consisting of eight affiliate companies including a network of 33 primary and specialty physician offices.

Employment by Industry

Gaston County has over 4,000 businesses and government entities, with the largest employment numbers in the following sectors:

- Manufacturing,
- Services,
- Retail Trade,
- Construction, and,
- Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate.

Figure 4-9 illustrates the employment profile of Gaston County with Mecklenburg County, the state, and the US based on ten key employment sectors. As shown, Gaston County economy has a strong manufacturing base that employed approximately 25% of the total workforce in 2007.
The manufacturing industry provided approximately 25 percent of the jobs held by county residents, more than twice the state average. While the overall service sector, which includes a number of sub sectors such as: professional/technical, information, health care, education, and other types of service oriented jobs employs more than 35 percent of total jobs, the data reveal huge difference when the sub sectors are analyzed independent of

Figure 4-6: Top 25 Employers, Gaston County, January, 2011

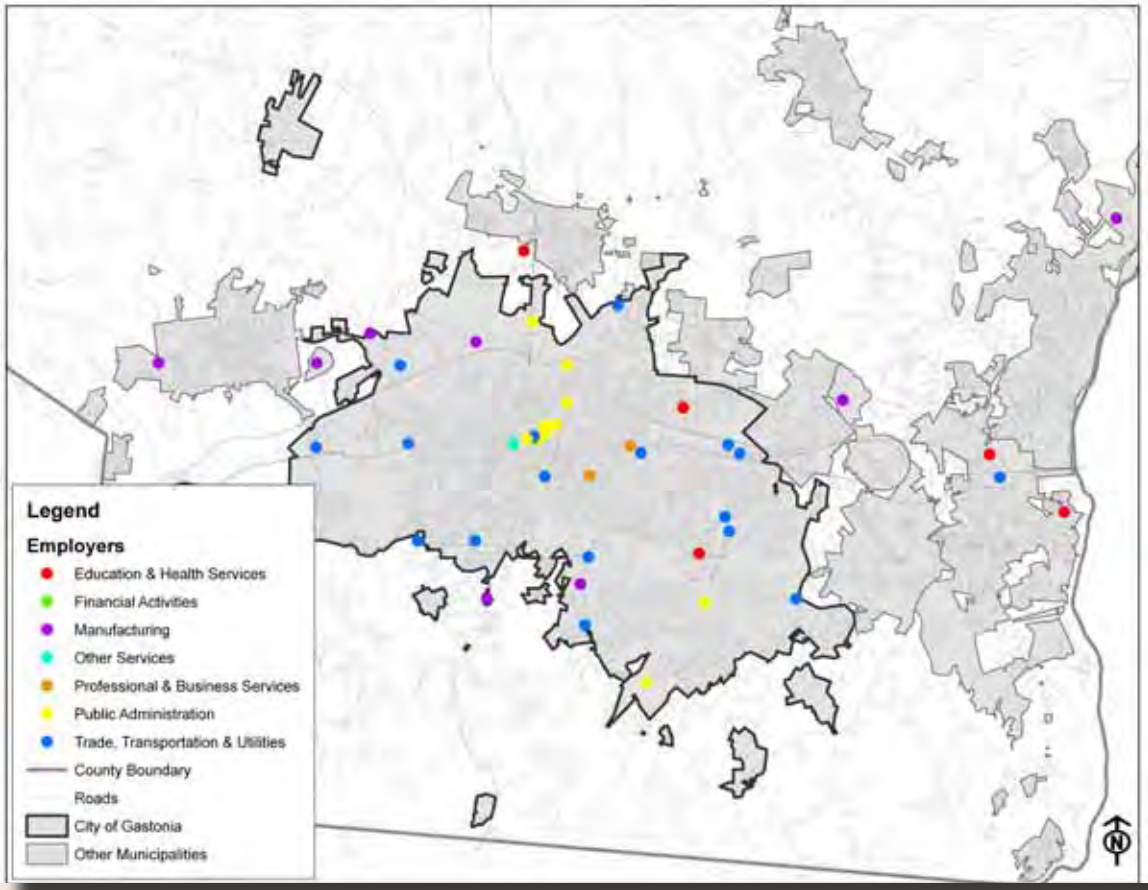
Rank	Company Name	Industry	Employment Range
1	Gaston County Schools	Education & Health Services	1,000+
2	Caromont Health (A Corp)	Education & Health Services	1,000+
3	Wal-Mart Associates Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	1,000+
4	County of Gaston	Public Administration	1,000+
5	Wix Filtration Corporation	Manufacturing	1,000+
6	Pharr Yarns, Inc.	Manufacturing	1,000+
7	American & Efird, Inc.	Manufacturing	1,000+
8	City of Gastonia	Public Administration	500-999
9	Freightliner Corporation	Manufacturing	500-999
10	Gaston College	Education & Health Services	500-999
11	Fayetteville Ind. Maint Corp. (DOLE)	Manufacturing	500-999
12	Food Lion, LLC	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	250-499
13	NC Advance Stores Co., Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	250-499
14	Integrated Staffing Solutions, Inc.	Professional & Business Services	250-499
15	Bi Lo LLC	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	250-499
16	Gaston County Family YMCA	Other Services	250-499
17	Quality Business Solutions, Inc.	Professional & Business Services	250-499
18	Lowe's Home Centers, Inc.	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	250-499
19	US Postal Service	Trade, Transportation & Utilities	250-499
20	Census-UCFE #910	Public Administration	250-499
21	FMC Corporation	Manufacturing	250-499
22	Southwood Realty Co., Inc.	Financial Activities	250-499
23	CBS Personnel Services LLC	Professional & Business Services	250-499
24	Belmont Abbey College	Education & Health Services	250-499
25	Danaher Tool Group	Manufacturing	250-499

Source: Gaston County EDC

one another. The most striking difference is that 19 percent or more than half of that are employed in the services sector are working in the education and health services sector. Also, the share of Gaston County residents with professional and business service-sector jobs was less than 10 percent, more than 10 percent than neighboring Mecklenburg County and 5 percent lower than statewide figures. Figure 4-8 illustrates the percentages of persons employed in each industry sector in Gaston County.

The trade, transportation, and utilities industry is the second largest employment sector in Gaston County, accounting for 22 percent of the total. The trade, transportation, and utilities sector consist of four sub-sectors which include: Wholesale Trade: Retail Trade, Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities. The third largest number of establishments was education and health services, accounting for 19 percent of the total. Other significant sectors include professional and business services (9%), Leisure and Hospitality (8%), Construction (5%). State estimates show that the industry which will add new jobs within the County by 2016 is the education and health services.

Figure 4-7: Top 25 Employers, Gaston County, January 1, 2011

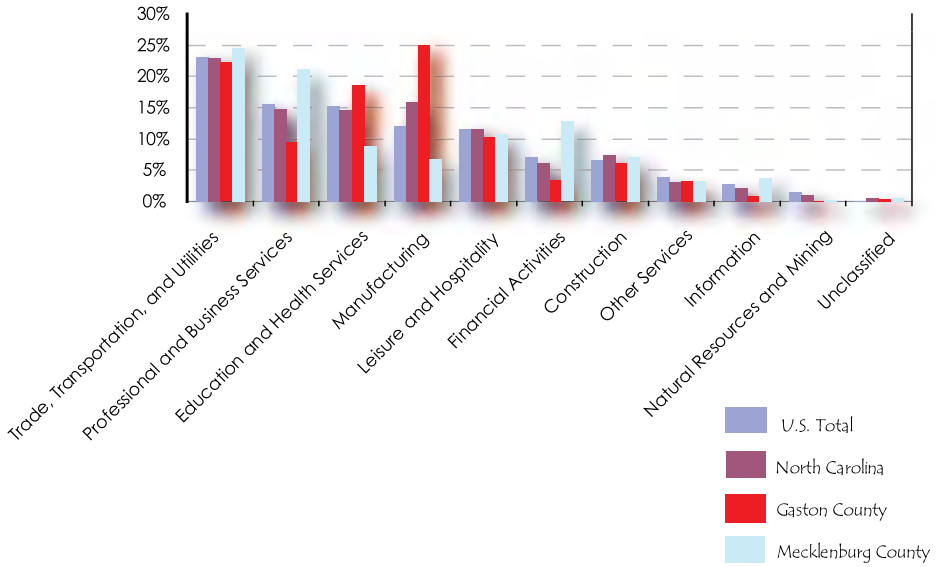


Source: Gaston County EDC

What kind of jobs will the City of Gastonia have in the future?

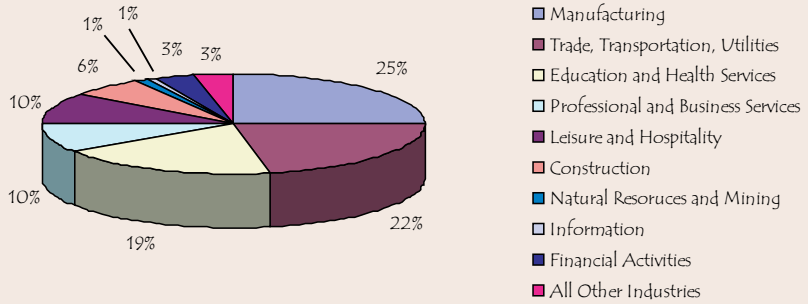
The Comprehensive Plan promotes a sound economy through planning for future growth in ways that maintain the City's high quality of life by directing facilities and services to areas that support jobs and by identifying and encouraging economic sectors that offer the best opportunities for new job creation and future economic growth. In order to develop a strategy to create jobs in the future, we must understand what economic sectors are projected to grow and or decline over the next 10 years. Figure 4-10 compares the year 2006 and forecast 2016 employment profile of Gaston County based on four key employment sectors. Overall the chart indicates that the knowledge-based jobs, and service sector jobs are projected to grow, while low-skill labor-intensive jobs will be lost. Low-skilled jobs are not going away any time soon. The occupations such as cashiers, janitors, retail salespersons, waiters, and waitresses will likely increase.

Figure 4-9: Ratio of Industry Employment to Base-Industry Employment, 2009



Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 4-8: Percentages of People Employed in Gaston County by Industry



Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

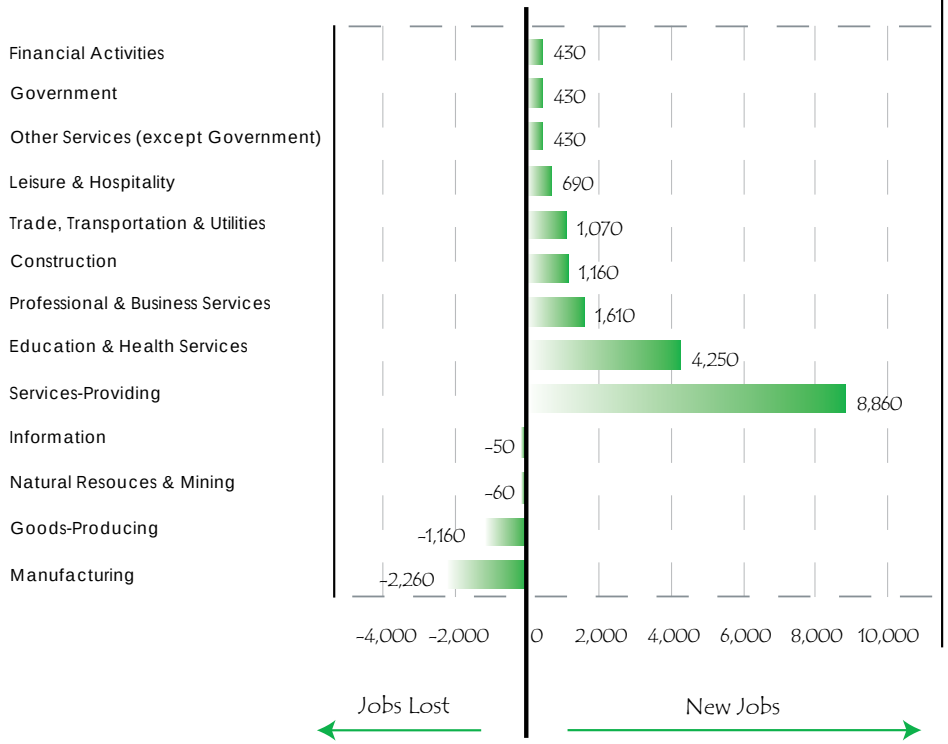
Most job growth throughout the county since 1970 has been in the service-producing sector. This trend is expected to continue as services required for an aging population, along with new healthcare related technology that transforms the way we administer medicine, and allows patients to recover from ailments and injuries that decades ago would have been fatal or permanently disabling. The Services Sector is projected to add the highest number of new jobs in Gaston County and will comprise approximately 38 percent of the total jobs in 2016. This sector includes jobs in health consumer, business, and legal services. Business services – which comprise advertising, equipment rental, business support operation such as photocopying, equipment rental, computer programming services, data processing etc – are projected to experience the highest growth among all

the services. Education & Health Services is projected to add 4,250 new jobs by 2016. In the next 20-30 years, the health care industry is going to experience significant changes.

The manufacturing and goods production sectors occupy a central role within the Gaston County economy and its health has a large impact on other industries in the County. As such, retaining and expanding existing manufacturing and good producing companies as well as attracting new industry has been a long-standing economic development strategy of the County's economic development program. However recent projections on the future growth of industry throughout Gaston County reveal that these sectors will experience significant declines which will result in huge job losses. Traditional manufacturing jobs where workers spend their days making things instead, will likely be replaced by "blue collar" manufacturing jobs that require works to move things, process or generate information, or provide services to people. However, the numbers of new "blue collar" jobs will likely show up in smaller numbers.

Recent economic crisis has led to short falls within budgets at all levels of government. State and local governments have scrambled to close the gaps within the budget while avoiding layoffs. This effort has failed and many government workers have been laid off at all levels of government. This current condition however is expected to change and state and local government employment, particularly education is projected to grow through 2016. Growth in government employment will be fueled by an increased demand for public safety, but dampened by budgetary constraints and outsourcing of government jobs to the private sector. State and local governments, excluding education and hospitals, are expected to grow by roughly 5 percent as a result of the continued shift of responsibilities from the Federal Government to State and local governments.

Figure 4-10: Industry Outlook - Employment Growth by Industry, 2006-2016



Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Economic Development Framework

This comprehensive plan draws on recommendations from the *Cleveland-Gaston Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* plan, dated July 2003 (commonly known as the "Gaston 2012" plan) to develop a framework for how Gastonia plans to maintain its economic vitality in the future. This framework includes supporting existing businesses with needed financing and technical support and attracting new economic activity to the region by:

- Identifying and preserving locations suitable for residential and commercial development,
- Enhancing and diversifying workforce development, and
- Providing the physical (water, sewer, electricity, roads) and technological infrastructure needed to accommodate the growing service and knowledge-based industries.

Partnerships

The City does not have an economic development department, but instead, collaborates with several agencies to engage in workforce development, attract new businesses to the region, retain existing businesses, and recruit clients for local industrial and business parks. The City participates in funding the activities of the Gaston County Economic Development Corporation, the Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation, and the Gaston Chamber of Commerce. This partnership approach has enabled the consolidation of local resources to market and recruit from both within the region and throughout the world.

Gaston County Economic Development Corporation

The City and the Gaston County Economic Development Corporation work hand-in-hand to market the City to potential employers through such means as:

- Providing businesses with quality of life information and the advantages of locating within Gaston County,
- Providing businesses with assistance in obtaining financial incentives, finding available real estate, and, getting through the local development and permitting processes, and
- Providing a link with Gaston College to initiate job training programs and education for potential and existing workers.

Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation (GDDC)

The Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation (GDDC) focuses solely on facilitating development opportunities in and around the downtown area. Established in August 2001, the GDDC is a non-profit corporation that works to restore the downtown as a viable marketplace and, to again make it the center of community activity. The GDDC actively markets vacant buildings to prospective developers and through design review, ensures that downtown buildings are revitalized in such a way that maintains and restores their historic character. The GDDC is funded in part by the City of Gastonia through a self-assessed municipal service tax, which is applied to downtown property owners located within a defined municipal service district (MSD). The GDDC is limited in what it can spend MSD money on, as specified by state law and a formal agreement approved by the City and the corporation.

Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation

The Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation (GDDC) is a non-profit corporation that works to restore the downtown as a viable marketplace, and to once again make it the center of community activity. The GDDC actively markets vacant buildings to prospective developers and through design review, ensures that downtown buildings are revitalized in ways that maintain and restore the historic character.

Gaston Chamber of Commerce

The Gaston Chamber of Commerce focuses on promoting job creation and investment throughout Gaston County. The Chamber does this by:

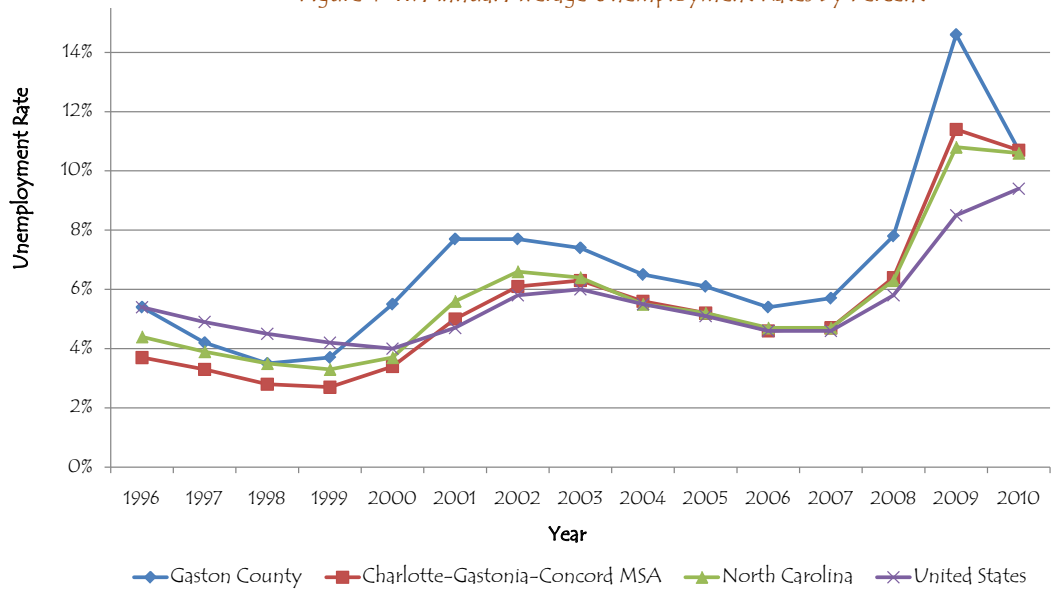
- Using private moneys to fund the Gaston County EDC's economic development marketing program,
- Developing regional partnerships with other chambers of commerce within the Charlotte metro area,
- Establishing committees of local business people that promote the interests of Gaston County businesses by: meeting with local, state, and federal legislatures to advance issues pertinent to the County; promoting the need for progressive land use and development of infrastructure and the wise use of resources; partnering with local public and private schools and colleges to advance the need for educational reform; advancing the health of the community; and workforce development.

The Chamber was central to the development of the *Gaston 2012 Plan.* The main purpose of the *Gaston 2012* plan is to help both Cleveland and Gaston counties recover from the dramatic loss of thousands of jobs and dozens of businesses, mostly due to global competition in the textile industry, and to develop effective, proactive strategies for reviving their economies and creating new jobs.

Human Resource Development

People are by far our most important and precious resource. Gastonia's economic future and quality of life depend on the development and success of its people. Having skilled and flexible workers are a very important element for developing a vibrant economy. Competitive firms need workers who can easily adjust to new product ideas, who can be trained in new technology, and who can produce more efficiently. In order for Gastonia to establish its place as a true competitor in the global marketplace, the City must better prepare its citizens for the changing economy. Specifically, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, Beginning in 2006, Gastonia began to experienced double digit unemployment rates. This is a result of business closing due to the downturn in the economy. Figure 4-11, the annual average unemployment rate, indicates how we are doing comparatively to the region, state and nationally. In order to successfully create a strong network of human capital and maintain a sound economy, Gastonia and its local partners must work to advance education and workforce development. The City must also work to create the best economic development opportunities based upon the current resources of land, buildings and work force.

Figure 4-11: Annual Average Unemployment Rates by Percent



Source: North Carolina Employment Security Commission

Educational Attainment Issues & Workforce Development

There is no simpler, more direct, or more important determinant of human welfare today than educational attainment. In almost every way, people with more education enjoy a higher standard of living. They live longer, have better health, and are happier and more productive than those with less education. Educational attainment is also linked to poverty. For instance, a June 2010 Urban Institute study - "*Childhood Poverty Persistence: Facts and Consequences*, found that 49 percent of American babies born into poor families will be poor for at least half their childhoods. Those poor at birth are more likely to be poor between ages 25 and 30, drop out of high school, have a teen non marital birth, and have patchy employment records than those not poor at birth. Poverty intertwines with many other social issues to negatively impact children's educational outcomes.

According to *Gaston 2012 Plan,* the single greatest challenge facing our community is the relative lack of preparedness of the workforce to cope with new economic realities. Workforce development begins with early education. In addition to more than fifty public schools, Gaston County offers 15 private schools, a technical high school, and two colleges. The Highland School of Technology is a technology magnet high school located in Gastonia. Highland School of Technology's aim is to provide a seamless transition for students entering the workforce or going to technical college.

When comparing the educational measures of Gaston County with national and state levels, Gaston has a lower percentage of adults with college degrees, lower levels of high school attainment, lower mean SAT scores, and lower per pupil spending on K-12 education. Below average high school and college graduation rates signal that Gastonia's workforce could be better prepared for today's job market where the trend has been a shift from low skilled, manufacturing jobs to the knowledge and service economies. Those with only a high school diploma will find it increasingly difficult to find long-term, gainful employment, as many jobs now require some form of postsecondary education or advanced workforce training.

Market Post-Secondary Educational Institutions

The City must continue to market itself as a great location for post-secondary educational institutions and workforce programs in order to increase the educational opportunities available to residents of the community. The ability to provide potential employers with an educated, skilled workforce is a key factor in attracting new businesses to the area. Additionally, an educated community provides a number of other benefits such as the ability of educated workers to act as magnets for information and technology, private investment, and innovation. Never before have education, skills and economic success been more interdependent.

Institutions in Gaston County that offer post-secondary education are:

- Belmont Abbey College, founded by the Roman Catholic Church in 1876, is a coeducational liberal arts college offering bachelor's and master's degrees.
- Gaston Community College is a state and locally controlled co-educational institution offering occupational and two-year, principally bachelor's-creditable degrees. The College recently opened a BioTechnolgy Center and through the community college system, offers a program for New and

The ability to provide potential employers with an educated, skilled workforce is a key factor in attracting new businesses to the area.

In addition to more than fifty public schools, Gaston County offers 15 private schools, a technical high school, and two colleges.

Gaston College has recently opened a BioTechnolgy Center

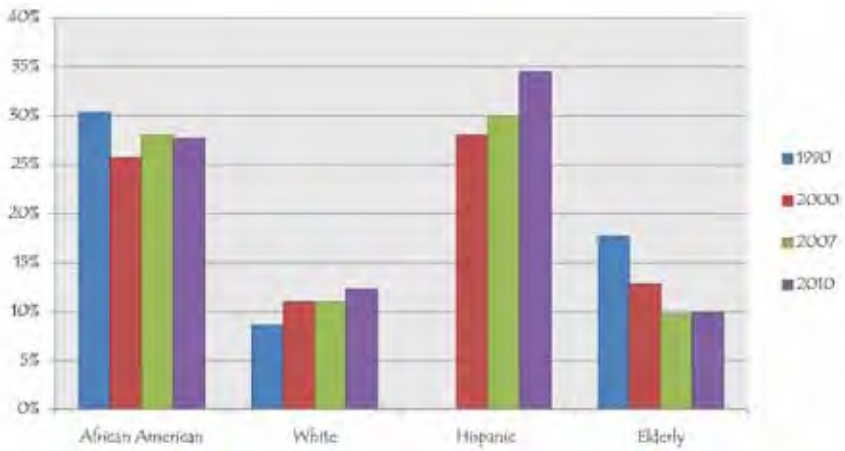
Expanding Industry (NEIT).

- The Center for Applied Textile Technology in Belmont, a technical school for post secondary textile training.

Human Services Needs

There are people, who live in our community who lack access to supportive social services. These individuals are vulnerable and face barriers to functioning independently. The community should help them flourish and participate fully in the life of the city. Human resource development is primarily the function of the county and state, carried out through their formal education and social services programs. The city's role is to ensure their policies are consistent with, and supportive of, the goals of the agencies whose mission is the development and training of our citizens. We also recognize that government cannot meet this wide range of competing human needs by itself, nor in the same old ways. System reengineering must start with creating a coordinated public/private interest in building healthy communities that connect people with the resources such as education, social services, and supportive networks. This strategy entails building a heightened public commitment to fostering the healthy development of children and youth, and a human service delivery system that is comprehensive in scope, coordinated and collaborative in action, and responsive to culturally diverse populations.

Figure 4-12: Percentage living below Poverty Level, Gastonia Census 1990, 2000, 2007, 2010



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey

Reduction in Poverty Levels

2000 Census data for Gastonia indicate that, 15% of individuals and 11.8% of families are living below the poverty level. Data also reveal that a larger percentage of African-Americans in Gastonia are living below the poverty level than any other racial group. In fact, 30.3% of African-Americans living in Gastonia are living below the poverty level. Whites have a much lower percentage, approximately 11%; however, as illustrated in Figure 4-12, over the past decade the percentage of whites living below the poverty level has increased by 2.4%, while the percentage of African-Americans decreased by nearly 5%. The large differences maybe due to population changes throughout the 1990s. Fore instance, during this time, the white population grew by 6,000 persons while the African-American population decreased by approximately 3,400 persons.

When reviewing poverty levels for the most vulnerable persons, the elderly and children the percentages are significant. The elderly and children require a higher level of social service support. Specifically, as we continue to deal with the effects of the declining real estate and stock markets, high health care costs, as well as soaring fuel and food prices the community's health and social services resources will face unprecedented demand. As more families face hardships, public and non-profit human services capacity is stretching to breaking point.

As alluded to in the Growth & Demographic Chapter, the higher levels of individuals and families living below

the poverty level is possibly related to a combination of factors including the loss of textile employment, recent high unemployment rates, and trends in educational attainment. A reduction in the overall number of families and individuals living below the poverty level is critical for developing a strong economic infrastructure in the City. A reduction in poverty will result in a healthier environment for everyone, and will mean more individuals and families will be able to contribute to the community and the workplace. An investment in human capital is an essential component of the economic development strategy.

Income

The median household income for the City as estimated by the US Census Bureau is $38,826. While the median income increased from 2000, it remains slightly below the median household income for the state. The wealth of our community, as measured by median household income, is located largely in the southeastern sections of the planning area. Wealth has become even more localized over the past 10 years. Community income levels are useful in assessing the economic health of the community, albeit somewhat after the fact. Communities with high median incomes reflect growing affluence, wealth, and an economic base that is thriving with more residents with a large amount of disposable income to spend within the community. Lower incomes, and the geographic disparity of income within the planning area speak to the need to diversify the local economy and encourage employment centers throughout the planning area to create more balance.

Business and Industrial Outlook

Business Retention and Attraction

Business attraction is the most visible and media-oriented of the economic development activities. When it is successful it creates significant numbers of jobs, enhances the tax base, and boosts the county's reputation as a place to do business. However, business attraction is often highly competitive, very expensive, time consuming, and unpredictable.

Business retention and expansion, although less glamorous, is widely recognized as a more cost-effective strategy. At least two-thirds of new jobs are created by existing companies. Our aim is to encourage local expansion, stabilize the tax base, help companies at-risk, and, at the same time encourage local companies to sell the area to prospective investors.

According to the 2010 Plan, homegrown jobs are generating more economic growth than industrial recruitment, therefore business retention is key. At the same time, Gaston County must entice new businesses to the area. Competing with Charlotte, Hickory and other communities for new businesses is a challenging responsibility, which requires an aggressive marketing effort. A concerted, sustained, and well-financed effort to promote Gastonia, and to reinforce a positive image, is essential.

Technology parks in Gastonia

Positive marketing includes how the City interacts with new and existing businesses. Streamlining the development approval process can help the existing and recently arrived businesses and supports entrepreneurship. The City of Gastonia has adopted the mission of providing the public with superior customer service. Part of that mission is achieved by making the development process clear and efficient. As part of this commitment, the City renovated the historic former Gaston County Courthouse, now known as the James B. Garland Municipal Business Center, to provide a "one-stop" permitting center. This center has helped to streamline the development process, increase customer service presence and promote open communication between City departments and customers.

Gaston County offers targeted business retention programs through the Gaston Workforce Development Board, aimed at pairing job seekers with existing businesses and worker training programs. In addition, the state offers a variety of tax credits and workforce training incentives to relocating or expanding companies, added to which the counties provide local infrastructure incentives. The two main incentives include tax credits for job creation and tax credits for investments in machinery and equipment. Incentives available in Gaston County include:

- Gaston County Investment Grant Program
- The North Carolina William S. Lee Quality Jobs and Expansion Tax Credit Program for Gaston County
- Industrial Development Fund
- Industrial Revenue Bonds
- City of Gastonia Investment Grant Program
- Mill Rehabilitation Tax Credit
- State Development Zones

These incentives are intended to diversify the tax base, improve employment opportunities for Gastonia and Gaston County residents, and create an increase in the net depreciable taxable value of the City and County tax base.

Existing Buildings

The primary role of economic development is to market a community's assets, including real estate opportunities, that match the site selection criteria of targeted industries or companies. An adequate supply of competitive industrial and office building space, as well as improved sites, such as parks, must be available. In addition, communities often want to have at least one large vacant tract available for a potential mega-industry.

Industrial

According to the North Carolina Department of Commerce, over 80% of all prospective companies desire an existing building as opposed to a land site. Based on property data obtained from the Gaston County Tax Assessor's Office, there are a total of 532 warehouse and manufacturing buildings containing 27.4 million square feet. Class C space commands a 76% share of all square footage, dominated by older textile plants that are often functionally obsolete for modern industrial uses. Generally, Class C buildings are more than 25 years old and have not been renovated.

INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS - GASTON CO.

Class	Buildings	Total Square Feet	% of Total
A	63	2,760,735	10%
B	96	3,800,010	14%
C	373	20,882,625	76%
Total	532	27,443,370	100%

Note: Includes buildings > 5,000 sq. ft.

Sources: Gaston Co. Tax Assessor, Barker Corvus, Carolinas Real Data and Warren Associates

The composite availability rate in Gaston County is 20%, double the 10% rate for Mecklenburg County. The large Class C segment has the highest availability rate of 22% and the small Class A sector has the lowest vacancy rate of 10%. While this vacancy rate is one of the highest in the Charlotte region, economic forecasts indicate that demand should be adequate to support construction of one million square feet of space each year from 2006 though 2012.

Class C space simply cannot be used as an economic development recruitment tool like Class A and B space. The key challenge is what to do with the large quantity of lower quality buildings that fall short of current market requirements for location, materials, and specifications. Indeed, three-quarters of Gaston County's industrial buildings fall into this obsolete Class C category.

The *Gaston 2012 Plan* suggests two main options. The first is to look for alternative uses for these buildings, focusing on the limited number of historically and architecturally interesting ones appropriate for residential, office, and/or mixed-use conversion. Adaptive reuse has been highly successful in other communities and can be an attractive investment with the existing tax credit opportunities in place.

The second option is to purchase and replace the buildings with new, high quality development either for industrial or some other use. However, the economics are generally not favorable for this option, except for the few buildings that occupy adequately large parcels in close proximity to I-85.

Over time, market forces will dictate the type of uses that absorb the available Class C space. A continued focus on a industrial product that is functional and marketable should be the strategy of the County.

Figure 4-13: 2025 Planning Area Business and Technology Parks

Name	Specifications	Location
Gastonia Technology Park	350 Acre campus Class A Sites range from 10-80 acres Zoned I-P (Planned Industrial)	Located one mile north of I-85 off of US 321 in Dallas, NC
Industrial Pike Park	1,523 acres total; 709 acres available 30 acres available Zoned I-2 (Industrial)	One mile from I-85 via NC 274, Isley Drive, Gastonia
Farmington Hills Industrial Park	54 Acres Zoned I-1 and I-2 (Industrial)	I-85 frontage, Southwest corner of I-85 and Bessemer City Road, Gastonia
Edgewood Industrial Park	113 acres total; 93 acres available Zoned I-G (Industrial Growth)	I-85, Edgewood Rd., via NC 274, Gastonia
Delta Business Park	360 acres total; 240 acres available Zoned I-G (Industrial Growth)	One half mile north of I-85 via NC 274, Isley Drive, Gastonia
The Summit	36 acres 40 acres-undeveloped Class A Zoned O-M (Medical Office District)	One mile north of I-85 off of N. New Hope Rd., Gastonia
Northwest Blvd. Industrial Park	202 total acres; 77 acres available Zoned Industrial	One-quarter mile from I-85 via NC 274

Office

Based on buildings containing a minimum of 5,000 square feet, Gaston County's office space totals approximately 3.3 million square feet, excluding buildings attached to manufacturing plants. Class C is the largest category, representing 51% of the inventory.

The 6% overall office vacancy rate in Gaston County is well within the real estate industry's accepted 5% to 10% range, with most of the vacancy concentrated in older Class

Flex Space

Flex buildings evolved from industrial buildings that prevailed in the 1970s that were designed for trucks usually having front loading docks. As the 1980s approached, demand for office parks increased and the idea of flex space, as we know it, emerged. Flex spaces are usually one-story buildings with high ceilings, rear loading docks, surface parking, and generous landscaping.

What are Greenfields?

Greenfields are undeveloped parcels or tracts of land that are commonly used for agriculture or remain in a natural state. Alternatives to greenfield development include redevelopment of built sites, infill, brownfield and greyfield development.

B and C space. Class A has a vacancy rate of only 2%, indicating a potentially undersupplied market. However, weak demand limits development opportunities. Gaston County could begin to emerge as a viable multi-tenant office market by 2012, based on the following factors:

- I-485 is completed around Charlotte, improving regional labor force access.
- Higher-income households capture a greater share of the housing market, generating demand for a wide range of expanded professional services, including local offices.
- Office rents remain measurably lower than in Mecklenburg County.
- The following three locations are likely to support new office development, with the type of space described within the parentheses:
  - Gaston Memorial Hospital (medical)
  - Union Road between Hudson Boulevard
  - Gastonia Airport (small professional buildings)

Business & Technology Parks

The Gaston County park inventory as detailed in Figure 4-13 is divided almost equally among Class A and B acreage, with all parcels located within improved parks. For the most part, Gaston County has followed a park-only strategy, which has been, and will continue to be, very advantageous from a recruitment perspective in that companies typically seek to build in a park setting offering superior investment protection and appreciation. Park locations are a clear preference for many companies and thus a decided recruitment advantage. The Gaston 2012 Plan estimated that Gaston County has about 13 years' supply of industrial land available given current absorption rates and most of this land is within an existing industrial park.

There are currently 17 business and industrial parks within the County, seven of which are located in greater Gastonia, mostly in the Northwest section of the City.

A priority project is the completion of the Gastonia Technology Park adjacent to Gaston College just off US 321. This is a 380 acre site envisioned as being subdivided into approximately 15 lots of varying sizes from six to 50 acres, but still requires significant investment in internal roads, services, and landscaping. The intention is to recruit high quality manufacturing companies that need larger sites and that would create training, cooperation, and education programs with the college. The industrial park will be linked to the college campus with sidewalks, and to adjacent recreational parks with a greenway.

In addition, it will be advantageous to look at potential shared funding opportunities for infrastructure and road improvements which can be undertaken while maintaining the competitive land prices currently seen in Gaston County.

Greenfields

Greenfields are undeveloped lands such as farmlands, woodlands, or fields. Businesses often prefer to develop new facilities on greenfields to avoid the real or perceived difficulties associated with regulatory, financial, and construction obstacles. The key challenge is develop a sustainable development pattern while accommodating new industry. The answer will be some combination of zoning in key locations, unique design standards, incentives for private sector procurement for the long-term, and public sector land assembly and acquisition.

Before available land is segmented, new industrial park locations should be identified, primarily along US-321 North and I-85 West, and land will also need to be

identified and secured at one or more key interchanges along the proposed Garden Parkway in the southern part of the county. A more immediate priority would be the development of a high-density warehouse-only distribution park on the east side of the county to take advantage of the completion of I-485 around the western side of Mecklenburg County. This will increase the county's competitiveness as a warehousing and distribution center.

There has been much discussion about the need to identify a "mega-site" to meet a long-stated regional. Although there are no freestanding, unimproved sites being marketed in Gaston County, it is important to note there are multiple greenfield opportunities. These locations, which typically have some limitations such as lack of infrastructure, poor topography and inferior access, are less likely to be considered by most prospects, but could prove attractive to the right business at the right time.

Future Needs

The City has long planned for future industrial growth in the Northwest sector and much of the sector has been zoned accordingly. In preparation for growth, the Northwest sector has been prepped with utility infrastructure extensions and transportation enhancements. Ideally, the City should promote the location of business in areas such as the Northwest sector in order to make full use of existing infrastructure and building stock. While the basics have been provided, it is unclear how long the Northwest sector can continue to be a viable industrial center, due to a lack of land and encroaching land uses. In order to determine the next steps, the City should conduct a more detailed industrial zoning study to analyze the amount and location of existing industrial zoned land and industrial uses. The study should also analyze other buildings in the City that once housed industrial uses but are no longer relevant (in their current state) for today's businesses.

Another factor that must be considered is the balance of employment and job centers across the City. Industrial and business growth can, and should, occur in all sectors of the planning area, particularly where large swaths of land with available infrastructure exist. It will take a conscious effort to preserve large parcels of undeveloped land, especially in the unincorporated portions of the County, south of the City. Much of this area is being targeted and zoned for residential growth.

Future Opportunities

Economic Development entails creating a positive future for the community. Part of this strategy is capitalizing on future trends and being prepared to take advantage of changes in the regional, national, and global marketplace. The opportunities presented below include several alternative projects, or directions, that could take the community to another level of economic well being: one that does not depend on one sector of the economy alone to sustain future economic growth.

Biotechnology

Careers in biotechnology and life sciences technology are growing, and the Charlotte region is planning on capturing that growth. The North Carolina Research Campus, a new $1.5 billion dollar biotechnology research campus, is currently under construction in Kannapolis. The Kannapolis campus promises to bolster the region's economy similar to the way the Research Triangle Park (RTP) changed the Raleigh-Durham region and put the Charlotte region on the map as a leader in biotechnology research. In a 2004 report, The Milken Institute ranked the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill metropolitan area #3 in its success in attracting and producing biotechnological companies, jobs, products and innovation. That growth is predicted

Belmont Abbey College

Gaston College

Center for Applied Textile Technology

to move outward as land prices in the RTP increase and resources become depleted. The NC Research Campus is seeking to bring that growth to metro Charlotte and act as a catalyst for diversifying the region's economy from traditional industries such as textiles and tobacco to knowledge-based industries.

Public and private colleges and universities in North Carolina and the North Carolina Community College System will partner with the research campus to conduct scientific research that promises to elicit new discoveries, innovation, and employment and business opportunities. Gaston College has embraced this opportunity by offering an Associates Degree program in applied science and technology, operating the New and Expanding Industry Training (NEIT) program, and opening its BioNetwork BioEd Center. Gaston College is also working with Gaston County Schools to offer high school students the opportunity to earn college credits and a certification in bioprocessing.

Gastonia is in a position to capture some of the growth in the expanding biotechnology industry. Gastonia's supply of inexpensive land and trainable workforce can attract these companies to the area. Ways that Gastonia attracts the emerging biotechnology industry include:

- Provide financial incentives specifically geared toward biotechnological companies and business incubators.
- Preserve and zone land for scientific uses. 100 – 300 acre rectangular plots with easy access to I-85 are ideal.
- Develop a marketing campaign targeting scientific companies.
- Work with Gaston College and Gaston County Schools to recruit students to the biotechnology program, as well as teachers with science and biology backgrounds.

Telecommunications

The transmission of signals containing voice or data over a distance is essential for public safety and increasingly important in personal interactions and the transaction of business in Gastonia. The unprecedented growth in telecommunications technology has ultimately changed the way people live and do business. For instance, computers and network infrastructure have become an integral part of our daily lives in communication, business and financial transactions, the media, utilities, transportation, and schools. More recent technological advances have enabled communication devices to become less dependent on ground-based, wired systems and to use wireless networks on an increasing basis.

The infrastructure of telecommunications, however, differs from that of other sectors. It is financed, built and maintained almost entirely within the private sector. Ownership is divided among multiple companies that provide services using a variety of technologies, which include dial-up, landline (over coaxial cable, fiber optic or copper wires), T- lines, Wi-Fi, WiMax, satellite and cell phones, and operating under different types of government regulation. Moreover, due to constant technological advances that are now reshaping the industry, the ways in which telecommunications services are delivered–and the ways in which businesses and consumers use them–could change significantly during the next five to ten years.

The use of broadband telecommunications services are likely to help fuel the growth of a wide range of industries, including some that are central to Gastonia's economy. With this awareness of the changes in technology and role of telecommunications in our economy, the City of Gastonia, in cooperation with the Economic Development Commission, must monitor the changes that are occurring in the industry, assess the issues and opportunities that those changes present, and determine how best to respond for the following reasons:

- REMAIN A COMPETITIVE LOCATION. Firms and organizations evaluate many factors when deciding where to locate and do business. Gastonia must offer a competitive low-cost environment for firms. Not only will it make the City a better choice for firms to do business, but also it will enhance the desirability of the City's neighborhoods as a place to live.

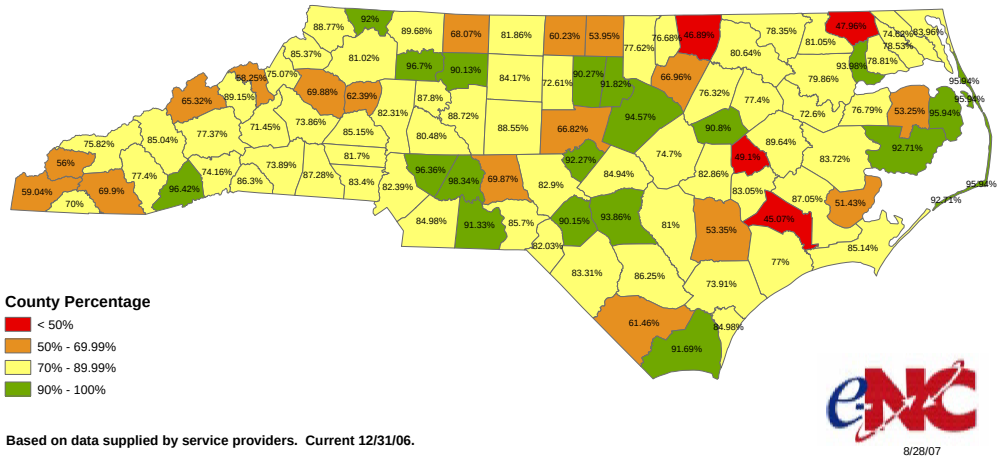
- ENHANCE THE VISITOR'S EXPERIENCE. Wireless access is fast becoming the indispensable tool of the leisure or business visitor. Today's visitor is demanding 24/7 access to travel information, restaurant and shopping information, and local tourism information.

- DELIVERING PUBLIC SERVICES. Governments are judged on how well they deliver services to their constituents and on the ability to provide those services at a low cost. Broadband is a means for governments to provide an increased level of service in a 24/7 mode and has lead to the "e–gov revolution." State, county and city governments are rapidly deploying applications that provide quick access to information and are moving into licensing and permits through e–commerce.

- INVESTMENT IN THE PEOPLE OF GASTONIA. A diverse telecommunications infrastructure will serve as a strategic investment in the people of Gastonia. It will provide a range of access to support a variety of personal goals including furthering one's education, improving access to health information, shopping, and social networking.

Efforts to improve the telecommunication infrastructure at the state level began on August 2, 2000, when the General Assembly of North Carolina created the Rural Internet Access Authority through Senate Bill 1343. On August 14, 2003, Governor Michael Easley signed into law House Bill 1194 reaffirming North Carolina's commitment to improving economic opportunity and quality of life by addressing technology needs. In 2003, the authority conducted a telecommunications infrastructure services survey for every county in North Carolina. The following provides some of the major conclusions regarding the current telecommunications environment in Gaston County:

Figure 4-14: Percent of County Population Served by High Speed Internet Access, 2006



- 79.47% of households have access to cable services (Time Warner or Charter Communications);
- 81.25% of the households have access to high speed internet service (broadband cable, DSL, satellite);
- 78.63% of households have access to telephone service (Bell South);
- Most of the businesses use standard telephone services (local, long distance, voice mail, fax) and networked computer applications (electronic mail, file servers, network printers, databases of various sorts, financial transaction systems, payroll systems, etc.);
- Various Wi-Fi hot spot locations;
- Public access to the Internet is available at ten

e-GOV and local government

- Online utility payments
- Online service requests
- Online payment of parking tickets
- Registration & payment of recreation activities

A primary goal of the Rural Internet Access Authority, renamed e-NC, is to ensure that all North Carolinians, wherever they live, have access to high speed Internet service at comparable prices to urban areas. This will only be possible if NC has a system of information infrastructure –wires, cables, towers and the like–that streches statewide and reaches every person and community.

www.e-nc.org

Gaston County Public Library Centers, three of which are located in the City of Gastonia;

- Most businesses have a web site, and many provide various forms of interactive services through their web sites (data retrieval, on-line ordering, etc.); and
- Many organizations operate computing and network applications specific to their fields of endeavor, including video uplinks, educational video distribution, patient records and teleradiology, and mapping/GIS.

Growth in the telecommunications industry has created considerable demand for new facilities and structures in order to ensure a cohesive telecommunications infrastructure. Assessment of future sites for facilities and structures supporting private telecommunications networks must include an evaluation of the impact on surrounding land uses and the desire to enhance telecommunications infrastructure throughout the planning area. Furthermore, site evaluation should include an assessment of the safety, aesthetics, security, access, and technological needs for the area. Therefore, Gastonia has the opportunity to play an important role in helping to facilitate deployment of wireless broadband by effectively regulating the use of public right-of-way, ensuring that zoning and building regulations do not unduly restrict placement of antennas, and by granting permits for the construction of networks. The City can also facilitate the development of a sound telecom infrastructure by continuing to identify aspects of the City's infrastructure that must be improved or upgraded to meet the future needs of businesses, education, and public consumers.

Higher Education Satellite Location

The idea of locating a satellite campus of a secondary educational facility in the City of Gastonia is not new, and should be revisited. Specifically, the City should continue to work to pursue a satellite campus of Gaston College within the Center City and a North Carolina University. A Gastonia location would provide the City with the following benefits:

- Provide area residents with additional opportunities to obtain advanced educations;
- Job creation;
- Draw students from outside of the area, many of whom may continue to live and work in Gastonia, thus decreasing the area's "brain drain";
- Appeal to new residents who enjoy living in "college towns"; and
- Bring commercial, retail, and office developments to the City that are attracted to the educational institution, its students, graduates and alumni, and the college environment itself.

Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Mills and Downtown Buildings

As the old saying goes, "what is old is new again." Nowhere is this more true than in adaptive reuse. All over the country, developers are purchasing older, often historic or dilapidated buildings, that have outlived their original purpose. They are transforming these structures by modernizing and adapting them to new uses such as office, commercial, retail and residential spaces. Adaptive reuse provides great benefit to Gastonia by:

- Increasing the tax base by increasing the value of existing buildings;
- Providing beautiful, unique spaces for new and expanding businesses;
- Increasing choice of housing and office space;
- Increases tourism options and sightseeing appeal;
- Preserving the past while at the same time building the future; and
- Creating sustainable development by mixing

complementary uses in one building reducing the need for vehicle trips to get to goods and services, and by reusing buildings with existing infrastructure, allowing businesses to share existing resources.

Gastonia has many adaptive reuse opportunities, especially in the Center City. Currently, adaptive reuse can be seen in the historic York-Chester neighborhood where historic homes have been rehabilitated for office uses, and in the historic Gastonia High School that was adapted for luxury apartment homes. The school gymnasium was converted into specialty shops, offices, and a restaurant.

There are many adaptive reuse opportunities in downtown. Though many downtown buildings remain vacant, the redevelopment of 'The Standard,' an old hardware store located downtown on South Street, has been converted into a mixed-use development that offers a live-work environment with first floor retail and residential lofts on subsequent floors. This project has piqued the interest of the development community and may signal the beginning of a downtown renaissance. The most noteworthy project is the planned redevelopment of arguably the City's most significant building, the Loray (Firestone) Mill. The redevelopment of this Gastonia landmark will house a mix of uses including residential, retail, a school, and municipal offices. The redevelopment of the Loray Mill is likely to bring big changes in terms of spin-off revitalization in adjacent residential and commercial areas, private investment to west Gastonia and possibly downtown, and it will put a large taxpayer back on the City's tax roll.

Activity in the Center City

There is a great need for more commercial and civic activity within the center city. The Strategic Development Plan for downtown adopted by City Council in 2007 has provided the framework for growth and development with in the core of the City. One key component is the construction of the conference center and parking garage. A centrally located conference center will provide the greatest economic benefit to the community by acting as the catalyst for the creation of adjacent businesses, retail, restaurants, hotels, and cultural venues in and around downtown. With close, pedestrian linkages to the surrounding areas, the probability that visitors would be able to leave their cars at their hotels and travel by foot, or public transportation, to adjacent businesses and venues greatly increases. A central location also provides greater opportunity for the facility to be used by the wider populace of the city, as well as becoming a civic and cultural expression of the central city.

Adaptive reuse: "The Standard Hardware" Building renovation sketch

Business Incubators

Business incubators nurture the development of entrepreneurial companies, helping them survive and grow during the start-up period when they are most vulnerable. These programs provide their client companies with business support services and resources tailored to young firms. The most common goals of incubation programs are creating jobs in a community, enhancing a community's entrepreneurial climate, retaining businesses in a community, building or accelerating growth in a local industry, and diversifying local economies. Incubator graduates create jobs, revitalize neighborhoods and commercialize new technologies, thus strengthening local, regional and even national economies.

Adaptive reuse: Loray Mill conceptual drawing

Academic institutions, governmental entities, economic development organizations, and non-profit organizations most often sponsor incubator programs.

A well-managed business incubation program is a strong investment in the local and regional economy.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, along with leading private sector interests, created the Ben Craig Center Incubator in 1986. The purpose of the Incubator is to provide state-of-the-art office space to the region's most promising companies in order to accelerate their growth by offering them advisory services, mentoring relationships, sales and marketing expertise and access to capital. The Center has graduated 102 companies since its inception with 80% financially viable at graduation.

Research has shown that for every $1 of estimated public investment provided for incubators, approximately $30 in local tax revenue is generated. In addition, 84 percent of incubator graduates stay in their communities and continue to provide a return to their investors. Incubation programs graduate strong and self-supporting companies into their communities, where these companies build, purchase or rent space.

The City can encourage the development of business incubator programs through financial incentives targeted to upcoming businesses, and the preservation of land for this use. In particular, the City should encourage the adaptive reuse of existing, underutilized buildings for use by business incubator programs. Once a business incubator is proposed, the City should invest in a feasibility study to help determine whether the proposed business incubator has the solid market, sound financial base and the strong community support needed to contribute to an incubator's success.

Issues

Further diversification is essential to the health of Gastonia's economy. Community leaders must focus on attracting more non-manufacturing industries to the area.

The City lacks potential employment sites that are equipped with the appropriate physical infrastructure, such as sewer and water, road improvements. Many large swaths of land are instead being developed as residential developments, resulting in a potential shortage of land for industrial purposes.

The shift from a low-skilled manufacturing economy to a services and knowledge-based economy has left much of Gastonia's workforce without the education and skills needed to compete for jobs in the global marketplace.

The growth of Charlotte as a major services, distribution and financial center has provided new job opportunities for Gastonia residents and has brought new residents to Gastonia. The ability of local government to provide needed services at a reasonable cost is dependent upon a healthy amount of quality, non-residential development.

Increasing concern for the environment and quality of life will dictate that economic development efforts focus on community stewardship. This will include compliance with local policies as well as federal and state mandates. Air and water quality standards will have major implications on future industrial development in Gaston County.

Land and buildings that have become obsolete for industrial use, and vacant downtown buildings, present opportunities for adaptive reuse.

Gastonia has a high percentage of female-headed households with children living below the poverty line, making daycare an important component of the local economy.

Much is being done to beautify downtown with projects such as the Marietta Streetscape project, the "Big Splash" and the decorative sign/ tree lighting projects, however there are still a number of empty storefronts downtown.

Lower wage jobs and low educational attainment have created median household incomes below State averages.

The separation of residential areas from employment centers has created longer commutes, congestion, and less free time for commuters.

Opportunities for economic diversity and economic growth are prevalent in this region.

Societal changes and the changing economy create the need for additional medical office and research space.

Because the City doesn't have its own economic development department, the City has partnered with county-wide agencies to conduct economic development activities and must ensure that its interests are fully represented within these partnerships.

Gastonia has emerged as a services and retail center for Gaston County and portions of adjoining counties. Maintaining this position is important for the local economy and Gastonia's competitive position. Providing support to existing businesses, local homegrown businesses, and industries is important to the economic health of Gastonia.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Objectives and Tools

Objective 1.

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.

Tools

a. Seek to attract sustainable economic development opportunities to the City.
b. Sponsor economic activities that will enhance the local economy, such as the provision of incentives appropriate for job creation.
c. Create a City economic development position that acts as a liaison between the City Manager's office and the Gaston County EDC and focuses solely on facilitating increased investment and job creation within Gastonia.
d. Engage a public process to develop a list of key strategic goals for City economic development.
e. Coordinate with the Chamber of Commerce and the Gaston County EDC to monitor local, regional and national economic trends.
f. Identify and protect strategically located vacant or underutilized land that can support future industrial and business park development.
g. Market and encourage the private development of high-quality industrial buildings with modern features and good transportation connectivity, while continuing to explore industrial tenants for business parks and adaptive reuses of older buildings.
h. Support expansion of medical office and research space around the hospital through changes to the Future Land Use Map. Encourage smaller medical centers throughout the planning area.

Objective 2.

The City will work with teaching and training facilities to accommodate new areas of job training programs and ongoing educational opportunities for community residents.

Tools

a. Work with Gaston County Schools to ensure that children value education as the route to long-term economic prosperity. Work to ensure that students graduate with the intent to pursue higher education or marketable job skills.
b. Explore creative approaches to workforce development such as new learning technologies, Internet-based market information, and regional organization and funding arrangements.
c. Work with local educational facilities to expand current workforce development efforts to accommodate those who are unemployed and underemployed.
d. Encourage more involvement of business leaders in the education and development of the workforce.
e. Tailor secondary and post secondary education curriculums to match national job market trends.
f. Pursue the possibility of the City as a location of a satellite of the UNC system or other institutions of higher learning, i.e. University of Phoenix.
g. Collaborate with Gaston College, North Carolina's public and private four-year colleges and universities, and Gaston County Schools to establish satellite locations for biotechnology classes and programs in and around Gastonia.

Objective 3.

The City will provide the infrastructure necessary to accommodate existing and new businesses.

Tools

a. Identify and preserve land for employment centers where infrastructure currently exists.
b. Plan for the timely provision of adequate infrastructure including roads, sewer and water to allow development in areas designated for retail, office and industrial uses.
c. Develop a capital improvement plan that considers the municipal purchase of sites to be prepped with utility services and preserved for future business/industrial development.
d. Encourage master-planned, mixed-use business centers with pedestrian connectivity are encouraged.
e. Research and consider regional water-sewer authority models.
f. Maintain adequate funding sources for infrastructure. Research available grant opportunities and seek legislation for additional funding options.
g. Provide the technological infrastructure, including citywide Wi-Max or Wi-Fi, that will attract young people and the "creative class" to Gastonia, and that will allow businesses, government, schools, and the public to operate in a faster, more efficient manner.
h. Explore mass or rapid transit connections to Charlotte, and take advantage of the completed I-485 loop along the western edge of Mecklenburg County.
i. Coordinate land use plans for the area surrounding the proposed Garden Parkway, to determine land use goals and utility needs.
j. Encourage residential development around office and retail corridors.

Objective 4.

The City will protect the business climate for existing businesses and promote opportunities for business expansion.

Tools

a. Provide technical assistance and outreach services to existing and prospective businesses, regarding site locations, permitting processes and financing.
b. Streamline and effectively communicate the City's development review process.
c. Increase the coordination of land use planning throughout the County through the development of common zoning regulations achieved through the adoption of a Unified Development Ordinance.
d. Involve the business community in the development of citywide programs that may affect them.
e. Protect existing businesses and industrial areas from encroachment of incompatible uses.
f. Promote adaptive reuse of vacant commercial and industrial buildings through education, incentives, and streamlining the development process.
g. Create additional opportunities for female heads of household to remain in the workforce through the convenient location of quality, affordable daycare close to residential and employment areas.
h. Seek to attract and support minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurship development through education, training, and technical assistance, and access to financing.
i. Prevent disinvestments from occurring in older parts of Gastonia by promoting employment and small business opportunities in these areas.
j. Ensure that a variety of housing opportunities are available for the local labor force.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

k. Support the creation of business incubators in Downtown Gastonia and within existing buildings throughout the City.

Objective 5.

The City will work to enhance quality of life for existing and future City residents.

Tools

a. Develop marketing and branding strategies to promote the City.
b. Promote the availability of employment for all. This may be accomplished by:
(1) Coordinating with public and private agencies to identify and help individuals requiring special assistance to obtain and maintain employment.
(2) Encourage local employers to provide labor market information.
(3) Encourage public schools and the community college and universities to determine what vocational and professional training is necessary and available for the current and future labor market needs with the possibility of setting up satellite programs in or near the community.
c. Support special events such as festivals, street fairs and parades that create a positive image of the City.
d. Create stock presentations and printed materials for communicating the City's strengths to internal and external audiences, stimulating feedback and dialogue.
e. Create a positive image of the City for visitors by providing attractive and functional landscaping and high quality architectural designs throughout the City, paying special attention to its gateways.
f. Promote and support the use of innovative commercial and residential neighborhood design.
g. Economic development should be expanded without endangering Gastonia's quality of life.
h. Selectively recruit higher wage employers that will be attracted to the quality of life in Gastonia.
i. Strengthen downtown as the professional office, civic, cultural, and entertainment core of the community.

Objective 6.

The City will provide resources for new and expanding businesses and industries while conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural resources of the community.

Tools

a. Economic development should be focused on "clean" industries and businesses that utilize the newest technologies to protect the environment.
b. Focus economic development efforts on knowledge industries and businesses, in addition to traditional manufacturing industries, that can locate in areas with existing infrastructure.
c. Consider benefits derived by preserving and protecting Gastonia's natural and cultural heritage when planning for infrastructure expansion.

Objective 7.

The City should research and take action to advance unique opportunities for economic expansion and diversification.

Tools

a. Assist businesses and educational institutions in advanced manufacturing, information technology and biotechnology to

collaborate more closely with one another and to market themselves as magnets for capital, research talent and high-skill jobs.

b. Encourage deployment of improvements in technology and the telecommunications system.
c. Adaptive reuse of mill and abandoned manufacturing buildings
d. Business incubators
e. Location for education satellite
f. Civic center

Objective 8.

The City will cooperate with economic development plans across Gaston County and the region in a manner that minimizes conflict between jurisdictions.

Tools

a. Coordinate comprehensive economic development efforts with a focus on regional collaboration with other municipalities and agencies.
b. Continue to implement recommendations from the *Cleveland-Gaston Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy* (Gaston 2012 plan).
c. Research and consider requiring a countywide impact study for developments taking place within the City of Gastonia that are likely to have effects outside of the local government's jurisdiction.
d. Follow and capitalize on trends and economic development initiatives in the region, such as the NASCAR industry, biotechnology, regional transit, etc.

Objective 9.

Adopt land use strategies that enhance and support the development of human connectivity.

Tools

a. Centrally locate human resource facilities (schools and colleges, work and job development programs, daycares) to ensure accessibility.
b. Encourage development that resembles close-knit communities, includes a variety of land uses to meet residents' needs (schools, businesses, offices, open space,) and that promotes resident interaction.
c. Support neighborhoods attempting to develop their own identity through such tools as gateway signage, distinctive street signs, and landscaped gateways.

Objective 10.

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.

Tools

a. Ensure local policies and regulations are supportive of, and complimentary to, the goals of State and County human service agencies that focus on education, job preparedness, and overall well-being of the City's workforce.
b. Encourage other governments, schools, institutions and community-based organizations to provide opportunities for participation in discussions that shape decisions about their neighborhood and community.
c. Work with schools, libraries, community centers, agencies and organizations to link services into a seamless system that helps students stay in school, and encourage co-location and joint use of facilities to make a broader variety of services available to students.

5

Public Utilities

Community Services

Issues

Objectives and Tools

Public Utilities & Community Services

GASTONIA 2025

Public Utilities & Community Services

Public Utilities & Community Services Goal

To provide 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.

Overview

The City provides and maintains public services and facilities such as sewer, water, parks, fire and police. It is also a regional provider of water and sewer services to other Gaston County municipalities and northern York County, SC. These facilities and services have expanded as the population has increased from both new construction and annexation. In the recent past, the City built a Police Station, four Fire Stations, created a stormwater utility, opened a Farmers' Market, and expanded existing utility systems in order to meet the wants and needs of the community. Over the past decade, the strongest demand for new construction has been in the southeast. However, this is also the area with the least amount of available sewer capacity. New public facilities such as water and sewer should be designed to support the land uses proposed by the Plan. In addition, the Plan will consider the cost of water and other community sewer services when recommending future land use. In general, the City will provide adequate, reliable, and affordable 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.

Public Utilities

Water Supply & Treatment

The City of Gastonia owns, operates and maintains a potable (drinkable) water system that serves the City of Gastonia, portions of Gaston County, and five neighboring towns including Lowell, Cramerton, Ranlo, and McAdenville, North Carolina, and Clover, South Carolina. The City also serves a section of the Spencer Mountain Village residential development currently under construction in Dallas. The City currently serves 71 houses in the first phase of the development. The City of Gastonia Public Works & Utility Department Water Supply and Treatment Division manages the water system supply infrastructure and treatment process. In addition, the City provides emergency connections to Dallas, Bessemer City, and Belmont. The Water Supply and Treatment Division manages the water system supply infrastructure and the treatment process. The water plant has been ISO 14001 certified since 2005 and became a North Carolina Environmental Steward in 2010.

The Gastonia water system centers on the Gastonia Water Treatment Plant (WTP), a 25.2 million gallons per day (mgd) conventional treatment facility that was originally constructed in the 1920s. Mountain Island Lake is the primary raw water source for the City of Gastonia. Rankin Lake and the South Fork River both serve as emergency

Figure 5-1: Historic Water Use

Year	Flow in Million Gallons	Gallons Per Capita, Per Day
1990	15.5	256
1995	14.9	222
2000	14.3	179
2005	12.2	149
2010	12.8	153

sources. Other system facilities include four above ground water tanks.

Over the past 20 years, many large industrial water users, mostly textile mills, have been lost. In order to make up for this loss in customer base, the City began providing services to other municipalities. This strategy has helped, but has not been able to recreate the historic customer base and water demands. As noted in Figure 5-1, the gallon per capita per day (gpcd) rates have dropped from a level of 256 gpcd in 1990 to 155 gpcd in 2002. It is expected that changes in usage patterns and more efficient water using appliances will further reduce the per-capita water use to around 140 gpcd by 2025.

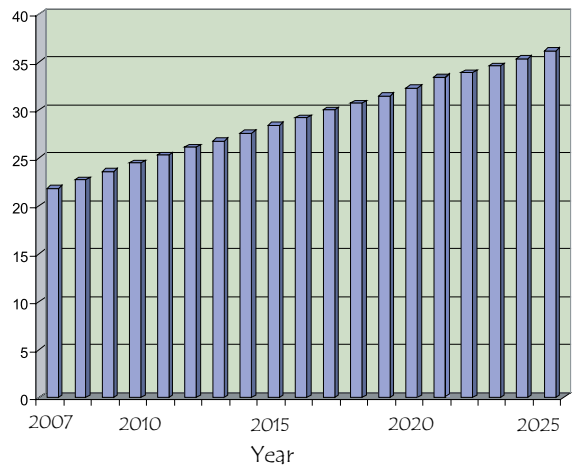
Water System Facilities and Future Improvements

Gastonia Water Treatment Plant

The Gastonia Water Treatment Plant is a conventional water treatment plant located adjacent to the central business district, County Courthouse and jail facility on Long Avenue. The plant dates back to the 1920s and has a current capacity of 25.2 mgd. Two raw water lines enter the plant and both can be fed by all available raw water sources including Mountain Island Lake, Rankin Lake, and the South Fork River. The plant currently consists of 10 sedimentation basins and filters ranging in age from 17 to 80 years, chemical facilities, a sludge plant, and clear wells. Water treatment plant structures generally have a design life of 50 years, with equipment lasting from 15-25 years. However, many upgrades have, and continue to be made to extend the design life of the treatment plant.

Providing treatment capacity to meet future growth will require improvements to the existing facility and may require the construction of new facilities. The current water system produces on average 12.4 mgd of potable water and the demand is expected to exceed 23 mgd by 2020. Water treatment facilities are sized to handle maximum-day demands, which are projected to reach 32 mgd by 2020 and 36 mgd by 2025. Facility capacity must be expanded to handle future use projections, through either on-site improvements or new facilities. Figure 5-2 presents the projected maximum-day demand per year from 2007 through 2025.

Figure 5-2: Annual Maximum Daily Water Demand Projections (million gallons per day)



*Flows shown are based on demand projections for a future countywide water system.

In 2002 the City completed a Water System Master Plan. This plan included guidelines for future water system

Water treatment plant structures generally have a design life of 50 years, with equipment lasting from 15-25 years. However, many upgrades have, and continue to be made to extend the design life of the treatment plant until a future plant is built.

Mountain Island Lake

The City of Gastonia acquired 432 acres along Mountain Island Lake only a few hundred feet from the city's water intake. This will help ensure that drinking water quality is preserved for its citizens.

improvements for the planning period through the year 2030. A major recommendation of the plan was that the existing treatment plant remain in operation until approximately 2013, depending upon facility condition and growth demands. The plan also recommended that in order to extend the life of the current facility, the plant should be re-rated to demonstrate that existing equipment is able to treat additional volumes. Furthermore, the plan recommended that an additional bulk chemical storage facility should be constructed and that a new 22-mgd treatment plant be constructed at a site located away from the center of the City. The new plant would reduce the need for treatment capacity at the existing plant by about half. Eventually, the new treatment plant would be expanded to 44 mgd and the remainder of the existing plant would be abandoned. While implementing the recommendations in the Water System Master Plan would require a large capital investment, they would allow for increased capacity, safety, and reliability with the fewest operational and maintenance challenges.

Due to the project costs and magnitude of constructing a new treatment plan and changes in water use demands (since 2002), the City will reevaluate the recommendations of the 2002 Master Plan to identify solutions that might prove to be more economical over time. This reevaluation will consider possible maintenance, rehabilitation, or replacement actions as well as the proposal to relocate the plant. The results of the assessment will determine the best option for renewal and possible replacement of the City's water treatment system to meet both the short-term and long-term growth of the City.

Mountain Island Pump Station

During the early 1980s, it became apparent that the South Fork River was becoming polluted and costs for treating the raw water were becoming increasingly expensive. It also became evident that the South Fork River was unable to provide the quantity of water required by the demand on the City's system, especially during drought conditions. These circumstances led the City to begin looking for a new raw water source that would not only provide the quantity of water to meet the demands of the City's system, but would also be a quality source of raw water that could be protected from the pollutants which had degraded the South Fork River source.

In 1986, a Raw Water Supply Study was prepared for the City. One of the principal recommendations of the study was that the raw water supply be shifted from the South Fork River to Mountain Island Lake. Mountain Island Lake is a man-made lake that was formed in 1924 after a tropical storm dumped large amounts of rainfall into the Catawba River Basin. The Catawba River was then dammed, which resulted in the formation of Mountain Island Lake. The Lake covers an area of about 3,300 acres and it stores about 6.3 trillion gallons of water when filled to capacity. The watershed, or drainage area, for Mountain Island Lake covers 1,819 square miles. The lake, which forms part of Gaston County's eastern border, has significantly better water quality than the South Fork and does not experience flow problems during summer droughts.

The Lake's high water quality is due to two factors. First, Lake Norman acts as an enormous settling basin, removing pollutants before the water flows into Mountain Island Lake. Second, the Mountain Island Lake watershed contains relatively few point and non-point sources of pollution.

The City established Mountain Island Lake as its primary source of raw water in 1995. Mountain Island Lake also provides the City of Mount Holly and Charlotte-Mecklenburg with a dependable source of water. The Samuel L. Wilkins Raw Water Pumping Facility at Mountain Island Lake withdraws raw water from the Catawba River basin. The station has a normal capacity of 60 mgd, with a permit to withdraw an average flow of 75 mgd and an instantaneous flow of 150 mgd. The pump station provides high quality water in sufficient amounts that allows for current and future needs. With continued maintenance, the pump station should have a minimum 50 – 100 year life expectancy.

The Mountain Island Lake reservoir was created as one of a series of dams along the Catawba-Wateree river chain, constructed and operated by Duke Energy. The original license, issued in 1958 by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), was set to expire in 2008, and the Federal Power Act requires non-federal hydroelectric projects to obtain a new license, which can be granted for a 30-50 year term. The Comprehensive Relicensing Agreement and Low Inflow Protocol were filed in August 2006 as part of the new license application. The City of Gastonia, along with over 80 organizations having interest in the river and its resources, have been, and will continue to be, involved in the relicensing process.

Several relicensing issues affect the City of Gastonia including the development of a water conservation policy for all major water purveyors in the Catawba-Wateree project. The Low Inflow Protocol (LIP) will determine how water is removed from the lake under low water conditions, including timing for voluntary and mandatory water use restrictions. The new license will also specify the amount of water that can be removed from the lake by each water purveyor now and for the term of the license.

A Water Management Group (WMG) has been created to maintain water quality and manage the lakes. The licensing agreement and the long-term management of Mountain Island Lake is directly related to the City of Gastonia's ability to provide water to its residents and water to other customers.

Rankin Lake and Pump Station

The Raw Water Transmission System from Mountain Island Lake was designed to allow raw water to be pumped directly to the water plant for treatment or to be stored in Rankin Lake. Rankin Lake serves as an emergency raw water impoundment for the City's water system. Under emergency conditions, raw water can also be pumped from the South Fork River into Rankin Lake. The lake was constructed near the original Long Creek withdrawal location by excavating soil from the lake area to form the embankments. The original construction was completed in 1925. A sedimentation basin was added adjacent to the west side of the lake at a later date. Raw water pumps are housed in two pumping stations. Both pump stations are expected to have a 25-year life expectancy. The dam does not have any imminent safety problems; however, slope instability and water seepage beneath the weirs should be monitored closely in the future.

South Fork Pump Station

Before the Mountain Island intake was placed in service, the South Fork River served as the principal drinking water source to the City of Gastonia. The facility has two intake structures, one of which was taken out of service in the 1990s. The remaining structure is still maintained by the City as an emergency raw water source; therefore, existing pumps should be routinely exercised to ensure that the equipment is ready when needed. Equipment upgrades may be necessary in the next 10 years to ensure its continued operability.

The majority of the water supply and storage facilities are in good shape, and each facility needs to remain in service to provide continued and reliable service for the next 25 years. As growth occurs on the western side of the planning area, an additional storage tank will be required to provide service due to the increased elevations surrounding Crowders Mountain.

Figure 5-3: Water System Map

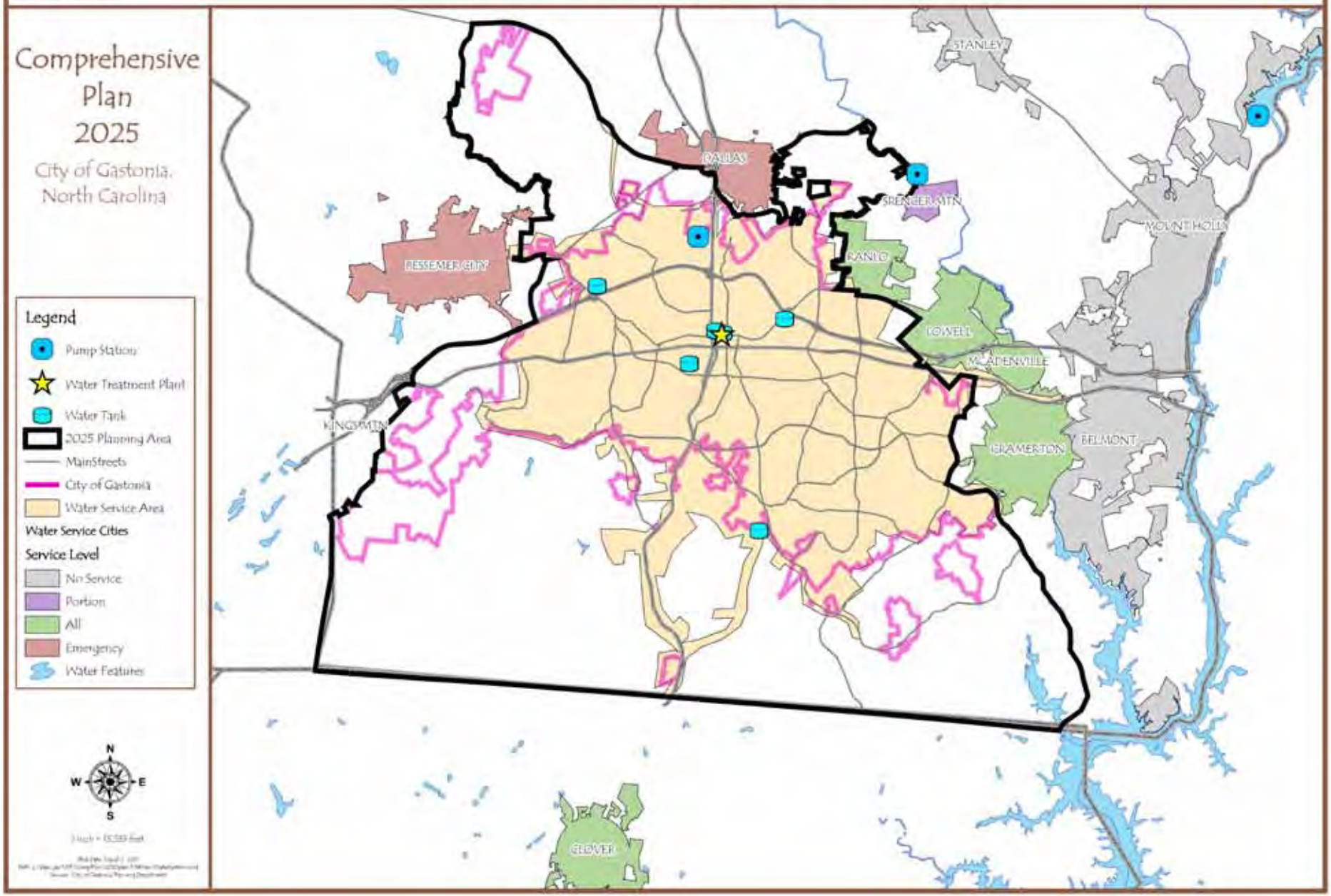
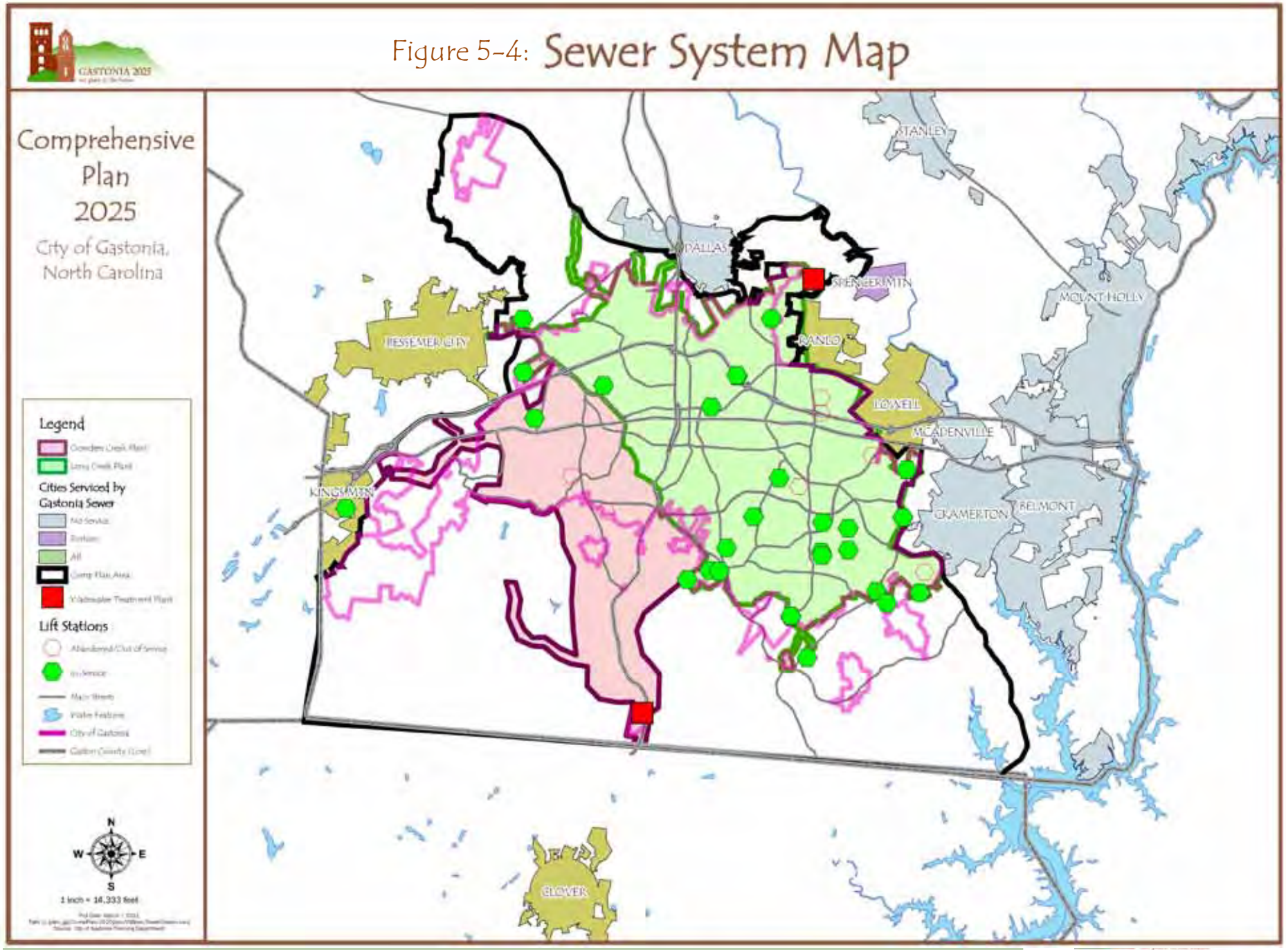


Figure 5-4: Sewer System Map



In the Low Inflow Protocol (LIP), drought stages are determined by the following three indicators:

- How much water is in the reservoirs;
- How much water is flowing into the reservoirs;
- and The US Drought Monitor, a government web site that indicates what parts of the country are in a drought and how severe that drought is.

Duke Energy performs a monthly evaluation of these indicators and then issues a report to all large water users along the Catawba, indicating which stage the basin is in and what actions should be taken to help conserve water.

There are 5 stages - from stage 0 (a watch) to stage 4 (emergency - where water supply is in critical situation). Actions are detailed for each stage.

Source: http://www.duke-energy.com/lakes/cwdmag-overview.asp

Water Storage Tanks

The City of Gastonia has 4 water storage tanks throughout the distribution system, but only three are active. The West and East tanks are elevated storage tanks sized at 1 MG each, located on the west and east sides of the City. The 5 MG, above ground South tank was constructed in 1976. The associated pump station services the Little Mountain area. The Firestone tank is an elevated steel 1 MG inactive tank constructed in 1929. This tank has been drained and is out of service. The majority of the water supply and storage facilities are in good shape and with the exception of the Firestone tank, each facility needs to remain in service to provide continued and reliable service for the next 25 years. As growth occurs on the western and northwestern portions of the planning area, the creation of a new pressure zone with an additional storage tank will be required to provide service due to the increased elevations surrounding Crowders Mountain and toward Pasour Mountain.

Response to Drought

The Droughts of 1986, 1997, 2002 and 2007 have influenced how the City of Gastonia manages its raw water supply. The Drought of 1986 spurred the city to select Mountain Island Lake as its primary raw water source after the flows in the South Fork Catawba River became low enough to limit the available supply. The Drought of 2002 created some partnerships as Gastonia, Bessemer City, Kings Mountain and Shelby worked together to provide drinking water to Shelby when their raw water supply was inadequate to meet their needs. The Droughts of 2002 and 2007 occurred during the FERC re-licensing process for facilities in the Catawba – Wateree Basin by Duke Energy. Several FERC re-licensing issues affect the City of Gastonia, which includes the development of a water conservation policy for all major water purveyors in the Catawba – Wateree project. The Low Inflow Protocol (LIP) will determine how water is withdrawn from the lake under low water conditions, including timing for voluntary and mandatory water use restrictions. A Water Management Group (WMG) was formed to identify, encourage, fund and help implement water resource improvements to preserve, extend and enhance the overall basin's reliability, its ability to support water withdrawers and to improve water use efficiency. The licensing agreement and the long-term management of Mountain Island Lake is directly related to the City of Gastonia's ability to provide water to its residents and to other users.

Following the Droughts of 2002 and 2007, the State of North Carolina also enacted legislation requiring a water conserving measure including the development of rate structures to promote conservation. The City of Gastonia conducted a rate study, which included changes in the water rate structure for residential customers and irrigation customers. The new rate structure, which includes an increasing block rate for residential and irrigation customers was adopted in June 2009 with an implementation date of January 1, 2010.

Wastewater

Wastewater, more commonly known as 'sewage' is the water released by residences and businesses through drains, such as toilets, washing machines, sinks and showers. Wastewater flows from the drainage system in homes and businesses through underground pipes to treatment plants for treatment using various complex processes. Treated water, or 'effluent' is then routed to a receiving stream or applied to land as a fertilizer.

The City of Gastonia provides regional wastewater services, maintains 528 miles of wastewater collection system ranging from 6-inch through 42-inch diameter sewer, and includes

approximately 12,000 manholes. Wastewater flow is treated at the Long Creek and Crowders Creek wastewater treatment plants. The Wastewater Treatment Division has been ISO 14001 certified since 2001. Long Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant became a NC DENR Environmental Steward in 2004 and Crowders Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant became a NC DENR Environmental Steward in 2010.

Wastewater Treatment System

The City of Gastonia provides wastewater collection and treatment to residents and businesses of the City, as well as provides regional treatment services to portions of unincorporated, south central Gaston County. The City also provides services for the satellite communities of Bessemer City, Ranlo, Clover, SC, portions of Kings Mountain and to several homes located within the City of Lowell. The city also serves a section of the Spencer Mountain Village residential development currently under construction in Dallas. The city currently serves 71 houses in the first phase of the development. Existing topography, proximity to available Gastonia treatment capacity, and the increasing performance requirements and cost of local wastewater treatment have created regional treatment opportunities and increased revenue for the City. Figure 5-5 outlines the existing agreements with satellite communities.

It is expected that future population and business growth in the Town of Ranlo, the Town of Clover, and the City of Bessemer City will be added to the City of Gastonia wastewater system through the year 2025. The system also will be expected to serve future growth on the east side of Kings Mountain, growth in the southeast and southwest portions of the County as well as northwest of the City of Gastonia boundary. The City also has an agreement to serve approximately 250 homes in the Spencer Mountain Village residential development which is currently under construction. The City currently serves 71 homes in the first phase of the development.

Figure 5-5: Existing Long-Term Wastewater Satellite Communities

Satellite	Date of Agreement	Term (years)	Current Flow Allocation	Peak Limit (mgd)	5-Day Limit	Basin
Kings Mountain, NC	N/A	N/A	1.00	1.00	N/A	Crowders Creek
Ranlo, NC	June 1996	20	.40	N/A	N/A	Long Creek
Clover, SC	November 1996	25	.62	N/A	N/A	Crowders Creek
Bessemer City, NC	September 1996	25	.067	N/A	N/A	Long Creek
Bessemer City, NC	December 2006	20	1.0	N/A	N/A	Crowders Creek
Lowell, NC	October 1997	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Long Creek
Spencer Mountain Village, Dallas, NC	January 20, 2004	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Long Creek

How Our Wastewater Treatment System Works

What Happens First

Wastewater passes through the Gravity Collection System on its way to the treatment plants, unless it passes through a pump station or outfall first. Gastonia maintains 485 miles of sewer pipes.

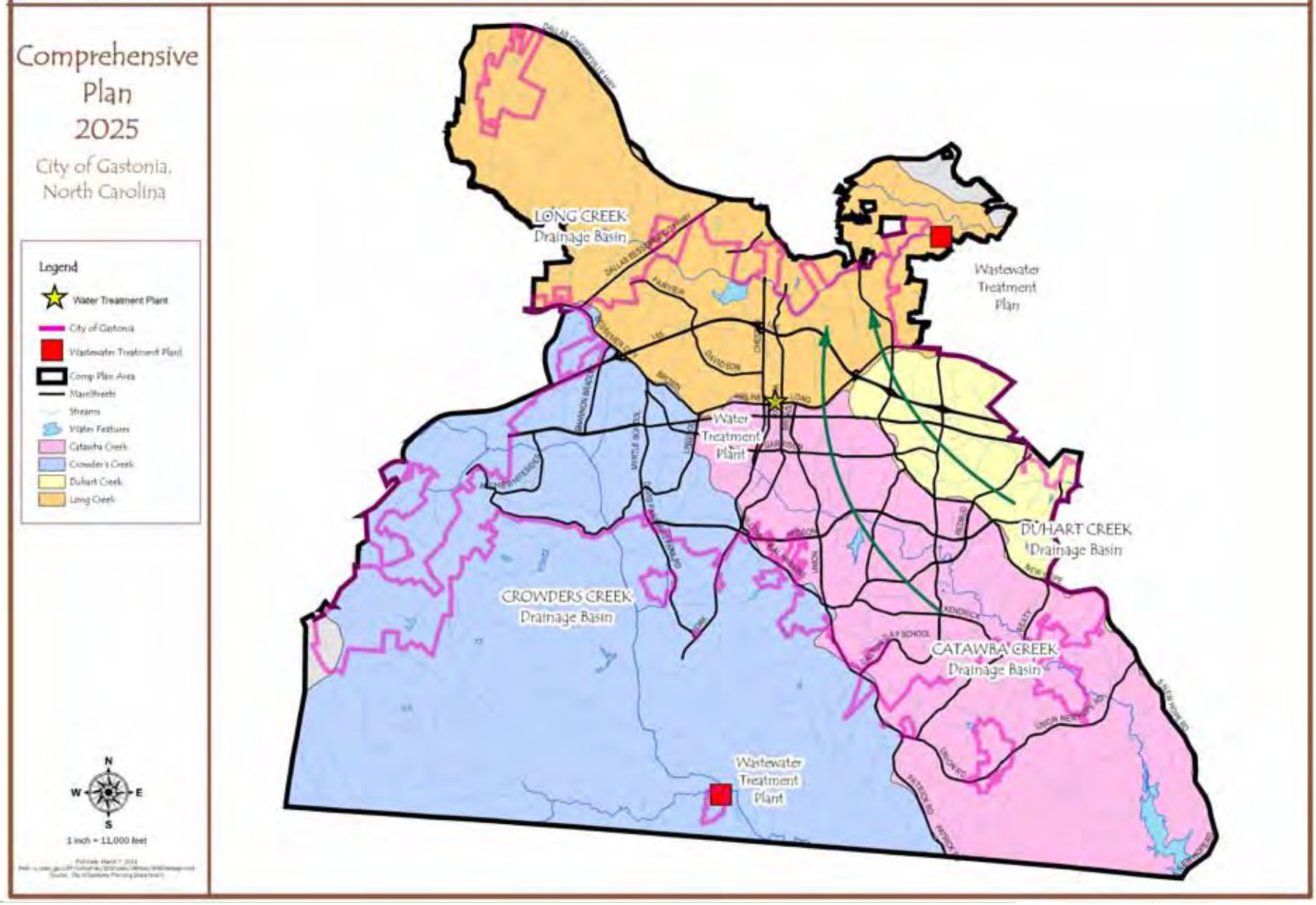
How Our Staff Cleans the Water

The Operations staff controls the treatement plants. Staff are present at both plants 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Wastewater is tested in each step of the treatment process by the Laboratory staff to ensure that it is properly cleaned in the treatment plants.

What Happens After the Water is Treated?

Disinfectant is injected into the clear portion of the water to kill any remaining bacteria. The Crowders Creek Plant discharges to the treated water to Crowders Creek and the Long Creek Plant discharges to the South Fork River. The solids that are removed are treated and land applied as a fertilizer on 2000 acres of private farmland throughout Gaston County.

Figure 5-6: Wastewater Treatment & Drainage Basins



Regionalization of wastewater facilities is a growing trend to be encouraged since it leads to the elimination of small inefficient systems for centralized management, lower costs and subsequently more effective environmental protection. In order to assist with regional system expansions and adequately meet demands, inter-municipal agreements may need to be developed.

Drainage Basins

The City of Gastonia wastewater system serves four major drainage basins:

1. Long Creek, generally north of the Norfolk Southern Railway right-of-way;
2. Crowders Creek, generally south of the Norfolk Southern Railway right-of-way and southwest of a line running from Linwood Road to Spencer Avenue to Carolina Avenue to York Road to Neal Hawkins Road;
3. Catawba Creek, generally south of the Norfolk Southern Railway right-of-way and located between the Crowders Creek basin and New Hope Road; and
4. Duhart Creek, generally south of the Norfolk Southern Railway right-of-way and east of New Hope Road.

Because sewer systems operate most efficiently by gravity, the locations of sewer mains and treatment plants are generally at the bottom of a basin. Since pumping the sewage over a ridge from one basin to another is costly, the drainage basin generally serves as the service area for each of the treatment plants. Thus, gravity service and drainage basin location have a significant impact on the extension of water and wastewater services to future growth areas. This situation has greatly affected the City's ability to extend sewer services to the Garden Sector of the planning area (the area located in the far southeast corner of the County). As future growth in this area may eventually lead to the annexation of this sector into the City, the extension of sewer service will become necessary and a new southeast wastewater treatment plant may be required to meet the demand.

Nevertheless, service to the Catawba Creek basin is an exception to the general rule of gravity service. In 1999, the City of Gastonia decommissioned the Catawba WWTP due to the high percentage of flow the Catawba discharge represented in the receiving stream. The Catawba Creek basin's flow is pumped to the Long Creek plant for treatment and the Catawba WWTP facilities are currently used for flow equalization and storage during peak wet weather events. Other significant events include the continued demand for services, especially in the southeastern portion of the County, and as with water service, the loss of significant industrial users has reduced the wastewater flows to be transported and treated.

Treatment Plants

Gastonia owns and operates 19 pumping stations to transport and deliver wastewater flow to the City's two wastewater treatment plants (WWTP):

1. Long Creek WWTP – located to the north of the city, and,
2. Crowders Creek WWTP – located to the south of the City near the South Carolina border.

Why use Biosolids?

Biosolids are a recycled product that can be used as fertilizer reducing the need to deplete non-renewable resources such as phosphorous.

The nutrients in biosolids are not as soluble as those in chemical fertilizers and are, therefore, released more slowly.

Biosolids appliers are required to maintain setbacks from water resources and are subject to more stringent soil conservation and erosion control practices.

The organic matter in biosolids improves soil properties for optimum plant growth, and decreases the need for pesticide use.

The Long Creek WWTP discharges into the South Fork River. The plant was constructed in 1965 and was expanded to 7 mgd in the 1970s. In 1990, the plant was expanded to 16 mgd and upgraded for biological nutrient removal (BNR). Since the Catawba Creek WWTP was decommissioned in 1999, the Catawba Creek pumping station has delivered all the Catawba basin flow to the Duhart pumping station for eventual transport to the Long Creek WWTP for treatment, placing additional demands on the Long Creek plant. Regardless, the capacity of the Long Creek treatment plant, with some minor facility enhancements, is expected to be adequate through 2020.

The Crowders Creek WWTP discharges into Crowders Creek. The plant began operation in April 1992 with a design capacity of 6 mgd and remains the same today. As long as the future southeast development flows are treated at the Long Creek WWTP, the capacity at Crowders Creek should be sufficient to treat projected future flows with some facility enhancements.

Biosolids Program

Treatment of wastewater from the City's households and businesses results in solids that may be incinerated, sent to a landfill, composted, or applied to land. Land Application is the most economical disposal for the City of Gastonia's water and sewer customers. The biosolids contain nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus that are beneficial for crops. This has the additional benefit of recycling nutrients back into the soil. The City then provides the fertilizer, in the form of biosolids and lime, at no cost to the farmer, decreasing the farmer's expenses. The State of North Carolina Division of Water Quality must permit each field used for Land Application. The City has 2010 permitted acres in North Carolina including the Resource Recovery Farm, which was established in 1994 on City owned land located between Dallas and Cherryville. There are 414 acres permitted by SCDEHC in South Carolina. In 2010, the City applied 2,221 dry tons of biosolids on 1,274 acres.

In 1997, the City was awarded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region IV First Place Award for Beneficial Use of Biosolids for its Biosolids Program, which included the Resource Recovery Farm. In addition, the City was awarded Honorable Mention at the National level. These awards recognized the City's activities for demonstrating biosolids management practices, which are environmentally safe, economically attractive and acceptable to the public.

Future program goals include: increasing the number of Land Application sites, evaluating the feasibility of re-using methane gas, providing a thicker product for application to reduce making transport and applications more cost effective and reducing the potential for stream contamination. Finding sites for Land Application will be increasingly difficult as the City continues to grow and urban areas overtake farms and rural land.

System Growth Requirements

The City is growing under the influence of both internal economic development and growth pressures from greater metropolitan Charlotte, even while overall wastewater flows have decreased due to the reduction of high volume industrial discharges (primarily from textile mills). Residential development is pushing into the east and southeast while industrial development is planned for the northwest area of the City. The proposed Garden Parkway around the southern and western boundaries of the City is creating new transportation corridors that will necessitate expansion and growth of the City's wastewater system. Recent annexations into the City also increase the need for wastewater extension. Because sewer service is essential to urban-density growth, the location of sewer mains will

play a major role in the pattern of growth at the fringes of Gastonia.

The Wastewater Master Plan dated March 5, 2004, provides recommendations for the wastewater collection and treatment system and facility needs through 2020. Meeting Gastonia and Gaston County's growth requirements will require significant capital improvements, especially in the southeastern segment of the City's planning area.

REGIONALIZATION/UTILITY CONSOLIDATION

The loss of large industrial, mostly textile based, customers in the City of Gastonia and the other municipalities in Gaston County has resulted in a reduction of revenues and excess capacity at the water and wastewater treatment plants in the county. The City of Gastonia has the largest water treatment plant in the county. The current capacity is 25.2 mgd and the current average daily demand is 12.4 mgd. The Long Creek and Crowders Creek Wastewater Treatment Plants have a combined capacity of 22 mgd and for calendar year 2010, the average daily flow was approximately 8.5 mgd. The water plant and both wastewater plants are currently operating at less than one-half of their capacities. This reduces the efficiency of the operations. The city needs to regain its "economy of scale" at both wastewater treatment plants and at the water plant.

Staff from the Public Works and Utilities Department have been meeting with the other municipalities in Gaston County to develop partnerships for utility services that will regain the economy of scale and provide cost effective water and sewer service for our customers. Long Creek and Crowders Creek WWTP's are the most advanced wastewater treatment plants in Gaston County and have biological nutrient removal. The water plant has excess capacity and can provide drinking water for much of the county. By working together, the municipalities in Gaston County can accomplish more than by working alone.

The City is interested in using the expanded municipal model to form a regional utility. Discussions have been ongoing with Dallas, Cramerton, Lowell, McAdenville and Pharr Yarns and Ranlo concerning the possibility of forming partnerships that will benefit each community.

Stormwater

Stormwater is the term used to describe the runoff from rain, snowmelt, or other precipitation. Stormwater runoff travels across the land, or through storm drainage pipes, to local streams, rivers and lakes. Stormwater is not treated along the way. As it flows off of roofs, across roads, parking lots, lawns, construction sites, athletic courts, and other surfaces, stormwater picks up pollutants.

Everyday activities such as driving, maintaining vehicles and lawns, disposing of waste, and even walking pets can leave behind pollutants that are picked up by stormwater and carried to streams and lakes. Additionally, contaminants can find their way to streams through illegal utility connections, failing private septic systems and illegal dumping. When these contaminants enter lakes, streams, and wetlands, they result in the degradation of our waterways and natural resources impacting other important activities such as recreational fishing, swimming, and boating.

UTILITY FORMATION & FUNCTION

In an effort to respond both to growing concerns over stormwater runoff and the EPA's mandates, the City of Gastonia established a Stormwater Utility in July 2001. The Stormwater Utility is charged with protecting the local

Rain gardens

A rain garden is a shallow depression in the ground that captures runoff from your driveway or roof and allows it to soak into the ground, rather than running across roads, capturing pollutants, and delivering them to a stream. Plants and soil work together to absorb and filter pollutants and return cleaner water through the ground to nearby streams. Rain gardens also reduce flooding by sending the water back underground, rather than into the street.

http://www.catawbariverkeeper.org/issues/stormwater/rain-gardens

creeks and streams that flow through the City. The Utility focuses on compliance with EPA Phase II mandates, maintenance of the City's stormwater system, and assisting property owners dealing with problems associated with increased runoff. The funding source for the Utility is the monthly stormwater utility fee, which is based on the amount of impervious surfaces on a property. Funds are provided to property owners with point source stormwater runoff problems on their property in an attempt to mitigate egregious situations.

The Stormwater Utility operates under the advisement and guidance of a fourteen seat Stormwater Commission made up of private citizens. Commission members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council to represent the interests of the citizens of Gastonia concerning stormwater related issues. The Commission has provided input into the level of service that is provided by the Utility, prioritization of requests for service, as well as implementing educational programs. Commission members also serve as a voice for the Utility in the community, listening to citizens concerns and promoting stormwater related issues.

Stormwater Permit Implementation

In 1998, the EPA implemented Stormwater Phase II mandates and, subsequently, the State of North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR) developed rules and a permit program to enforce compliance. As a result, affected municipalities and urbanized areas are required by the State to write and obtain approval for a Stormwater Permit under which to operate. On September 2, 2005, the City of Gastonia was issued Permit No. NCS000429. This permit requires the City to comply with six minimum measures:

- Public Education & Outreach,
- Public Involvement & Participation,
- Illicit Discharge Detection & Elimination,
- Construction Site Runoff Controls,
- Post-Construction Site Runoff Controls, and
- Pollution Prevention & Good Housekeeping for Municipal Operations.

The City has begun implementing these best management practices (BMPs) as required for each minimum measure in the Permit. The Stormwater Utility with the City of Gastonia takes an active role in both protecting local creeks and striving to best serve the interests and safety of the citizens of Gastonia. In the future, the City will continue to pursue successful compliance with EPA mandates, continued maintenance of the stormwater system and efficient operation of programs to assist property owners struggling with the effects of increased runoff.

Solid Waste

Solid waste removal or garbage removal is handled by the City of Gastonia's General Services Department, Solid Waste Division. Residential roll-out garbage service is provided to the residents of Gastonia once per week by use of a 96 gallon container. Gastonia has four automated refuse collection vehicles to collect the garbage from the roll-out containers. Household trash, consisting of large boxes, trash, and extra garbage and yard waste is also collected curbside by the City. Bulk pick-up is provided on a call-by-call basis. Yard waste is collected by the City and then composted into mulch.

The City picks up residential solid waste and takes it to a transfer station owned and managed by Waste Management located in the city of Lowell. The City contracts with Waste Management to pick-up and dispose of solid waste from commercial businesses. Businesses that want City solid waste disposal must provide their own

dumpster or garbage cans and pay a fee to the City for the service. The County operates a landfill; however the landfill is not currently in use.

Voluntary Recycling Program

Gastonia provides recycling services to its citizens once per week by contracting this service to a private company. The curbside recycling is a voluntary program for which the City charges a nominal fee. Gastonia citizens are encouraged to recycle and to reduce the amount of garbage they produce. Besides providing curbside recycling services, an additional measure that promotes recycling in Gastonia is a State Law effective July 1, 1994, that prohibits aluminum cans from being disposed of in a landfill.

In addition, the City of Gastonia has formed a partnership with Gaston County to provide a recycling center in Gastonia. This center is located at 410 E. Long Ave (at the Farmer's Market).

Electricity

The City of Gastonia owns the municipal electrical system and is a member of ElectriCities of North Carolina and a member of Municipal Power #1. The City supplies an average of 52,769,400 KWH per month to the 25,461 residential, commercial, and industrial customers through eleven substations operating at primary voltages of 44 and 15 KV. The Rankin Lake Substation, the City's newest substation, was energized on July 27, 2001, and serves the Gastonia Technology Park. The City of Gastonia buys power wholesale and distributes it to customers within the City. North Carolina law grants a supplier of electricity exclusive rights to sell to customers within 300 feet of an electric line. The City and other suppliers, such as Duke Power, generally do not compete with each other for the same customers. Rather, they each have exclusive territory determined by the location of their respective power grids.

Because Gastonia is surrounded by other suppliers of electricity, opportunities for expansion of the power grid are limited. Newly annexed areas into the City are generally developed by the time they are incorporated into the City and have existing electric service. State law does not allow the City to take over electric service following annexation. For this reason many of the outer areas of the City do not buy their power from the City.

Despite these issues, the sale of electricity still provides a significant portion of City's revenue base. However, this situation is problematic in terms of annexation. The City's property tax rate is too low to be the single major source of revenue for the City's budget. The shortfall is offset by electricity revenues as well as other taxes. The City's goal has been to reduce monetary transfers of electricity revenues to the General Fund in efforts to reduce the City's overall budgetary dependence on these funds. Newly annexed areas that do not buy power from the City only contribute property taxes and state-shared revenues. The result is a revenue imbalance, with the inner city residents bearing a greater burden than residents of fringe areas, because inner city residents buy City electricity. This could be considered regressive because many of the low and moderate-income areas are in the electric service area, while many of the high-income areas are outside the service area.

Expansion of Service

The Electric Department expands its infrastructure in response to growth and development in various areas

of the City. Expansion of the electric system, typically involves installing new lines, transformers, lights, and other infrastructure to serve new system loads. Given current load growth within the City, a substation is typically added to the system every 5-8 years.

Within the past ten years, the electric department has responded to the growing demand for electrical services within the City in the following ways:

- Addition of two substations (Redbud and Rankin Lake),
- Extension of lines along Hudson, Redbud, and Gaston Day School Roads,
- Extension of lines where the City limits meet the Town of Dallas,
- Expansion to the West along US 74, Archie Whitesides Road, and Edgewood Road,
- Expansion to the Southeast along Kendrick and Beatty Roads, and
- Expansions to the Northwest to US 275 to serve developments that have been recently annexed.

The costs of energy and fuel have soared all over the world. While the City's wholesale costs have not increased as much as in other parts of the country, there is still some pressure to increase the rates of electricity to keep up with rising wholesale costs. Despite these pressures, the Electric Department is well equipped to manage growth in the city and future expansion of services to high growth and newly annexed areas. While there are constant pressures to increase rates to ratepayers due to debt and growth, the Department is able to absorb those costs since growth in the City allows for the spreading of costs over more households. There have been no increases in rates since 2002. The Electric Department is not only capable of extending services to high growth areas, but it encourages it in order to keep down costs passed on to ratepayers.

The Electric Department is currently undergoing a system study to determine specific areas in need of increased infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Department recognizes the need to expand in fast-growing and newly annexed residential areas, especially those in the Southeast and the industrial areas in the Northwest. The Department also recognizes the need for expansion in the West due to expected growth near and surrounding Crowders Mountain.

Police Department Mission Statement

"To Protect, Serve and Enhance the Quality of Life for All"

Community Services

Police Department

The Gastonia Police Department is the second largest urban police department in the Charlotte metropolitan area. The department headquarters is located on the north side of Long Avenue west of Broad Street and adjacent to downtown. The law enforcement center, built in 1997, was part of a $10 million dollar project that also included a new County Courthouse and Jail.

The Police Department has adopted a Problem-oriented Policing philosophy through which officers work in partnership with citizens and community groups and use crime analysis data to focus on solving the problems of crime and its results on society.

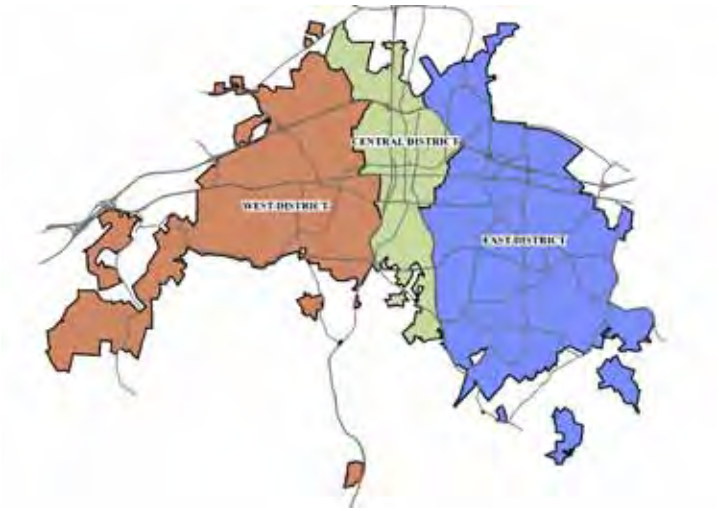
Gastonia Police officers and community coordinators are assigned to the city's three police districts: East, West and Central. Calls for police services are answered by District Patrol Officers who serve as first responders to emergency 911 and non-emergency calls. Community coordinators assist community watches and work with officers in assigned districts to facilitate problem solving to prevent crime.

Gastonia's Police Districts

As the population of the City increases, and as the City becomes a regional destination for business and services, the need for police service will increase. Future events that are expected to place additional demands on police services include:

- The continued annexation of adjacent areas,
- Increased housing growth,
- The proposed Hudson Boulevard extension (West),
- The construction of the Garden Parkway,
- The increased growth of Gastonia's Hispanic population as well as other ethnic groups,
- The future revitalization and redevelopment of the Central Business District,
- The trend in population growth in southern Gastonia, and
- The possibility of light rail connecting Gastonia to Charlotte and the creation of a transportation hub in the Center City.

Figure 5-7 Gastonia Police Districts



Future Expansion

The City of Gastonia Police Department maintains all police personnel and services at its headquarters on Long Avenue. However, in response to tremendous growth occurring in both the eastern and western parts of Gastonia, the Police Department plans to expand their patrol divisions in those areas. The Department is also anticipating the expansion of its community outreach and involvement initiatives.

A new training facility is also in the Department's plans. Additionally, the Department also recognizes the need to recruitment and hire additional officers as a priority in order to keep up with population growth. In order to keep costs to taxpayers down, the Department is looking into alternatives to new construction of planned facilities, such as collaborating with existing facilities or using existing City structures.

Technological Innovation

The Department has placed, and continues to place, great emphasis on the use of technological innovations. In 1987, the Department switched from a manual dispatch system to a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system with combined enhanced 911. This allowed emergency dispatchers to see the phone number, name, and address from which a 911 call was made. The Department was one of the first departments in the State to install laptop computers in patrol cars that transmitted CAD information to officers in the field. The installation of "heads up" displays in patrol cars allowed officers to view the information on their laptops on a little rectangle mounted on their windshield. The Department will continue to purchase technological innovations that will allow officers to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.

Figure 5-8: Calls For Service Per Officer

Year	Calls for Service Per Officer
2000	519
2001	523
2002	533
2003	532
2004	564
2005	576
2006	611
2007	568
2008	543
2009	500
2010	516

Figure 5-9: Existing Fire Station Locations

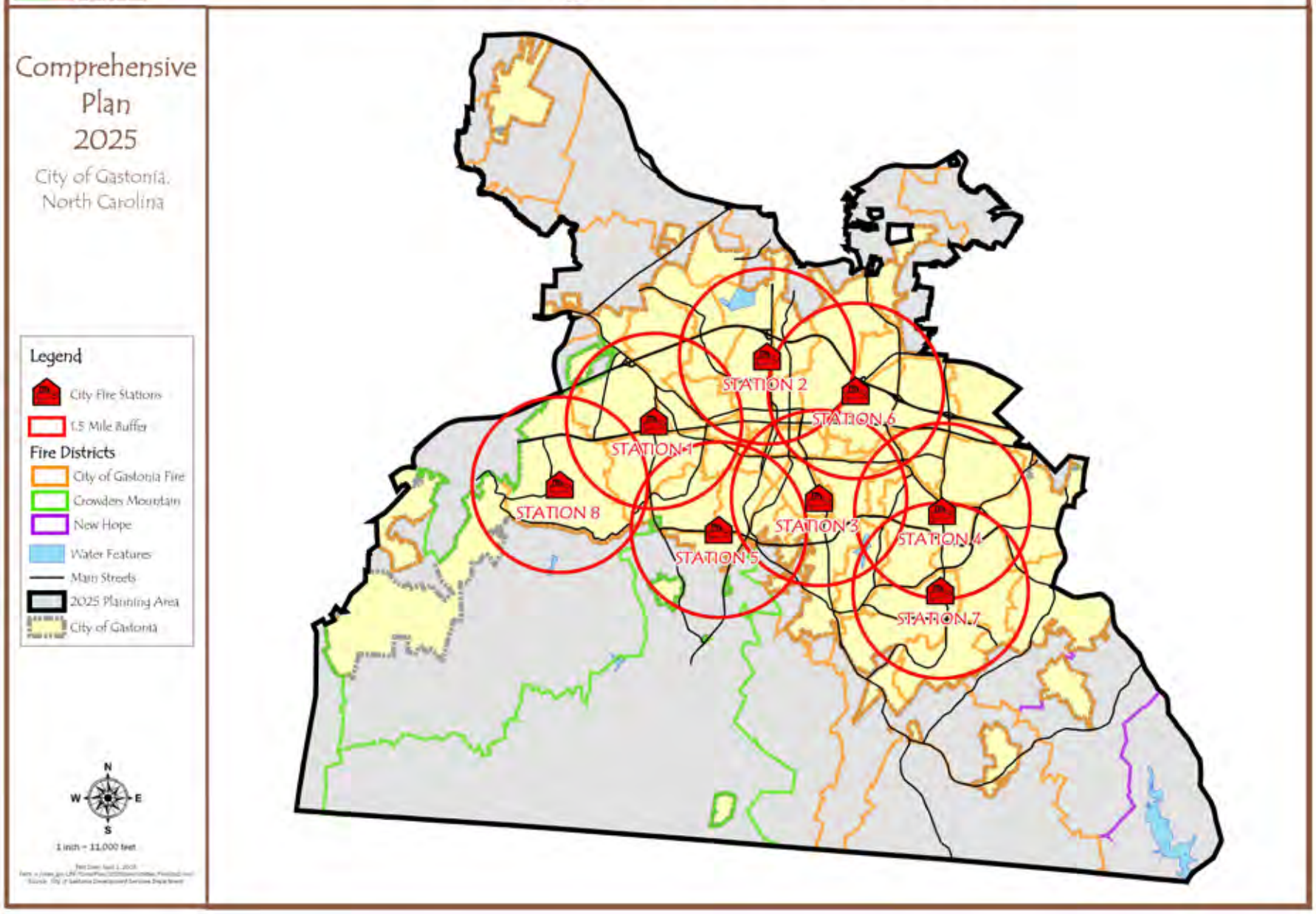
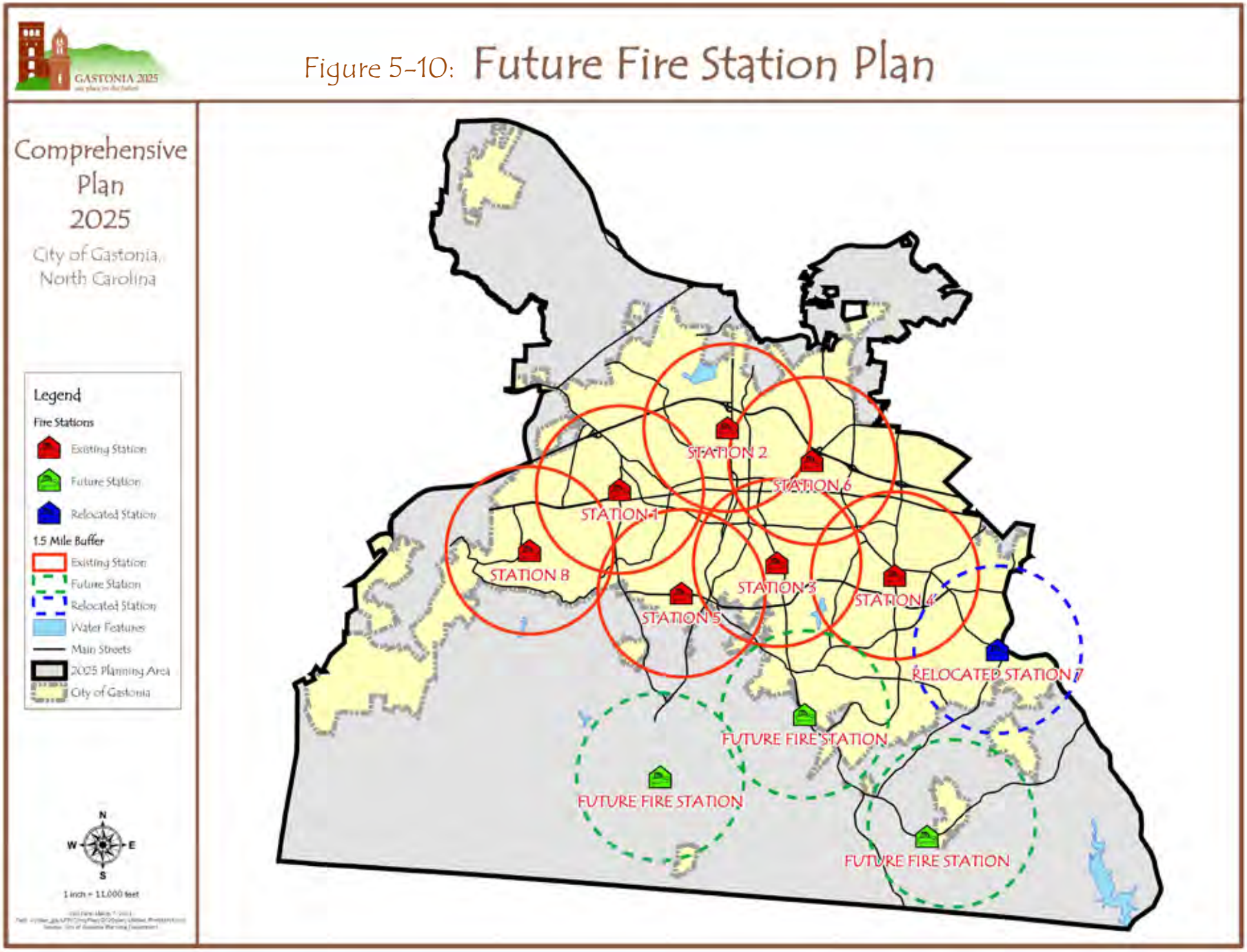


Figure 5-10: Future Fire Station Plan



Fire Department Mission Statement:

"To save lives and property and proudly serve the citizens and visitors of the City of Gastonia."

Fire Department Statement of Services:

In order to meet the highest standard of protection, we commit ourselves to offer comprehensive programs for the following areas: fire suppression; emergency medical serviced; hazardous materials/ weapons of mass destruction; technical rescue; and life safety services including code enforcement, education, and investigation.

Enhanced Response to Homeland Security Threats

In response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Gastonia Police Department has made changes to departmental roles and equipment in order to enhance the agency's hazardous material response and response to threats to homeland security.

The Department expanded its interoperability with other regional police agencies, including participating in several exercises involving multi-jurisdictional responses. Furthermore, the Department increased its interoperability with other emergency agencies within the City. For example, the Police Dive Team was cross-trained to work with the Fire Department's Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) team in dealing with chemical spills and providing physical inspection of the Gastonia Water Treatment Plant holding tank facility. The Police Bomb Squad also works with the HAZMAT team in dealing with hazardous devices.

In addition, the Department has received federal grants, which it has used to purchase a bomb protective suit, a bomb robot, a multiple channel communication device, personal protection equipment, a mobile command post, and a bomb truck.

Gastonia Fire Department

The Gastonia Fire Department is the ninth largest fire department in North Carolina with eight stations throughout Gastonia. The Department provides fire & rescue services 24-hours a day. In 2010, the Department responded to 8590 calls with an average response time of 5:09 from the time of dispatch for all incidents.

Fire Station Placement

The single most important aspect in the selection of a location for a fire station is its effect on apparatus response time to emergencies. In a fire or medical emergency, excessive travel times may mean an increased risk to the public experiencing the emergency. Therefore, basic fire station location recommendations recommend that stations be located to form an orderly pattern or network of stations from which emergency services are delivered in a timely fashion.

The Fire Department adopted a 'standard of coverage' for structure fires in the City as being able to place at least one fire company on the scene in 9:30 or less from the time the call was received for 90% of all such incidents. Data analysis indicates that the department achieved this goal 95% of the time during 2010.

Annexations and growth may generate a need to construct, equip, and staff additional fire stations in the future The growth occurring on the south side of the City, especially in the area of Union Road and South New Hope Road and the north side of the City in the area of Gaston College and the Industrial Park are examples.

The Fire Department maintains a close relationship with the City Planning and Engineering staff in order to stay abreast of future annexations and developments, and plans expansion of its services accordingly.

The Department's Changing Role

Modern fire departments, such as the City of Gastonia's, are now performing an ever-widening variety of public safety services, based upon the needs of citizens. Examples of these expanded services include: emergency medical care, technical rescue, hazardous materials response, fire inspections and pre-planning, smoke and

carbon monoxide detector inspections and installations, fire hydrant testing, and a variety of other safety and preventative services. The fire department was given the role of "first responders" in 1997. These types of incidents have increased to the point where they make up the bulk of fire department responses. For example, the Gastonia Fire Department responded to 8,590 emergency incidents during 2010. Of this total, 5,752, or 67%, were to provide emergency care at serious medical emergencies or accidents.

In response to the September 11, 2001 World Trade Center attack, the Fire Service in general has changed its role and mission, bringing such terms as 'terrorism' and 'homeland security' into common use. This new threat, coupled with an increasing need for highly specialized emergency operations, led to the reorganization and expansion of the Gastonia Fire Department's Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Response Team. The HAZMAT team focuses on threats caused by toxic and hazardous chemical, biological, and/or explosive substances and the planning and responses associated with these types of incidents.

In addition, in 2000, the City Council formally assigned the Gastonia Fire Department the responsibility of technical rescue within the City limits. Technical rescue is the mitigation of incidents in which people are involved in situations such as confined spaces, structural collapse, vehicle accidents, industrial accidents, trench collapse, swift water issues or other incidents involving rugged terrain or high-angle rescue.

Figure 5-11: Station Description & Service Area

Fire Station	Address	Description & Service area
Station # 1	260 N. Myrtle School Rd	Built in 2003, Station # 1 is located on the west side of Gastonia. This station houses the administrative offices, 1 Ladder Company, 1 Rescue Company, and the west side Battalion Chief.
Station # 2	510 New Way Drive	Built in 1989, Station # 2 is located in the northern part of Gastonia, near the US-321/I-85 interchange. This station houses 1 Engine Company.
Station # 3	717 Wellons Drive.	Built in 2002, Station # 3 is the station closest to the center of Gastonia. This station houses 1 Ladder Company.
Station # 4	1012 Armstrong Park Road.	Built in 2002, Station # 4 is located in the southeast area of Gastonia. This station houses 1 Engine Company, 1 Ladder Company, and the east side Battalion Chief.
Station # 5	900 Hudson Boulevard.	Built in 1976, Station # 5 is located in the south part of the City just off of US 321. This is the oldest station in the City. This station houses 1 Engine Company.
Station # 6	1335 E. Ozark Ave.	Built in 1989, Station 6 is located in the northeast area of the City next to I-85. This station houses 1 Engine Company.
Station # 7	3811 Gaston Day School Road.	Built in 1991, Station 7 is located in the southern area of the City. This is the closest station to the City's airport. This station houses 1 Engine Company and 1 Brush Unit.
Station # 8	613 Carson Rd.	Built in 2002, Station # 8 is located in the western part of the City. This is the closest station to Crowder's Mountain State Park. This Station houses 1 Engine Company and 1 Brush Unit.

Gaston County Emergency Medical Services (GEMS)

Gastonia, and Gaston County, use modern emergency response systems, based on enhanced 911 service. The 911 service is a combined emergency dispatch system with one telephone number for police, fire, and emergency medical service.

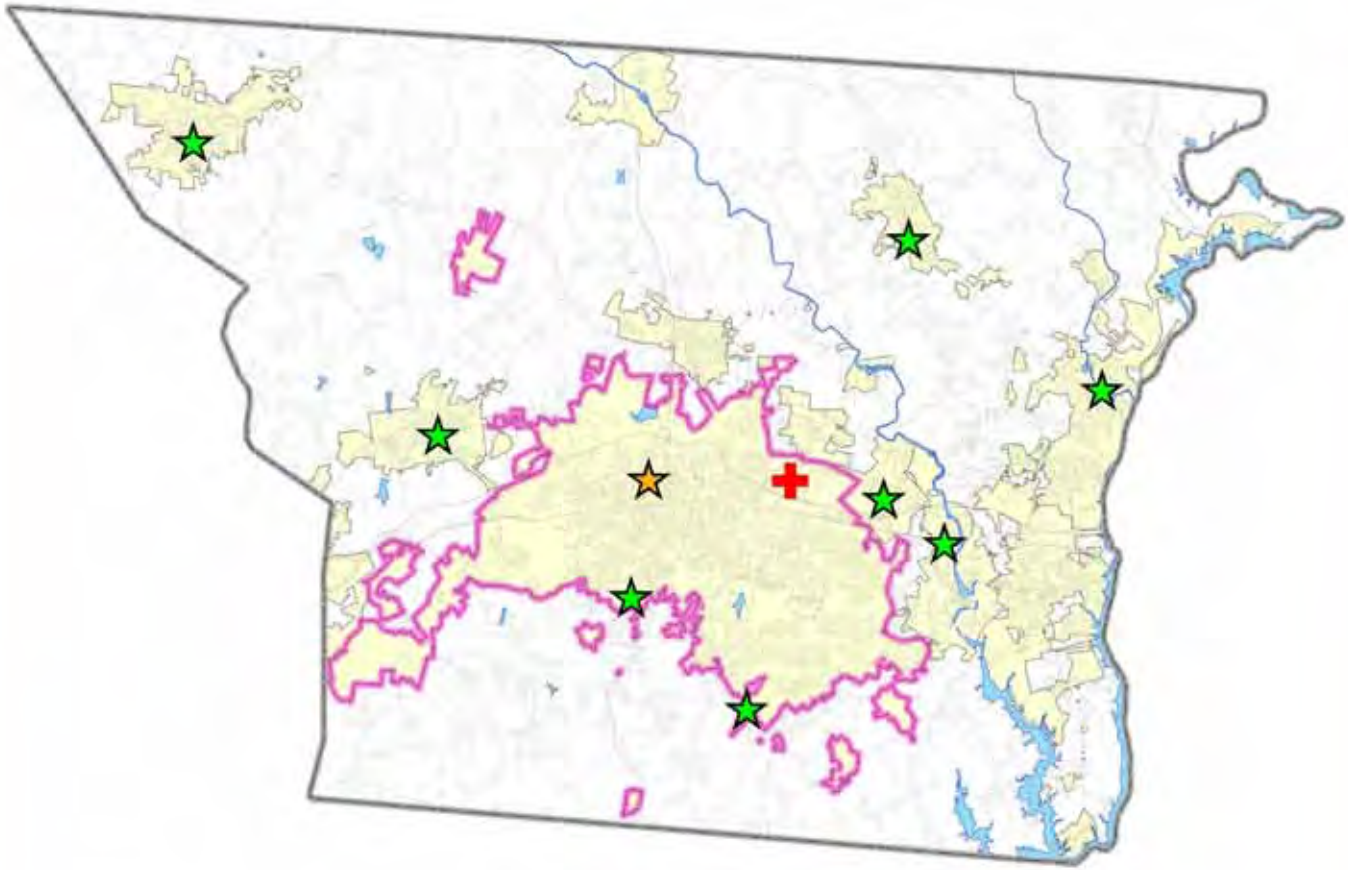
Gaston County EMS (GEMS) was established in 1982 as a basic level ambulance provider. Today, it operates all Advanced Life Support units, and deploys a Rescue Support Unit and various special teams. GEMS is operated by the County with its headquarters on Highland Street in Gastonia. It responds to medical emergencies throughout Gaston County by providing initial patient assessment and

GASTONIA 2025

Figure 5-12: GEMS Locations

Comprehensive Plan 2025

City of Gastonia, North Carolina



Legend

- Gaston County (Line)
- Municipalities
- Water Features
- Roads
- City Limits

GEMS

- Station
- Headquarters
- Hospital

N W E S

1 inch = 20,000 feet

treatment using paramedics trained and equipped with Advanced Life Support standards, with radio communications to hospitals and physicians. GEMS deployment consists of nine Paramedic units assigned to EMS stations strategically located throughout Gaston County to minimize response time and to provide 24-hour Advanced Life Support coverage.

System Status Management (S.S.M.) has helped decrease response times and maximize service coverage. S.S.M. involves distributing emergency personnel in such a way as to maintain a balance in emergency coverage to an area when the number of available ambulances is decreased In addition to GEMS, Gaston County's EMS System is supplemented by eight Volunteer Rescue Squads that provide Rescue and Ambulance services. Gaston County Rescue Squads also provide valuable support during large-scale incidents and response to disasters.

GEMS is also committed to public education and community involvement through a variety of courses, events, and activities.

Hospital Services

Established in 1946, Gaston Memorial Hospital was originally located on Highland Street in Gastonia as a memorial to all local soldiers who died in World War II. The present Court Drive facility in Gastonia opened in 1973 and was a part of a major expansion of medical facilities and services in the region.

Gaston Hospital is a not-for-profit general and acute care facility that serves Gaston and surrounding counties. Gaston Memorial Hospital is the anchor for CaroMont Health, an independent, not-for-profit health care system, which includes a network of primary and specialty physician offices and affiliate companies.

The hospital is surrounded by a large medical office park, which has brought a diverse array of medical services to the area, and has significantly increased the amount of medical office space within Gastonia. Gaston Memorial provides a variety of specialty services including:

- The Birthplace,
- CaroMont Cancer Center,
- CaroMont Heart Center,
- Emergency Services,
- Heartburn Treatment Center,
- Imaging Services,
- Neuroscience,
- Pain Center at Gaston Memorial Hospital,
- Psychiatric Services,
- Rehab and Sports Medicine,
- The Sleep Center,
- Special Care Units,
- Surgical Services, and
- CaroMont Wound and Diabetes Centers.

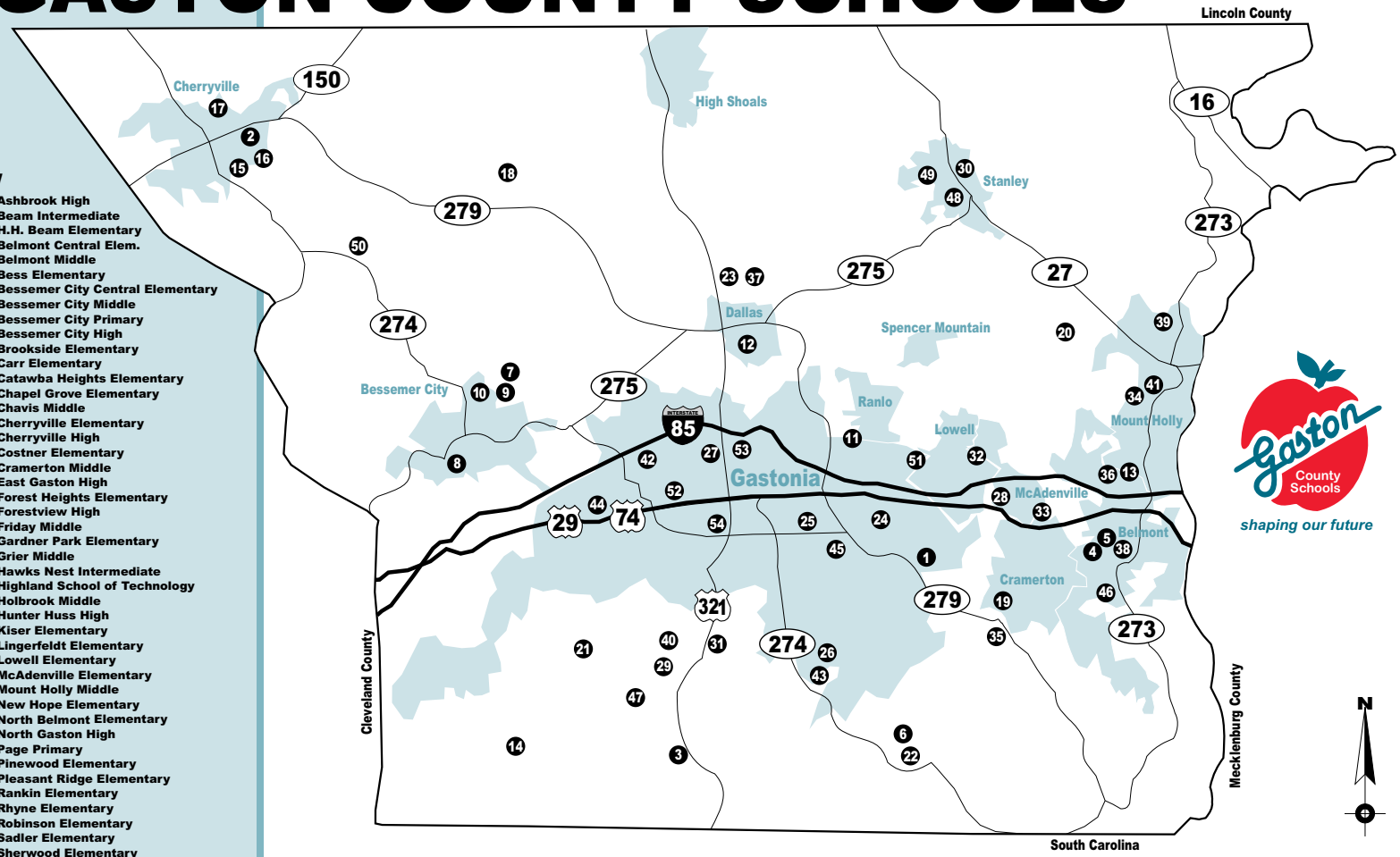
Schools

Gaston County Schools is the eight largest school system in the state of North Carolina with an enrollment of 32,325 students enrolled in the 2010-2011 school year. The school district is Gaston County's largest employer with a workforce of more than 4,410 employees; 2,292 of these employees are teachers. Thirty percent of the teachers within the school district have advanced degrees (Master's and Doctorates).

The school district operates fifty-five schools throughout the county: nine high schools, one magnet high school, eleven middle schools, thirty elementary schools, one special needs school, two intermediate schools and one alternative school. As shown on Figure 5-13, twenty-three

Figure 5-13: Gaston County Schools

GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS



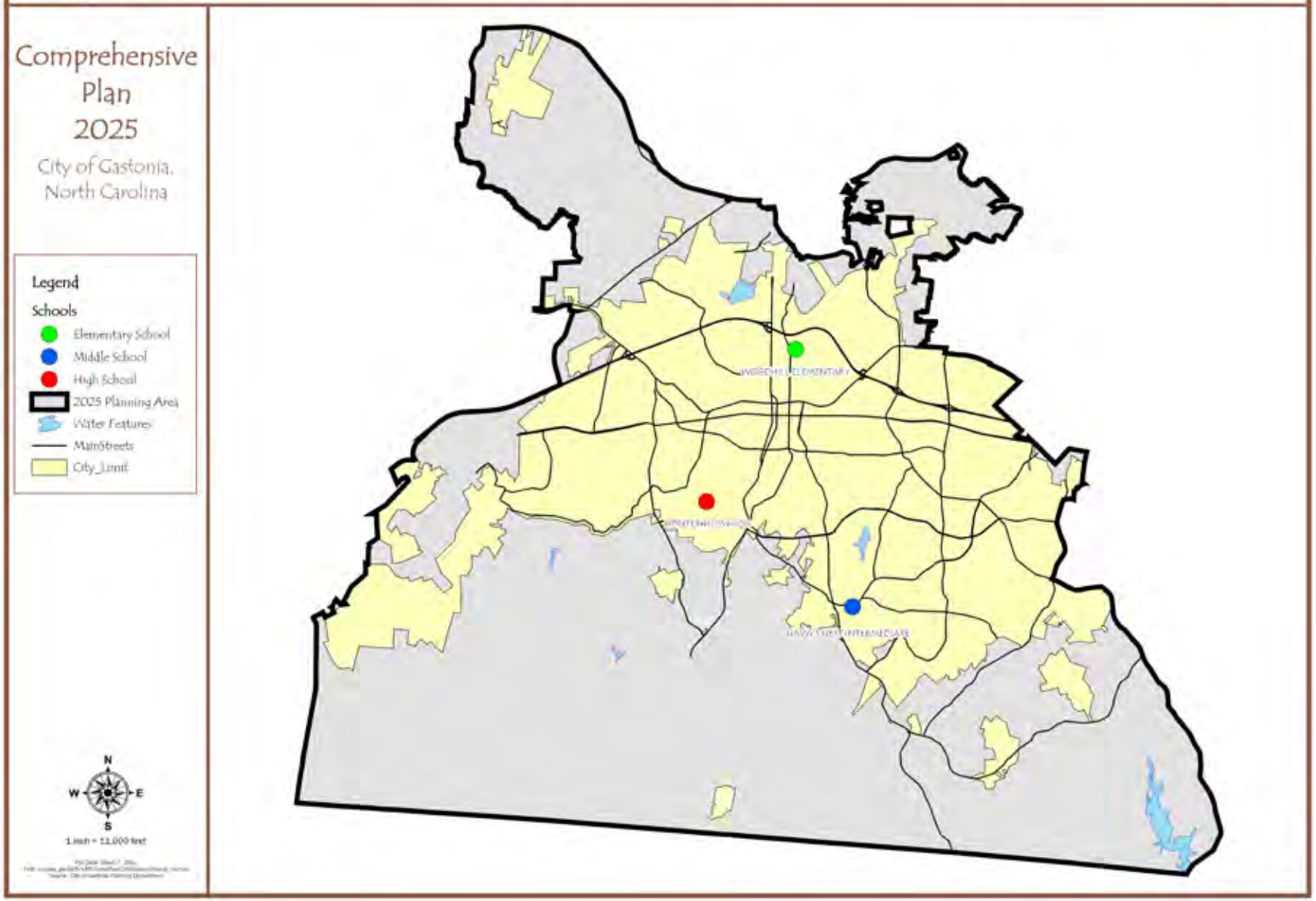
Key

1 Ashbrook High
2 Beam Intermediate
3 H.H. Beam Elementary
4 Belmont Central Elem.
5 Belmont Middle
6 Bess Elementary
7 Bessemer City Central Elementary
8 Bessemer City Middle
9 Bessemer City Primary
10 Bessemer City High
11 Brookside Elementary
12 Carr Elementary
13 Catawba Heights Elementary
14 Chapel Grove Elementary
15 Chavis Middle
16 Cherryville Elementary
17 Cherryville High
18 Costner Elementary
19 Cramerton Middle
20 East Gaston High
21 Forest Heights Elementary
22 Forestview High
23 Friday Middle
24 Gardner Park Elementary
25 Grier Middle
26 Hawks Nest Intermediate
27 Highland School of Technology
28 Holbrook Middle
29 Hunter Huss High
30 Kiser Elementary
31 Lingerfeldt Elementary
32 Lowell Elementary
33 McAdenville Elementary
34 Mount Holly Middle
35 New Hope Elementary
36 North Belmont Elementary
37 North Gaston High
38 Page Primary
39 Pinewood Elementary
40 Pleasant Ridge Elementary
41 Rankin Elementary
42 Rhyne Elementary
43 Robinson Elementary
44 Sadler Elementary
45 Sherwood Elementary
46 South Point High
47 Southwest Middle
48 Springfield Elementary
49 Stanley Middle
50 Tryon Elementary
51 Warlick
52 Webb Street
53 Woodhill Elementary
54 York Chester Middle

GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS
P.O. Box 1397
Gastonia, NC 28053
GCS 21 Education Station
Phone: (704) 866-6100
Fax: (704) 866-6175
www.gaston.k12.nc.us

Figure 5-14:

Schools with Proposed Renovations/Additions: 2007 Bond Program



In 2005, there were 1,833 high school graduates in the district.

43% of those graduates planned on going to a four-year college,

34% planned on attending a two-year college,

5% planned to attend a vocational, trade, or business school,

4% planned to join the military,

9% planned to enter the job market, and

5% planned on taking part in other endeavors.

of these schools are located within the City of Gastonia. In 2010, the ethnic makeup of the student population was 67.6% white, 20.4% African-American, 7.8% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, 2.5% multiracial, and 0.2% American Indian.

There are 2,132 Spanish-speaking students in Gaston County Schools, and a Newcomer Center at Gardner Park Elementary serves Spanish-speaking children in grades 1-8. Forty-seven different languages are spoken, and of the 47 languages, 1,648 children are identified as Limited English Proficiency students. The district has 30 second language teachers and second language programs in all schools.

As the Hispanic population continues to grow within Gastonia and Gaston County, following national and regional trends, the need for more bilingual teachers and services geared toward Spanish-speaking students, and their families, will become necessary. In addition, services and programs aimed at breaking down language barriers will be necessary to retain students and increase retention and the likelihood of graduation.

Gaston County Schools' dropout rate continues to decrease. This year's rate is 23.25 percent lower than last year's. The dropout rate, which reflects the percent of students leaving school in one given year, was 4.43 for 2009-2010 compared to 5.60 percent in 2008-2009. The district's graduation rate improved to 72.0 percent, up from 68.1 percent in 2006. The Class of 2010 included 2,048 high school seniors, who were offered more than $33 million in scholarship money to the most prestigious colleges and universities in the country. The scholarship total is a record amount for Gaston County Schools.

School Expansion

2001 Bond Program - All projects in the $89 million school bond referendum approved by voters in 2001 are complete. The 2001 bond package included the new Edward D. Sadler, Jr. Elementary School (opened in 2003) that replaced Arlington school; renovations and additions to the old Cherryville High School which reopened as William Blaine Beam Intermediate, grades 4-5; classroom additions on 15 school campuses; seven school cafeteria additions; and renovations and improvements at many other schools.

2007 Bond Program - In November 2007, the citizens of Gaston County overwhelmingly passed a $175 million school bond referendum. The referendum provides funding for six new schools – one high school, two middle schools and three elementary schools; renovations at Hunter Huss, the district's oldest high school; and additions at four schools – Stanley Middle, W. Blaine Beam Intermediate, Woodhill Elementary, and McAdenville Elementary.

In August 2009, the district opened its newest school, Hawks Nest Intermediate, which was paired with Robinson Elementary and serves students in grades 4-5. The Board of Education purchased the former Hope Lutheran School and transformed the campus into Hawks Nest – a decision that saved taxpayers $5 million because it cost less to purchase an existing school than to build a new one. Construction is underway on the new Gaston County high school to be built in Cramerton on the former Lakewood Golf Course property. A groundbreaking ceremony was held in September 2010 and construction began the next month. The new high school will house 1,200 students in a 268,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility.

The district completed a major part of the renovations and upgrades at Hunter Huss High School in spring 2011. The construction project revamped the school's interior and provided students with modern classrooms and resources. The school's media center will be renovated over the next

year and a new HVAC system added with a majority of the work being completed this summer.

Museum and Public Libraries

The Schiele Museum of Natural History & Lynn Planetarium

The Schiele Museum of Natural History, a facility owned by the City of Gastonia, is one of the community's greatest and best known assets. The museum has the largest collection of land mammal specimens in the Southeast, a planetarium, and a mile-long looped nature trail, which is the site of a replica of a Catawba Indian village and a pioneer backcountry settlement. The museum also conducts archeological research and offers extensive outreach programs to school systems in 46 counties within North Carolina.

The Schiele is a designated Smithsonian Affiliate, one of six affiliate museums in the State of North Carolina. The Smithsonian Affiliate program allows emerging, and established museums, to obtain Smithsonian exhibits and collections for a prolonged period. The affiliate program is aimed at making the Smithsonian's collection more accessible to the American people by sharing artifacts and other resources with museums and cultural institutions across the country. The Schiele has adequate room for future expansion.

Gaston-Lincoln Regional Libraries

The Gaston County Public Library system was established in the 1960's. While there were library facilities in several communities, and a bookmobile at that time, there was a need and desire for a comprehensive, countywide system to facilitate public access to library services. Several new branches were built and existing municipal libraries merged into a County system with eight locations geographically mapped in a "wheel and spoke" pattern: Belmont, Bessemer City, Cherryville, Dallas, Lowell, Mt. Holly, and Stanley together acting as the "spokes" with the Main Library in Gastonia at the center. Library officials devised a plan to eventually add more branches—South, North, and West--as future growth and development dictated.

The southern section of the County, identified as the area between the South Carolina state line and Gastonia, has experienced tremendous residential growth and the Union Road Branch Library was opened in 1999 in response to the increased demand.

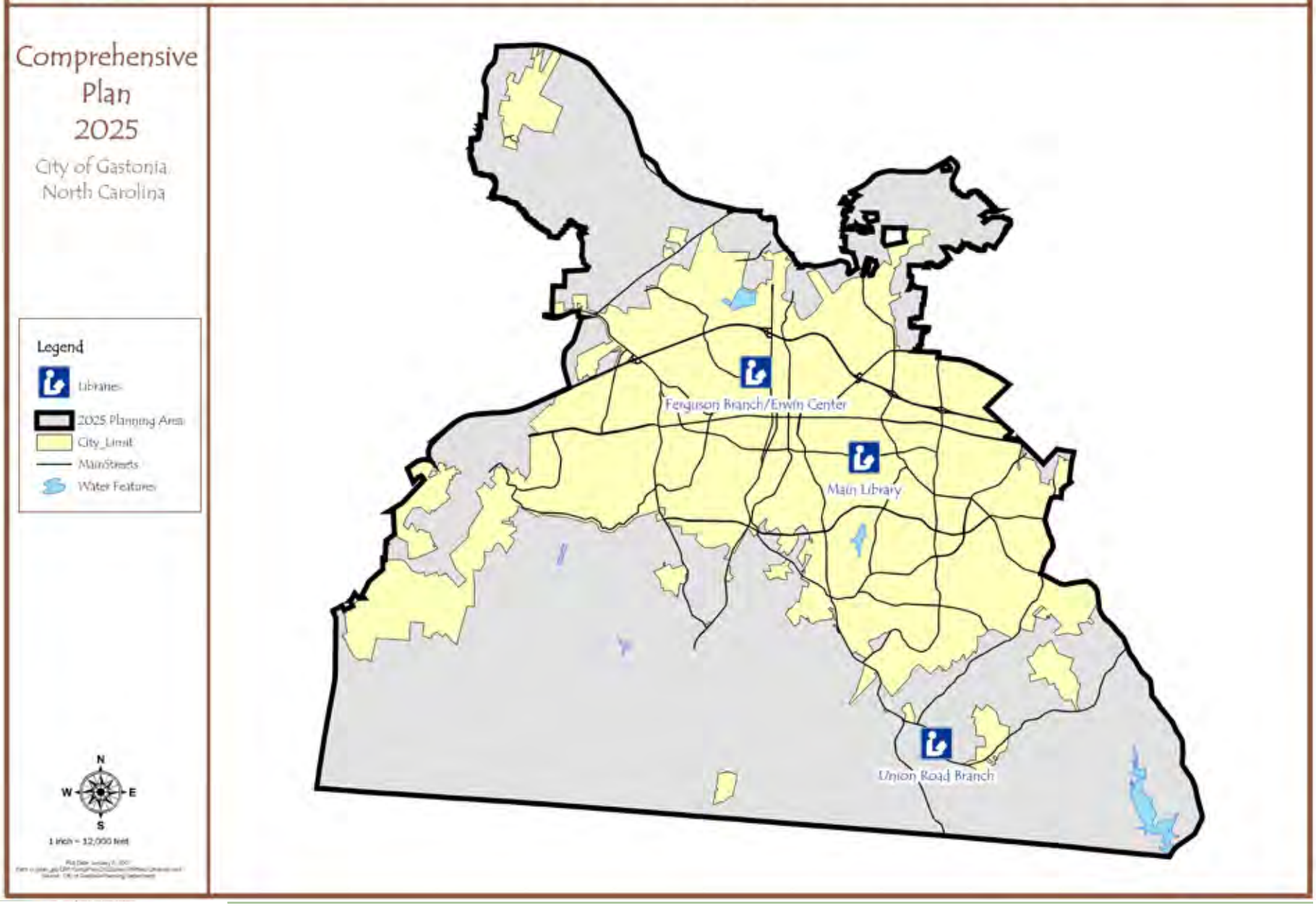
The northern "spoke" in the County Library system plan, identified as the High Shoals area, has experienced slower growth. There are no immediate plans for a library branch facility there.

The western spoke in the County Library system plan, the Crowders Mountain area, is gaining attention from developers wanting to take advantage of its natural beauty and viewsheds. If the Garden Parkway becomes a reality, this part of the County will become even more desirable and possibly lead to the construction of a library branch there.

In 1963, the Gaston County Public Library and the Lincoln County Public Library joined to create the Gaston-Lincoln Regional Library system, the sixth largest library system in North Carolina. Shared technical and administrative operations are supplemented with State Aid funds that, in turn, lower the cost of library service to local taxpayers.

Figure 5-15:

Gaston County Library - Gastonia Branches



Gastonia Library Branches

The Main Library

Built in l978, the Main Library on Garrison Boulevard is a popular location. Attendance at special library programs and events often exceeds the Auditorium's seating capacity of 150. The Library is also challenged to meet growing technological needs—there is insufficient space to house additional public access computers and study areas.

In addition, the Main Library is on a parcel that is surrounded by other businesses and a residential neighborhood. The physical plant was designed for vertical expansion with such features as an elevator shaft for an additional floor and a skylight. However, the combined costs of building renovation, additional parking, and relocation of 300,000+ library materials would probably be more expensive than construction of a new facility.

Ferguson Branch at Erwin Recreation Center

The Ferguson Branch is a small reading room located in the Erwin Recreation Center in the historic Highland neighborhood just north of downtown Gastonia. Highland was the City's first African-American neighborhood. The idea of a library branch in the Erwin Center was generated when the Main Library moved from Second Avenue to Garrison Boulevard in 1978. Troubled by the move, James Ferguson, the long-time director at the Erwin Recreation Center, argued that the new library was too far away for children from the Highland community to reach by walking. It was his dream to have a true library branch—not just a collection of donated books—at the Erwin Center. His dream became a reality in 1990 when the branch named for him opened. Ferguson Branch usage has grown to average 50-60 patrons per day. Currently, there are no plans for expansion.

Union Road Branch

The Union Road Branch Library, which opened in 1999, has become one of the most heavily-used branch libraries. The building is designed to house either satellite emergency medical and police stations, or additional library space in the rear. However, there are no plans for expansion in the immediate future.

Facility Expansion

Demographic changes within the last forty years have impacted the Gaston County Public Library system and its original plans for expansion and building construction. Branches that were conveniently located in the 1960's are no longer in the mainstream of community activity due to population and service center shifts.

While growth in some areas of the County has diminished, others are experiencing sufficient growth that will generate public demand for library service. There will be need:

- to provide enhanced library services in larger, better-equipped, strategically located facilities; and,
- to consider housing library branches in buildings or complexes where other community services are located for convenience, security, and cost effectiveness.

The Farmers Market

The market is open from June through November. Vendors sell a variety of locally grown fruits and vegetables, and locally made baked-goods, jams and jellies.

Farmers Market

The idea of a farmers market located in downtown Gastonia is not new. The City of Gastonia has worked with the Gaston County Farmers Market Association, a non-profit group of citizens, since the 1970's by providing them public property for a market where local farmers sold their wares out of the back of their trucks. At that time, the market was located in the area where the current railroad trench is now located.

However, there was a strong desire within the City to build a permanent home for the market. A citizen's board was appointed to look into the possibility of raising private funds to use for constructing a building. The City provided the former Love Park site located on Long Avenue for the permanent location of the market while donations from citizens and businesses went toward the construction of the new facility. The building was dedicated in 1995 and has space for twenty vendors.

The City leases the property to the Gaston County Farmers Market Association, which is responsible for operating the market. The City is responsible for maintaining the property and a Farmers Market Advisory Board, made up of members appointed by both City Council and the Gaston County Commissioners, oversees the direction of the market.

The market is open from June through November and on Saturdays during the months of April and May. The market opens on the first Saturday in June for the regular season of produce selling and is open three days a week until the week of Thanksgiving. Vendors sell a variety of locally grown fruits and vegetables, and locally made baked-goods, jams and jellies.

Issues

- The majority of the Gastonia water treatment plant units and structures have outlived their design life. Implementation of a plant repair and upgrade is essential to ensure continued reliable potable water and watewater treatment in the future.

- The State of North Carolina has established guidelines that require plans for WTP facility improvements when the maximum day demand reaches 80% of the plant capacity, and require improvements to be under construction once the facility reaches 90% of the plant capacity.

- Providing treatment capacity to meet future growth will require improvements to existing facilities and construction of new facilities. The current water system produces an average of 12.4 mgd of potable water and demand is expected to exceed 23 mgd by 2025. Water treatment facilities are to be sized to handle maximum-day demands, which are projected to reach 32 mgd by 2025 and 36 mgd by 2025.

- Providing sewer services to growth areas, especially the southeastern section of the planning area, will require facility upgrades, expansions, and new facilities.

- As the County becomes more urban, a countywide system for water and sewer service delivery will become increasingly feasible.

- The current land application program for Class B biosolids is in jeopardy due to the decrease in application sites as the County becomes more urban.

- NPDES discharge limits are becoming increasingly stringent.

- Increased urban development in Gastonia will lead to increased stormwater runoff that will continue to threaten the City's creeks and watersheds.

- Gastonia received its Stormwater Discharge Permit (NCS000429) permit for municipal point source of runoff. Currently, the City of Gastonia remains in negotiations with the State of North Carolina regarding specific details of the Stormwater Phase II Permit.

- Gastonia is separated by several mountain ridges that traverse the City. Development has traditionally followed the downward slope of these ridges, which allows runoff to flow downhill and the effects of runoff to development lying at the bottom of the slope to be easily determined and mitigated. However, as development pressures increase, new development is now occurring at the top of the ridges (especially in the Northwest sector), which makes it difficult to predict how runoff from these developments will affect developments lying beneath them on the low end of the slope.

- Newly annexed areas that do not buy power from the City only contribute property taxes and state-shared revenues. The result is a revenue imbalance, with inner city residents bearing a greater burden than residents of fringe areas, because inner city residents buy City electricity. This could be considered regressive because many of the low and moderate-income areas are in the electric service area, while many of the high-income areas are outside the service area.

- Increased growth and development will necessitate more police officers and staff. This may lead the Department to consider satellite police stations ("mini-

ISSUES

stations") strategically located throughout the City.

- The increased growth of Gastonia's Hispanic population as well as other ethnic groups will present new challenges to all public service agencies.

- New residential development within the City's planning area has, and will continue to, impact the Gaston County School System requiring additional schools and/or district boundary changes.

- Future annexations and growth will generate a need to construct, equip, and staff additional fire stations and GEMS stations over the next five to ten years.

- As the City grows further outward, there may be a need for satellite hospital facilities, especially in Southeast Gastonia.

- As the City continues to grow, larger, more strategically placed library facilities will be needed to meet the increased demand in areas currently without library services.

- The Main Library branch on Garrison Boulevard does not have adequate space for current or future materials. There is no room for expansion on the site.

Objectives and Tools

Objective 1

Plan and locate new utility infrastructure that supports the community's vision for the location and pace of growth.

Tools

a. Ensure that long-range plans for water, sewer, and land use are consistent.
b. Expand the electric system into high growth and newly annexed areas to secure new customers where economically feasible.
c. Partner with the development community to provide an utility infrastructure in support of the community's vision for growth.
d. Provide necessary utility upgrades to promote growth and redevelopment in Gastonia's existing service areas.
e. For potential annexations with 300 or more dwelling units, perform a service and utility study to determine impacts on the existing infrastructure and the need for additional facilities such as police and fire stations.

Objective 2

Encourage utility planning that contributes to a high quality of life for Gastonia residents and businesses by ensuring safe and efficient utility delivery.

Tools

a. Upgrade facilities when new technologies prove to be safer and more efficient.
b. Continue to conserve and protect existing natural resources to ensure a continued supply of clean water.
c. Ensure that sufficient capacity is available to meet the City's future infrastructure needs.
d. Promote, where feasible, the underground burying of existing utility lines in specified redevelopment corridors.

Objective 3

Upgrade and expand the City's water treatment system to meet demands and conform to regulatory guidelines.

Tools

a. Complete a re-rating study on the existing water treatment plant to increase capacity, and extend operation capacity for at least 10 years without additional treatment capacity from a second facility.
b. Conduct further study to determine if the water treatment recommendations found in the 2002 Water system Master Plan remain viable, specifically the construction of a new 22 mgd water treatment plant at a site located away from the center of the City and the abandonment of the existing plant.
c. Maintain existing municipal water customers and promote regionalization of water systems with surrounding communities using the Expanded Municipal Model.
d. Implement capital improvement plan recommendations found in the Water System Master Plan.
e. Increase water treatment staff to address security needs and increased regulatory requirements.
f. Monitor finished water quality relative to inorganic chemicals and physical characteristics, specifically trihalomethanes (TTHMs) and haloacetic acids (HAA5) and consider modifying the treatment process to manage the disinfection byproduct levels if levels rise to unacceptable levels.
h. Monitor slope instability and water seepage beneath the Rankin Lake Pump Station weirs and upgrade as

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

needed.

i. Continue to use the South Fork River and Pump Station as an emergency raw water source, exercising the equipment regularly.

j. Construct a new water storage tank on the western side of the planning area to provide service to new developments that will occur at the higher elevations surrounding Crowders Mountain. In order to protect scenic views in this area, the tank should be a ground level storage tank that is camouflaged from major roadways, residential areas, and from the top of the mountain.

k. Maintain compliance with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Objective 4

Require that utility planning and operation protects Gastonia's natural environment and resources.

Tools

a. Continue to maintain ISO 14001 certification.

b. Continue participation in the Environmental Stewardship Initiative Program.

c. In order to protect the quality of the water supply, continue to pursue the purchase of lands in Gaston County directly adjacent to Mountain Island Lake, with priority given to lands nearest the City's intake.

d. Design, locate, and construct facilities to reasonably minimize adverse impacts to the environment and to protect environmentally sensitive areas.

e. Balance the need for provision of utilities at a reasonable cost with the need to protect the environment and natural resources.

f. Work with Gaston County and others to pursue policies that minimize or eliminate new septic systems subdivisions.

e. Continually monitor and improve systems to prevent excess storm run-off

Objective 5

Protect the Mountain Island Lake water source and watershed.

Tools

a. Maintain Mountain Island Lake as the primary raw water supply for the City.

b. Continue to participate in the Catawba-Wateree Basin Water Management Group formed during the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission renewal process for Duke Energy's license to operate the Mountain Island Lake hydroelectric plant, to ensure that sufficient water volumes can be removed from the lake under low water conditions to meet City of Gastonia customer demands.

c. Continue to take an active role in the Drought Management Advisory Group (DMAG) for the Catawba-Wateree Basin in the management of the Low Inflow Protocol (LIP), which will determine the timing for voluntary and mandatory water use restrictions.

d. Advocate WS II status for land adjacent to our intake structures and WS III status for the overall watershed with the stipulation that no new point source permits would be allowed.

Objective 6

Upgrade and expand Gastonia's wastewater treatment system.

Tools

a. Continue to address nutrient removal limits at the Crowders Creek and Long Creek Wastewater Treatment Plants.

b. Upgrade the Catawba, Duhart, and Long Creek

collection gravity sewer systems by replacing sewer pipes (per the Wastewater Master Plan) based on the following schedule:

c. Implement capital improvement plan recommendations found in the Wastewater Master Plan.
d. Expand the wastewater customer base connecting property owners adjacent to the existing system and extending services to adjacent and satellite communities within designated growth areas.
e. Continue to promote regionalization of wastewater collection and treatment systems with surrounding communities using the Expanded Municipal Model.

Objective 7

Operate an environmentally friendly wastewater collection and treatment system.

Tools

a. Increase acreage available for biosolid land application prior to County urbanization.
b. Evaluate the feasibility of re-using the methane gas by-product produced in the wastewater treatment process.
c. Revise the bio-solid land application end product to create a thicker product, which is easer to transport and apply, more cost effective, and reduces the potential for stream contamination.
d. Maintain NPDES permit compliance for discharge.
e. Continue to pursue efforts to enhance regional wastewater collection and treatment planning and management activities.

Objective 8

Address water pollution associated with stormwater runoff.

Tools

a. Maintain the existing stormwater system and operate programs to assist property owners struggling with the effects of increased runoff.
b. Amend current ordinances to require that all development (both residential and commercial) provide for stormwater detention in compliance with Stormwater Phase II mandates outlined in the new NPDES permit.
c. As development is proposed, work with developers to identify potential stormwater impacts associated with the new development and mitigate those impacts using best management practices during construction.

Objective 9

Work with regional partners to improve utility services where possible.

Tools

a. Continue to work with other municipalities in the development of new wastewater facilities, such as outfalls, pump stations and treatment facilities.
b. Continue to work with the other municipalities in Gaston County to form a regional water and sewer system using the Expanded Municipal Model.
c. Continue to work with regional partners to protect the water quality of Mountain Island Lake.
d. Explore ways to strategically provide City services such as fire and police to new outlying development.
e. Work with Gaston County to establish more cohesive development policies; thus minimizing the City's urgency to annex and provide new public facilities outside of the planned growth areas.
f. Continue to work to extend electric service to newly annexed areas.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Objective 10

Ensure that City facilities, such as police, fire and recreation are easily available to all citizens.

Tools

a. Pursue opportunities to establish community facilities as neighborhood meeting spaces and satellite emergency services.
b. Consider the use of satellite police stations to provide service in high growth and newly annexed areas.
c. Consider the needs of the Spanish speaking population through bilingual staff and publications.
d. Maintain current government service facilities and locate new ones within the Center City.
e. Promote the use of Gastonia Transit to access City facilities.
f. Encourage locating complimentary facilities adjacent to each other. For instance, parks adjacent to libraries and to schools.
g. Build larger, technologically enhanced libraries in strategic locations to expand library services to larger areas of the City.
h. Work with the County to install Wi-Fi wireless internet in all City libraries.
i. Ensure that all City libraries are accessible by public transit.

Objective 11

Seek opportunities for the City to provide environmental education and to assume a leadership role within the community.

Tools

a. Conduct City business in a manner that leads by example through environmentally friendly activities such as recycling, water conservation, best management practices, and energy conservation whenever possible.
b. Encourage and support programs aimed at reducing average and peak day water usage, such as rate structures, water restrictions and best practices education.
c. Use the excess water supply as a marketing tool to attract additional municipal customers and new industrial companies.
d. Seek grant funding for new, sustainable technology projects.

Objective 12

Plan for a safe community.

Tools

a. Continue to cross-train members of the police and fire service, such as the Police Dive Team, the Police Bomb Squad, and the Fire Department's Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) team, to react to specialized problems such as chemical spills and water supply contamination.
b. Enhance emergency operations plans, communication plans, and technologies to be used between City of Gastonia departments and other related agencies in times of distress.
c. Involve all City of Gastonia departments in emergency planning.
d. Nurture the evolving roles of the police and fire departments as they expand from traditional duties into more specialized duties, such as hazardous materials mitigation, specialized rescue and extrication, explosive materials handling, and public education.

e. Establish a CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) Program and assign a police

What is LEED?

Established by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System ™ is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. Public and private developers can attain LEED Certification of buildings on a voluntary basis. LEED Certification is not an addition to the City's regulatory framework.

officer the responsibility of CPTED review of site plans in the TRC process.

f. Continue to use new technology to foster a safer community.

Objective 13

Assist the Gaston County School System in preparing for, and accommodating, growth.

Tools

a. Work with the school system to identify strategic areas for new school construction that can be integrated with the Future Land Use Plan.
b. Provide incentives to encourage school site renovations, new construction, expansions, and donations from private developers as projects occur in high growth areas or areas where new schools are planned.
c. Integrate schools into local neighborhoods by constructing joint-use and mixed-use schools and learning centers that can be identified as community learning and recreational resources.
d. Encourage alternate school construction standards that will allow facilities on less acreage multiple level school buildings, and construction on smaller parcels, where infrastructure is already available.
e. Encourage the use of environmentally friendly construction practices and materials, such as LID and LEED Certification.

6

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

GASTONIA'S RECREATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

GREENWAYS

LAND ASSEMBLY & FUNDING SOURCES

ISSUES

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Open Space, Parks & Recreation

GASTONIA 2025

Open Space, Parks & Recreation

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.

Why is it Important?

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 recreational needs. These large tracts, combined with Crowders Mountain State Park, existing local parks, potential greenways along creek corridors, the nearby Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens, and recent conservancy acquisitions all provide the elements for Gastonia to be known as the region's "Green Community." Creating linkages and connections to these places will draw attention to them, make their use easy and help ensure their success. If marketed properly, these assets could make Gastonia stand out within the region, by attracting people and businesses to the area, and making Gastonia a great place to visit. The Gastonia of the future will have an abundance of parks and open spaces with connecting greenways that accommodate the variety of recreational needs of a growing and diverse population.

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 recreational 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.

Health Benefits

Studies show that fewer adults and children are engaging in daily, moderate physical activity. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention:

- 61% of North Carolina adults are overweight or obese;
- 22% of non-Hispanic white adults, 36% of non-Hispanic black adults, and 21% of Hispanic adults in North Carolina are obese; and
- 27% of North Carolina high school students are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

Beyond cosmetic concern and quality of life issues, obesity has been identified as a contributing factor to many chronic diseases and conditions in both adults and children, including hypertension, type-2 diabetes, colon cancer, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, and coronary heart disease. In addition, health care costs associated with our sedentary lifestyles, and obesity-related illnesses are on the

rise, with costs for treatment estimated at over $78 billion annually.

Recreational facilities and programs and open space promote community health by allowing us to "re-create" ourselves so that we maintain a healthy mental and physical state and lead productive lives. While many people can afford physical activity through private membership clubs, there are still a large number of citizens in need of free public facilities for exercise. Free, public recreation within a community is a matter of civic responsibility and promotes the common good for all citizens.

Economic Benefits

There is evidence of the economic benefits of green space and recreational facilities through increased real estate values based on the property's proximity to these features. In addition, these amenities create desirable communities, helping to improve business recruitment, tourism, and retaining retirees.

Enhancing Real Estate Values: There is a myth that properties diminish in value due to their proximity to green space, such as parks and greenways, but the opposite is true. Studies show that many people are willing to pay more for property located close to parks and open space areas than for a property that does not offer this amenity. Higher property values mean higher property-tax income for the city. Professor John L. Crompton, professor of recreation, park and tourism services at Texas A&M University argues that park land is "capitalized" into increased property values of proximate (nearby) landowners through a process called the "proximate principle". This means that the increased value of properties located near a park will pay the cost of maintaining the facility. The amount of revenue realized diminishes the further away the property is from the park.

Business Recruitment: In today's knowledge-based economy, businesses are adding quality of life to their list of factors affecting business location. Many location recruiters give high scores to amenities such as entertainment, recreation, parks, open spaces, and cultural events. In order for Gastonia to diversify its economy and attract and retain knowledge-based companies, the City must strategically invest in these quality of life factors.

Tourism: Parks, greenways, and open spaces can attract visitors from other communities. Within the region, Gastonia could be known as the place to go for hiking, biking, and recreating, especially as other parts of the region become more urbanized without dedicating areas for parks and green spaces. In July 2002, the United States Specialty Sports Association chose Martha Rivers Park to host the 2004 world baseball tournament. The event, which brought 32 teams to Gastonia for eight days, is an example of such recreation/open space related tourism. Participants and fans stayed at local hotels, ate at local restaurants, and shopped at local stores. According to the Gaston County Travel and Tourism, the economic impact of this event was $531,533.

Retaining Retirees: According to the 2000 census, in terms of per-capita disposable income in the United States, the 55-59, 60-64 and 65-69 age cohorts (individually) are wealthier than any other five-year age range (individually).

"Accumulating evidence indicates that open space conservation is not an expense, but an investment that produces important economic benefits."

-Will Rogers, President
The Trust for Public Land

Figure 6-1: List of Parks & Locations	
Park	Location
Bradley Park	N. Modena St
Crowder's Mountain State Park	Linwood Rd
East Park	Hemlock St
Erwin Park	North Pryor St
Ferguson Park	Golf Course Dr
Lineberger Park	Garrison Blvd
All American Park (formerly Linwood Park)	Garland Ave
Martha Rivers Park	Neil Hawkins Rd
North Park	Rankin Ave
Phillips Park	Echo Lane
T. Jeffers Park	Whitener St
Rankin Lake Park	Rankin Lake Rd
Sims Legion Park	N. Marietta St
Gastonia Municipal Golf Course	Niblick Dr

Figure 6-2: List of Community Centers & Locations		
Sector	Rec Center	Location
Northeast	Bradley Center	N. Modena St
Central	Erwin Center	N. Morris St
Southwest	Phillips Center	Echo Lane
Southeast	Armory	Robinwood Rd
Northwest	T. Jeffers Center	Whitener St
Citywide	Adult Rec Center	W. Franklin Blvd

While many retirees chose to age in place, many others search for a new location that will provide the types of services they will need in their later years. Attracting and retaining what may be the most affluent and activity-oriented group of retirees, will require an exciting mix of recreational and cultural activities.

Public recreation within a community is a matter of civic responsibility and promotes the common good for all citizens. It also provides residents with an aesthetically pleasing environment in which to live and work. The City should implement the recommendations set forth in the *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020* by actively maintaining existing facilities, making upgrades to older facilities, and planning for and constructing new facilities in areas with an inadequate level of service.

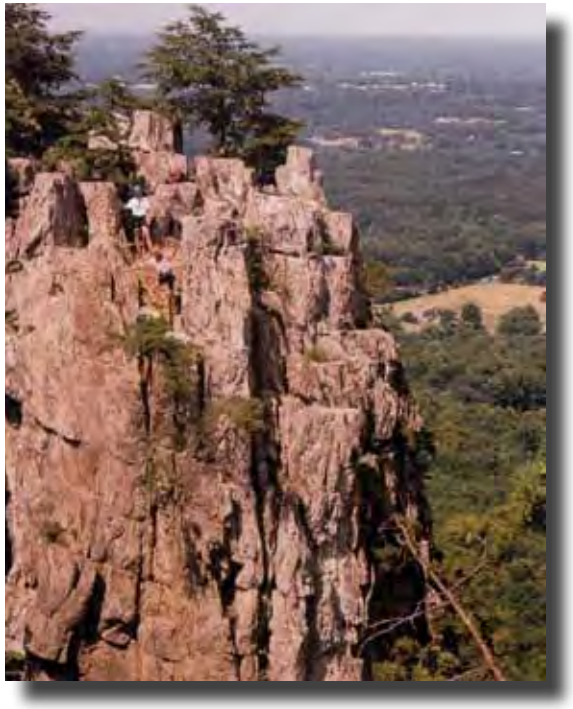
Gastonia's Recreational Infrastructure

A well planned and well maintained park and open space system is one that not only meets the recreational needs of the residents of Gastonia, but also helps project a strong community image. Gastonia's parks and open spaces are a source of civic pride for a community that cares about its valuable natural areas.

Gastonia's parks and community centers serve overlapping functions, with generally one large park and/or community center for each sector of the City. Lineberger Park is Gastonia's flagship park, with a central location and a variety of active and passive recreational opportunities. Rankin Lake is another large park that also provides both active and passive recreation.

Crowders Mountain State Park is an enormous source of pride for Gastonia. Located just southwest of Gastonia, Crowders Mountain is an outstanding scenic and recreational asset, attracting people from the entire region. The newest addition to the Gastonia park system, the Youth Sports Complex at Martha Rivers Park on Neil Hawkins Road in southeast Gastonia, is also a Gastonia gem. The Youth Sports Complex, which opened in 1999, provides one of the region's premier youth sports complexes and playgrounds. The playground effort organized thousands of local citizens that gave tens of thousands of volunteer hours and funding to build it.

In addition to the City-owned parks and community centers, the City of Gastonia has a joint-use agreement



Crowders Mountain State Park

Crowders Mountain became a state park in 1973 as the result of a citizens' movement in Gaston County. A group of local citizens formed the Gaston County Conservation Society in response to a threat to mine the Mountain. This group was able to convince state officials of the importance of preserving this unique natural resource. A portion of Crowders Mountain State Park was annexed into the City of Gastonia in August 1996, adding a superb natural and recreational resource to the City.

The park currently encompasses 5,100 acres. This total includes the recent addition of 2000 acres, primarily in Cleveland County, which will protect the entire Kings Mountain ridgeline and join Crowders Mountain State Park to Kings Mountain State Park and Kings Mountain National Military Battleground in South Carolina. Crowders Mountain State Park offers a contrast to the rapidly developing counties in Piedmont North and South Carolina. One of the major issues for the park is the encroachment of development around the park boundary, making the acquisition of additional properties more difficult. The NC Division of Parks and Recreation seeks to add properties to the park for resource protection, access control, the construction of new recreational facilities, and to protect the scenic and biological integrity of the park. Another issue is the character of development surrounding the park and its impact on the park experience, from a visual, environmental, and ecological standpoint.

In 2006, the park had roughly 350,000 visitors. Park visitation is expected to increase over the next 20 years, due to approximately 20% of North Carolina's population, and 20% of South Carolina's population, being within a 50-mile radius of the park. The park offers a variety of hiking trails ranging from the more rugged trails leading to the summit, to the flat, easy trails circling the nine-acre park lake. Canoes for use on the lake can be rented during summer months and bank fishing is allowed. The park also includes an office with display area, multiple picnic tables, grilling areas, and several large shelters.

New initiatives and activities to be considered for the future include:

- facilities for backpack camping,
- horse and mountain bike trails,
- pedestrian trail improvements and extensions, and
- the purchase of an additional Ranger residence.

Other goals include limiting automobile use in the area by road closures, maintaining the rural nature of the park experience and safety of hikers through narrow streets and rural street drainage systems and constructing a new access area in Cleveland County with a new contact station, maintenance building, Ranger residence, and public parking. These new facilities will provide public parking and access to the seven-mile Ridgeline Trail that will connect the current Pinnacle Trail to trails to be built in Kings Mountain State Park and Kings Mountain National Military Park.

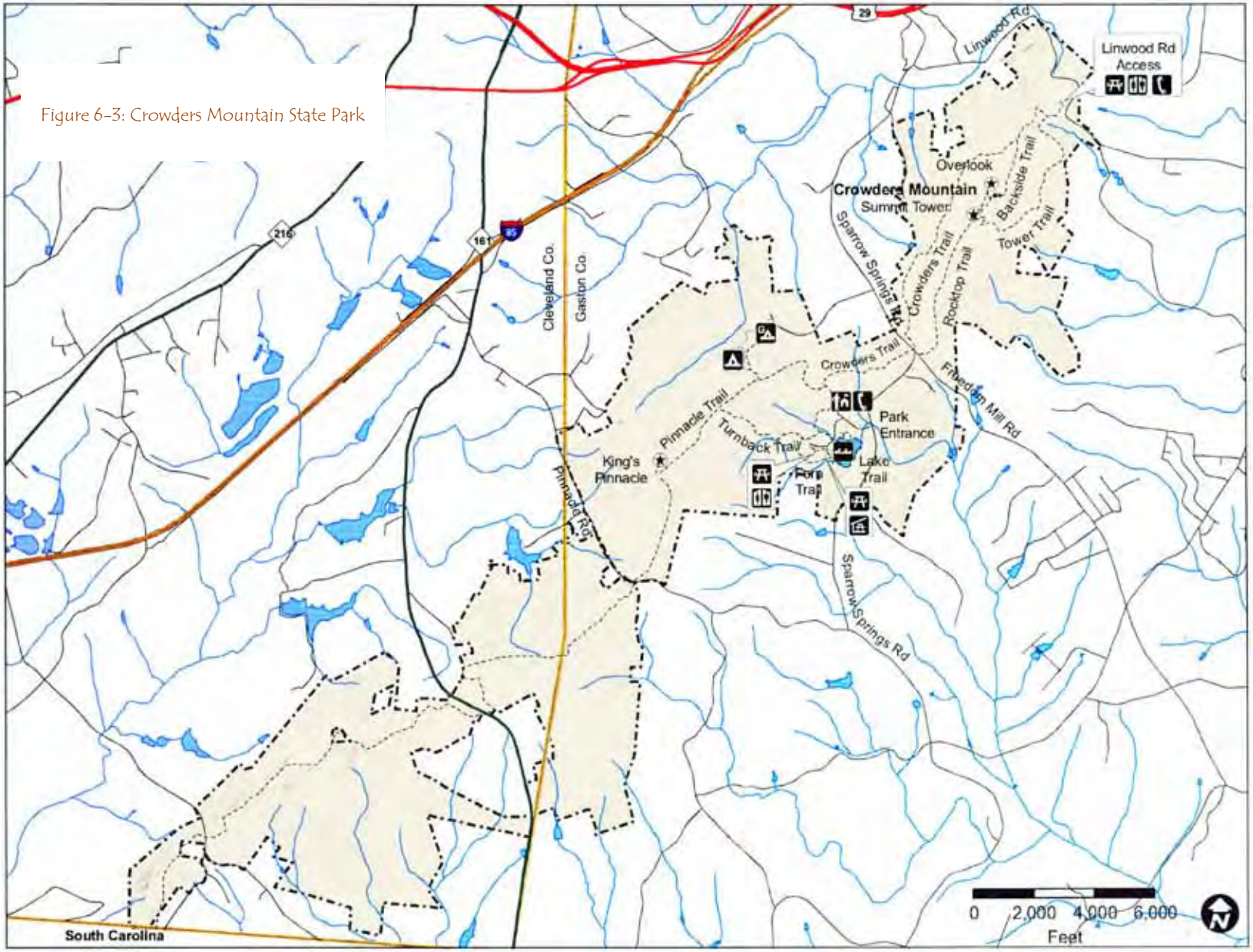
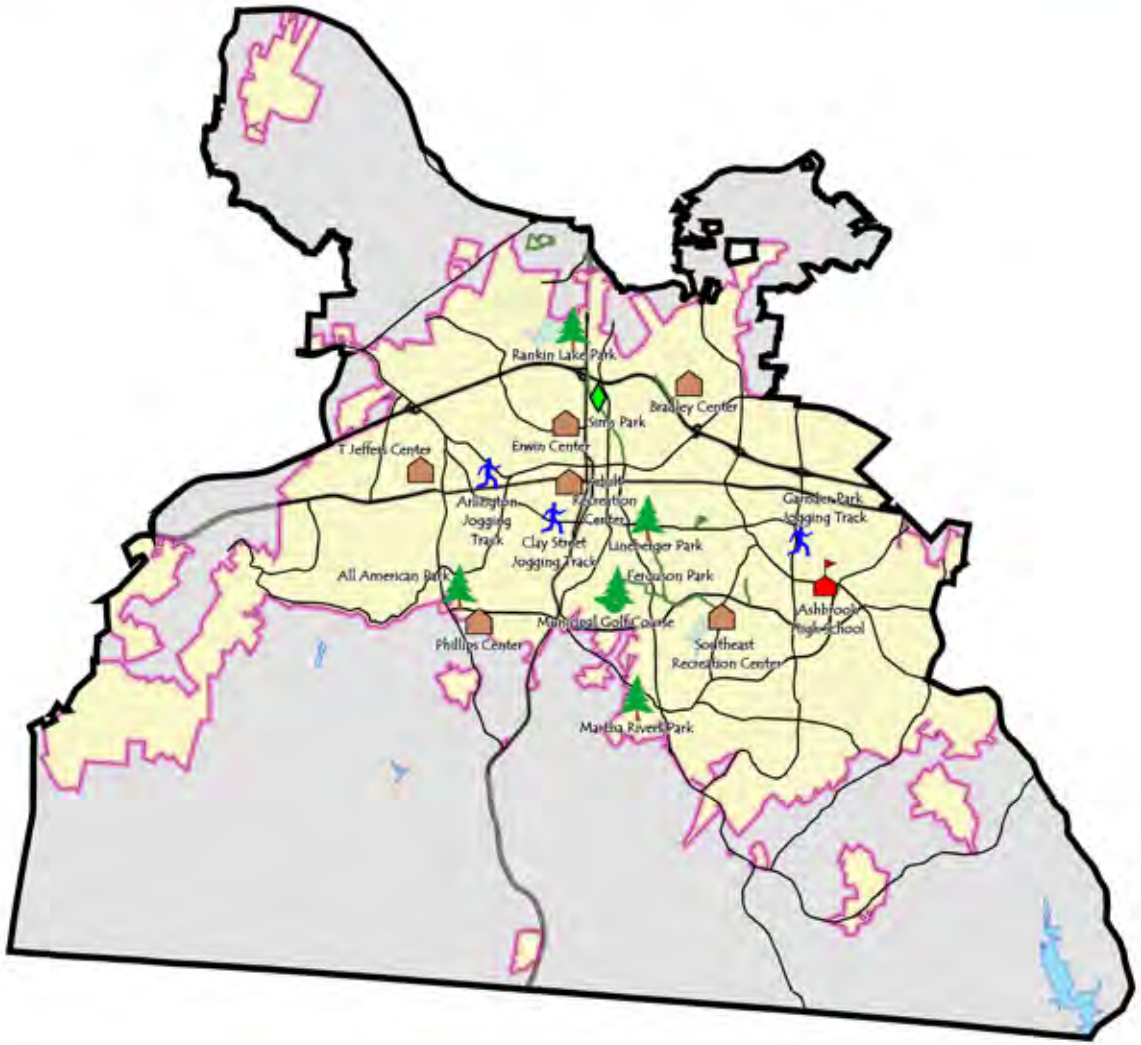


Figure 6-3: Crowders Mountain State Park

Figure 6-4: Recreational Facilities

Comprehensive Plan 2025

City of Gastonia, North Carolina



Legend

Recreation Sites

- Municipal Golf Course
- Recreation Center
- Park
- Jogging Park
- Ashbrook High School
- Sims Park
- Main Streets
- Roads
- City Limits
- Comp Plan Area
- Greenway Trail

N W E S

1 inch = 12,034 feet

Community Centers provide gymnasiums, clubrooms and game rooms, and are available for use by the public. Supervised recreational activities are available at the community centers.

Parks provide open space enjoyment and a variety of active and passive recreation activities.

Figure 6-5: Inventory of Gastonia's Park and Recreational Facilities and Amenities Offered At Each

FACILITIES	Instructional Programs	Ceramics Room	Game Room	Activity Room	Gymnasium	Weight Room	Athletic Fields	Jogging Track	Picnic Area	Playground	Swimming Pool	Tennis Courts	Outdoor Basketball	Skating	Sand Volleyball
1. Ferguson Park							•			•		•			
2. Lineberger Park									•	•	•		•	•	
3. All American Park									•	•					
4. Hunter Huss High School												•			
5. Rankin Lake Park				•					•	•					
6. Adult Recreation Center	•	•	•	•											
7. Erwin Center	•		•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•		
8. Phillips Center	•		•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•		•	•
9. Bradley Center	•		•	•	•		•		•	•		•	•		
10. Southeast Center	•				•										
11. T. Jeffers Center	•		•	•	•		•		•	•		•	•		
13. Clay Street Jogging Track								•							
14. Gardner Park Jogging Track								•							
15. Martha Rivers Park							•	•	•	•					•
16. Memorial Hall															
17. Ashbrook High School												•			
18. Skeet & Trap Range															
19. Municipal Golf Course															
20. Sims Legion Park							•								
21. Greenway															
22. Smyre Millennium Park								•	•						
23. Gardner Park Elementary School								•			•				
24. East Park									•	•					
25. I.C. Falls Park								•	•	•			•		
26. Rhyne Elementary School								•							
27. Woodhill Elementary School								•							
28. Sherwood Elementary School								•							

with Gaston County Schools. This increases the number of walking and jogging tracks and tennis courts that are available to the public.

Additional recreational opportunities are available through Gaston County, which maintains its own parks and recreational programs. Other recreational facilities available in and around Gastonia include church-sponsored activities, such as family life centers, the YMCA, the two boy's clubs, the Optimist Club and school activities.

Recommendation for Level of Service

Figure 6-6 shows Level of Service (LOS) standards for park and recreational facilities as recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) or by the State of North Carolina when there is no national recommendation. The table gives the recommended number of various recreational facilities that a city should have based upon its population. The recommended number of facilities is compared to the number of those facilities within the City, as well as the City's goals for those facilities in the future.

These numbers are not "minimally acceptable standards" of park and recreational facilities; rather they are targets to strive toward for an optimum level of service for the community. (Totals were rounded off to the nearest...)

The planning area for the City of Gastonia includes areas outside of the City's corporate boundaries that could be annexed into the City in the future. Gaston County currently provides parks and recreational amenities and maintains services and facilities in these areas. Currently, there are two park facilities within Gastonia's planning area, that are outside the

Figure 6-6: Level of Service (LOS) Standards for Park & Recreation Facilities

Facility type	Recommended standard per population	Facility needs (based on population as of July 1, 2009 (pop. 75,280)[1]	Facility inventory 2011	2020 Facility goals (based on population projection of 110,000)
Adult baseball fields (lighted)	1/20,000	3	5	6
Youth baseball/adult softball	1/5000	15	11	22
Ball field (soccer, football)	1/5000	15	7	22
Basketball courts	1/5000	15	5	22
Tennis courts	1/2000	38	46	55
Picnic tables	1/125	600	195	880
Picnic shelters	1/2000	38	23	55
Playgrounds	1/1000	75	11	110
Trails	0.4 mile/1000	30	9	44
Recreation Center w/ gym	1/25,000	3	6	5
Swimming pool	1/20,000	4	2	5
Golf course (9-hole)	1/25,000	3	0	4
Golf course (18-hole)	1/50,000	1	1	2
Open Space/Park Land	16 acres/1000	1200	587	1,760
Dog Park	1/50,000	1	0	2
Skateboard Park	1/50,000	1	1	2

[1] Population as of July 1, 2009 based on the Official Municipal Estimate with July 1, 2009 boundaries as determined by the NC State Demographer, Office of State Budget and Management.

Organized Youth Sports

Gastonia has seen an exponential increase in participation in youth sports activities over the past 15 years, with a total increase of 654% in the City's baseball, softball and soccer leagues. This growth spurred the plan for a Youth Sports Complex at the existing Martha Rivers Park. In 1995, the Gastonia City Council, Gaston County Commissioners, and the Gaston County School Board collectively worked to deed an existing 20-acre passive park at Martha Rivers Park, and 34 adjoining acres, originally purchased as a future school site, to the City for the proposed Complex. The City then purchased an additional three acres for approximately $300,000, bringing the total park size to 57.95 acres. On October 23, 1997, ground was broken on the new complex and it opened exactly two years later on October 23, 1999.

The Youth Sports Complex at Martha Rivers Park is one of Gaston County's premier youth recreational facilities. The complex includes: four ball fields, four lighted soccer/athletic fields, a stunning one acre playground, two large picnic shelters, a sand volleyball court, horseshoe pits, approximately two miles of asphalt walkway, 110 additional parking spaces and other amenities.

The playground at Martha Rivers Park covers approximately one acre and was built with the assistance of hundreds of community volunteers over a six-month period. Over $350,000 in private donations was raised by volunteers for the project. Upon completion, the appraised value was over $600,000. In 2009, volunteers raised $160,000 to complete minor restoration projects, which include repainting, replacing outdated equipment, and replacement of rubber surfaced walkways and play areas throughout the park that are used by all but suitable for the physically challenged.

Future phases include a corporate picnic shelter and a full-scale community center. The *Vision for a Healthy Community*: *A Plan for Parks and Recreation, 2005-2020* recommends that a recreation center be built to serve southeast Gastonia due to the tremendous amount of growth occurring there.

The updates at Martha Rivers Park have been very successful, making the park a popular destination and a great source of community pride. However, despite the popularity of the complex, the City lacks a centrally located youth sports and recreation facility. Also, more space is needed as the demand for youth practice and game fields continues to exceed the amount of space available.

current City limits. As the planning area develops, and is potentially annexed into the City, the City will plan for new, City-owned recreational facilities and services to meet the corresponding increase in population and level of service as recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association. In addition, school recreational facilities in the planning area will remain part of the recreational network if annexed into the City.

Facility Needs

The *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020* includes an inventory of the state of amenities offered at each City park and recreational facility and makes the recommendations listed in the Figure 6-7.

Trends and Projections

Recreational facilities, services, and open space amenities are dependant on area demographic trends. As the city experiences growth and development, newer areas such as the Southeast Sector may be delayed in getting new city parks and recreational services. Conversely, if older areas suffer from population loss and private disinvestment, they may also suffer from municipal disinvestments in new recreational amenities, as well as inadequate maintenance of existing facilities.

As people go through various life stages, their abilities and preferences for physical and leisure activities change. Young adults, particularly single professionals, may look for solo or group exercise opportunities such as greenways and trails bicycle paths and jogging tracks. While senior citizens may also enjoy greenway trails, they may be more interested in activities offered at recreation centers. Families with children are likely to seek out playgrounds, athletic fields, aquatic facilities, and picnic areas.

Figure 6-7: List of Recommendations for City Park & Recreation Facilities

Facility	Recommendations
Lineberger Park	Rebuild park including recommendations from the Lineberger Park Master Plan, expansion of parking adjacent to the park, reconstruction of the pool bathhouse.
Erwin Center/ Park	Update playground, update ball field, install water fountains, replace gym floor and update gym, replace bathhouse roof, various outdoor enhancements.
Phillips Center/ Park and adjacent Davis Park Tract	Replace gym floor, replace weight room equipment, update playground, resurface and landscape parking area, resurface tennis courts, replace/update interior lighting, replace lobby doors and furniture, add activity room/storage, install water fountains, construct outdoor basketball court, construct press box/concession/restroom facilities for ball area, add picnic shelter, connect to Davis Park, add amenities.
Roland E. Bradley Center/ Park	Build storage/activity room to gym, replace gym floor, minor building improvements, outdoor improvements, rebuild tennis courts, add picnic shelters, water fountains, landscaping, volleyball court, install lighted ball field with fencing, construct park trail system, provide for beautification and pedestrian access, construct press box and concession and restrooms for main ball field, add bleachers to main ball field, upgrade playground.
T. Jeffers Center	Build new storage/activity room, replace gym floor, misc. bldg. Improvements, landscaping, water fountains, resurface tennis courts, update picnic shelters, resurface parking lots and build entrance walks, construct paved trail system, improve walking track, misc. outdoor improvements, enlarge press box, screen ball field from Wal-Mart, update playground.
Rankin Lake Park	Replace clubhouse roof, refinish exterior with stone or brick, upgrade playground and add second playground, landscaping and drainage, update/repair shelters and move shelter Number 4 from floodplain, return lake to clean public access, build attendant station, remove City storage from north end, piers, docks, and decks, Lake Pavilion, trail around lake, corporate picnic pavilion, interconnecting trail with County park and Gaston College, build three new picnic shelters, repair constructed wetland.
Skeet and Trap Range	Remodel manager's building and add restrooms, add storage facilities, staff with full-time range manager and two part-time seasonal employees.
Ferguson Park	Update softball fields, construct warm-up area inside fence, resurface tennis courts, pave parking areas, extend greenway trail through park, landscaping and walks, update playground.
Gastonia Municipal Golf Course	Irrigation upgrades, rebuild tee complexes, build driving range facility, relocate front half of Hole #10, rebuild sand traps, install two distant restrooms.
Sims Legion Park	Renovate press box and restrooms, add a backup scoreboard, replace lighting and poles, replace backstop netting, repair outfield wall, repave, landscape parking lot of main ball park, build a lighted softball field at southwest corner of park, relocate BMX track, build two lighted fields at present location of fields, explore the feasibility of creating a joint-use softball complex in the North Chester/Highland area.

Demographic Trends

The Growth Patterns and Directions Chapter of this plan includes age trend maps that show the percentage of people within different age cohorts and where they reside. A large percentage of young people under the age of 18 are clustered in the moderate to low income areas of Highland and west Gastonia. Another pronounced concentration of people under 18 is shown in south Gastonia. Thus, recreational facilities that serve the under 18 population are needed in these areas. Gastonia has seen an exponential increase in participation in youth sports activities over the past 15 years. While the Youth Sports Complex at Martha's River Park is a great asset to the City, it is not centrally located to allow adequate accessibility, nor does it meet the demand of the City's youth.

The 18 to 34 age group is relatively absent in the most affluent areas of southeast Gastonia, and seems to occupy the more modest residential areas of west Gastonia and near northeast Gastonia. This could be because this age group is generally less affluent because they are just entering into their careers and make less money starting out than those in the 35 to 59-age cohort. In addition, those in the 18 to 34 age cohort have less disposable income than those in the older cohorts because they are taking on extra costs such as buying their first home and having children. These areas should have a balance of recreational facilities for active adults and families with children.

It is not surprising that a large percentage of people in their prime earning years, those in the 35 to 59-age cohort, are most concentrated in the more affluent sections of southeast Gastonia. In comparison, this age group is notably absent in the older parts of Gastonia, including west Gastonia, the Center City, and other inner city areas. Gastonia's high population growth to the east and southeast will create greater demand for parks and recreational facilities in those sectors of the City. As this area continues to grow, it will require additional recreational facilities and amenities targeting active adults and seniors as well as families with children.

This growth trend indicates that the current need for facilities in the southeast area will only become more critical over the next 15 years. In order to meet the City's parks and recreational services system goal of "regional community centers," the City will need to add a minimum of one, preferably two, new community centers to the southeast area of Gastonia. The recommended facilities should consist of a park and athletic facility on a new site west of New Hope Road. A new community center could be located on the grounds of Martha Rivers Park.

Other parts of the Gastonia area that will receive moderate rates of growth and could benefit from additional facilities include: areas near Crowders Mountain, areas between Gastonia and Bessemer City and west of NC 275, and areas northeast of the city along Long Creek.

Population maps show that a cluster of senior residents near the hospital area and in older traditional residential areas that could be considered the first ring of Gastonia's "inner suburbs." Many of the areas showing high percentages of older people contain larger numbers of nursing homes, active senior communities, and apartment complexes occupied by seniors. The City must meet the recreational needs of the growing number of active seniors in these areas by providing amenities that meet their activity levels, such as greenway and walking trails, jogging tracks, passive parks, fishing ponds, and recreational centers that offer various classes and activities that target the senior population.

Despite these trends, it is crucial to understand that the highest densities of population, where there are a larger number of people per square mile, still tend to be in the downtown and surrounding areas of Gastonia's urban core. The recreational facilities in the Central City are generally older than those found elsewhere the City and require updating. It is crucial that a variety of recreational facilities and amenities be located in the Center City in order to take advantage of its central location and easy accessibility to a large number of residents, as well as to revitalize downtown and make it a destination for both people and businesses.

Greenways

As Gastonia expands and grows outward, there is an opportunity to preserve and make use of some of the City's best natural assets. The development of greenways can provide the community with miles of paths for walking, jogging, bicycling and other forms of non-automotive recreation.

The development of greenways has been a trend in cities across the country since the 1970s. The trend emerged because of a dramatic shift toward the activities that greenways are best suited for, and because of the relative cost-effectiveness of greenway development. Greenways are usually on land that often goes unused for any other purpose. While greenways typically include some type of trail for public or private use, they can also remain completely natural.

Benefits of Greenways

Greenways benefit the public through the transportation, environmental, and connectivity functions that they serve. Greenways can potentially connect parks, neighborhoods, schools and other destinations. If a greenway is strategically located, it can function as an alternate transportation system, giving pedestrians and cyclists a safer and more enjoyable route than thoroughfares. Greenways also serve to preserve natural habitats, remove critical areas from development, and as a buffer between development and adjacent streams, providing filtering for stormwater runoff.

Other greenway benefits include:

- Helping to reduce air pollution by lessening the demand for vehicular travel.
- Enhancing urban livability through the protection of stream corridors and offering the opportunity to interact with the natural environment.
- Preserving natural features, and, therefore, adding aesthetic value to the overall image and quality of life of our community.
- Protecting wildlife by providing habitat, shelter, and migration corridors.
- Providing opportunities for people, particularly children, to have a close-up, live classroom setting of how nature relates to the environment.

Connections

Potential greenway land is not always obvious to the casual observer because vegetation, buildings, and/or the rise and fall of the land often obscures it. Frequent greenway locations include adjacent to streams and floodplains, abandoned streets, abandoned railroad beds, and utility rights-of-way. Greenways help to protect important community, scenic, and historic sites and not only connect these places to each other but to parks, neighborhoods, and schools as well. When determining locations for future greenway funding, policy makers should look at making connections between existing and future community facilities such as:

- parks
- schools and school playgrounds
- neighborhoods
- retail centers
- existing greenways and trails
- special features, such as lakes and mountains
- community recreational centers
- historic sites and tourism sites
- libraries, offices, employment centers, civic spaces
- miscellaneous points of interest and visitation
- major tracts of open space

What are Greenways?

Greenways are a linear natural or landscaped feature designed for pedestrians, bicycles, and other non-motorized users.

They can exist along a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley or ridge line, or overland along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use; a canal, scenic road, or other route.

Avon & Catawba Creeks Greenway

Highland Rail Trail

Gastonia's Greenway System

Gastonia opened its first greenway, the 2.5 miles Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway, on December 1, 2001. The City has continually improved this greenway. Such improvements include the addition of another access bridge and an extension across Union Road to Stevens Street, an additional three quarters of a mile. The greenway was spearheaded jointly by a private nonprofit group, Connect Gaston (a metamorphosis of the Mayors Committee on Greenways, Sidewalks and Bikeways) and the City Planning Department. In addition to City of Gastonia funding, this greenway was financed by grants from the Clean Water Management Trust fund, NCDOT T-21 Enhancements Program, the NC Recreational Trails Program, The Community Foundation of Gaston County and the local Glenn Foundation, as well as a host of other private contributions. The project has been a success since its opening, with weekly visits totaling around 2000 in good weather. The trail is currently used as more of an exercise and recreational facility as opposed to alternative transportation although is does connect to destination points. It has served as an example of how to make greenways more acceptable and supported by the public. This greenway should be viewed as an ever-expanding "work in progress." Other natural trails and scenic paths in Gastonia include the popular Crowders Mountain trails and the loop-shaped, mile-long nature trail behind the Schiele Museum.

Greenways are not purely recreational features. They also protect watersheds and serve a transportation purpose as well by providing a natural linkage accessible by foot or bicycle. Fortunately, the City of Gastonia recognized these functions and has consequently taken the initiative by organizing the Gastonia Committee for Greenways, Sidewalks, and Bikeways. In July 1996, Mayor Jick Garland appointed seven citizens to a panel that would focus solely on identifying places in and around the city for people "to walk, jog and ride bikes." The City of Gastonia adopted the Connect Gaston plan in 1998 and a more detailed greenway plan in 2002 as part of the *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020*.

Trail at Crowders Mountain State Park

A new development for the Gaston Urban Area MPO and the local municipalities is participating in the development of the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT). The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional trail network that will eventually reach 15 counties and over 2 million people. While not every local trail will be part of the Carolina Thread Trail system, it will link the regionally significant trails and many regional attractions. Think of it as a "green interstate system" of major trails and conservation lands created by connecting smaller trail systems throughout the region. The City of Gastonia received funding from the AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009 (ARRA) for the Marietta Street Bridge Improvement project which

includes a Downtown Gastonia Carolina Thread Trail Bicycle/Pedestrian connector.

The Greenway Plan Map should be viewed as a multiple opportunities and alternatives map. The goal of the plan is to interconnect the entire city and make joining connections to County and regional trails. The plan should be implemented strategically. Not all alternatives listed in the plan will be implemented. Different alternatives will present themselves to the City as corridors are made available. The City will take advantage of corridors that become available, typically through the private development process, and subsequently make connections through acquisition of "missing pieces." Corridors no longer needed will be removed from the plan.

The City should seek to leverage its own public resources with funding from public grant agencies, private foundations, and private donations. Greenways are today, a popular funding target for several public and some private funding programs. In other words, greenways are hot items when it comes to grants!

There are several regional greenway plans that have included proposed greenway systems for Gaston County, including Gastonia. Generally, these plans follow the proposed system as established by the City of Gastonia in its Greenway Plan.

Land Assembly and Funding Sources for Parks, Open Spaces, and Greenways

Land for parks, recreational and open space purposes are capital investments that help to secure a sustainable and economically viable future for our community. Not counting Crowders Mountain State Park, which is a state facility, Gastonia lags far behind national standards in parks and open space land. These lands are vital for a well-rounded community that is attractive to both new residents and businesses. The establishment of parks and open spaces should be considered an ongoing process as the city expands.

From 1970 to 2005, Gastonia has grown by over 50% in both population and land area, during which time little public resources have been spent acquiring parklands. The three major new parks (Bradley, Jeffers, and Martha Rivers totaling 143 acres) established during this period were provided land primarily through outside sources. Bradley and Jeffers lands were acquired with Federal Community Development Block Grant Funds, while Martha Rivers was largely funded through private donations. The only significant exception was land acquisition for the Mountain Island Watershed, but, this tract is over 15 miles from Gastonia and will exist in a virtually natural state for the primary purpose of protecting our water supply.

Davis Park, located only 1,600 feet south of Phillips Park is a park that was once a very active park operated by a local civic organization. However, after a drowning occurred in its lake, the park closed, the lake was drained, and the land dedicated to the City. It is currently a 25-acre undeveloped tract of land. The *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open*

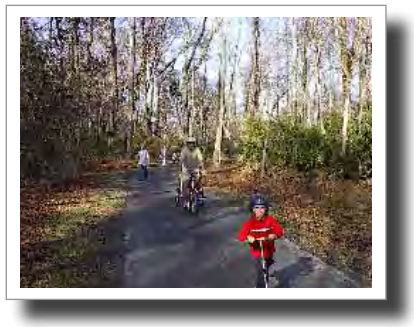
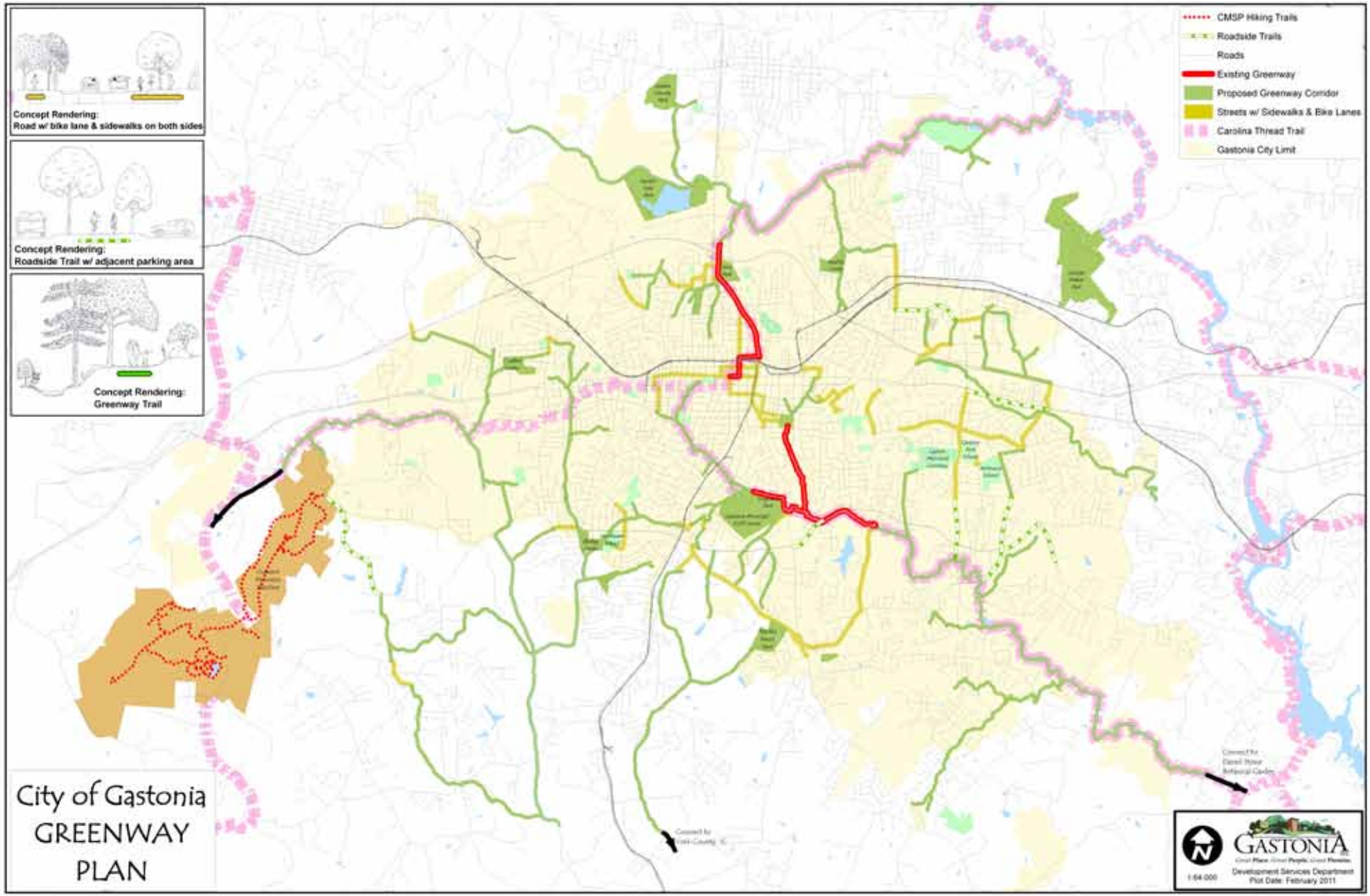


Figure 6-8: City of Gastonia Greenway Plan



Spaces, 2005-2020 recommends that Davis Park should be developed into an active park again, offering such amenities as a public fishing lake, a pedestrian trail around the lake, picnic facilities, bicycle trails, parking, and a greenway connection to Phillips Park and All American Park. This interconnection would provide a greenway connection running through and between the three major tracts along the Blackwood Creek floodplain and would be a great asset to the city.

Some jurisdictions in the region pursued visionary policies and programs during this period to provide parklands and open space. The three most important points to make about a comprehensive open space program are: (1) parks and open spaces exist to make our community more livable and more competitive; (2) they are time sensitive opportunities and, for greatest enjoyment, should be distributed throughout the community; and, (3) once an area is "built-out," opportunities for open space and parkland preservation are forever lost.

The following are methods used by municipalities for the assembly of land to be used for Parks, Open Space and Greenways.

Land Donations

Private citizens may contribute any land that a municipality is willing to accept. The land donor can claim the value of the land donated to a charitable organization as an income tax deduction equal to the land's current fair market value. Land donation also removes its value from an estate, reducing future estate taxes. Land donations result in an actual transfer of ownership, unlike a conservation easement as discussed below. This relieves the owner of the management and care of the land. Furthermore, North Carolina provides a 25% of value *state income tax credit* called the North Carolina Conservation Tax Credit (distributable over five years), for land and easements donated for public recreational and conservation purposes. This is possibly the easiest form of land assembly.

Land donations through development process

In many instances, the development process has led to the donation of land for greenways or other open spaces. During the rezoning process, developers of both residential and non-residential projects have agreed to dedicate land and construct portions of the public greenway system. The developer obtains credit for open space improvements (residential developments), generate city and public support for the project, and create an amenity for future buyers or users that will reach beyond their own project. Projects outside of the greenway plan area have provided sidewalks and connector trails to provide access to the proposed and existing public trail system.

Gastonia Code - Sec. 18-37.

Areas for schools, parks, playgrounds

Planning Commission may consider the allocation of suitable areas for schools, parks, and playgrounds. In the interest of the public welfare, a minimum amount of land in the ration of three acres per 100 families, exclusive of streets, should be set aside for recreational or park purposes. Where a tract contains less than 40 acres, such reservation for open space should be combined, whenever possible, with similar reservations in adjoining tracts. Such parks or playgrounds may be dedicated for public use or reserved for the common use of all property owners within the proposed subdivision by covenant in instruments conveying lands in such subdivision. In some cases policies may be in place, but are not being applied.

"Land…they aren't making any more of it."

Will Rogers

A trust fund grant helped purchase, and a conservation easement will preserve, this land along the shore of Mountain Island Lake in perpetuity.

In 2009, the City Council amended the Subdivision Ordinance to require that most subdivisions dedicate land for parks and recreation or provide a fee in lieu of that property dedication. The policy provides the land or funds that would assist in constructing new parks, open space, and recreation facilities identified in the Vision for a Healthy Community Plan, which was adopted in 2005. The property dedication or payment in lieu of is tied to the subdivision approval process; therefore, the program only applies to newly constructed dwelling units, the units that actually add population to the City.

Conservation Easements

A Conservation Easement consists of a legally binding agreement between a property owner and a governmental body, or land trust, that restricts the type and amount of development that may take place on the property. A conservation easement ensures a landowner that his land will be protected for future generations. The ownership of the land does not change hands and does not imply free access by the public. For the City, conservation easements are a better financial alternative than land donations because the land remains in private ownership and on the tax roles, unlike publicly owned land. The City is not responsible for the maintenance of easements.

Property owners donating land through a conservation easement are also privy to the North Carolina Conservation Tax Credit Program, which renders a 25% tax credit for donating property or land conservation easements to a state or local government entity or to a qualified non-profit organization.

Excess purchase by municipality

Using the idea that the value of land surrounding a park increases otherwise called the "proximate principle", the municipality can purchase an excess amount of land for a park project. After developing the park, which increases the value of the surrounding land, the municipality can sell the remaining land at a higher market value. The increased property tax revenue pays for the original investment.

Grants

Grants are available at both the state and local level to purchase land for protection purposes. The City received significant financial resources from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund to purchase land for the Avon and Catawba Creek Greenway. Together with the Trust for Public Land, the City used Clean Water Management Trust Fund dollars to purchase land for conservation along the shore of Mountain Island Lake where the City draws raw water for potable treatment.

General Revenue

Local general tax revenues, and voter approved tax levies, support the purchase of property for open space protection. In the fall of 2004 there was a countywide referendum for a half cent sales tax for economic development related projects. The City of Gastonia allocated a portion of its projected share of the proceeds for recreational project development. Although this referendum failed, there may be future opportunities for similar initiatives.

Bonds

Another way to fund capital parks, recreational and open space improvements is through a general obligation G.O. bond referendum. Because the full faith and credit of the City as a taxing authority is pledged, authority for a G.O. bond issuance must be granted by the electorate. The table below illustrates the amount of funds that can be generated through various size bond referendums. Each

Figure 6-9: Annual Amortization Costs of General Obligation Bonds, 20 Years @ 4.5% Rate in $1,000's

Year	$6 Million	$8 Million	$10 Million	$12 Million	$14 Million
1	563	751	939	1,126	1,313
5	509	679	849	1,018	1,187
10	442	589	736	884	1,032
15	375	499	624	749	874
20	307	409	511	613	715

$400,000 dollars of debt requires the equivalent of one cent per $100 valuation on the property tax rate.

In addition to new bonds, existing bonds can be refinanced to create funds for parks, recreation, and greenways.

Development Code Mandates

Some jurisdictions require a certain amount of land in residential developments to be set aside as open space. The Town of Davidson adopted an aggressive policy of a 50% set-aside. Gastonia requires a 20% set-aside in "planned residential developments" (PRD). For this, the developer may build a greater density/intensity on the remaining 80%, and is freed of most lot dimensional and setback requirements. But, this provision only applies to those who elect to take their application through the PRD process. Furthermore, installing sidewalks to a superior standard can satisfy part of the 20%.

One important principal in land conservation through the development process is that the land to be preserved must be developable. Sometimes, designated land is inaccessible and may have little use for recreational purposes.

ISSUES

ISSUES

- Gastonia's recreational facilities are showing wear and tear due to age.

- Gastonia's facilities have not kept up with changes in recreational and leisure preferences.

- As the baby boom generation ages, the proportion of people middle aged and older will increase. This age group (50-65) will have increasing amounts of leisure time and will probably be more active than the previous generation. Increased facilities targeting this age group are needed in order to keep them in the City.

- The growing societal awareness of the unhealthy habits of Americans, and the correlating increase in the emphasis on exercise and fitness, especially for children, may lead to an increased usage of Gastonia's recreational infrastructure.

- Young adult professionals, in the growing creative and information economy, show a preference for pedestrian and cycling trails, as well as other non-traditional recreational activities like skateboarding, inline skating, BMX, whitewater sports, and mountain cycling. If Gastonia wants to attract this emerging "Creative Class" (as coined by bestselling author, Professor Richard Florida), the City must offer the recreational facilities they seek.

- The City of Gastonia has not built any new community centers since the T. Jeffers Center in 1979.

- Despite the opening of Martha Rivers Youth Sports Complex in 1999, the demand for youth practice and game fields continues to exceed the amount of space available.

- There is a serious lack of appropriately sized outdoor athletic fields for adult competition.

- The fastest-growing, and most populous area of the city, southeast Gastonia, lacks an anchor public recreational facility, such as a community center with a large park.

- Gastonia does not have an adequate year-round facility for competition aquatic sports.

- Many recreational facilities have a regional focus, and the planning and operation of regional facilities should be coordinated with Gaston County, the schools, and the towns surrounding Gastonia.

- Trends point toward the increased use of parks and recreation facilities for less organized pursuits, such as walking and cycling, and children's playground activities.

- While the demand for more flexible open space grows, the resources for acquiring that space will probably shrink. Thus, the City must search for innovative ways of providing for the changing needs of the residents of Gastonia.

- The provision of adequate parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities is an important indicator of quality of life, and therefore, will be instrumental in attracting a diversified economy.

Objectives and Tools

Objective 1

Provide park and recreation facilities to meet the needs of a diverse population at accessible locations throughout the City.

Tools

a. Implement the recommendations of the recently completed *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020* according to the following priority schedule.
   i. Renovation of Lineberger Park
   ii. Renovation of Rankin Lake Park (including trails and lake pavilion)
   iii. Phase I Greenway Development (8-10 miles)
   iv. Land Banking
   v. SE Community Center Building
   vi. Second Youth Sports Complex
   vii. Development of Davis Park (as a passive facility) and Phillips Park interconnecting trails
   viii. Construction of two modular skate parks
   ix. Improvements to the Adult Recreation Center
b. Continually update facility needs to reflect demographic changes.
c. Actively maintain existing facilities, make upgrades to older facilities, and plan for and construct new facilities to exceed the recommended Level of Service standards set by the National Recreation and Park Association.
d. Promote recreation facilities as a center of civic activity where people gather to play, interact and learn about each other.
e. Design new, and improve existing recreation facilities that are safe, secure and aesthetically pleasing.
f. Provide adequate funding to ensure updating of older facilities and proper facility maintenance.
g. Increase staffing levels as new programs are offered and facilities are built.
h. Implement the recommendations for improvements and new facilities of the *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020* to ensure a fair geographic dispersal of recreation opportunities.
i. Continue to work with Gaston County Schools to extend the joint-use agreement.
j. Provide recreation services to fill current gaps, including adding a southeast recreation center to serve southeast Gastonia due to the tremendous amount of growth, and adding a centrally located youth sports/recreation facility with youth practice and game fields.

Objective 2

Increase participation with other public and private agencies to maximize the efficiency of the City's facilities and programs.

Tools

a. Where feasible, partner with other public and private agencies to provide joint park, recreation and open space facilities.
b. Communicate the need for park and recreation programs through community watch groups and local churches.
c. Work with Gaston County to plan for recreational facilities in areas for potential annexation into the City.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Objective 3

Maximize all available and develop new funding sources for the maintenance, updating, and construction of parks and recreation facilities and open space opportunities.

Tools

a. Continue to use the public and private land development process as a means of acquiring additional recreation space and greenways.
b. Encourage the dedication of properties for recreation through appropriate incentives and tax relief programs.
c. Proceed with a bond referendum, or other financing mechanisms, to finance the needs demonstrated in the *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020*.
d. Use volunteers and encourage non-profit groups, local companies, and other organizations to build and maintain park, recreation and greenway facilities, whenever possible.
e. Consider hiring a development administrator for parks, recreation, open space and greenways to plan and manage the construction of new facilities, grant writing and administration, and master plan implementation.
f. Add parks, recreation, open space, and greenway projects to the City of Gastonia's annual capital improvement plan.

Objective 4

Provide an open space system that protects natural habitat areas, enhances quality of life and links people, neighborhoods and resources together.

Tools

a. Continue to develop the greenway system as the "emerald necklace" that ties together natural areas throughout the City.
b. Encourage landowners to donate land for open space and greenways using conservation easements and other financial incentives.
c. Modify open space requirements for new residential and non-residential development to enhance the quantity, quality and contiguity of open space.
d. Encourage new development to use natural features and open space (both active and passive) as an integral part of the development.
e. Minimize significant loss of natural features during the site preparation phase of new development.
f. Identify and preserve land for urban pocket parks and urban greenspace, particularly in the Center City and in west Gastonia.
g. Work with Gaston County to add protective zoning around Crowders Mountain State Park in an effort to limit negative visual, environmental and ecological impacts on the park.
h. Consider future land acquisition plans for Crowders Mountain State Park when reviewing rezoning requests.
i. Update regional greenway plans and preserve corridors that would link Crowders Mountain State Park with other regional parks and cultural facilities.
j. Maintain the rural nature of the Crowders Mountain State Park experience, and the safety of hikers, by retaining narrow streets and rural street drainage systems.

Objective 5

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.

Tools

a. Continue to implement the *Connect Gaston* plan and Master Greenway Map in the *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020*.

b. Implement short-term priorities for greenways as outlined in the *Vision for a Healthy Community: A Plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces, 2005-2020*.

   i. Expand the Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway system with connections to, and through, Ferguson Park to Marietta Street. Study the feasibility of extended connection to the Historic Loray Mill Neighborhood. Expand the Greenway southward to connect to, and through, the City property at the former Catawba Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant site.

   ii. Interconnect Phillips Park with All American Park to the north and Davis Park to the south.

   iii. Continue to implement the Highland Greenway proposal to connect the existing greenway with the Gaston Technology Park.

   iv. Determine other strategic opportunities for greenway development as they present themselves to the city in the near term.

c. Require greenway dedication for new residential and non-residential development located as shown on the approved Greenway Master Plan Map.

d. If new development is located adjacent to a constructed or planned greenway, require connection points during subdivision and rezoning processes, where a legal nexus exists.

e. When easements, and rights-of-way are being acquired adjacent to planned or existing greenways, ensure that a greenway easement is also acquired.

f. Implement existing policies regarding the reservation of park and open space lands during the property subdivision process. Consider amendments to the Unified Development Ordinance and other innovative techniques to acquire greenway and park property.

g. Develop standards for greenway trails to include specifications for trail width, slope, materials, bridge construction, etc. for multiple trail types to be constructed within the City.

h. Ensure that new road and transportation improvements interfacing with planned greenway corridors accomodate greenway accessibility and promote connectivity.

7

The Center City Overview

Center City's Planning Legacy

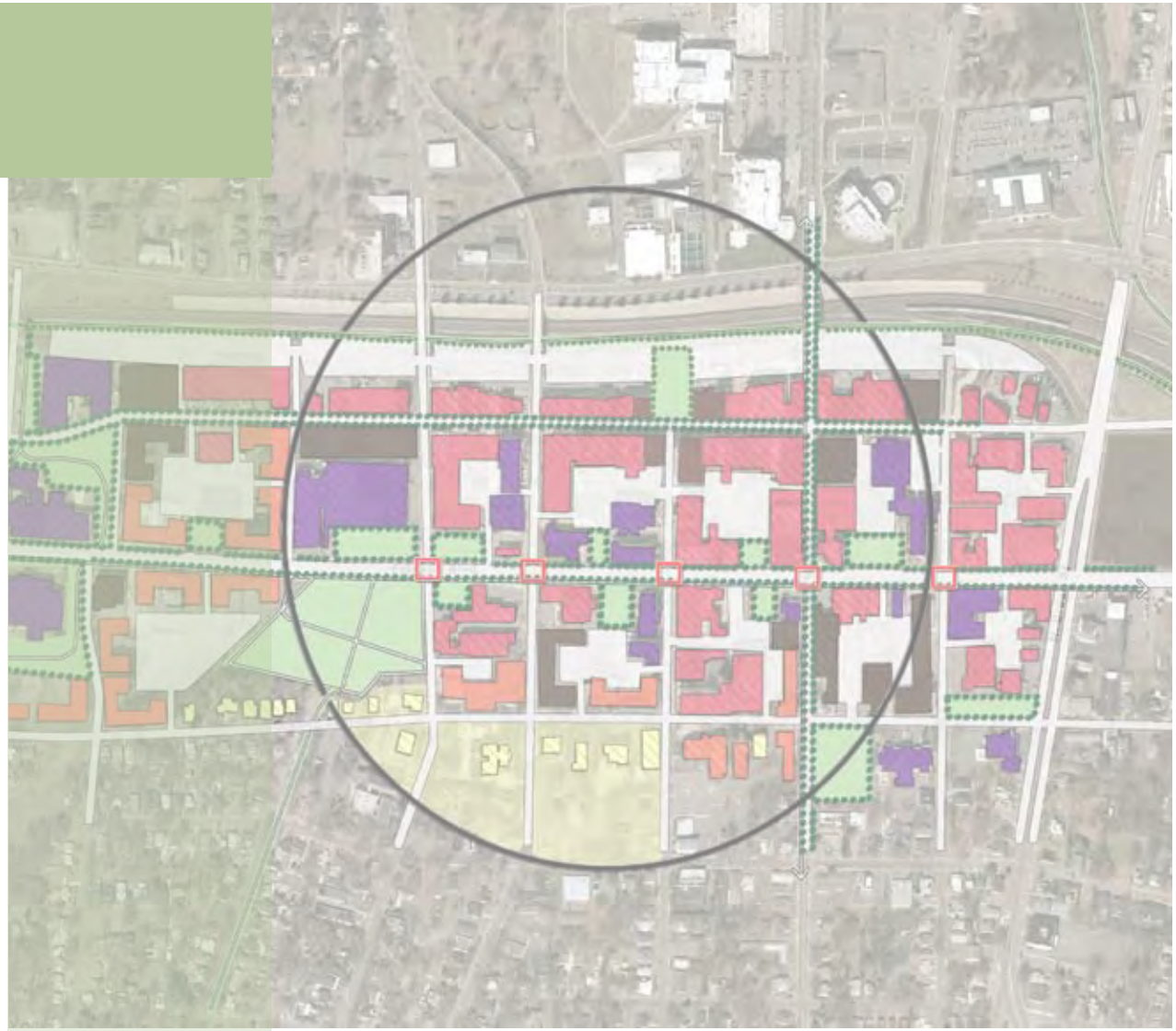
Components of the Center City

Center City Neighborhoods

Achieving the vision

Issues

Strategies & Tools



Center City

GASTONIA 2025

7 The Center City

Center City 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.

Center City is the heart of our community. It is the engine that drives our economy, and serves as the seat of commerce and government. Center City is a major source of jobs and a major producer of tax revenue, which helps to fund public improvements and services citywide.

The Center City area is more than just the core business and retail blocks normally thought of as downtown. Center City includes nearby neighborhoods that provide workers and consumers for downtown businesses, and that can help provide the synergy needed for Center City to become the destination we envision.

Center City defines who we are as a city. It reflects the health of the city as a whole. Without a strong and vital Center City, the City of Gastonia is just another sprawling, poorly defined, suburb of Charlotte.

The Center City Overview

A strong and vibrant downtown followed by healthy urban neighborhoods is essential to the economic viability of the City. A strong and vital Center City serves to attract new businesses and residents into the area. Whether a business locates downtown, or in another area of the Center City, the vitality of Center City Gastonia and the amenities that it offers are important quality of life assets that influence a business' decision to locate in the area. Today's successful downtowns do not try to compete with regional shopping centers, but seek to provide visitors and residents with a completely unique, authentic experience, based on the "sense of place" that a historic downtown can offer. This includes becoming a destination for tourism, shopping, living, and recreating. Producing this sense of place requires attention to streetscapes, entryway's into downtown, building design, and pedestrian movement. 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.

Evoking a Sense of Place Downtown

It's a warm summer afternoon and the streets of downtown Gastonia are full of people walking in and out of specialty shops. Some are eating lunch at outdoor cafés, while others chat on sidewalk benches. There is live music at the Rotary Pavilion Park and people are basking in the sun, reading books and jogging with their dogs through the park that connects to the nearby greenway. Others are purchasing items from street vendors as children sit around a large water fountain enjoying ice cream from a local shop. Business professionals enjoy their favorite drink while sitting in a main street coffee shop surfing the Internet via wireless access. Also, guests in town for a regional conference at the downtown conference center are debating about where to eat given the variety of nearby restaurants to choose from. All the while, those who live in the upper floors of the surrounding buildings are taking in the sights of downtown and enjoying the wonderful view of Crowders Mountain.

This vision evokes a 'sense of place'—a unique place that is unlike anything found in the City. This Center City serves Gastonia and the region as a destination for lodging, conference facilities, dining, performing arts, festivals and other special events. Immediately adjacent to the Center City core, or downtown, would be a complementary ring of older established neighborhoods with historical architecture, parks, recreation and greenway connections, with tree lined streets in vibrant historic neighborhoods.

This vision is merely a snapshot of what the future can be and is dependent upon several variables—many beyond the direct control or influence of the City. To make this vision of Center City a reality and to achieve long-term economic vitality and sustainability, the public and private sector will have to work together and they will have to be creative. It will require the City to forge partnerships with downtown property owners and regional and national developers. The collective vision for the Center City is intended to provide a functional framework to guide redevelopment and implementation of policies and decisions that promote:

Picture it...a vibrant downtown with popular cafe's, restaurants, pedestrians and cyclists, using downtown amenities at night and on the weekends.

- Economic vitality that will attract and support a wide diversity of business opportunities Downtown,

Main Avenue through the ages

1900

1920

1950

1980

- Developing and maintaining a sense of place;
- Balanced and responsible urban design, planning and development;
- Protection of the City's historical, cultural and natural resources;
- Reinforcing Downtown's traditional role as the civic, governmental, retail, and commercial core of Gaston County;
- Vibrant central city neighborhoods, consisting of distinct districts where a diverse population lives among a exceptional architecture, intimate streetscapes, and quality open spaces;
- A safe and efficient multi-modal transportation system;
- Authenticity in the scale, design and appearance of new development and uses in Downtown with Gastonia's heritage; and,
- Pedestrian-friendly environments where the safety and comfort of downtown pedestrians, workers and Center City residents is the determining factor in land improvement and infrastructure decisions.

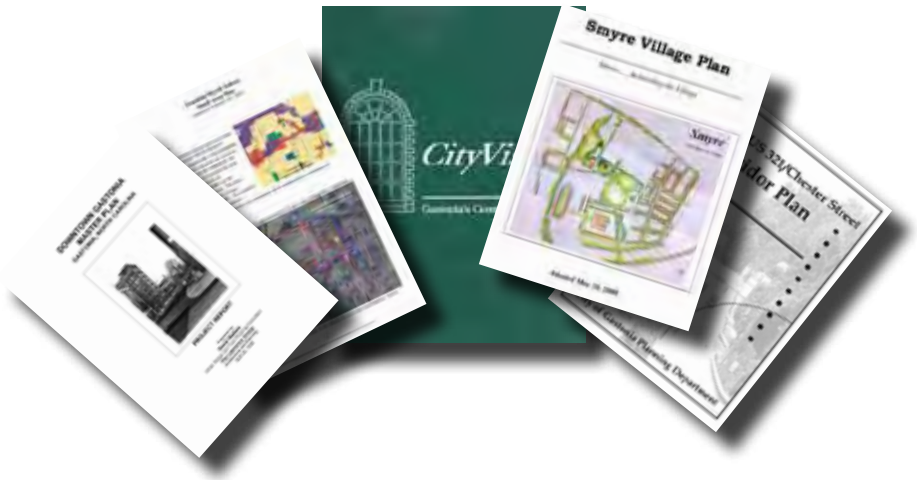
This chapter describes and illustrates the key aspects that will make Gastonia's downtown a special place for residents and visitors alike. This chapter also addresses the major issues facing the Center City and identifies the goals and strategies that will provide clear direction for coordinating public and private decisions regarding how each of the issues should be addressed in order for the Center City to reach it's full potential.

The Decline of the Central City

Like most historic urban core communities throughout North Carolina and the South in general, Gastonia's Center City has suffered serious social, economic, and physical problems over the past several decades. The affects created by a changed economic market has created a list of urban problems such as a shrinking business district, diminished sense of community pride, and urban sprawl. The decline of the central city began in the 1950s when population began to slowly shift into suburban areas. The supply of vacant land within the city dwindled and transportation technology opened peripheral farmland to urban development. As Post-World War II economic and demographic expansion fueled the demand for housing, a nation of urban renters quickly became a nation of suburban homeowners.

This shift accelerated in the 1970s, and peaked in the 1980s. The middle class, in large measure, moved to the suburbs. Ringed by affluent suburbs, the central city was virtually the only place open to the poor. Central city, once a place where affluent neighborhoods and working class mill communities thrived, became neighborhoods left vacant and often neglected. Sensitive to the location of affluence, retail trade soon followed the population to the booming suburbs. In the mid 1990s, the advent of big-box retailers, and most significantly, the collapse of the North Carolina textile manufacturing industry further lead to a declining central city. In fact, North Carolina lost 213,000 manufacturing jobs between 1994 and 2003.

The consequences for central cities has been catastrophic with many in fiscal distress. As their tax bases shrink, many cities struggle to cope with aged and obsolete infrastructure, and the service demands of an increasingly dependent population. The problems facing central cities have proved extremely difficult to solve.



Center City's Planning Legacy

Gastonia's municipal leaders and community stakeholders have provided the framework for stimulating redevelopment efforts in the Center City. Indeed, the municipal government has a long history of planning for downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, having commissioned many studies over the past few decades, which not only include downtown redevelopment plans, but neighborhood revitalization planning, and most recently the Franklin Boulevard Corridor Master Plan. Each plan set the stage for specific improvements and many were accomplished.

Early Beginnings

Established in the early nineteenth century, downtown Gastonia was the primary commercial district and was home to the City's banks, retail merchants, and grocery stores, restaurants, churches, hotels, theaters, and government offices. The City's primary employers were located in and around downtown and many relied on the nearby railroad as a means for receiving and shipping goods. Neighborhoods such as York Chester, Highland, and Oakland, developed around the central commercial district thus giving residents easy pedestrian access to shopping and employment.

In the 1960s, when the goal of city planning was securing federal subsidies to compensate for market failure, the storyline often was a depressing tale of deterioration, poverty and loss. The effects of the 1954 tax-reform bill were soon felt when social policy established a strong preference for new construction, and left existing buildings to deteriorate. Many builders rushed to put up shopping malls, motels and office complexes within open suburban areas. These effects reached Gastonia during the late 1970s. The city attempted to address those effects by adopting the City's first Redevelopment Plan, which was amended in 1976 and followed by the establishment of a Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Reconditioning area in 1985. The plan allowed for the creation of a loan pool and the use of façade incentives. The land-use plan included the railway relocation, parking improvements, and the creation of the Bradley Bus Transfer Center. The general purpose of that plan was to encourage the rehabilitation of existing buildings.

However, the population and commercial shift to the suburbs continued into the 1990s as downtown Gastonia saw a continued decline in retail and office activity as businesses and residents moved out of the Center City. Many of the successes of the 1985 redevelopment strategy

Recent Center City Public Re-Investment Strategies

Establishment of the Downtown Development Corporation
Main Street parking lot improvements
Decorative street lighting
"The Standard" parking lot
City code amendments regarding downtown uses
Rehabilitation of former County Courthouse
Two locally designated historic districts established
Center City and Loray Mill Village National Register historic districts established
West Franklin Boulevard and North US 321 streetscape improvements
Potential Center City grocery store site purchased
Oakland Neighborhood design district established
Hotel Conference Center Strategy initiated.

Figure 7-1: The Downtown Master Plan, 1999

Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

were evident in public projects. As was true for most commercial and retail developers in the country, the focus was on developing new indoor shopping centers, such as Eastridge Mall and strip malls, and "power centers," such as Franklin Square. This type of development contributed to significant economic disinvestment in the Center City. As downtown stores lost their customer base, they were either forced to close or to relocate to the new shopping centers. To a lesser extent, downtown office space also relocated to suburban employment centers. As the flight from downtown progressed, the community leaders and business stakeholders of Gastonia began to identify revitalization issues and worked to strengthen the Center City with some success.

Downtown Master Plan

In 1999, the City of Gastonia, with the assistance of urban designers, conducted an intensive 'design charette' in which City residents, and downtown stakeholders provided input on the process of downtown revitalization. Through this process, the Downtown Gastonia Master Plan was developed. It established a clear and practical vision to revitalize the residential, business, and civic environment through recommended changes in policy and the development of design standards.

The prevailing issues discovered during the 1999 planning process were that the downtown area failed to provide a healthy pedestrian environment, and that disinvestment coupled with well intended improvements of the 1970s and 1980s, had lowered downtown's capacity for attracting new businesses and customers. The public realm had been redesigned around the automobile and the result was the degrading of the central city. The main concepts, as developed by the community, that helped to guide the redevelopment of downtown were:

- Focus on Main Street,
- Reuse old buildings,
- Address parking issues,
- Endorse mixed-use,
- Encourage pedestrian orientation,
- Design of new infill buildings, and,
- Improve connections.

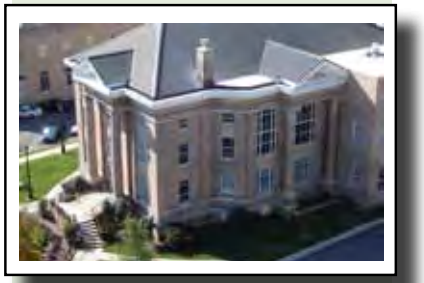
Since the adoption of the 1999 plan, the Center City has become an ideal place for retail and restaurant investment, rehabilitation of historic districts and redevelopment planning in the nearby mill villages. Many of the success have come in the form of both private and public initiatives. Sucessfull projects include:

- Establishing Downtown Gastonia, Loray Mill, and York-Chester Neighborhood as National Register Historic Districts.
- Establishing Brookwood as a local Historic District. Contributing structures to the district are eligible for State and Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits.
- The formation and strong presence of the Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation.
- Redevelopment Plan for the Lorary Mill Village, which has two phases. Phase One will include 176 loft apartments for rent, offices, restaurants, public storage and light retail, and Phase Two will include 100 for-sale condominiums.
- Renovation of the 1911 Historic County Courthouse, now known as the "James Garland Center."
- City Council passed ordinances allowing outdoor dining and sidewalk vending.
- In September 2010, the City Council adopted the Downtown Streetscape & Public Realm Plan, a comprehensive vision for the streets, sidewalks, greenways, parks and other public areas in Downtown Gastonia.
- Created a pedestrian plaza along Main in front of the Rotary Pavilion creating an enhanced public gathering and outdoor event space with unique public art / water feature. This area is a focal point of an outstanding South Street terminal vista.
- Updated Downtown Design Standards.
- The Oakland Neighborhood design district was established.
- West Franklin Boulevard and North US 321 streetscape improvements.
- Revitalization of "the Standard," the first mixed-use development in downtown. This project was named after the old Standard Hardware building, and houses Gastonia Downtown Development's offices and loft-style apartments.
- Increased interest from the development community.

Most recent activities include:

- **The Cotton Company historic building.** Adaptive re-use for restaurant tenant and other uses. Approximately 10,000 square feet.
- **Historic Craig and Wilson Building**. About 30,000 square feet. Partial exterior renovation, marketing for tenants.
- **Renovation of the Former Luxury Fabrics Building.** Approximately 10,000 square feet historic building.
- **Former Morris Jewelers Building.** Marketing for historic renovation and upfit to suit tenant.
- **The Historic Webb Theater on South Street.** Adaptive re-use for restaurant. af the Webb Theater
- **Renovation and upfitting of the Hasanni Building Complex.** Phase I will have 20,000 square feet currently under renovation for pre-leased tenants. Phase II will have 21,000 square feet.
- **Moore and Stewart Building.** Historic building marketing for renovation and upfit to suit tenant. 17,000 square feet.

Recent projects and activity in rehab and re-investment



James B. Garland Center

Redevelopment Plan for the Loray Mill Village

Center City Strategic Redevelopment Plan

Southeast Aerial Perspective

Northeast Aerial Perspective

2008 Strategic plan: A focused approach to Downtown redevelopment

Gastonia has taken steps to make downtown the 'heart' of the community, where visitors and residents alike can walk, shop, dine, recreate, be entertained, and engage in a mix of cultural, social, economic, and civic activities. However, the central city continues to lack basic retail services and is yet to be a vibrant place where people congregate daily. This weakens our ability to attract new businesses, frustrates the current populace, and harms the community image and identity.

The City Council decision to move forward with the Strategic Redevelopment Plan in downtown sends a clear message that the Center City's success is closely linked to the overall success of the City as whole. This path towards redevelopment is critical especially since earlier forecasts suggest that the study area's population is expected to increase by 46% from 2005 to 2035. In fact, Gastonia has seen a steady increase in the number of households and, as mentioned in the Housing & Neighborhood Chapter, the majority of those new households were established in auto-dependant neighborhoods located in the east and southeast planning areas. An increase in population will certainly serve as a catalyst for an increase in the number of related activities such as retail, recreation, entertainment, transportation, social services and housing.

In March 2008, the City of Gastonia began implementation of the Strategic Redevelopment Plan for downtown. The Strategic Redevelopment Plan is a bold economic and place-making initiative for the City of Gastonia that aims to develop the Center City as a regional destination for arts and entertainment, dining, post-secondary education, supportive specialty retail, civic and office uses, and housing. The hotel-conference center project, and the arts and entertainment district, will be facilitated by an aggressive strategy of public-private partnership opportunities. Today, there are probably more significant and contributing private revitalization projects underway, or starting, than at any other time since the decline of downtown as the City's retail center in the mid-1970's. Nevertheless, the City desires the process of revitalization and economic restructuring to occur at a faster pace while both reinforcing and capitalizing on the emerging momentum.

The plan identifies a limited and focused series of strategic initiatives to effectively 'catalyze' Center City revitalization.

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

The revitalization approach for the Center City strategically focuses efforts and resources on the creation of successful, regional destination venues for lodging, conferences, business training, banquets, dining, performing arts, night-life, entertainment, post-secondary education, the production and sale of fine arts, crafts and antiques, and cultural and heritage-based tourism experiences. This strategy will tap into the market of the Charlotte Region, introducing new people and new spending to Gastonia. Further, it will generate a greater "sense of place" and affinity for downtown. The plan has three near-term public-private projects (or project clusters) to catalyze the Arts and Entertainment District:

- **Conference Center** - This project consists of a City-owned conference center of 10,000 to 12,000 net square feet of appropriately configured meeting space and a 300-space parking deck/garage. A grand ballroom could seat 500 in a theater setup or 350 for a banquet. Plans call for six smaller rooms for breakout sessions and a 4,000-square-foot lower gallery. The facility will be financed by a combination of city hotel tax receipts, municipal service district revenue and proceeds from parking fees at the planned garage.

- **212 West Main Avenue as a Dining Destination** - The City seeks to facilitate the renovation of the County property, the historic former Citizens National Bank Building. The building, most recently used as the County Administrative Center, has about 42,000 square feet and is in very good condition. The City envisions this National Register property being converted to a major, regional dining destination.

- **Webb Theater Reborn** - The adaptive reuse of this city-owned film theater for sale and transfer to the private sector for restoration as a restaurant venue with possible nightlife components. A few steps from the Conference Center site, the theater also holds the potential to enhance the downtown dining exprience. This National Register property is partially renovated, and in good structural condition.

In addition, the plan has a number of place - making and physical enhancement strategies that include coordination with public and private institutions. The idea behind many of these initiatives is to create an atmosphere where there is a consistent flow of people into the downtown area thus creating a pedestrian friendly environment. Activities include:

Gaston College Downtown Center - The City desires to coordinate with Gaston College to locate a satellite post-secondary educational center in the downtown area. Downtown would be a desirable location for curriculum outreach programs geared to mid-career adults, particularly for evening-hour offerings.

Relocation of Salvation Army and Homelessness Outreach - The City plans to work with the Salvation Army to relocate its shelter, and its program of homelessness outreach and support services, from the current Broad Street location to a new accessible location outside the downtown area.

Graphic representation of proposed Conference Center

Conceptual photo enhancement of the 212 N Main Avenue property facing the Rotary Pavilion.

Public gathering and outdoor event space created at the South Street and Main Avenue terminus

Relocation of Chamber of Commerce Headquarters to Downtown - The City should encourage and assist, to the extent possible, the physical relocation of the Chamber of Commerce facility to Downtown Gastonia.

Pedestrian Enhancement of Marietta Street - The City has prepared plans and expects to implement near-term a series of improvements to Marietta Street between Franklin Boulevard and the County Courthouse and other County offices at Long Avenue and Marietta Street.

Program for Street Furnishings and Public Art - Through its nationally recognized, award-winning Keep America Beautiful program and other community organizations, the City plans to establish a program to gain private support for the acquisition and installation of standardized street furnishings and to support the commission and acquisition of public art, which compliments the development of the downtown arts and entertainment district.

Enhancement and Development of Downtown-Based Public Transportation to include the following:

- Center-City Circulator Trolley Bus - Once there is a major destination point downtown such as the conference center or 212 West Main dining destination, and the opening the Historic Loray Mill Project occurs (residential and commercial), the City plans to initiate a circulator transit component to interconnect downtown locations and the Historic Loray Mill.

- Old P&N Rail Corridor and Multi-Modal Transit Center - A short line rail operator has been tentatively selected by NCDOT to operate freight and passenger service over a state-owned out-of-service rail line, which connects the downtowns of Gastonia and Charlotte over a corridor separate, different and apart from the Norfolk Southern main. This operator's vision includes establishing freight, dinner passenger trains and eventually commuter rail between the two city centers. The City of Gastonia plans to work with an operator of the former P&N line to facilitate the development of passenger service. Furthermore, the City has an initial study on the development of a multi-modal Transportation Center at the western terminus of the P&N located downtown at Broad and Main. The City expects such a center to include Gastonia Transit, Charlotte (CATS) express buses, Amtrak, Greyhound, and eventually commuter rail to Charlotte and supportive mixed-use private development.

Improve the U.S. 321/I-85 corridor - Attract a grocery store to city-owned property at U.S. 321 and Rankin Avenue. The Corridor has been designated for economic investment incentives through the State's Urban Progress Zone program.

The City will continue to focus investment in the form of streetscape improvements along the North US 321 Corridor as it continues to grow in profile and importance as a gateway into the Center City.

Sims Park - Seek a public private venture for an enhanced, high visitation sports venue.

Rankin Lake Park and Greenway Connection - The renovation and enhancement of this treasured historic park facility will be a top priority for parks and recreation capital improvements. In summer 2008, the City began construction of Phase I of a Rail-Trail/Greenway to connect Downtown Gastonia to Rankin Lake Park. The City also has bicycle and pedestrian plans for the connection of Downtown to its existing greenway based at Lineberger Park, one-half mile southeast of downtown.

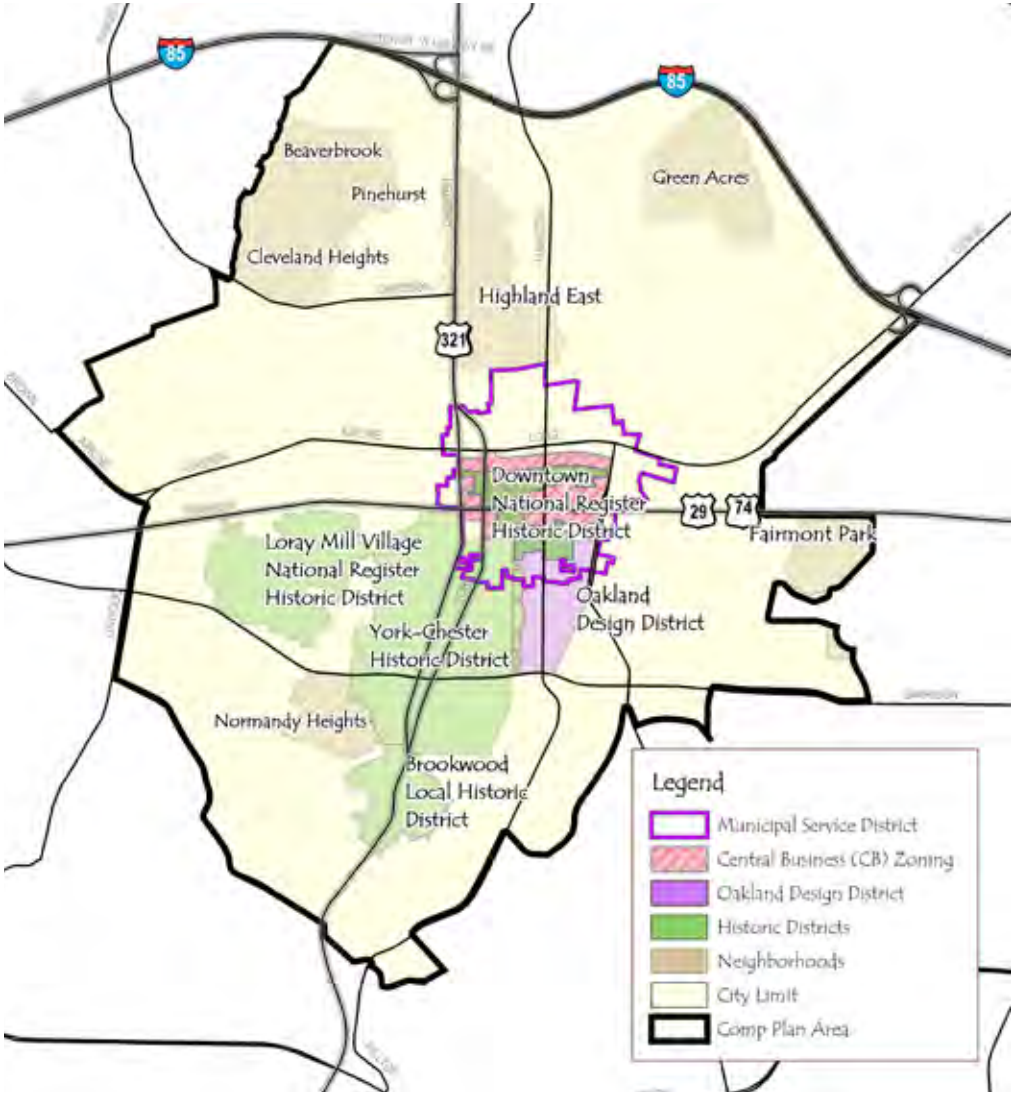
This vision recognizes the importance of place, space and people. It also recognizes the significant advantage a strong core provides in a highly competitive global economy. A strong Center City represents smart growth at its best, fighting regional sprawl and building a sustainable economy and community. This vision for the Center City places emphasizes on creating a vibrant place which focuses on building homes, businesses and public facilities on unused and underused lands within existing urban areas. Infill development is the key to accommodating growth and redesigning our cities to become environmentally and socially sustainable.

Increased infill development can be an effective antidote to sprawl and offers needed alternatives in both housing and lifestyle. Infill, redevelopment and reuse of vacant and underused parcels can be an economical way to decrease traffic, and promote walking by reducing walking distances and supporting transit use. Large-scale infill development can take even more advantage of transit and other measures to reduce travel demand through mixed-use development.

The development of vacant and underused sites within the Center City will have the following fiscal and social benefits:

- Making better use of urban land supplies while reducing consumption of forest and agricultural land.
- Increasing access to jobs, and jobs to labor force.
- Reducing the time, money, energy, and air pollution associated with commuting and other use of single occupant automobiles.
- Strengthening real estate markets and property values, and renewing older neighborhoods and housing stock.
- Supporting unique cultural, arts, educational and civic functions, such as museums, opera, sports, and universities.
- Making better use of existing infrastructure and lowering costs of public services such as: transit, sidewalks, water and sewer, school, and public safety (police, fire, ambulance).
- Replacing brownfields and abandoned industrial areas with functioning assets adding to socioeconomic diversity.

Figure 7-2: Components of Center City: Neighborhood Boundaries and Districts



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Components of Center City

An economically healthy central city contains a mixture of traditional institutional and civic uses, as well as commercial, office, retail, entertainment, and residential uses. Each of these uses works together to drive the local economy, ensuring that it is strong and healthy. It is important to understand these components and the unique contributions each makes to Gastonia's economy. The section below provides a brief analysis of the existing variety of land-use, activities, and attractions and discusses the missing elements that together will help realize the vision of creating an economically viable energetic 24-hour destination center.

Orientation

Center City is defined as the downtown area and the surrounding older established neighborhoods as shown in Figure 7-2. The sector contains 3000 acres or, over three-square miles.

The Center City has undergone changes in land use, transportation, building condition and use. The Center City has had declines in retailing, industry and population, but it remains the focal point of Gastonia's transportation network and the center of governmental and financial services.

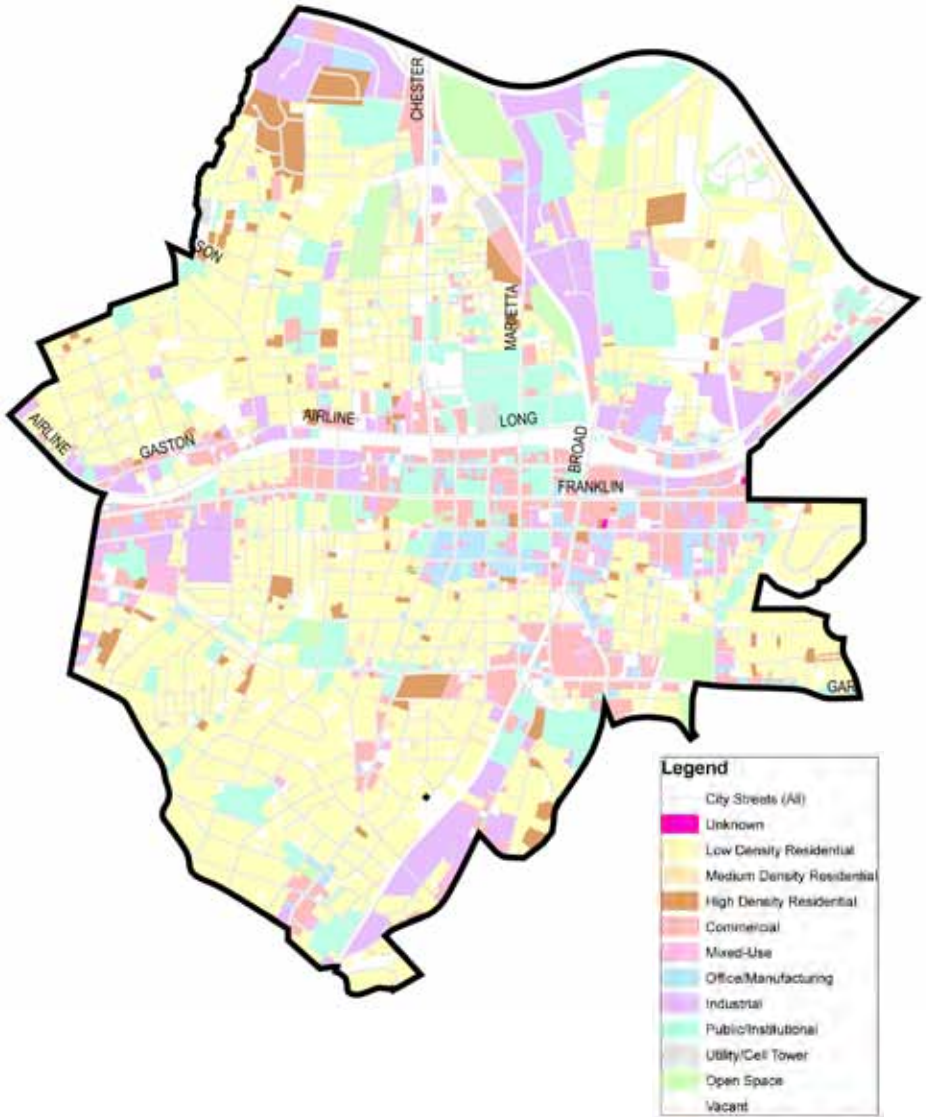
Although much of the district is residentially developed, the downtown area is the core of Gastonia's central area and the Gaston region as a whole. There are also many cultural, institutional, recreational, banking, and

governmental services within the Center City. According to U.S. Census Bureau figures, in 2000 there were 13,467 people living in the Central City. Recent estimates indicate the current population of the Center City is 15,221 and is expected to grow to 17,220, or by 14%, by 2035. The growth can be attributed to a renewed interest to live in downtown and Baby Boomers moving into the Center City.

Figure 7-3 illustrates the breakdown of current land uses in the Center City by individual parcels. Nearly half, or 43 percent, of all property in Center City is used for general residential housing, while roughly half of the land is utilized for retail, office or industrial businesses. This generally indicates a balance between commerce activities and residential uses within the heart of Gastonia.

Community-enhancing amenities such as grocery stores, libraries, schools, hospitals, places of worship, key government buildings, including post offices, city hall, court buildings, police and fire stations, museums, performance halls and public art reveals whether a neighborhood is socially and culturally self-sustaining or if it must extend outside its boundaries for essential needs. Grocery stores, performance halls and public art are the types of amenities that are generally perceived to be lacking within the Center City. Strategic placement of these uses would also encourage or support more family-oriented residential development.

Figure 7-3: Land Use in the Center City



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Figure 7-4: Land Use Percentages in the Center City

Land Use Category	Percentage
Residential	43%
Office Centers and Health Services	29%
Public and Institutional	13%
Vacant and Undeveloped Land	13%
Industrial	11%
Commercial	10%
Transportation, Communication and Utilities	7%
Parks and Open Space	4%
Mixed-Use	3%

Beautiful large houses converted to offices along York & Chester

York Chester Square and Water Tower Place

Commercial, Industrial, & Office Uses

Downtown offices provide jobs, tax revenue, and a pool of downtown shoppers and residents. Office land use accounts for approximately 13% of the uses in the Center City. These uses are concentrated predominantly within the general area of Main Avenue and Second Avenue. There are also a number of large homes that have been converted into offices located on the main thoroughfares in the Historic District along York Street and Chester Street. These uses consist of insurance, real estate, medical, law, finance, and professional offices. There are a number of vacant offices along Main Avenue. A diversity of uses, attractions, and amenities, creating a critical mass of activity, will make the Center City even more competitive as an office location.

Commercial land use is located both downtown and as strip commercial development, primarily along Franklin Boulevard, US 321, Airline Avenue and Union Road. There are many commercial properties along Franklin Boulevard that are being redeveloped or renovated to accommodate uses more suited to today's market. Newly developed, or redeveloped, shopping centers in the Center City include York-Chester Square and Water Tower Place. Commercial buildings in the Center City have a median construction date of 1948.

The Center City has the largest concentration of office and institutional land use within the 2025 Planning Area, most of which is either in the heart of downtown or in the perimeter. The median construction date for offices is 1947.

Industrial and warehouses occupy the smallest amount of land in the Center City, although they have a visual impact that exceeds their actual use of land. The median construction date for industrial and warehousing facilities is 1954, with little new industrial and warehouse construction since about 1970. Residential land use is located throughout the Center City, constituting the primary land use on most local streets.

In January 2004, 46 acres within the Center City commercial area were designated as a National Historic District with 77 buildings listed as contributing structures and eligible for state and federal tax credits. The City has also made available development incentives for commercial and residential adaptive reuse and new construction within the Center City.

Public & Institutional

Historically, public, institutional, and cultural uses have been located predominantly in the Center City. Central cities are the traditional central gathering places for a community. To establish the Center City as a focal point for the community, it must become a central stage for civic and social events. Within the Center City, approximately 13% of all uses are public and institutional uses such as city and county government offices, the U.S. Post Office and seven Gaston County public schools. The City of Gastonia has its central offices in the historic 1926 City Hall. The City also uses the 1911 Courthouse as a one-stop business and development Center. After being destroyed by fire in 1998, it was revitalized and renamed the James B. Garland Municipal Business Center. The City also uses several buildings on South Street and Second Avenue for administrative offices. Gaston County's main administrative office is on Main Avenue. The City Police Department is also located in the Center City, one block west of the courthouse on Long Avenue. The County has several buildings in the Center City, including a courthouse and jail campus located on Marietta Street, just north of

downtown, the Department of Social Services, which is located across the street, the county administrative building on Main Avenue, and the county police headquarters located on Franklin Boulevard.

Civic uses should continue to be located in the Center City. Having civic uses downtown will provide the community with a central location for government offices and makes doing business in Gastonia easy and accessible to residents. The presence of these organizations in the Center City significantly increases the daytime population and provides downtown businesses with a daytime market. Other significant civic uses in the Center City include: The Gaston Chamber of Commerce, and the YMCA Adult Recreation Center.

Cultural Uses & Activities

The vision for downtown Gastonia includes the Center City as the location for community events such as festivals, concerts, parades, and the performing arts. In order to create an environment for creative and cultural activities we must stenghthen the local arts community and increase the number of venues and cultural resources within the Central City. Festivals, special events and performances are held frequently in downtown. Some of the events and activities that currently take place in the Center City include:

Downtown Alive

Possibly the most notable downtown event is the Downtown Alive Summer Concert Series held at the Rotary Centennial Pavilion each summer. The Downtown Alive Summer Concert Series was established in 2002 by the Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation (GDDC) and brings locally favorite bands to downtown from May through September. Over the years, the concert series has grown from an average of approximately 1200 attendees per concert to 2000. Overall, Downtown Alive brings 25,000 – 30,000 people to downtown each summer.

Run for the Money

The Community Foundation of Gaston County holds its annual Run for the Money event in downtown Gastonia. This large fund-raising event brings non-profit agencies and churches, businesses, schools, and residents from all over Gaston County to downtown Gastonia to participate in a 5K run or a 2K walk to raise money to help advance the mission of participating community organizations. The Run for the Money event is a fun-filled day full of food, contests, and karaoke.

Unity Place

Located in the historic First Baptist Church (now home to St. Stephen's AME Zion Church) on West Franklin Boulevard, Unity Place is considered the center of arts in Gaston County and is an excellent example of mixed-use development. The center provides:

- Office space for The United Arts Council of Gaston County,
- Classroom and storage space for Gaston Dance and Gaston Dance Theatre,
- Rehearsal room for the Gaston Choral Society, and,
- A studio and meeting space for the Gaston County Art Guild

Unity Place uses other rooms in the church, such as the Sanctuary, the Chapel, the Dining Hall, and the Education Building when they are not in use by worshippers.

Downtown Alive concert event

School of Arts Visual Art Class

Little Theater of Gastonia

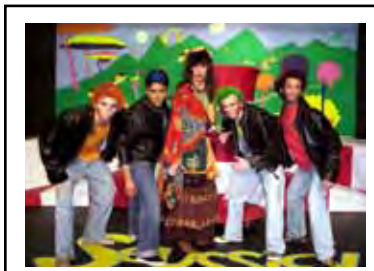
The Little Theater of Gastonia is located just west of downtown at the border of the York-Chester Historic District on South Clay Street. For decades, this community theatre has produced a full season of plays using amateurs both on and behind the stage. The Little Theatre brings comedy, drama and music to the stage. Auditions are open to the public.

School of Arts Playhouse

Cultural Heritage Tourism

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines cultural heritage tourism as "traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present." It includes irreplaceable historical, cultural and natural resources. Tourism creates jobs, provides new business opportunities and strengthens local economies. The Center City area is the heart of Gastonia's cultural heritage. The area includes:

- The historic downtown,
- York-Chester, the City's first neighborhood,
- The Loray Mill Village which includes the Historic Loray Mill and the surrounding neighborhood that was built for its workers,
- The Brookwood neighborhood, the City's first 'suburb,'
- The Highland neighborhood which is the City's first African-American neighborhood,
- Other neighborhoods such as Oakland, Belvedere, and Fairmont-Craig,
- Lineberger Park, the City's central park,
- The Schiele Museum, a public institution established to promote awareness and appreciation for nature,
- Historic churches in and around downtown, and
- Commercial and institutional buildings.



Little Theatre of Gastonia

These resources provide opportunities to share Gastonia's cultural richness and showcase the City's history. Cultural heritage tourism can have a tremendous economic impact on our local economy. Economic benefits like new businesses, jobs and higher property values, tourism adds less tangible—but equally important—assets. Communities with authentic cultural resources can, with proper management of the resources, benefit in various ways. For example, cultural tourism development can:

- Provide a way for cultural exchange and understanding;
- Stimulate conservation and heritage preservation efforts;
- Revitalize traditional building and craft industries;
- Generate economic activity and local or regional development; and
- Enhance community cohesiveness and pride in cultural identity.

Perhaps the most positive benefit is promotion of community pride, which grows as people work together to develop a thriving tourist industry. An area that develops its potential for cultural heritage tourism creates new opportunities for tourists to gain an understanding of an unfamiliar place, people or time. With the arrival of visitors comes new opportunities for preservation. Well-interpreted sites teach visitors their importance, and by extension, the importance of preserving other such sites elsewhere. In addition to creating new jobs, new business and higher property values, cultural tourism can be a powerful tool used to protect our community's natural and cultural treasures and improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

Greenway Connection

Open space within a highly developed central city is not limited to natural land. It also includes the establishment of small 'pocket parks' on vacant properties. Many municipalities with recreational characteristics similar to those of Gastonia have established protected open spaces and provided visual and scenic enhancements by restoring and reusing vacant and underused properties, utility corridors or rights-of-way, or stream corridors and floodplain areas for such 'greening' efforts. It is important to use not only open spaces and parks, but also rights-of-way and vacant or abandoned building lots in commercial and residential neighborhoods. These actions create visual relief and provide for active or passive areas that can promote a sense of community. Providing pedestrian-friendly commercial areas with links to parks and scenic areas and transit stations would afford residents many of the same benefits they would gain from passive and active recreational areas.

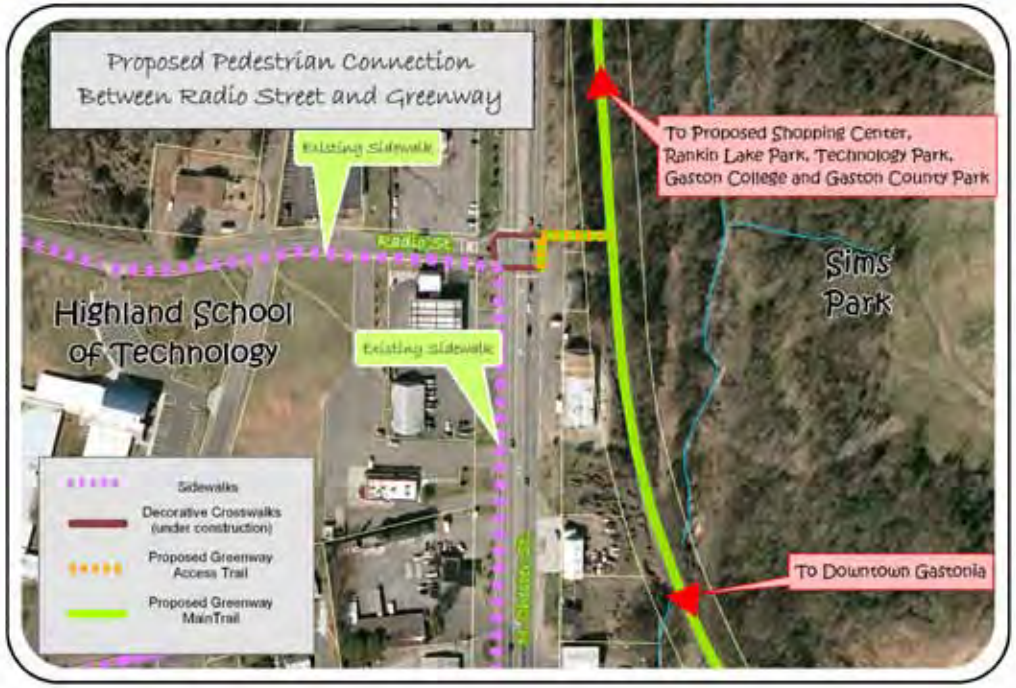
Figure 7-5: Illustration of Potential Greenway Connections in Center City

Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

As discussed in detail in the Open Space, Parks and Recreation Chapter, trails and greenways positively impact individuals and improve communities by providing not only recreation and transportation opportunities, but also by influencing economic and community development. Some benefits of having a well-planned greenway system in the Center City are:

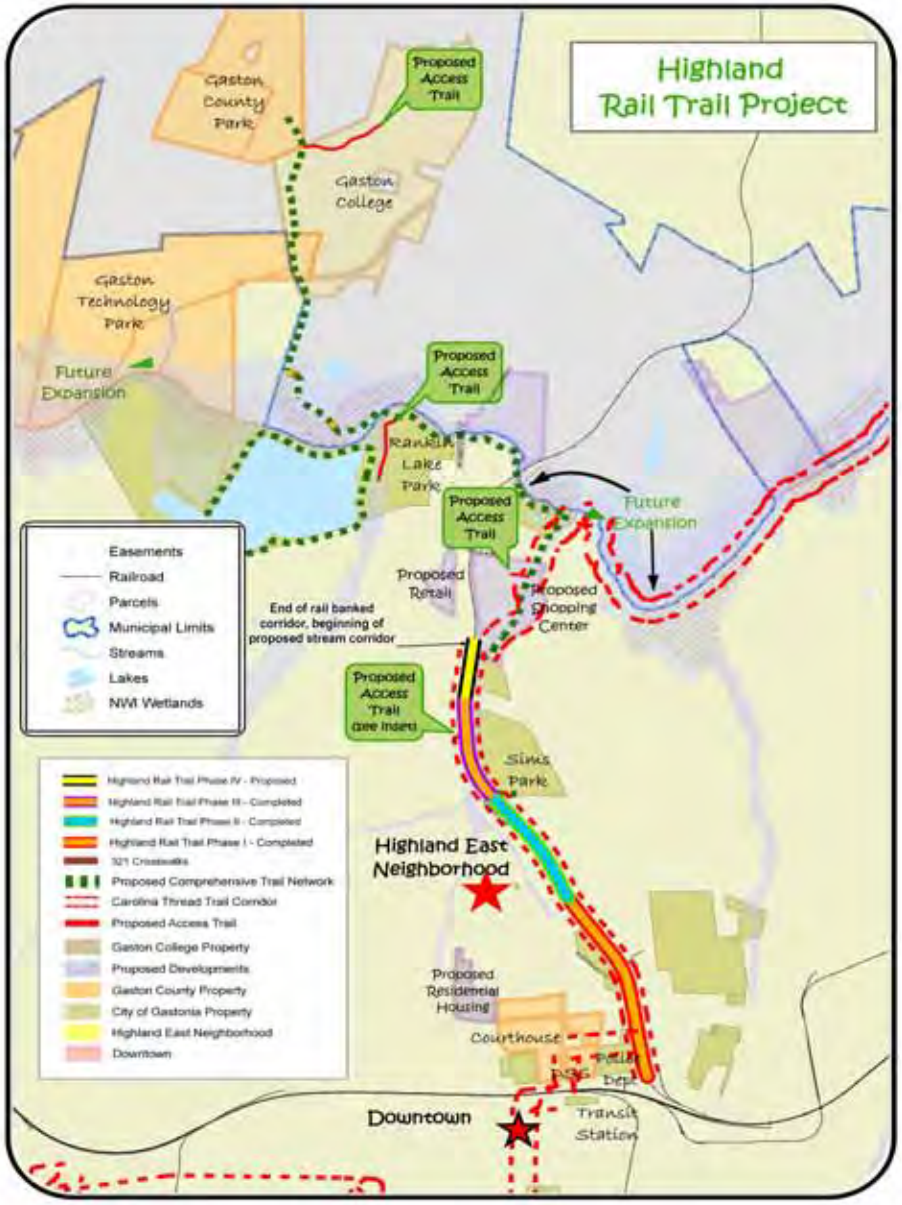
1. The establishment of the greenway system, including a multi-use trail system will provide an important element of education, natural environment conservation, passive and active recreation, alternative transportation and land-use buffering.
2. Connecting residents in older neighborhoods located around the perimeter of downtown, including the Highland Community, York-Chester, and Lineberger. Because of urban and suburban diversity, opportunities exist to create a diverse trail experience.

Figure 7-6: Illustration of On-Street Pedestrian Connections to Greenway



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Figure 7-7: The Highland Rail Trail Project is a greenway trail running along the Norfolk Southern rail line from the Police Department on Long Avenue north to Rankin Lake Road.



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

The Greenway will also serve to define the transition between the urban character of downtown and the residential character of surrounding neighborhoods.

3. Connecting existing parks and green spaces around downtown, thereby making previously underused parcels accessible for recreation and education. Addressing the future health and wellness of Gastonia's
4. increasing Center City population by providing convenient opportunities for outdoor activity and exercise.

Infill Development

Infill is building homes, businesses and public facilities on unused and underused lands within existing urban areas. Infill development is the key to accommodating growth and redesigning our cities to be environmentally and socially sustainable. Increased infill development can be an effective antidote to sprawl. It is an effective redevelopment strategy and reuse of vacant and underused parcels can be an economical way to decrease traffic, and promote walking by reducing walking distances and supporting transit use.

There are numerous opportunities for downtown development and reinvestment. The rich historic architecture, existing utility and road infrastructure network, variety of funding opportunities, and central location makes downtown a great place to establish a business. While downtown's affordable rents make it a desirable location, there are also opportunities for new, infill construction. Over the years, some downtown buildings were demolished, leaving gaps in the street façade. These gaps can, and should, be filled with new construction to maintain the building pattern.

The City should encourage new construction in addition to rehabilitation. In doing this, the City must ensure that any new structures built within downtown adhere to the design guidelines set forth in the Central Business Zoning District.

Each project should undergo an urban design review process, even if the proposed project is not receiving grant funding.

Adaptive Reuse and Mixed-Use Development

Adaptive reuse is the process of adapting old structures for new purposes. When the original use of a structure changes or is no longer required, as with older buildings, architects have the opportunity to change the primary function of the structure, while often retaining some of the existing architectural details that make the building unique. For example, an old commercial building can become a mixed-use building as in the case of the redevelopment of the former Standard Hardware Company building located at 164-172 S. South Street. Most downtown buildings were originally used for office and commercial purposes. In some cases the residential space of the merchant was often above the commercial space. Gastonia's Center City offers many opportunities to reuse existing buildings. The City encourages the adaptive reuse of these buildings through a mixture of first floor retail or office, with upper level residential space.

Sketch of proposed adaptive reuse of historic downtown building into a restaurant and outdoor courtyard.

Traditionally, people have 'lived above the store' in commercial areas. This is again become popular and has become a national trend for downtowns. These mixed-use developments are designed to get people back in the downtown. As people move back in, so too will the commercial, retail and entertainment outlets that cater to downtown and citywide residents and visitors alike. People attract people, goods and services. Currently, the Center City offers a range of housing types (rental, for-sale, condominiums, townhomes, apartments, single-family homes) and prices. The City should ensure that this continues despite market pressures. Adaptive reuse and mixed-use development opportunities in downtown should continue to be encouraged through financial incentives and public-private partnerships and investment.

Historical Design

The preservation of the historical character of the Center City is essential to the sense of place that the City wants to create through the economic redevelopment process. Downtown is zoned Central Business, referred to as the C-B district. This district is designed to accommodate uses that were traditionally found in the central city and to encourage high density, compact, urban development in a pedestrian-oriented setting. Uses such as retail, office, personal services, institutional, second-story residential, high-rise and high-density residential are permitted. Architectural design of buildings, landscaping, and signage is critical to the character of downtown; the C-B district is subject to urban design standards containing both mandatory and voluntary site, building and sign standards intended to preserve the unique architectural and historic character of the downtown area.

Existing development along West Franklin Boulevard – Loray Mill Area.

Computer photo manipulation indicating potential street enhancement and infill development.

Some cities employ a bike patrol as a safety presence in downtown.

In 2010 the City updated the design standards for the downtown area to apply reasonable and clearly described design standards through a design review process. Such standards are necessary to ensure renovation and new development are in harmony with the unique character of the downtown environment. The updated design standards address the need to protect downtown character and new investment.

Vacant Buildings

There are a number of vacant buildings in downtown. Vacant storefronts can make the street environment seem unsafe and unfriendly. They also detract from the progress made by adjacent storefronts that have undergone renovations. In order to provide a sense of safety for residents and visitors, and to increase the aesthetic appeal of downtown, vacant storefronts should be decorated using lighting and colorful displays until renovations are complete or the storefronts are reoccupied.

Mobility and Connectivity

Downtown is disconnected from Center City neighborhoods by a street network that is unfriendly to pedestrians, as well as the railroad tracks. There is also a lack of alternative transportation options for traveling in and around the Center City. Getting people from Center City neighborhoods to downtown quickly and efficiently is critical to the 'downtown experience' of Gastonia. When people are able to walk, ride bicycles, drive, and use public transit to travel around downtown and into the adjacent neighborhoods, quickly and easily, they are more likely to enjoy downtown and want to frequently visit or live in the Center City. As this happens, commercial and retail development follows. Thus, a multi-modal Center City is necessary for stimulating both residential and commercial development and tourism in the Center City. The City should invest in a multi-modal circulation system plan for the Center City that takes into account:

- Intersection and streetscape improvements,
- Improvements to the street network,
- Greenway connections,
- Parking,
- Proposed bus "trolley", and,
- Multi-modal transit.

Safety

Perception of safety is as important as actual safety. Some people feel downtown is unsafe. Vacant storefronts and an unfriendly pedestrian environment contribute to this perception. However, this is merely a perception and untrue. According to Gastonia Police crime statistics, crime in the downtown area is minimal compared to the city as a whole, consistently comprising only 1% of the City's crime between 2000 and 2006. Nevertheless, downtown residents and visitors must feel comfortable and safe in their environment. If downtown is to become a vibrant destination for people to enjoy shopping, recreation and dining, then the City should increase the visibility of police presence in downtown. Physical factors of the built environment which contribute to unsafe perceptions must also be addressed such as the presence of panhandlers and inadequate street lighting.

Importance of Housing

Housing is a foundation of Center City development and a key ingredient of a strong economy. Well-designed and properly located, housing brings employment districts to life after dark and provides a ready-made market for

retail and commercial ventures. Specifically, lodging and nightlife activities within the downtown area extends the cycle of activity beyond the workday. Housing located within walking and biking distance of public transit gives commuting people a choice. This creates a 24-hour urban neighborhood that is vibrant and active around the clock. The vitality created by a 24-hour downtown generates a positive image, draws increased numbers of visitors, and improves safety by providing eyes on the street. Downtown businesses benefit from a large residential base that helps to expand the market by demanding a diverse mix of products and services including retail, restaurant and entertainment facilities. Additionally, downtown residents create a constituency to take an active role in downtown growth and improvement issues.

Housing is the cornerstone of a sustainable center city economy. Communities that include housing development as part of their strategies have attracted new residents who provide stability. Blending housing with other uses creates neighborhoods and districts where people are present at all hours, a key element of crime prevention and public safety.

Also, in order for the Center City to live up to its greatest potential, one of the foremost needs is the protection of established neighborhoods. This idea was expressed during the visioning sessions held throughout the community and by the 2025 Steering Committee in their development of community goals. Residential neighborhoods are an important part of the overall quality of life and history of Gastonia. Additionally, other advantages of preserving housing in established neighborhoods include a more resourceful use of the city's aged infrastructure, expanded housing and lifestyle choices for area residents, and reduced reliance on the automobile. These benefits are magnified when a diversity of housing options are available for people of all incomes. Housing will play a key role in supporting the continued revitalization of the downtown area.

Photo illustration of the Marietta Street bridge intersection and streetscape improvements to improve safety and aesthetics for pedestrians. Improvements will be complete in 2011.

Brookwood home

York-Chester home

Proposed Gateway Village senior housing in Highland

Center City Neighborhoods

Residential Element

A large residential population is an important element of a central city's success and is often the catalyst for new retail development demands. The current housing stock lacks opportunities that appeal to all social and economic demographic groups. An attractive alternative to typical suburban development that emphasizes 'life cycle' housing, would return residents to the Center City. This objective seeks to provide housing options for all points in a person's life.

However, it has proven to be very difficult to compete with the residential and retail forces of suburban style development. New City sponsored programs and policies that make infill development more financially attractive than greenfield development will encourage redevelopment in the Center City. Policies should emphasize the importance of keeping civic uses in downtown, thus creating a destination, sense of place, and a sense that one has arrived in a special part of the City. Over the last 50 years, such factors as the advent of the automobile, post World War II federal housing finance programs, and inexpensive land prices led to expansive residential growth outside Gastonia's Center City and the development of the City's suburbs.

These neighborhoods are among the first neighborhoods established in the City. One of the primary issues for housing in the Center City is the condition of the housing as the neighborhoods age. Maintenance and conservation of the housing stock not only help keep neighborhoods stable, but also sustain an important source of affordable housing. The City is committed to providing housing in the Center City for a wide range of ages and incomes.

Neighborhood Preservation

A critically important aspect of a community's quality is its appearance, which has a profound impact upon how the City is perceived by visitors and residents alike. As discussed in the Community Appearance and Identity, community pride closely tied to housing condition. Houses in Central City neighborhoods are typically well maintained, and home improvement programs are made available for homeowners needing assistance. In addition, the City emphasizes the maintenance of neighborhood streets and sidewalks in its yearly Capital Improvements Program process. These factors combine to enhance the desirability of the Center City's neighborhoods. In 1988 and 1997 a Historic District Overlay (HD) was created for the York-Chester and Brookwood historic districts, respectively, in order to maintain and protect the historical architecture and characteristics of these neighborhoods. Because these neighborhoods have been identified as 'locally designated historic districts,' a homeowner wishing to make exterior improvements to their home must seek approval in the form of a Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the Historic District Commission or its staff.

York-Chester

The York Chester neighborhood is the City's oldest community. Consequentially, it is Gastonia's first locally designated historic district and it is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The York Chester neighborhood dates back to the late 1880s and was once home to most of the City's prominent businessmen and their families. The neighborhood is composed of over 540 structures with

an array of architectural styles and housing types, from mansions to more modest mill homes. While there are some homes that need attention, most of the historic fabric of the neighborhood has been preserved. The neighborhood is a mixture of single-family and duplex residential units. Most units are owner-occupied In addition, the street network is arranged in a grid pattern and many of the large homes located along the main thoroughfares of South York Street and South Chester Street have been converted to office space.

Brookwood

The Brookwood neighborhood is located just south of York-Chester and is the City's second locally designated historic district. Brookwood was the City's first planned suburb and was also home to many prominent Gastonians. Established in the 1930s, Brookwood's beautiful brick homes remain in excellent condition. The neighborhood has over 106 structures most of which are single-family residential dwellings constructed in the mid-1930s to late 1940s. The predominant architectural style of those single-family units vary between Craftsman, Tudor, Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional.

Proposed Loray Mill mixed-use design

Highland

The Highland neighborhood is located just north of downtown. The boundaries include Long Avenue and the railroad trench on the south, I-85 on the north, a branch of Kaylor Creek on the west and Broad Street on the east. The eastern part of the community is the 'original' Highland community, historically an African-American residential community. West of US 321 was long dominated by local hospitals and other medical professional uses. As an African-American neighborhood, Highland was starved for resources for long periods of its history. This neighborhood has been greatly affected by unsuccessful urban renewal projects of the 1960s and 1970s, including the building of the railroad 'ditch' and the County Courthouse campus, which have acted as physical barriers between the neighborhood and the downtown. Despite these adverse circumstances a strong community spirit was developed and maintained. Numerous churches acted as community focal points, and helped to organize community residents to tackle neighborhood issues. The City completed a master plan for the community in 1999. The plan was updated in 2010 to include plans for an adaptive reuse project, a commercial grocery store site, and additional affordable rental units for the elderly and disabled. The area is home to many low-income families and highway-oriented businesses along US 321.

Loray Mill Village

Loray Mill Village is located in West Gastonia just off of Second Avenue. Dominating the mill district landscape is the Loray Textile Mill, a six-story building

Some of the neighborhoods included within downtown's boundaries are:

The York-Chester Historic District

The Brookwood Historic District

Fairmont Park and Belvedere

Oakland Design District

The Loray Mill Village, National Register Historic District

The Highland Neighborhood, Gastonia's oldest African-American neighborhood.

The Firestone, Trenton, Mutual, Avon, Modena
and CDA Mill Villages.

A walk in the Highland neighborhood

Loray Mill neighborhood home

totaling approximately 600,000 square feet. The mill was constructed in 1902 and was once known as the largest mill under one roof and served the greater Gastonia area as a major employer until 1988. In 2001, Loray Mill and Mill Village were listed as a historic district in the National Register of Historic Places. The designation was unusual: it determined that the Loray Mill historic district is of national significance because of its prominence in the development of the textile industry in the South and because of the importance of the 1929 strike in American history. Because of the National Historic designation, the mill, and the historic mill housing surrounding it, are eligible for state and federal rehabilitation tax credit. Preservation North Carolina, a non-profit organization devoted to preserving buildings, landscapes and sites important to the diverse heritage of North Carolina, is working closely with the City of Gastonia to rehabilitate several mill houses on the western side of the district and is actively looking for properties to market throughout the district. The Loray Mill redevelopment project is in the final predevelopment stages. Plans for the Mill call for a mixed-use design—residential, commercial, and government offices—that will occupy the entire 600,000 square foot complex.

Clara, Dunn and Armstrong (CDA)

Named for the three mills that were once clustered in this area, this neighborhood is located adjacent to the Oakland neighborhood. Although most of the CDA mill houses have been altered since they became privately owned, they retain their original form and character. Typical modifications include replacement of window sashes; application of aluminum, asbestos, or vinyl siding; and replacement of porch posts and railings.

Oakland

Efforts to strengthen the social and economic fabric of Center City have been a priority of City Council for many years. In May 2006, City Council established the City's first 'Center City Design District' with emphasis on the Oakland neighborhood. The Oakland neighborhood lies just south of downtown Gastonia and encompasses roughly 58 acres. It is bounded to the north by Second Avenue, to the west by the York-Chester Historic District, to the south by Garrison Boulevard, and to the east by Broad Street and the Northwestern Railroad right-of-way. The streets and avenues are arranged in a grid pattern, that are well connected and encourage walking, cycling and public transport use. The majority of the land within the neighborhood is devoted to residential use, most of which was originally single-family housing. The Oakland neighborhood is dense, but all houses have compact front and back yards with narrow side yards. The dwellings are mainly one, or one and one-half, stories in height and are positioned near the street and close to one another, resulting in a harmonious rhythm of form, massing, and materials.

The design district status is not a overlay zoning district that ensures that development surrounding the Center City is done in a manner that best contributes to the economic well being and quality of life of the citizens of Gastonia. The district was created to provide an opportunity for design review of new development and redevelopment within the district. Applications for exterior work must be reviewed and approved by a Design Review Committee appointed by the City Manager. An approved application is required prior to the issuance of a building permit or other permits required for work. New development or alterations to structures within the design district are required to be harmoniously related to their surroundings, the terrain, the scale, and the architecture of existing buildings.

Other Center City neighborhoods do not have mechanisms in place to aid in protecting their historic architecture. The

historic fabric of the Center City is vital to the community, especially the revitalization of downtown. The City should actively pursue making all Center City neighborhoods locally designated historic districts, Center City design districts, or National Register Historic areas as applicable. The City should continue increased housing and nuisance code enforcement activity in these areas in order to rid the neighborhoods of public nuisances, such as cars parked on the lawn and debris and trash in yards, common in these older areas.

Neighborhood Identity

Oftentimes, it is difficult even for the most seasoned resident to determine the boundaries of one of these historically designated neighborhoods. Currently, only York-Chester and Brookwood have signage noting neighborhood entry points. Each neighborhood has its own identity and place in Gastonia's history. The City should install individualized, distinctive street name signs on each street, as well as neighborhood entry signs at entry points in each Center City neighborhood to provide easy identification of their boundaries. In addition, the City should encourage property owners who own historically significant buildings or homes to install a small, City-approved plaque in the yard or attached to the building, that briefly displays the historical significance of that home. This initiative would be very beneficial to any future cultural heritage tourism program.

York-Chester neighborhood entry point

Achieving the Vision

Future Needs & Direction

Utilizing an existing house for businesses retains existing architecturally important housing stock.

In order to create a stable, energetic 24-hour destination featuring a variety of retail outlets, cultural and civic activities, and housing opportunities in the Central City, the City will need to embrace strategies that combine efforts from both the public and private sector. The following issue areas represent the most essential needs that the city must address in order to strengthen Center City and achieve our vision.

Infill Development - Developing vacant and abandoned sites in the city's core reduces sprawl, and it is sound economic policy encouraging use and reinvestment in existing infrastructure, which lessens the fiscal impact to city services. While each Center City neighborhood is different, each provides some opportunities for infill development. Infill development should be encouraged in these areas and designed to fit the scale and look of the neighborhood. Infill development should include a variety of housing types, such as single-family homes, apartment buildings, townhomes, and condominiums. This helps to ensure that people of every household type and income range are able to enjoy Center City living. The City offers grant funding to stimulate new housing development through residential infill and rehabilitation in the Historic Housing Development Area, shown in Figure 7-8.

Public Support of Catalytic Projects - In chemistry, a catalyst is a substance that speeds up a reaction. In city building, the process is much the same. Redevelopment creates momentum for spin-off projects in its wake. In fact, some projects, because of their size, location or programming, have the potential to simulate additional investment or provide the Center City with the mixed-uses that are critical to maximizing long term economic vitality. In order for the strategic redevelopment projects to provide the spark needed for further redevelopment, they should be planned and managed to achieve maximum public support.

Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships - Better integration of public and private infrastructure and community building assets, such strategic consideration of the city's most important public and private assets, should become an explicit basis for new interventions, strategies and plans.

Housing Opportunities in Downtown - One of the most significant components of creating a vibrant downtown is a diverse mix of housing. Although the Center City has a mixture of housing types in the neighborhoods that surround downtown, there is a need to encourage and create greater opportunities for the development of moderately priced housing opportunities in the downtown area. Ensuring a diverse mix of Downtown housing will increase the presence of residents, thereby creating customers and employees for local businesses and strengthening the perception of Downtown as a safe and secure place to live.

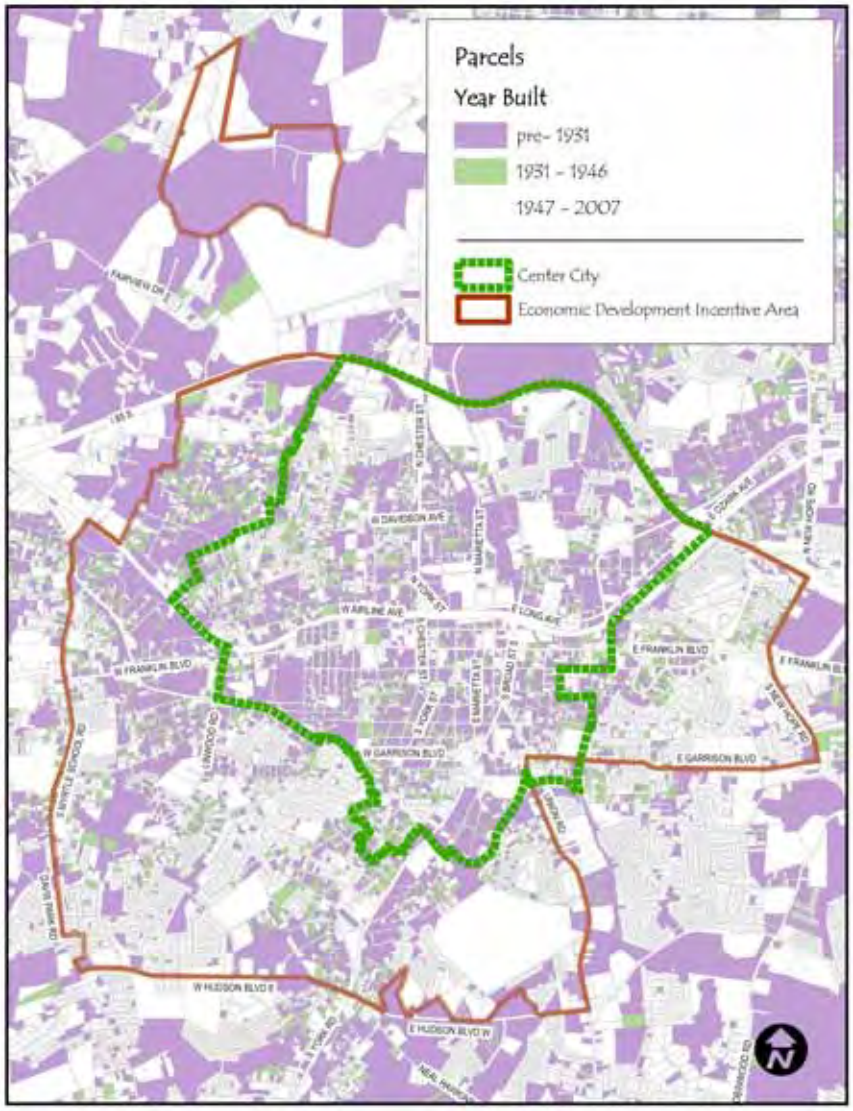
Preserving Surrounding Neighborhoods In order for the Center City to live up to its greatest potential, one of the foremost needs is the protection of the established

neighborhoods. The city should pay special attention to preserving the existing housing stock as many of Center City's housing units are located in neighborhoods that were established prior to 1960 and will likely be in need of more significant improvements. Preserving housing in the established neighborhoods is a more resourceful use of the city's aged infrastructure and it will play a key role in supporting the continuing efforts to revitalize downtown.

Placemaking - There are many areas for commercial and residential growth in the Center City. In fact, there are opportunities to create a diverse range of land uses, activities and attractions in the downtown area that will draw people into the City's core. Creating this 'place' in downtown is essential to foster economic vitality. Center City's developing areas offer the opportunity to generate new tax revenues. Success in this undertaking will require continued strategic investment.

Connected Networks – Transportation, open space, green infrastructure and community amenities should be identified and used as a deliberate basis to create great public places and community anchors. Such places should either help create or capitalize on the natural intersections of such networks. People will choose to walk if the pathways are safe, comfortable and enjoyable; if distances between destinations are deemed walkable; and, if destinations are clearly linked by a network of sidewalks and pathways. With this in mind, the city must continue to pay special attention to the quality of the pedestrian environment, and work to furnish a clear pedestrian network.

Figure 7-8: Economic Development Incentive Area in the Center City



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Networks of sidewalks and bikeways to include pedestrians and bicyclists along-side cars and buses, like this example, can be created to provide a safe, quality environment for everyone.

Increased Emphasis on History, Arts and Culture - The vitality and liveliness of the Center City depends on its historic, cultural, artistic and entertainment elements being strong and active. The 'arts, culture and history' topic encompasses the places and ways in which Gastonians pursue myriad activities that enrich their lives. Arts, cultural and historic resources are major contributors to the region's outstanding 'livability' because they encompass many of the special extras that give Gastonia its character and appealing uniqueness.

Public art and fountains, such as this piece at the South Street Pedestrian Plaza in downtown, enhance public spaces with color, sound and unique perspectives.

Fourth of July celebration at the Pavilion.

Issues

- Downtown cannot compete with suburban shopping centers, but instead should create a "sense of place" – a place unlike any other within the community that supports residential, commercial, retail, office, civic, public art, and parks and recreational space, and that celebrates the City's history.

- Several past enhancements to downtown, though well intentioned, have had the opposite effect of furthering economic decline.

- The construction of the railroad ditch has separated the Highland neighborhood from downtown and surrounding areas.

- Downtown is disconnected from Center City neighborhoods, and the railroad ditch creates a barrier to pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

- The perception of a lack of convenient parking in downtown is an issue that should be addressed through a parking plan.

- The perception that Center City is an unsafe place should be addressed by increased police visibility.

- Transportation is disjointed in the Center City; there are no links between passenger rail, City of Gastonia transit, and express bus service to Charlotte.

- Lack of residential development impedes retail and commercial development and keeps entertainment destinations from locating downtown.

- Potential investors do not know financial benefits of locating in a National Register downtown or do not view downtown Gastonia as a potential market.

- Larger development projects in downtown will require both public and private investments through a partnership approach.

- Center City neighborhoods are becoming more attractive to homebuyers and for reinvestment opportunities, due to location, historic architecture, and cost.

- Encouraging new development and reinvestment within the Center City is financially beneficial, increasing the tax base and reinvesting in existing infrastructure.

- A successful Center City operates as its own microcosm of the greater city, with residential, office, retail and entertainment accessible by multiple modes of transportation.

- A vibrant downtown requires people and people are attracted to safe unique destinations where they have access to goods and services and can be entertained.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Objectives and Tools

Objective 1.

Create a sense of place by reconnecting people to the Center City.

Tools

a. Encourage more activities. such as parades and festivals. to reestablish the Center City as a meeting place in order to support increased commercial activity and to attract new private investment.
b. Create active destination points such as parks, restaurants and entertainment venues that attract people to the Center City.
c. Develop a Conference Center in downtown, which will generate new investment and enhancement opportunities throughout Center City.
d. Enhance and expand design guidelines to ensure that the renovation of existing buildings and new construction is compatible with the scale and character of downtown.
e. Enhance the connection between established Center City neighborhoods and downtown by infilling key sites that rebuild the urban core.
f. Retain existing civic facilities such as the YMCA, Post Office, and local government offices in the Center City and locate new civic facilities in the Center City as well.
g. Facilitate and eventually require active uses such as restaurants and retail outlets on ground floors within the Central Business District.
h. Increase public safety programs to include both foot and bike patrols.
i. Reconfigure the Franklin Boulevard corridor to become Gastonia's larger main street, focusing on both the road pattern and pedestrian access to adjacent land-uses.
j. Existing neighborhoods near downtown should be strengthened through infill development, housing rehabilitation, proactive enforcement of zoning and building standards, and housing code enforcement.
k. Consider acquisition of key properties within selected districts for possible redevelopment sites.

Objective 2.

Attract a diverse range of new investments to establish the center city as the dominant economic, social, and cultural center of Gastonia.

Tools

a. Promote the use of new markets tax credits to enable reinvestment in the Center City.
b. Assist the private sector in land assemblage by making publicly-owned property suitable for targeted uses available at favorable rates.
c. Use self-financing bonds to support infrastructure improvement activities, and other activities related to the re-use of abandoned or vacant facilities, creation of affordable housing, and infill commercial development.
d. Work with the Downtown Development Corporation and the Gaston County EDC to enhance and expand the marketing program for the promotion of the current façade grant and incentive programs.
e. Promote the federal and state tax credits available for the redevelopment of National Register Historic Districts in Gastonia: Downtown, Loray Mill and York Chester.

f. Consider establishing new National Register and local historic districts in older Center City communities such as Highland and Fairmont Park-Belvedere, Armstrong Park, Oakland, and Brookwood.
h. Develop a cultural heritage tourism program in downtown and surrounding neighborhoods as a means of attracting visitors to the area, which benefits the local economy, preserves historic sites and structures, protects and celebrates Gastonia's heritage, and markets Gastonia as a great place to live, work, and play.
i. Develop a comprehensive strategy for educating the public, neighborhood residents, and the development community on Center City infill redevelopment efforts, strategies and incentives. This campaign could include public presentations, media, GTV, brochures and other outreach efforts.
j. Continually evaluate the incentive program to ensure that it contains a variety of options that provide long-term benefits and creates a Center City that is business-ready.
K. Create public-private partnerships and support existing efforts to manage ongoing Center City social issues, including graffiti, vandalism, larceny, speeding and loitering.

Objective 3.

Increase the number of people living downtown by providing choices and creating places that provide a unique experience.

Tools

a. Encourage a variety of housing types and price ranges throughout Center City.
b. Encourage well designed, high density, residential development in the downtown core.
c. Encourage upper floor residential space.
d. Encourage mixed-use developments throughout Center City.
e. Locate and encourage the development of key infill sites to rebuild the urban core.
f. Make downtown living desirable by encouraging household services such as food stores, dry cleaners, recreation facilities, and entertainment outlets to locate nearby.

Objective 4.

Ensure easy, safe and enjoyable mobility throughout Center City for cars, pedestrians and cyclists.

Tools

a. Provide an adequate circulation system for pedestrian accessibility by creating location-efficient, clustered, mixed-use patterns, and pedestrian-oriented buildings throughout Center City.
b. Update the parking plan for downtown.
c. Create visually pleasing and safe pedestrian links from downtown to the surrounding neighborhoods.
d. Consider new transportation alternatives such as a 'rubber tire trolley' or busses to serve Center City.
e. Develop an urban trail or other similar pedestrian corridor.
f. Support the development of parks, green spaces, and other neighborhood-enhancing uses on appropriately located vacant or underused lots.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

g. Build greenway connections to Sims, Lineberger, Rankin Lake Parks and all Center City neighborhoods, and other trails as indicated in the Greenway Master Plan, and connect with the Carolina Thread Trail.
h. Initiate streetscape and pedestrian improvements throughout Center City to improve pedestrian activity and support the development of housing, retail, and other services.
i. Build a safe, efficient, accessible and integrated transit center downtown that supports the interface for various transportation modes: CATS Route 85X Gastonia Express, Gaston County ACCESS, Gastonia Transit, Greyhound, Amtrak, bikes, private taxi services and shuttle services and, eventually, commuter rail to Charlotte.

Objective 5.

Ensure adequate infrastructure for existing and future development.

Tools

a. Improve coordination and communication between City departments and utility providers regarding infrastructure requirements and planned improvements.
b. Continue to develop quality streetscape amenities.
c. Assess existing and future infrastructure needs, identify necessary upgrades, and prioritize improvements.
d. Seek opportunities for public/private partnerships to fund improvements
c. Repair or construct new sidewalks where needed.

8

Introduction

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Land Use

Redevelopment Scenarios

Transportation Strategies

Issues & Opportunities

Implementation Plan & Policy Framework

Franklin Boulevard Corridor

GASTONIA 2025

Franklin Boulevard Corridor

Franklin Boulevard Corridor Master Plan Goal

The vision for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor through Gastonia is to recreate a vibrant series of mixed-use centers that define the corridor as a gateway to the community by promoting distinct, multimodal destinations that provide a sense of character, history and economic opportunity for the next 50 years of Gastonia's evolution. The Franklin Boulevard Corridor will feature highly accessible, attractive and well-connected places that strengthen adjacent neighborhoods while enhancing regional mobility for people and goods.

Introduction

The Charlotte Metropolitan Region 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 regional growth to capitalize on revitalization efforts. The impacts of growth within the 2025 Study area, and within the Franklin Boulevard Corridor in particular, will impact land use and the resulting traffic volume, generation and distribution. With the understanding of the potential impact the growth would have on the City, in August 2006, the City of Gastonia, and the Gaston Urban Area MPO, contracted with Renaissance Planning Group to prepare a corridor study and Master Plan for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.

The purpose of the corridor study and Master Plan is to integrate the land use, transportation, and urban design elements along the corridor in a manner that fosters redevelopment and improved personal mobility. The corridor is both a gateway and center to the history, culture, and economic fortunes of the City. What is now a disconnected hodgepodge of aging hotels, stately churches, fenced-off industrial uses, vacant storefronts, institutional land uses, as well as new suburban retail and residential development can be transformed into a cohesive, interconnected corridor that includes a mix of residential, commercial and open space uses that enhance surrounding areas.

The plan is a long-range 30-year vision for the corridor that will guide development and provide a framework for policy direction for future implementation and controls. The corridor did not deteriorate overnight. For a variety of economic and social reasons, it took over 40 years for the corridor to decline. With that knowledge comes the reality that positive change, which reflects the community's vision, will also not happen overnight. However, there are many relatively low cost, near-term improvements that the City, and its partners, can undertake that will serve as a catalyst to the revitalization of this important gateway that links the City's past, present and future.

The Master Plan serves as a guide for the community to complete that transformation in a manner that unifies the corridor while celebrating the unique character and history within each segment. 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. They can also serve as a source of civic pride and economic vitality within the community.

Figure 8-1: Current Development Trend along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor

Community participation is vital to the plan's success. The Master Plan was driven by the concerns, ideas and visions expressed by the public and key stakeholders at multiple meetings, personal interviews, design workshops and other forums. The three community designed workshops drew between 60 and 80 participants collectively, representing diverse interests and perspectives along this nine-mile corridor.

The input drawn from the design workshop and public forms helped to develop the community's vision and goals for the corridor. The goals set the course to further define essential characteristics key to implementing the vision of the Franklin Boulevard Corridor. While they were important in the creation of the Master Plan, they will also be important in guiding the community's efforts during implementation.

- Enhance connectivity while preserving capacity.
- Provide land use and transportation alternatives that address community values;
- Capitalize on existing character and unique assets for redevelopment.
- Create pedestrian-oriented destinations and districts.
- Maximize use of Transportation System Management strategies along the Corridor to improve safety and capacity (traffic signal system coordination and access management improvements); and,
- Increase multi-modal opportunities along the Corridor.

This is a long-range 30 year vision for redevelopment of Franklin Boulevard. This section of the Comprehensive Plan presents the summary of the findings of the Franklin Boulevard Corridor Master Plan as well as the goals and policies that are specific to the area. However, the overall 2025 Comprehensive Plan applies to the Franklin Boulevard.

Location and Context

Perhaps the most important message of the Master Plan is that the Franklin Boulevard Corridor is a significant vital component of Gastonia's economy. The Franklin Boulevard Corridor stretches approximately nine miles east to west from Redbud Drive at the municipal line shared with Lowell on the east, through downtown to the municipal line at Barney Castle Road on the west. The study area included properties within one-quarter mile of Franklin Boulevard on both the north and south side of the roadway. The Corridor serves dual functions - both as a federally designated highway (US 29/NC 79) linking Charlotte and the Piedmont region, as well as the historic center of the community, connecting different neighborhoods within the City to the downtown. The Franklin Boulevard Corridor has perhaps

An examination of vacant redevelopable lands within one-quarter mile of either side of the corridor revealed a future growth trend where the highest growth is expected on the eastern and western ends of the corridor forming a barbell shape as shown in Figure 8-1.

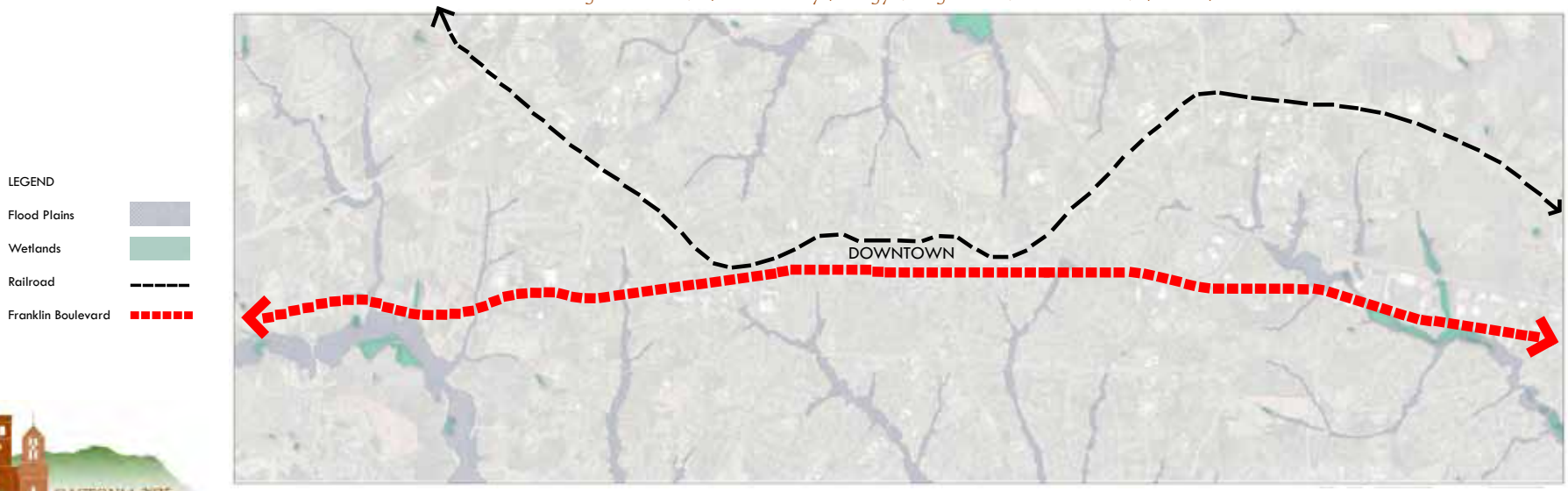
The historic center of Gastonia, its downtown, sits along a high point, or ridge, running east to west, that forms the boundary between the South Fork Catawba (Long Creek) watershed and the Upper Catawba (Catawba Creek) watershed. The hydrology and land form shape Franklin Boulevard in a profound way, giving it an undulating character of high points and prominent viewsheds as well as low points with significant wetlands.

the greatest potential of any area in the City to become a high-quality, economic success.

Gastonia, like the rest of Gaston County on the western edge of the Charlotte Metropolitan Region along I-85, is poised for rapid growth. Much of the growth that previously occurred in the suburban ring areas of western Mecklenburg County is now leaping across the Catawba River into the previously undeveloped areas of Gaston County, where land costs have historically been less. An examination of vacant and redevelopable lands within a one-quarter mile on either side of Franklin Boulevard in the study Corridor revealed a future growth potential of 2,250 additional dwelling units and 5,000 new jobs by 2030, assuming there is no change in land use, and based on data from the Gaston Urban Area MPO transportation model. That's in addition to 12,600 dwelling units and 23,600 jobs from existing and approved development in the Corridor. This represents a growth increase of approximately 18 percent, largely following a typical suburban pattern of growth. Under this trend, the highest growth is expected on the eastern and western ends of the Corridor, forming a barbell pattern of growth along the Corridor.

This growth in the Corridor, when combined with regional growth elsewhere in Gaston County and surrounding areas, could mean numerous additional daily vehicle trips on the Franklin Boulevard Corridor by 2030. These growth projections, as well as the incident management overflow requirements of I-85, were taken into careful consideration in developing the recommendations for the Franklin Boulevard Corridor Master Plan. The challenge and opportunity that is addressed in the Master Plan is how to redirect most of the anticipated growth into the urban core and established corridors in the form of quality redevelopment that fits the character of each community. The Corridor Master Plan presents an opportunity to re-conceptualize Franklin Boulevard through the City as a dynamic resource for attracting some of this new growth back into the older parts of the City. By re-using and

Figure 8-2: Land Form & Hydrology along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor



enhancing the existing infrastructure of the City for new growth, current rural areas of the county can be preserved.

Existing Conditions

Good planning relies on an understanding of the current natural and human characteristics of the planning area, the relationships between different types of characteristics, and how those characteristics have been changing over time. These conditions inform recommendations that emerge from the Master Plan. The following is a brief summary of the present conditions along the Corridor as discussed in the plan.

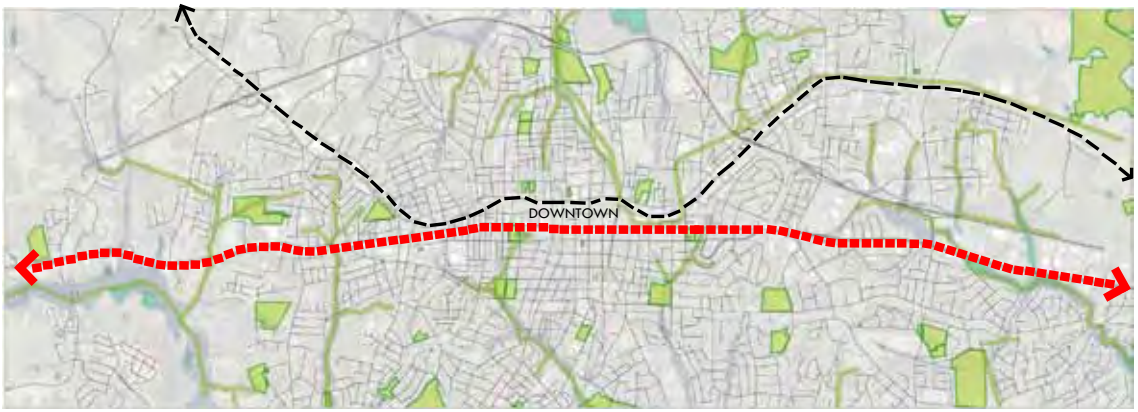
Land Form

Franklin Boulevard follows a historic route through the headwaters of the Catawba River, connecting the cities of Belmont, Lowell, Gastonia, and Kings Mountain with Charlotte and Mecklenburg County to the east of the Catawba River. The historic center of Gastonia, its downtown, sits along a high point, or ridge, running east to west, that forms the boundary between the South Fork Catawba (Long Creek) watershed and the Upper Catawba (Catawba Creek) watershed.

Hydrology

The hydrology and land form shape Franklin Boulevard in a profound way, giving it an undulating character of high points and prominent viewsheds as well as low points with significant wetlands. Unlike the railroad line, which sticks to the high ground along the ridge, Franklin Boulevard follows a more direct east-west route. As such, the road crosses several flood plains and wetlands, as well as high points such as downtown and older areas west and east of downtown. The Boulevard rises and falls as it traverses this landscape, starting at a low point on the east as it enters the City, then rising at New Hope Road before falling down to the industrial area east of downtown. It then rises again to parallel the rail line through the high point of downtown, before falling and rising again as it traverses the mill villages west of the downtown.

Figure 8-3: Street Connectivity Along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.



LEGEND
Flood Plains
Wetlands
Railroad
Franklin Boulevard

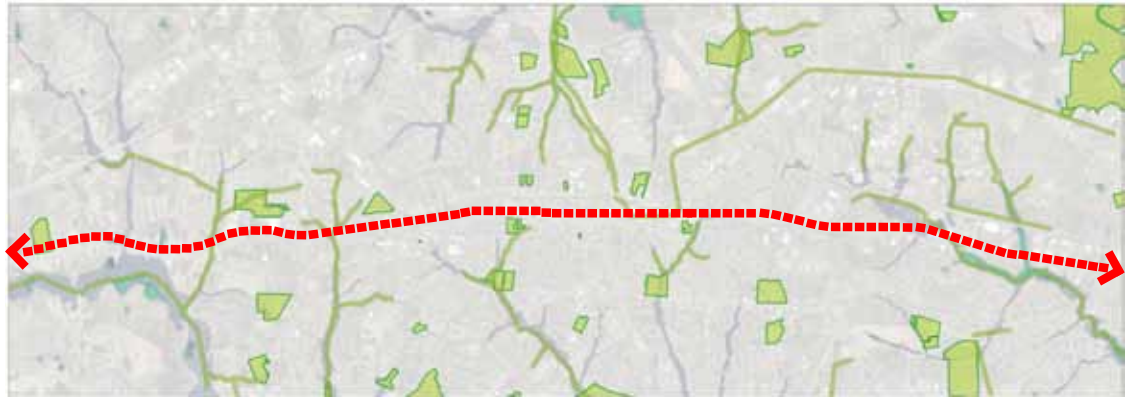
Street Connectivity

A key function of street connectivity is placemaking. Great places have well defined blocks and avenues that create an inter connected network for personal mobility. Older urban areas, such as central Gastonia, often have some form of street connectivity that pre-dates the rise of the automobile as the primary means of personal mobility. While newer areas of Gastonia, like other cities, are marked by less street connectivity and more disconnected arterials and residential streets. With less interconnection, the primary arterials in these places (such as Franklin Boulevard to the east and west of downtown Gastonia) become oversized in order to handle the traffic.

Along most of the Corridor there are six lanes (three in each direction). The exceptions to this profile are the segment of Franklin Boulevard downtown, from Broad Street to York Street, which consists of five lanes (two in each direction with a center turn lane) and the segment west of Myrtle School Road, which has two lanes in each direction separated by a wide median.

There is less congestion through downtown, and on the western edge of the corridor, but there are delays at certain signalized intersections east of downtown and in the vicinity of Franklin Square. These delays contribute to a perception of traffic congestion along the entire corridor.

Figure 8-4: Open Spaces and Greenway Opportunities Along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.



LEGEND

Flood Plains
Wetlands
Railroad
Franklin Boulevard
Open Space
Proposed Greenways
Streets

The volumes are well below the road's acceptable service volume given the number of lanes and traffic signals per mile. There is less congestion through downtown, and on the western edge of the Corridor, but delays at certain signalized intersections east of downtown and in the vicinity of Franklin Square. This contributes to a perception of traffic congestion along the entire Corridor. The Corridor Master Plan looks at opportunities for enhancing the street network along, and adjacent to, Franklin Boulevard at key locations in order to improve the overall street connectivity.

Corridor Functionality

Franklin Boulevard is designated as a primary arterial through-route that serves a variety of trip purposes and modes. The Corridor has three major functions. First, it serves as a federal-aid highway that is the primary reliever route for I-85 through Gaston County, and can accommodate a significant amount of truck traffic, which often occurs when incidents on the interstate force traffic to divert. Secondly, it has been designed to accommodate a significant amount of truck traffic due to the legacy of industrial development and increasing level of new commercial development. Another function of the Corridor is as a multi-modal Corridor, where both Gastonia's and Charlotte's transit agencies operate routes that serve portions of the roadway. Also, the Norfolk Southern rail line is an active freight Corridor that was placed in a large ditch through downtown Gastonia two decades ago because the long freight trains caused access problems getting into and out of the downtown area.

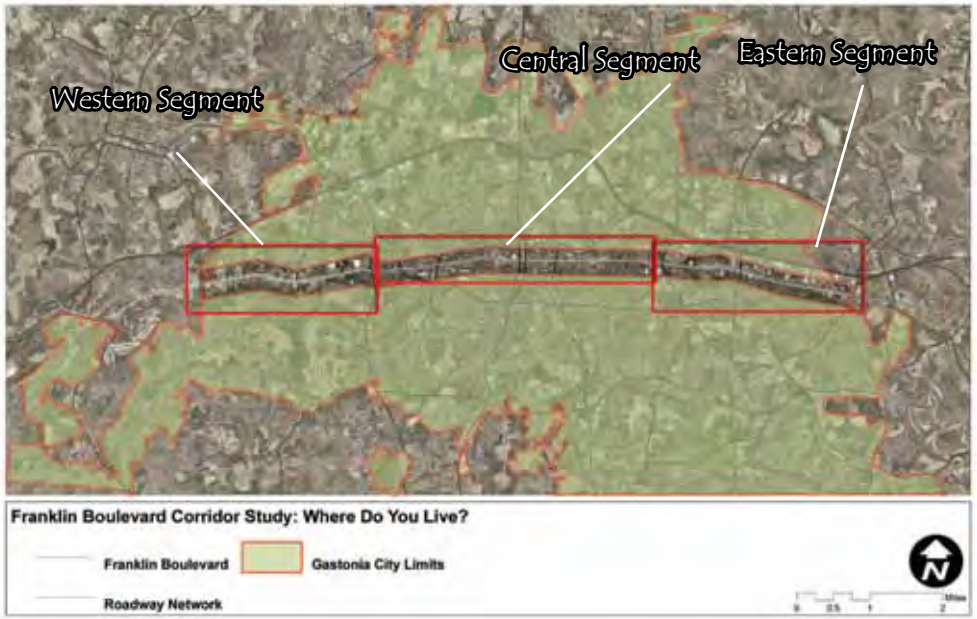
Open Space and Greenways

With the exception of the cemetery at South Chester and Franklin Boulevard, the Corridor functions as a primarily commercial spine, with residential areas sprinkled in at several locations. However, the decline and decay of some segments of the Corridor have introduced places for "informal" open space such as empty parking lots and abandoned building sites that may be considered as part of a formal open space network as the Corridor redevelops.

In several key locations, proposed greenways intersect with Franklin Boulevard. These places represent important areas for "making visible" the greenway network to the users of Franklin Boulevard and providing a logical place for multi-modal, mixed-use development.

Because the greenways typically follow low lying creek areas, they predominately run in a north-south orientation, without crossing the ridgeline where the railroad lies. This Master Plan presents opportunities for extending the proposed greenways to connect the neighborhoods north and south of Franklin Boulevard, and envisions a bike and pedestrian facility running east-west, parallel to Franklin Boulevard that connects the various proposed strands of greenway into a cohesive network.

Figure 8-5: The Franklin Boulevard Corridor, by Segment.



Land Use

The Franklin Boulevard Corridor functions in several roles as it traverses the City. Historically, it has served as an industrial Corridor in certain places, with institutions like Sun Drop and major places of employment, such as the current and former textile mills. It is a commercial linkage between new growth at either end of the City with the older established neighborhoods near downtown. Also, it is an important civic spine, containing numerous prominent religious and government buildings. Finally, the Corridor serves as the front door to different residential neighborhoods that are set back off the Corridor, including the York-Chester Local National Register Historic District, the Loray National Register Historic District, and the Downtown National Register Historic Districts.

While the intent of the plan is to create a singular image and integrated plan for the Corridor, it was recognized early in the planning process that three distinct identity areas could be identified. Each segment has its own unique set of issues, challenges, and opportunities. Due to this, the early planning process focused on each of the three areas individually while still maintaining a holistic approach to the Corridor. Understanding the land use conditions throughout the Corridor is important for planning what it could be in the future. The land use condition for each segment of the Corridor is summarized below.

Eastern Segment

The eastern segment of Franklin Boulevard, from the municipal line with Lowell on the east to the intersection with New Hope Road on the west, is differentiated by two primary conditions.

1) Some key land use conditions along the north side of the eastern section include large lot commercial uses such as dealerships, home improvement supercenters, and regional shopping centers. This area is a primary retail destination serving Gaston County and the surrounding region. Excellent access to I-85 has made this a prime location for car dealerships, home improvement supercenters and similar retail development catering to a regional market.

2) The south side of the Corridor consists primarily of single-family residential neighborhoods. Most of these neighborhoods are not directly accessible from Franklin

Eastern Segment, large lot commercial properties

Eastern Segment, retail destinations with excellent access to I-85

Central Segment, single family homes fronting the street, sheltered by a dense canopy

Western Segment, with commercial nodes but retaining its rural character

Western Segment, rolling terrain with two lanes in either direction

Boulevard, rather their access is from perpendicular streets such as Cox Road. Included in this category are several significant parcels of undeveloped land. This undeveloped land encompasses much of the 100 year floodplain. Much of this segment of the Corridor lies at a lower elevation relative to the rest of the study area.

Central Segment

The central segment of the Corridor runs from New Hope Road on the east through downtown to Myrtle School Road on the west. This segment includes the oldest parts of the community, including the downtown and former mill village around the Historic Loray Mill. The most significant uses include:

- The National Register Downtown Historic District, which has the character of an urban mixed-use district.
- Gaston Memorial Hospital, an important employment and visitor destination, is located on the north side of I-85 east of New Hope Road.
- The Loray National Register Historic District, which is a former mill village characterized by small scale single-family housing with mixed scale commercial establishments and vacant parking lots.
- Industrial sites like the Sun Drop bottling plant.

The intersection around New Hope Road is similar in nature to the commercial properties further east along the Corridor. Franklin Boulevard travels slightly downhill from New Hope Road through an older established residential neighborhood, with single-family homes fronting the street, sheltered by a dense canopy. Leaving the residential neighborhood, Franklin Boulevard gradually ascends toward downtown through a former industrial Corridor, with a current mix of commercial and civic establishments, along with legacy industrial sites. Through downtown, prominent churches and government buildings are interspersed with surface parking lots. The segment west of downtown includes the York-Chester cemetery, along with the former Sears building, the downtown YMCA, and the Gaston County Police station which fronts the Corridor, as well as several older hotels.

Leaving downtown, Franklin Boulevard runs trough the old Mill Village around the Loray Mill, characterized by small scale single-family housing with mixed-scale commercial establishments and vacant parking lots. Parkdale Mills textile mill is located just west of the Firestone Mill. As the Corridor approaches Myrtle School Road on the west, the older commercial areas give way to some newer commercial development. This new commercial development forms the gateway into the City from the west.

Western Segment

The western segment of Franklin Boulevard runs from the Myrtle School Road intersection to the municipal boundary on the west near Sadler Elementary School. The character of the western segment differs most from the other segments. This difference is noticed specifically around the Myrtle School Road intersection and the intersections with Shannon-Bradley Road in that while it is indicated as commercial, much of the area around both intersections still retains its rural character. The roadway follows the rolling terrain and has a wide median with two lanes in each direction. Manufactured homes line parts of this segment and the low-lying floodplain that runs adjacent to the Corridor in this segment contains several old car dumps that have been there for at least three decades. Despite attractive rolling hills and views of Crowders Mountain, the scenery is marred by these decrepit buildings and auto junkyards.

Redevelopment Scenarios

Scenario building provides an opportunity to consider what might happen in the community under various policy conditions. The purpose of considering alternative scenarios is to understand the policy choices, educate local officials and the public about the implications of policy choices, and evaluate which policy choices are right for the Corridor. Understanding policy choices, and their implications, forces trade-offs between conflicting goals. The alternatives that are presented in the plan are general in nature and have been prepared to illustrate and explore distinct potential future development patterns for the Corridor. In order to arrive at the preferred scenario, a build-out analysis was conducted which examined the land use conditions to compare the existing conditions with two future scenarios-a trend and an alternative.

Figure 8-6: Build-Out Analysis

	Existing		Build-out (Trend)		Alternative Scenario	
	Dwelling Units	Employment	Dwelling Units	Employment	Dwelling Units	Employment
City of Gastonia	27,400	35,700	34,900	44,000	35,550	50,000
Franklin Boulevard (Study Area)	12,600	23,600	14,850	28,600	16,600	35,700
Percent of City	46%	66%	42%	64%	47%	71%
Jobs and Housing Balance	1.83 jobs per household		1.92 jobs per household		2.15 jobs per household	

Figure 8-7: Existing Land Use (2007)

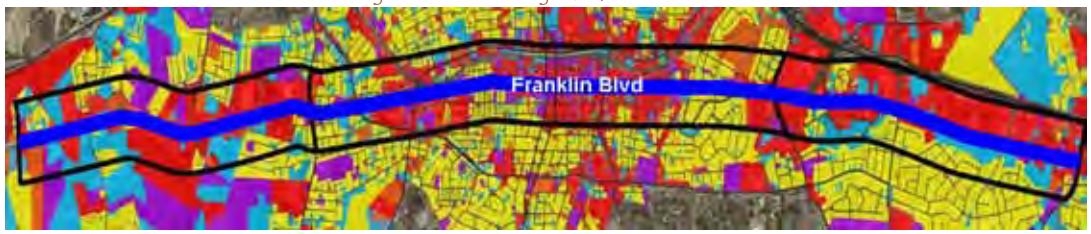


Figure 8-8: Future Land Use (2030)

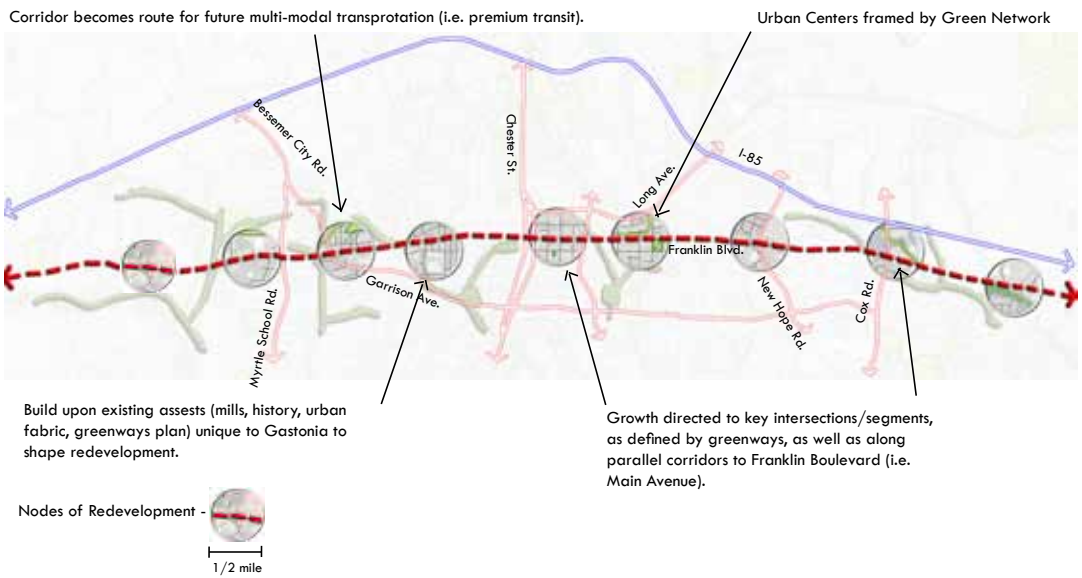
Build-Out Analysis

In order to arrive at a preferred redevelopment scenario, a build-out analysis looking at land use was developed to compare the existing conditions with two future scenarios -a trend and an alternative. The Build-out Analysis involves determining the potential amount and distribution of population and employment growth over a certain time frame. Using data from the Gaston Urban Area MPO Transportation Model, and an inventory of the existing land uses within one-quarter mile of the Corridor, the build-out analysis revealed several important lessons for Gastonia, which are measured in terms of "Business as Usual" or controlled growth.

If business continues as usual, current trends indicate that future growth along the Corridor will increase the number of new dwelling units and jobs by 18 percent and 21 percent respectively over 30 years. However, the share of new dwelling units and employment would decrease in the Corridor in relation to the rest of the City. Given the

Figure 8-9: Nodes of Redevelopment along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.

Urban Green Boulevard



Enhanced eastern gateway streetscape

ease of developing greenfields over brown or greyfields, this is not a surprising trend. Also, the business as usual scenario indicates that development will continue to appear disproportionately on the eastern end and sprawl into western rural areas, creating a dumbbell effect, with limited or no growth and redevelopment in the historic center of the City. This scenario indicates development will also intensify in areas located along I-85 relief points (Bessemer City Road, Chester Street and Long Avenue) as the Corridor remains the primary reliever for I-85.

The alternative scenario, as proposed in the Master Plan, would set up a regulatory framework for directing significant amounts of the projected growth into the existing infrastructure of the Corridor. Under the alternative scenario, both dwelling units and employment would increase in greater number and in real terms versus the trend. In addition, the percentage of the City's total amount of dwelling units and jobs would increase substantially along the Corridor. This is an important point, because for premium transit to work, there must be corresponding densities, particularly on the residential side.

As indicated by the number of jobs per household, increased density along the Corridor, especially if it occurs at key points, will create a transit-ready community in Gastonia along Franklin Boulevard. More residential development reaching 30-40 units per acre, at a minimum, within a one-half mile distance of a future transit station is needed to ensure a successful transit investment. The preferred growth scenario, as revealed through the alternative, suggests that the Corridor would become an urban green Boulevard and focus on building connections with existing assets at specific nodes. This provided the preferred vision for the Corridor.

Primary Nodes of Redevelopment

The Master Plan defines four specific nodes of development that can serve as gateways, activity centers, and hubs for existing and planned transit services. The enhancements for the nodes are illustrated on numerous maps, which serve as the primary method of describing the recommended land uses along the Corridor. These areas were chosen because they are strategic to the future economic development of the Corridor, and include a suburban commercial center (Eastern Gateway), the historic downtown, the close-knit community surrounding the mill villages (Greasy Corner/ Loray Mill Village) and the rural to suburban transition along the western approach into Gastonia (Dixie Village/ Myrtle School Gateway). The following is a summary of the four focal points of redevelopment along the Corridor:

Eastern Gateway

Along the Eastern section of the Corridor, the vision includes

creating mixed-use infill redevelopment opportunities with transportation and greenway networks. In order to achieve this vision, strategic improvements will occur across a 10-year span, which include integrating new multi-use greenway trails along riparian corridors, a new park or open space south of Franklin Boulevard along the stream/wetland and new civic spaces within redeveloped commercial properties such as Franklin Commons and Gaston Mall. Design elements include creating pedestrian connections from residential neighborhoods south of Franklin Boulevard across the new park to connect with the greenway trail and roadway intersections.

Additional improvements include creating a sense of arrival through an enhanced planted median and street trees, with the potential for a pedestrian bridge crossing Franklin Boulevard at the municipal line, containing "Welcome to Gastonia" type signage. This is necessary, because the current entrance into the City of Gastonia from the east is indistinguishable from the surrounding municipalities.

Downtown

The downtown section of the Corridor includes a mixture of land uses, which vary in intensity, thus the plan envisions maintaining this mix; however, creating additional opportunities for mixed-use development with emphasis placed on the residential-retail mix and a continued emphasis on civic uses. The vision along the downtown section implies a heavy emphasis on intersection improvements on Franklin Boulevard at Oakland Street, Marietta Street, South Street, York Street, and Chester Street, and increasing pedestrian connections from existing developed areas to the new civic open space and greenway networks. As seen on Figure 8-10, the node located in the heart of downtown is equal to one-quarter mile radius, or a five-minute walk and envisions the following improvements:

- Creating new multi-use trails that connect the north and south sides of Franklin Boulevard and run through Main Avenue;
- New civic open spaces located along Franklin Boulevard and along the railroad on South Street;
- Gateway signage marking the entry into the downtown area from the East and from the West on Franklin Boulevard;
- Integrating art galleries and other art amenities, community art center;
- Enhanced roadway section between South Street and York Street through the addition of a new stamped crosswalk, curbs, flower beds, street light enhancements, a street canopy and a planted median.

Greasy Corner/Loray Mill Village

The historic Loray Mill Village currently consists of a mix of single-family residential housing and underused or vacant commercial buildings. Plans are in the works to redevelop the front portion of the old Loray Mill into a mixed-use building with commercial, civic, and residential uses. The mill's redevelopment can serve as the catalyst for the Corridor's transformation. The City can therefore capitalize on historic preservation funding assistance, private market interest, proximity to downtown, and excellent regional accessibility to use this location as a catalyst for corridor-wide change. Strategic improvements along this section of the Corridor include improving greenway and open space networks by introducing a new multi-use trail along West Main Avenue connecting Dixie Village via Webb Street School and new trail spur along the railroad connecting to the proposed greenway trail running along the stream adjacent to Garrison Boulevard. The strategy also includes

Enhanced "Greasy Corner" Intersection

Existing conditions

New crosswalks, street lighting and greenway crossing

Street trees and planted median

Enhanced Dixie Village Intersection

Existing Conditions

New crosswalks, curbs and street lighting

Street trees and planted median

developing a new trailhead and pocket park between Vance Street and Linwood Road, and a new civic open space between Franklin Boulevard and Second Avenue, adjacent to Firestone Street.

Currently the western gateway into Gastonia along Franklin Boulevard, is an area where Franklin Boulevard transitions from a high-speed divided rural highway into a more urban roadway with retail and residential development. It is characterized by an aging strip commercial center (Dixie Village) across from a new strip commercial center (Walmart Supercenter). Much of the surrounding residential areas are not accessible to adjacent commercial developments other than by automobile.

The vision for the western section of the Corridor is to create a mixed-use infill redevelopment with transportation and greenway. Achieving this vision will require a number of key projects, which are focused on improving street connections, renovation of the Dixie Village shopping center, and a mixed-use residential development.

With relatively little private investment and continuing concerns about crime, blight and urban decline, the western portion of the Corridor from Shannon-Bradley Road to Myrtle School Road needs immediate attention. The catalyst for its transformation could be the redevelopment of the Firestone Mill/Loray Village site. The City can therefore capitalize on historic preservation funding assistance to implement these corridor-wide changes.

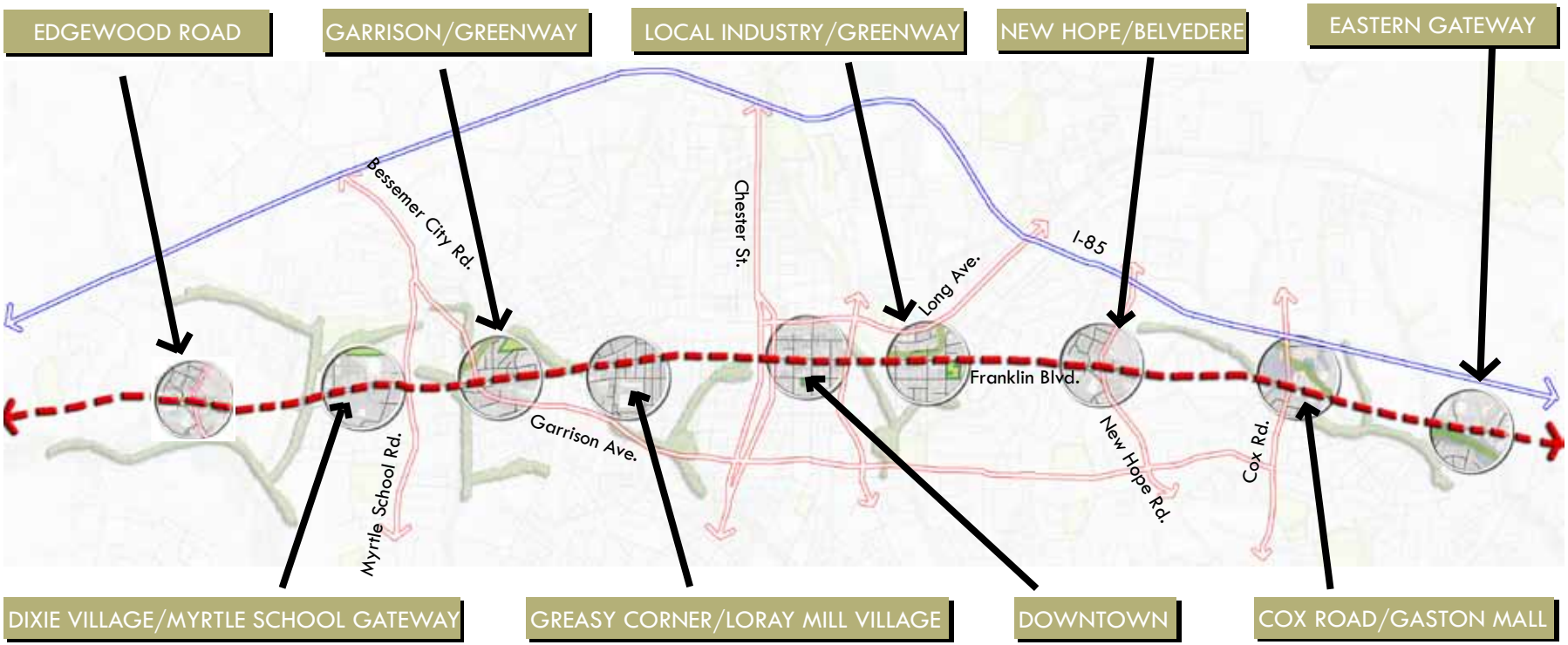
Dixie Village/Myrtle School Road Gateway

Currently the western gateway into Gastonia along Franklin Boulevard is an area where the Corridor transitions from a high-speed divided rural highway into a more urban roadway with retail and residential development. It is characterized by an aging strip commercial center (Dixie Village) across from a new strip commercial center (Walmart Supercenter). Much of the surrounding residential areas are not accessible to the commercial developments other than by automobile.

The Master Plan envisions creating a true gateway to enhance the transition from the rural high-speed roadway from the west as it enters Gastonia. This gateway would be located near the intersection of Franklin Boulevard and Myrtle School Road. Mixed-use in-fill development that meets the street will help to create a walkable district that forms a destination at the under-utilized Dixie Village shopping center and connects it to the new Walmart shopping district. Additional improvements along this section of the Corridor include:

- New multi-use trail that connects the north and south sides of Franklin Boulevard;
- New parks and open space areas located north and south of Franklin Boulevard that tie into a renovated Dixie Village containing new residential development;
- Landmarks and public art that mark the entry into Gastonia from the west;
- Intersection improvements at Franklin Boulevard and Myrtle School Road and at the entrance to Dixie Village;
- A new connection between Bolding Street and Hartman Street through the Walmart site;
- Renovation of Dixie Village shopping center;
- Mixed-use residential development North of Franklin Boulevard and west of Walmart; and,
- Residential development along the connection of Bolding and Hartman Streets.

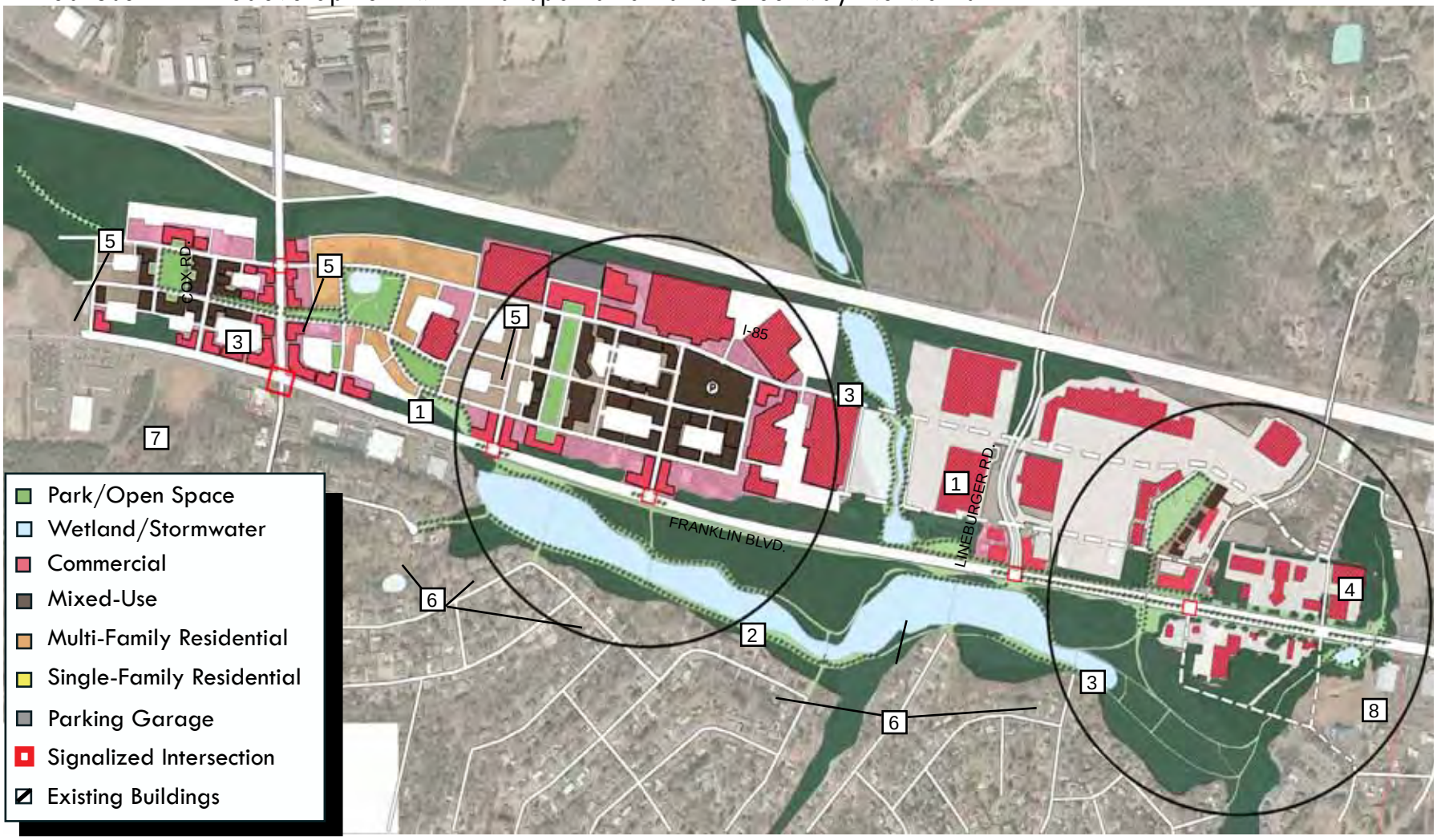
Figure 8-10: Nodes of Redevelopment and Connectivity



Nodes of Redevelopment -

Figure 8-11: Eastern Gateway Redevelopment

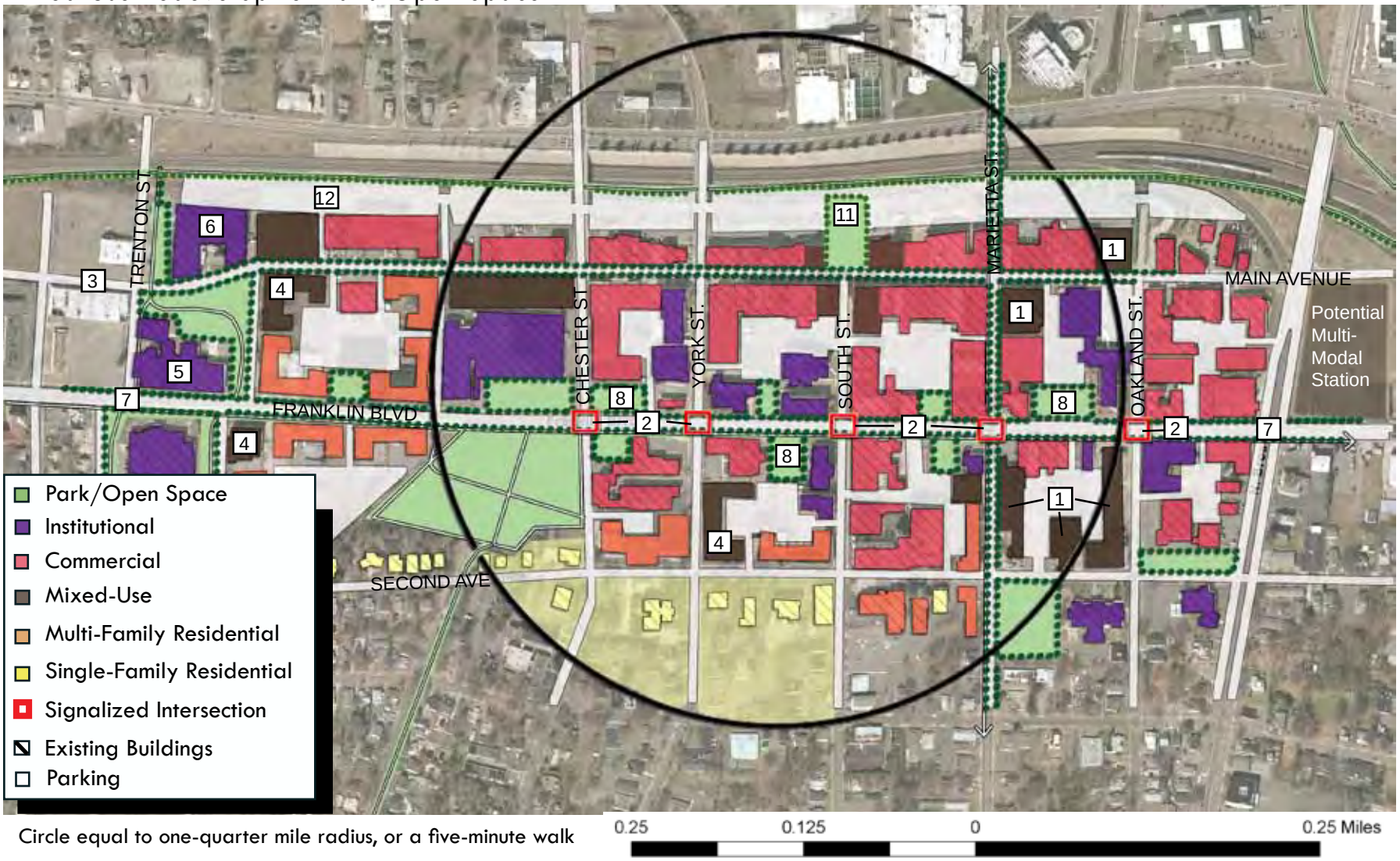
Mixed Use Infill Redevelopment with Transportation and Greenway Networks



Circles equal to one-quarter mile radius, or a five-minute walk

Figure 8-12: Downtown Redevelopment

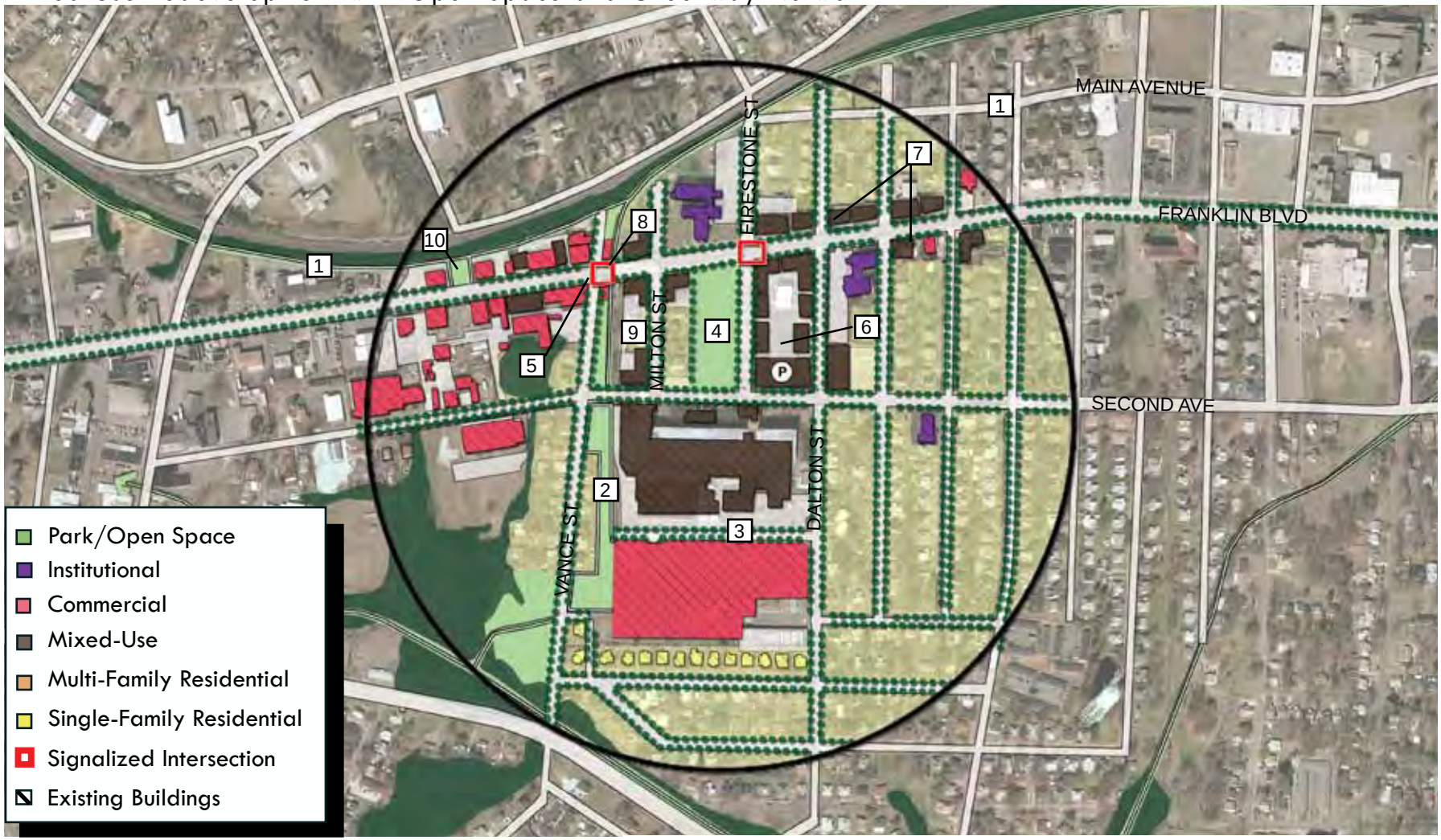
Mixed Use Redevelopment and Open Space Infill



Circle equal to one-quarter mile radius, or a five-minute walk

Figure 8-13: Greasy Corner / Loray Mill Village Redevelopment

Mixed Use Redevelopment with Open Space and Greenway Network

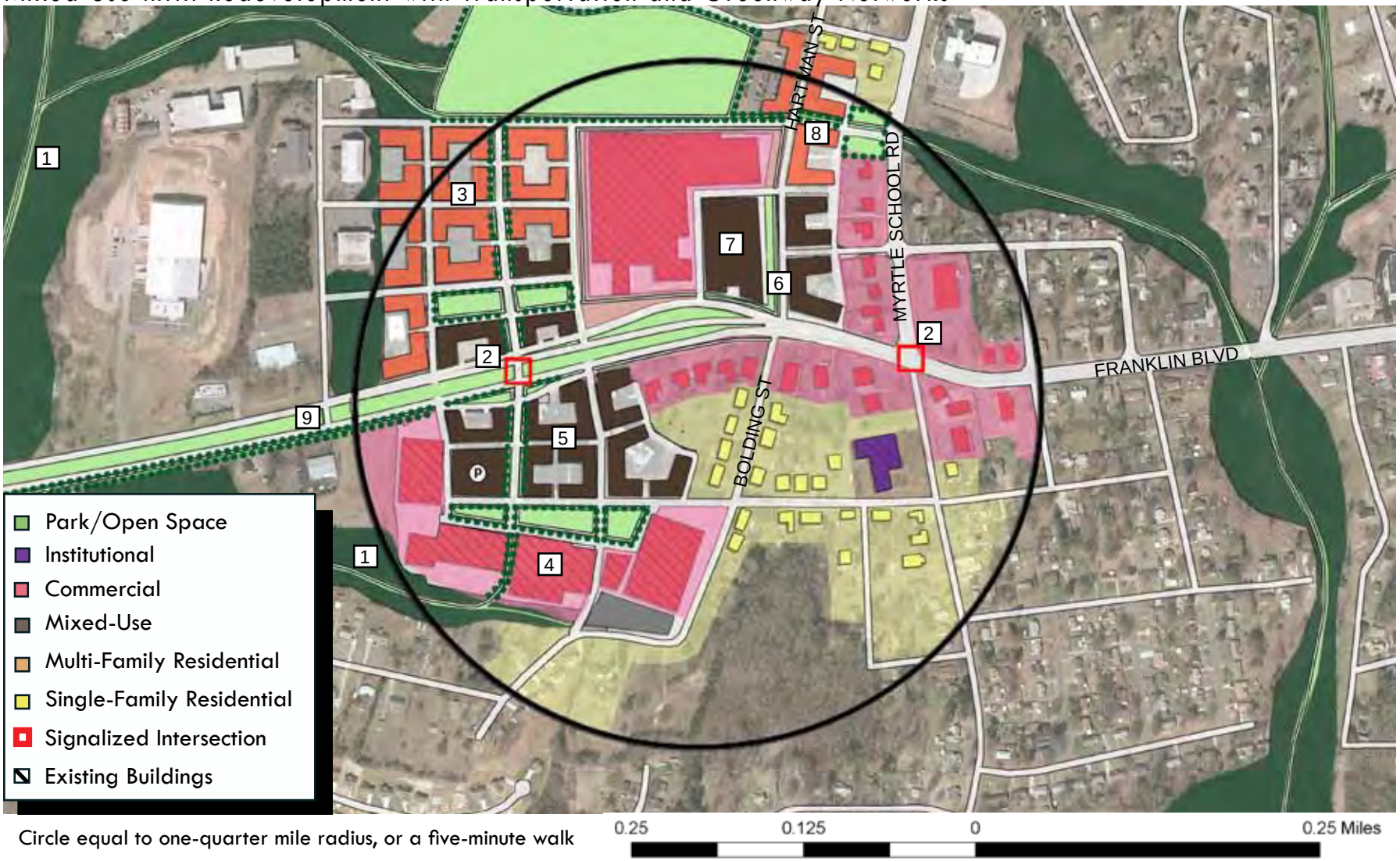


Circle equal to one-quarter mile radius, or a five-minute walk

0.25 0.125 0 0.25 Miles

Figure 8-14: Dixie Village / Myrtle School Road Gateway Redevelopment Master Plan

Mixed Use Infill Redevelopment with Transportation and Greenway Networks



Circle equal to one-quarter mile radius, or a five-minute walk

0.25 0.125 0 0.25 Miles

Road Capacity

Road capacity refers to the maximum traffic flow obtainable on a given roadway using all available lanes; usually expressed in vehicles per hour or vehicles per day. Roadway capacity deficiencies occur whenever the travel demand on a roadway is close to, or higher than, the vehicle capacity of that road. Figure 8-10 illustrates the ratio of the volume of cars to the amount of availble capacity during the PM peak using a color code system that ranks the roads from well below capcity to well above capacity.

Transportation Strategies

As shown in Figure 8-10, according to projections from the Gaston Urban Area MPO Transportation Model, Franklin Boulevard will remain well below capacity until the year 2030. Consistent with the trend scenario described in the plan, capacity will be significantly degraded along the eastern and westernmost segments of the corridor in the City of Gastonia. This is a direct result of projected land use patterns for those portions of the corridor, as well as the lack of roadway network connectivity.

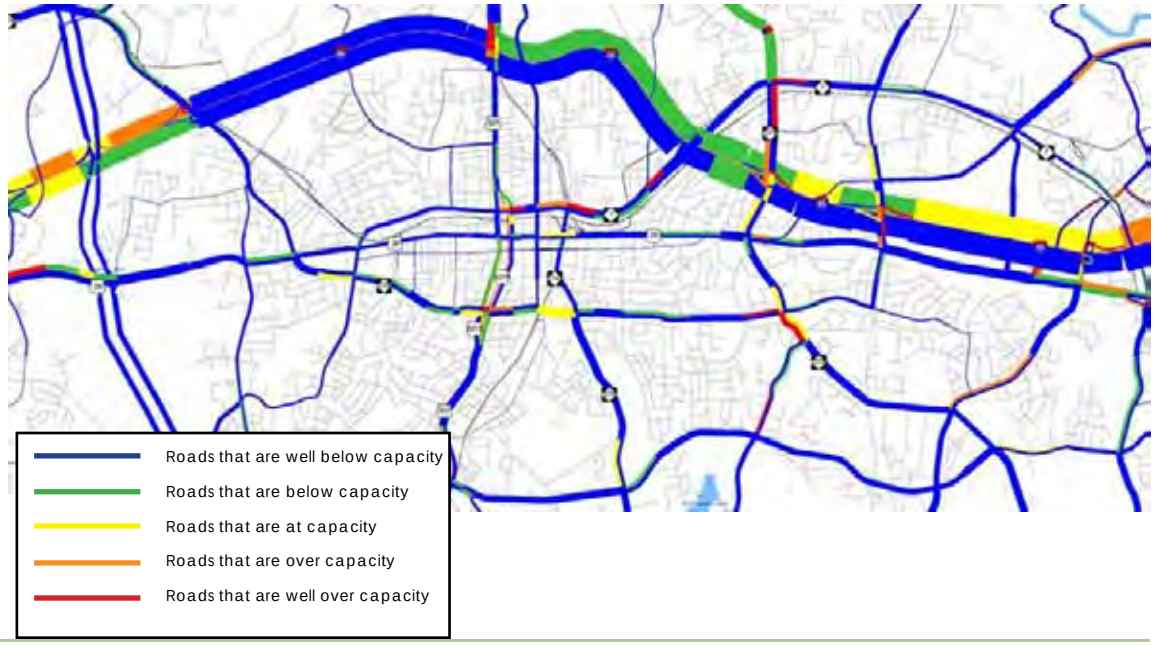
Transportation strategies as outlined in the plan include restricting left-turns and making intersection enhancements. These changes provide a framework which will help achieve the goal of lowering congestion along portions of Franklin Boulevard while enhancing design and sense of place. The changes, as detailed in the Master Plan, are outlined below.

Left-turn Restrictions

Much of the congestion along Franklin Boulevard is due to delays where vehicles make left turns at intersections. A strategy of prohibiting left turns at selected intersections while providing for them at more suitable locations offers a range of potential benefits:

- Traffic throughput can be preserved along Franklin Boulevard, especially during incidents on I-85.
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular safety can all be improved by reducing conflict points. Those that remain can be channeled to locations where they can be dealt with most effectively.
- The need to widen Franklin Boulevard to accommodate turn lanes can be eliminated at certain intersections, which will:
  - Reduce crossing distances for pedestrians;
  - Allow for medians that enhance the Corridor's appearance and provide safe, comfortable crossings for pedestrians.
- Potential locations for left-turn restrictions along Franklin Boulevard include:

Figure 8-15: Illustration of Road Capacity along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor



- Between York Street and North Broad Street;
- At minor streets in the vicinity of Greasy Corner/ Loray Mill Village.

Intersection Improvements

The reason for the conceptual intersection enhancements is to make pedestrian travel more attractive by reducing barriers and improving safety. Key elements include:

- Reducing crossing distances, typically accomplished with medians and center islands which also serve as pedestrian refuges;
- Channelizing traffic to separate and delineate vehicle movements and isolate conflict points;
- Emphasizing both high-pedestrian locations and desired paths for pedestrian travel;
- Tempering vehicle speeds during turning movements.
- The principal constraint to realizing the conceptual designs will be turning movement requirements for large trucks. Therefore, careful consideration of truck routing and the provision of viable alternative for truck access are critical to the successful implementation of these enhancements.

The Franklin Boulevard Corridor has and always will be a major transportation corridor. Historically, the primary thoroughfare through the City, it now functions as part of a regional transportation network. The road serves as both a "main" street and as the incident management overflow for I-85. With these multiple demands placed on the corridor, it is important to design and enhance the roadway in a manner that can accommodate the vision laid out in the master plan while preserving its ability to move people and goods.

Figure 8-16: Enhanced roadway section: Franklin Boulevard at entrance to Dixie Village

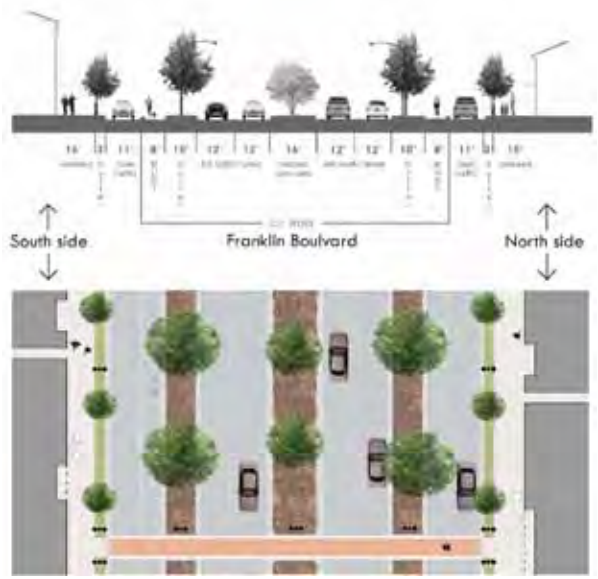
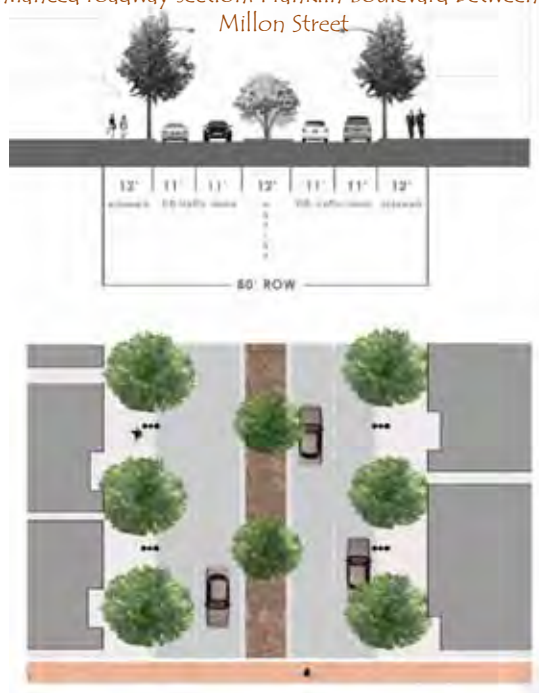


Figure 8-17: Enhanced roadway section: Franklin Boulevard between Vance Street and Millon Street



ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

Issues & Opportunities

As a means of developing a plan for obtaining the future vision of the corridor, an issues and opportunity analysis was conducted in a series of community meetings. The issues and opportunity analysis helped to conceptualize "big picture" ideas inspired from the community's assets and unrealized potentials. Participants were asked to indicate on maps and flip charts areas where they saw issues along the corridor that needed addressing as well as places of opportunities. Those issues and opportunities are detailed in four maps segments-downtown, eastern gateway, western gateway, and mill village.

The issues included points along the Corridor with visible decaying buildings, industrial land uses, abandoned lots and acres of empty asphalt (parking lots). These issues present opportunities to redefine nodes along the Corridor by creating public spaces, existing historic and cultural mixed-use focal points, and new focal points, strengthening pedestrian connections, and adding greenway crossings. Redefining the nodes will ultimately create a unifying theme that reinforces the sense of history and promise for the future of the corridor as an attractive, attainable and rewarding place for people and businesses. The following were identified as primary opportunities to provide the basis for the redevelopment:

- **Regional Destination:** This opportunity capitalizes on the strength of the corridor's dual role of providing regional mobility and a local destination for commerce, worship and entertainment.

- **Accessible Corridor:** This opportunity capitalizes on the high traffic volumes and existing cluster of auto-oriented uses and seeks to attract retailers and services with a desire for visibility. This also seeks to capitalize on the Gaston Urban Area MPO framework to create a dedicated transit service connecting Gastonia to the airport and downtown Charlotte.

- **Historic and Cultural Mix:** This opportunity capitalizes on the vibrant mix of historic buildings and adjacent neighborhoods along the corridor, which provides an opportunity to create cultural and arts attraction for local and regional patrons.

- **Greenway:** This opportunity capitalizes on the strength and proximity of the established neighborhoods and seeks to build upon the existing Greenways Plan by connecting the various links into a parallel corridor to Franklin Boulevard.

Figure 8-18: Downtown Issues and Opportunities Map

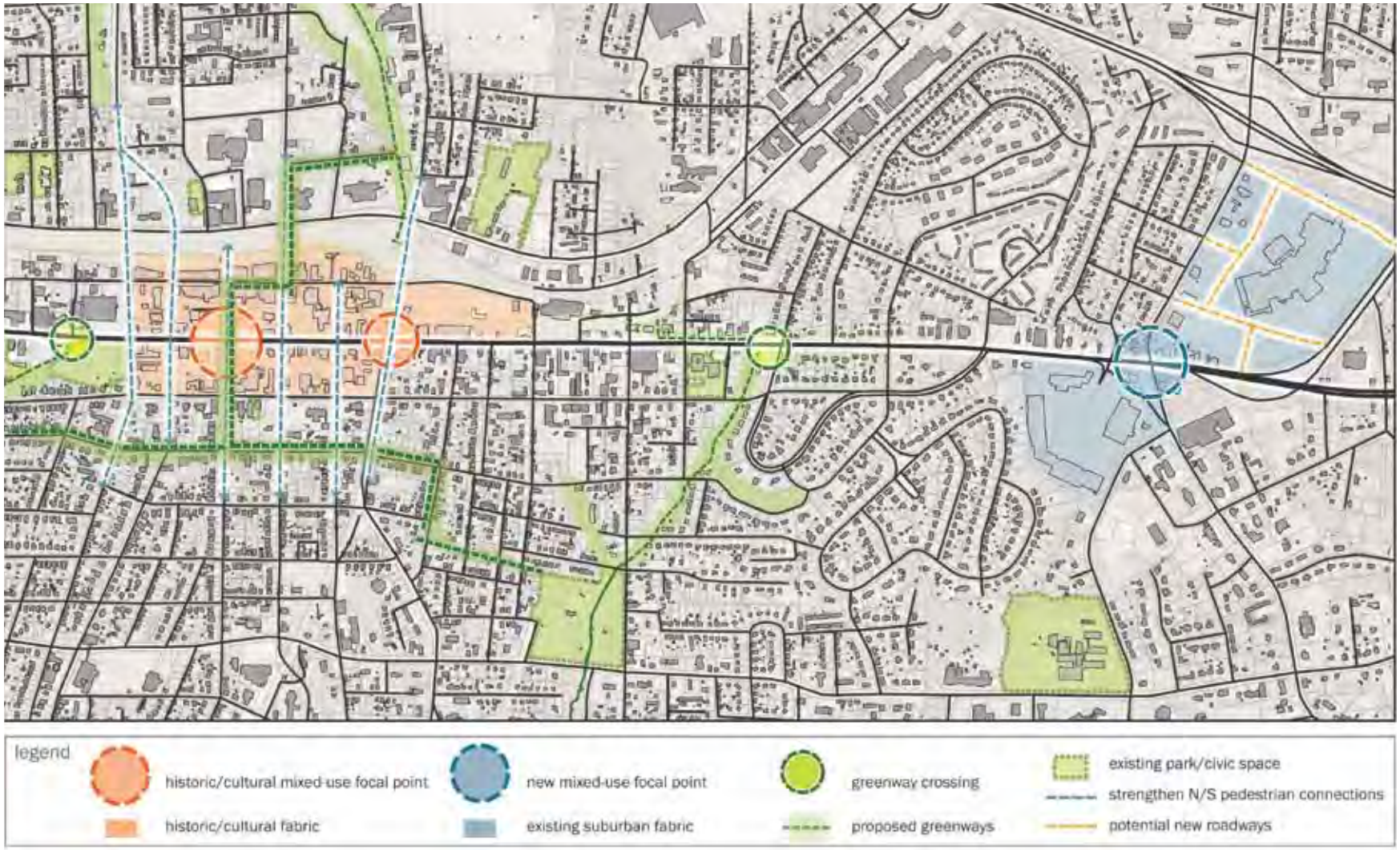


Figure 8-19: Eastern Gateway Issues and Opportunities Map

Figure 8-20: Western Gateway Issues and Opportunities Map

Figure 8-21: Mill Villages Issues and Opportunities Map

Implementation Plan & Policy Framework

The Franklin Boulevard Corridor has a storied past, and has been the historical backbone of the City of Gastonia for both commerce and industry. Current conditions along the corridor do not reflect the significance and importance of this roadway, however, forming a collage of vacant and under utilized parcels mixed with a series of auto-oriented uses.

The Master Plan illustrates those conditions, and explains what can be done to bring back vitality, activity, and value to this key section of the City. The key issue now is, how to achieve that vision? What steps need to be taken to take the corridor from here to there? How best to honor the street? Achieving the vision that is outlined in the Corridor Master Plan will require ongoing attention, advocacy, and new tools.

The Implementation Strategy outlines the necessary mechanisms required to deliver the individual projects by presenting options for both public and private sector agencies, including partnership opportunities. The approaches to implementation can be categorized as follows: encouraging private investment, funding public improvements, making operational changes, and adjusting zoning regulations. The following objectives and tools will guide the corridor in redevelopment and improvement of ability to move people and goods

GOAL

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

Objective 1

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.

Tools

a. Work with NCDOT and other appropriate stakeholders to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility through capital projects, signalization, signage and pavement markings at key intersections where walking and crossing Franklin Boulevard will be encouraged
b. Work with the Gaston Urban Area MPO, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Area MPO, Charlotte Area Transit System and NCDOT to expand transit service and provide appropriate transit infrastructure at key focal points along Franklin Boulevard.
c. Ensure that new development and redevelopment preserves the capacity of Franklin Boulevard for its regional purposes.
d. Work with Gaston County, the MPO and other stakeholders to update the master plan for greenways and pathways, with a focus on connecting parks, civic space and destinations along Franklin Boulevard.
e. Create a parking master plan for the downtown area and transition areas east and west of the City center to support desired redevelopment and improve multi-modal accessibility.

GOAL

Provide incentives and a regulatory framework to guide redevelopment along Franklin Boulevard in a manner that promotes economic growth, enhances the quality of the pedestrian environment and improves the physical appearance of downtown and its adjacent transition areas.

Objective 2

Establish one or more overlay planning districts to guide the desired urban form, scale and character of redevelopment and infill development in the downtown area and transition areas, with a funding mechanism to generate revenue for needed capital improvements described in the master plan.

Tools

a. Prepare design standards for specific urban design site plan elements that provide incentives and sufficient flexibility to attract desired future investment and achieve a diversity of land uses.
b. Develop an ordinance to address nonconforming signage throughout the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.
c. Establish key gateway areas that, through roadway design enhancements, create memorable entries to enhance the character of the area, and establish an identifiable image for the Corridor.
d. Conduct a survey of existing signage along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor to identify nonconforming signs and subsequently notify property owners of that status and a time period to bring their signs into compliance.
e. Create incentives for the provision of civic and usable open space with redevelopment along the corridor.
f. Provide density bonus tied to attainable, live-work housing programs in key development nodes along the Franklin Boulevard Corridor, but particularly within the downtown and transition areas.
g. Establish an incentive or matching program for underground utilities to reduce visual clutter along the corridor.
h. Establish a tree planting program to help "green" the Franklin Boulevard Corridor.
i. Target the capital improvement program toward addressing the recommendation of developing a key node starting with the western segment from Shannon-Bradley Road to Myrtle School Road.

Objective 3

The City will invest in public infrastructure along the corridor to encourage private investment in desired locations.

Tools

a. Establish a type of Community Redevelopment Agency or Urban Progress Zone, which enables the City to use economic development incentives.
b. Investigate creating a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) district for downtown and transition areas immediately to the east and west.
c. Develop Gateway Signage into downtown from the East, at Broad Street, and from the West, at Trenton Street.
d. Partner with the developer of the Loray Mill property for construction of public parking spaces.
e. Work with the developer of the Loray Mill property to develop an internal street network that has the same block dimensions as the surrounding Mill Village, and to develop single-family housing along new interior streets of the development.
f. Develop pedestrian improvements in the Downtown portion of Franklin Boulevard such as crosswalks, planters, and other sidewalk improvements.
g. Widen sidewalks at Franklin and Vance (Greasy Corner).
h. Make intersection improvements at Franklin Boulevard and Myrtle School Road.
i. Install safety intersection improvements at Oakland, Marietta, South, York, and Chester.
j. Make intersection improvements at New Hope Road, Cox Road, Franklin Commons, and Lineberger Road.
k. Establish downtown trolley bus circulator service.
l. Create additional parking along the railroad tracks between Tremont Street and Chester Street.
m. Change all hanging traffic signals in the downtown area to signals located on signal arms.
n. Continue replacement of light fixtures downtown with historic lighting.

o. Develop a shared-use trail for bicyclists and pedestrians along the railroad right-of-way between downtown and Dixie Village from West Main to the Webb Street School.
p. Develop a shared-use trail on the south side of Franklin Boulevard.
q. Work and partner with property owners to create civic open space within redeveloped commercial properties such as Franklin Commons and the Gaston Mall.
r. Add new pedestrian-oriented signalization (e.g., pedestrian-activated, countdown displays) at Marrietta Street and Franklin Boulevard and South Street and Franklin Boulevard, to mark the Carolina Thread Trail.
s. Continue a park (or designated, maintained open space) south of Franklin Boulevard, across from Franklin Square, between Franklin Boulevard and the wetland areas.
t. Develop pedestrian connections from the Gardner Park neighborhood south of Franklin Boulevard, to connect to Franklin Square.
u. Create an internal street network north of Franklin Boulevard at the eastern end of the City to connect various parcels and reduce traffic demand at the signalized intersections along Franklin Boulevard.
v. Develop a shared-use greenway trail running along riparian corridors, including a branch running north from Franklin Boulevard at the eastern end of the City, providing a connection to undeveloped property on the north side of I-85 between Franklin Square and Lineberger Road.
w. At the point of market demand, establish a commuter rail service on the Piedmont and Northern railroad line connecting to Charlotte.
x. Adjust refuse collection schedules to accommodate mixed-use development.
y. Continue to encourage sidewalk dining downtown, but not on Franklin Boulevard.
z. Place more emphasis on grant writing to secure additional resources. Possibilities can include use of Community Development Block Grant funds, programs administered by the NC Department of Commerce, more aggressive advocacy of tax credit programs related to historic properties and the New Market Tax Credits, and funding from the NC Department of Transportation and the NC Department of Cultural Resources for specific projects that improve the safety and character of individual development nodes along the corridor.

9

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GASTONIA 2025

9 Regional Planning

Regional Planning Goal

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

Introduction

The Greater Charlotte region consists of 14 counties in North and South Carolina. The counties are Anson, Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union in North Carolina, and Chester, Lancaster and York in South Carolina. In 2007, the region had a population of approximately 2.2 million people. The region is characterized by rapid population growth that has continued since 1960. Since the 1960s, the population has grown by nearly 200,000 people every decade, with the figure increasing to 400,000 in the 1990s. This trend has continued into the current decade, with the region adding approximately 200,000 people from 2000 to 2007. Projections to the year 2030 indicate that growth is expected to remain robust.

While rapid growth has brought the region an array of remarkable opportunities, it has also presented difficult challenges. It has forced the jurisdictions within the Greater Charlotte region to recognize that they can no longer act in isolation. The effects and impacts of urbanization, concerns about climate change, shifting economies, global economic competition, and new transportation realities are issues that are far-reaching in scope. Regional partners are beginning to address these issues within a coordinated framework. Partnerships are being formed within private and public entities to reach a common understanding of how to better protect the region's natural, cultural, economic, and historic resources, and how best to move forward with building a region that meets the needs of every citizen.

Understanding that the benefits and challenges of growth affect the entire bi-state region, Centralina and Catawba Regional Councils of Government, and the Charlotte Regional Partnership, decided to address these issues in a proactive, collaborative fashion. They began the CONNECT regional vision process and created a prioritized Action Agenda, based on regional collaboration and policy-driven consensus on regional interests and issues. The project involved two regional planning councils of government, and a 37-member task force representing the interest of local, county, and sub-regional governmental entities as well as civic and non-governmental organizations. The process involved two phases. Phase 1: Taking Stock, a comprehensive review of 75 plans, including transportation studies, land use plans, and comprehensive plans to identify shared values and policies, was concluded in November 2006. The review revealed that the region has a strong foundation upon which to build a vision, and that each jurisdiction share six core values. These core values express the desire that the regional vision must be responsive to the ecological, economic, historic, cultural, and political realities of the bi-state region. These are:

- Sustainable, well-managed growth that maintains a high quality of life, protects open space and environmental quality, retains the natural character of the region, and maximizes the efficiency of infrastructure investments.

- Increased collaboration among jurisdictions on issues that transcend boundaries including growth management, transportation, and environmental concerns, in a manner that recognizes both regional and local needs.
- A strong diverse economy that supports a wide variety of businesses.
- A safe and healthy environment with good air and water quality.
- High quality educational opportunities available to all residents.
- Enhanced social equity through community leadership and cooperative volunteerism.

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 it does not operate in isolation and activities within its corporate boundaries impact other jurisdictions within the region, and it is committed to further examining regional planning issues for the Greater Charlotte region. The specific policies and actions described in this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan fall under the broader goal of working within a regional framework to demonstrate the City's commitment towards promoting and creating policies which fall within the realm of shared values.

Gastonia's place in the region

Understanding Gastonia's place in a regional context is fundamental to the development of the Comprehensive Plan. When planning for Gastonia's future, the location of the City and the interdependence of the City with other geographic and economic regions is of prime importance.

Gastonia is the largest of 15 municipalities within Gaston County. Historically, Gastonia was known as the preeminent manufacturing area of the Charlotte region, a textile manufacturing center with an emphasis on yarn and thread mills. Over the years, the manufacturing base within Gastonia diversified to include machinery, transportation equipment, precision equipment and other industries. Within the last 10 years many of the remaining textile manufacturers and some of the smaller transportation and equipment- related manufacturers closed their doors, leaving vacant industrial sites. Gastonia has seen tremendous growth in retailing, drawing shoppers from Cleveland, Lincoln, York and Mecklenburg Counties. Mecklenburg County is the core county and Charlotte is the core city. There are three counties in North Carolina: Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, and two counties in South Carolina: Union and York. Both public and private entities use the Charlotte MSA data to measure the social and economic growth rates for the region and to track trends.

Figure 9-1: The 15-County Bi-State Region

Source: Centralina Council of Governments

Regional Collaborations

The Comprehensive Plan's vision of creating "Our Place in the Future" cannot be realized without proper coordination with Gaston County and other jurisdictions within the Greater Charlotte region. Each individual jurisdiction's ability to achieve its planning goals and create visible, lasting change depends on the success of other jurisdictions within the region. The list below details regional collaborations for education, economic development, environmental protection, transportation, land use and development.

"Today's business of being mayor is not just the business of a city, but more so now an entire region."
– Jennifer Stultz, Mayor of Gastonia

It is important for the City to encourage sustainable growth and development while maintaining and improving quality of life standards for existing and future populations.

Economic Development

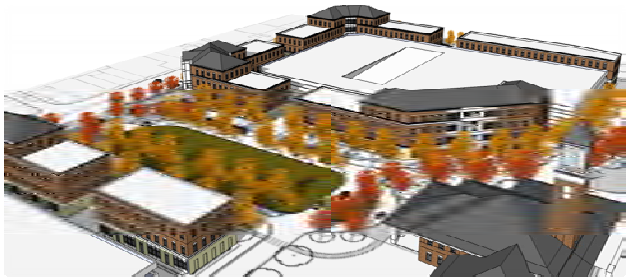
The Charlotte Regional Partnership, a nonprofit, public/private economic development organization is the leading association within the Greater Charlotte region working to attract new employers to the region and build regional collaboration to maximize competitiveness. Founded in 1991, the group works to bring together local governments, civic groups and the business community to market and promote "regionalism" as a necessary tool to foster planned growth and prosperity for the Charlotte region. There are also a variety of organizations working within Gaston County on economic development issues and initiatives. The two largest organizations are the Gaston County Economic Development Commission, and the Gaston Regional Chamber of Commerce. The City of Gastonia coordinates with the Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation for economic development projects located with Gastonia's Downtown. Continued coordination with these groups as well as ongoing communication with adjoining jurisdictions will ensure better management and future successes in economic development and job creation within Gaston County and the greater Charlotte region.

Growth & Development

The Centralina Council of Governments facilitates planning processes with regional partners to address regional growth and development issues. The Charlotte Bi-State Regional Visioning Project, called CONNECT, is the most recent localized planning effort. Sustainable Environment for Quality of Life (SEQL) was also a regional collaborative effort which addresses shared environmental and quality of life values related to water and air quality and sustainable growth. In many regards, SEQL activities laid the groundwork for ongoing collaboration in the region. Within Gaston County, many agencies collaborate to address growth and development related issues such as land use and housing. They are: City of Gastonia Community and Neighborhood Resources Division, Gaston County Planning Department, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Services, North Carolina Housing Finance Agency, Preservation North Carolina, various public utility entities, and other civic and nongovernmental organizations. The City will continue to seek ways to preserve what is valued and create a sustainable, well-managed land development pattern that maintains a high quality of life for existing and future populations.

Transportation

The City of Gastonia coordinates with the Gaston Urban Area MPO and NCDOT for transportation planning. Our goal is to develop a multi-modal transportation system. NCDOT has primary responsibility for the maintenance of interstates, state highways and bridges. However, The Gaston Urban Area MPO is a multi-jurisdictional planning agency consisting of twelve local governments, NCDOT, USDOT, and other providers of transportation services. The MPO maintains the region's 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan, which includes plans for not only automobiles, but also freight, rail, transit, bicycles, greenways, and pedestrians.



Conceptual multi-modal center in downtown Gastonia

Environmental Protection

In 2000, elected officials from across the Charlotte MSA region, along with the states of North Carolina and South Carolina and EPA, developed an initiative called Sustainable Environment for Quality of Life (SEQL) through a $275,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency. The initiative's objective was to promote a healthy environment, a strong economy, and a high quality of life for citizens of the 15-county Charlotte, NC - Rock Hill, SC region. The SEQL Grant has provided an integrated strategy that is used to address quality of life and environmental issues and further supports the region's efforts to develop integrated, long-range plans to ensure economic development and a positive quality of life for its future planning. SEQL is not just for local governments; it is a partnership with the business community, civic and environmental groups as well as individuals. A number of programs have been implemented, such as the partnership with the Carolinas Clean Air Coalition to develop a program for schools on health issues related to school bus emissions throughout the region.

Education & Workforce Development

Gastonia is served by the Gaston County Public School System, which is the seventh largest school district in the state. In 2008 it had an enrollment of 32,444 students in its 53 schools: 30 elementary schools, one intermediate school, 11 middle schools, nine high schools, one special needs school, and one alternative school. The district has approximately 6,500 teachers and staff, and thousands of volunteers working together to educate the children of Gaston County.

While there are over 36 institutions of higher learning, within the region, many City and county residents attend Gaston College, a state and locally controlled, coeducational institution offering occupational and two-year, principally bachelor's-creditable degrees and a co-educational liberal arts college offering bachelor's and master's degrees. The North Carolina Community College System New and Expanding Industry (NEIT) Program provides customized training assistance in support of new, full-time production positions created in the State of North Carolina, thereby enhancing the growth potential of companies located in the state while simultaneously preparing North Carolina's workforce with the skills essential to successful employment in emerging industries.

Other Regional Planning Efforts

In addition to other regional activities, planning professionals representing almost every jurisdiction within Gaston County meet on a monthly basis to discuss countywide planning issues and activities within the region on a number of regional planning activities. Several public services are operated on a countywide basis—such as the public school system, public libraries, storm water,

Gaston County Schools is the first school district in the state to produce its own biodiesel fuel for use in its buses. School officials are recycling used vegetable oil from school cafeterias,

recycling centers, restaurants and large manufacturers that produce waste oil. When the program is fully up and running, it will produce 120,000 gallons a year and save the county $250,000 annually, following a nationwide trend of using alternative fuel to save money and cut toxic emissions.

North Carolina offers a free New and Expanding Industry Training (NEIT) Program in Gaston County

- Companies creating 12 or more new production jobs are eligible.
- Gaston College, a leading community college, will create custom training programs for qualified employers.
- Courses are taught by qualified instructors, at the work site or on campus.

Gaston College Bio-Tech concentration

Gaston County G-CAMP meeting, a monthly forum for planners across Gaston County

Regional planning efforts must address both rural and urban issues.

hazardous waste collection, and EMS services—and require local input for facility planning. Undoubtedly, continued regional planning forums will be needed to meet the challenge of creating, implementing and funding a shared vision. The time frame for completing such work extends into the implementation period of this Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, as regional partners come together to address these issues and, as strategies become available, they should be considered for incorporation into this Plan.

Cooperation provides a forum to integrate common goals and establish a responsible regional community. The results of working collaboratively, and sharing experiences to common regional challenges, allow all concerned to benefit. The lack of a range of employment and housing opportunities, public facility sizing, and scheduling of transportation improvements, concurrent with development are issues that could be better managed through a coordinated approach.

Emerging Regional Planning Issues

Like many of the country's most successful urban regions, the Greater Charlotte bi-state region is in a critical time of transition. Many regional issues arose over the past 20 years as a result of rapid population growth; most issues have been identified, but not properly addressed. This section will discuss some of the most prevailing regional issues and policy implications we face now and into the future.

The region is connected and united by cultural identity, economic interests, geographic features, and common developmental and environmental concerns. Since the 1950s, the need for regional planning has grown from changing social and economic phenomena affecting local communities and regions throughout the United States. In particular, population growth, housing development, and other state and national social and economic trends are subjecting the Greater Charlotte bi-state region and its communities to internal migration and travel patterns never experienced before. Over the past 20 years, the Charlotte bi-state region has been a popular destination and growth has occurred at extraordinary rates. The resulting growth is creating a single, large, mixed rural and urban complex stretching from Iredell County on the North across the state line to York County, South Carolina. Dispersed development and diffusion, in turn, is creating complex developmental problems, inefficient accessibility to public transit and other community services. Careless depletion of valuable, irreplaceable agricultural and natural resources, and many environmental problems, also cause concern. Local governments of the region are faced with challenges of growing with nearby neighbors, weaving together the fabric of community. Local governments across the region are also learning that coordination of land development patterns and cooperation in service provision can offer mutual benefits.

While such growth and demographic changes will bring challenges, the Charlotte MSA, through it's system of regional and local planning, understands the need for a shared responsibility for maintaining regional quality of life standards to meet these challenges. A number of significant issues in the region are likely to become more prominent as growth continues. While these issues will not dictate a particular city's, or county's, given destiny, they are harbingers of planning trends and development forces that will impact the collective future of the region.

Development Patterns & Growth Management

As explained in the Growth Patterns & Directions Chapter,

the region is projected to add 400,000 people in each of the next two decades. With this growth has come increased prosperity – new jobs, rising incomes, added tax revenue, and higher property values. However, local governments within the region have discovered that accommodating growth is not always easy. Beginning in 1998, land development patterns quickly consumed land at a faster rate than overall population growth. Planners soon discovered that land use and development patterns throughout the region discouraged economic development within the urban core and downtown areas. Increased population also meant traffic congestion and commuting times had increased. Also, sewer and water systems spread throughout watersheds and across local jurisdictional boundaries, and jurisdictions across the region experienced shortages in safe, affordable housing as prices for new and existing houses rose at rates faster than median incomes. These conditions continue to strain local, and county budgets and they struggle to find ways to pay for the services and other costs related to growth.

Demographic changes have posed new realities for the region, such as shrinking household size, new service needs for an aging population, and a more ethnically diverse citizenry. New development has meant increased demand for costly urban services and increased pressure on vital natural resources. Population growth will result in the conversion of significant amounts of vacant land to residential, commercial, and industrial development. While coordination with Gaston County and other jurisdictions within the county led to development of the Unified Development Ordinance, the City will need to continue to work with adjacent municipalities to develop a growth management strategy. The City should continue to work to resolve development and growth management issues having impacts transcending the City's political jurisdiction, by participating in regional Technical Advisory Committees. Issues surrounding water quality will be coordinated with Gaston County and other agencies having appropriate jurisdiction. Issues of regional and state significance will be coordinated with the regional or state agencies having jurisdictional authority.

Transportation

Among the long list of transportation issues facing the region resulting from increasing population and the region's sprawling development patterns are unmanageable congestion, longer travel times and trip lengths, increasing energy consumption, declining air and water quality, increasing traffic safety problems, increasing maintenance and construction costs, and, lost habitat and natural areas. Urban highways, roads, and mass transit systems cover multiple jurisdictions within an urban area and impact local land use development. This overlap creates the need for coordination among all planning stakeholders within the region. With the effects of the economy felt by all, decisions about where to invest limited transportation funding are becoming harder to obtain. Regional partners will continue to explore ways to improve the existing transportation systems and target investments towards the creation of a multi-modal system balanced for every citizen in the region.

Green Infrastructure

As the region grew over the past 20 years, so did environmental issues related to rapid urbanization. Green infrastructure is a key component of the region's quality of life and economic competitiveness, including natural resources, environmental quality and open spaces. Regional partners have been engaged in a consistent battle to curtail loss of open space, protection of farmland, environmentally sensitive areas, parks, recreational areas, watersheds, and scenic views.

Changing demographics associated with increased life expectancy, an aging population, retirement of the baby boomers, more immigrants, changes in the ethnic make-up, and generational diversity are expected to create new demands on municipal and transportation services.

Figure 9-2: Regional Education Trends, Population 25 and Older

		Gastonia	Gaston Co.	North Carolina
Population 25 years and over	Total	46,045	137,431	5,964,892
	Less than 9th grade	10%	8%	6%
	9th to 12th grade, no diploma	11%	14%	11%
	High school graduates (includes equivalency)	28%	31%	29%
	Some college, no degree	22%	21%	20%
	Associate's Degree	7%	8%	8%
	Bachelor's Degree	15%	12%	17%
	Graduate or professional degree	7%	6%	9%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey

"Environmental awareness, or environmental action, is not a turf issue. It is something that we all have to address and work towards solving." – Jennifer Stultz, Mayor of Gastonia

Air Quality

Over the past 10 years, there has been an emerging sense of urgency regarding air quality. Regional partners understand that environmental pollutants do not recognize political or geographical boundaries. As explained in the Environmental Quality Chapter, eight of the region's 15 counties have been designated non-attainment for the eight-hour ozone standards. Poor air quality has a dual affect on the region; 1) it compromises the quality of life due to the health implications that come from inhaling air pollutants and the damage to the environment, and 2) puts the region at risk of losing federal transportation funding due to its non-attainment status.

Economic shifts

Undoubtedly, over the past 20 years, the Greater Charlotte region has grown a strong economy with diversified businesses, healthy urban centers, excellent accessibility, a strong distribution network, and effective universities and community colleges. The region boasts a strong banking center, headquarters of several Fortune 500 companies, a major share of the nation's motor sports industry, and hundreds of small business success stories. This is a diverse region and every county and jurisdiction has experienced varying degrees of success and challenges. However, recent changes in the economic climate suggest other areas of the economy, such as the financial sector, are vulnerable and communities should strive to create a more balanced economic sector not too heavily focused on one sector. Within the region, many counties are in a state of crisis due to large layoffs and record high unemployment levels, while other counties' are simply experiencing slow growth. However, the region is poised to rebound and has a common desire for continued economic growth. One key strategy is to develop innovative programs and partnerships to retrain former textile factory workers to work in the knowledge based business that are locating throughout the region. The region commonly recognizes workforce training is an essential component in the overall economic development strategy to help workers adjust to the current job market, and to prepare jobs that may emerge in the new economy.

Ensuring educational systems

Population shifts have placed strains on the county's ability to adequately balance the need to build more schools while maintaining the infrastructure of existing schools. In 2001, the county passed an $89 million school bond that provided funding to expand, renovate, and construct new schools throughout the county. The school board crafted a two-part plan, and in Phase I, many of the schools were renovated and expanded. In Phase II, the district plans to construct additional schools, but locations have not yet been determined. A new school often stimulates significant traffic and residential development near the new school site. Given this fact, it is imperative that City work closely with Gaston County Schools. The educational structure and current funding levels cannot keep pace with the increased needs of a changing demographic. Inter-jurisdictional coordination on issues related to funding for capital costs of school renovation, expansion, and new construction is needed for these important assets to be maintained.

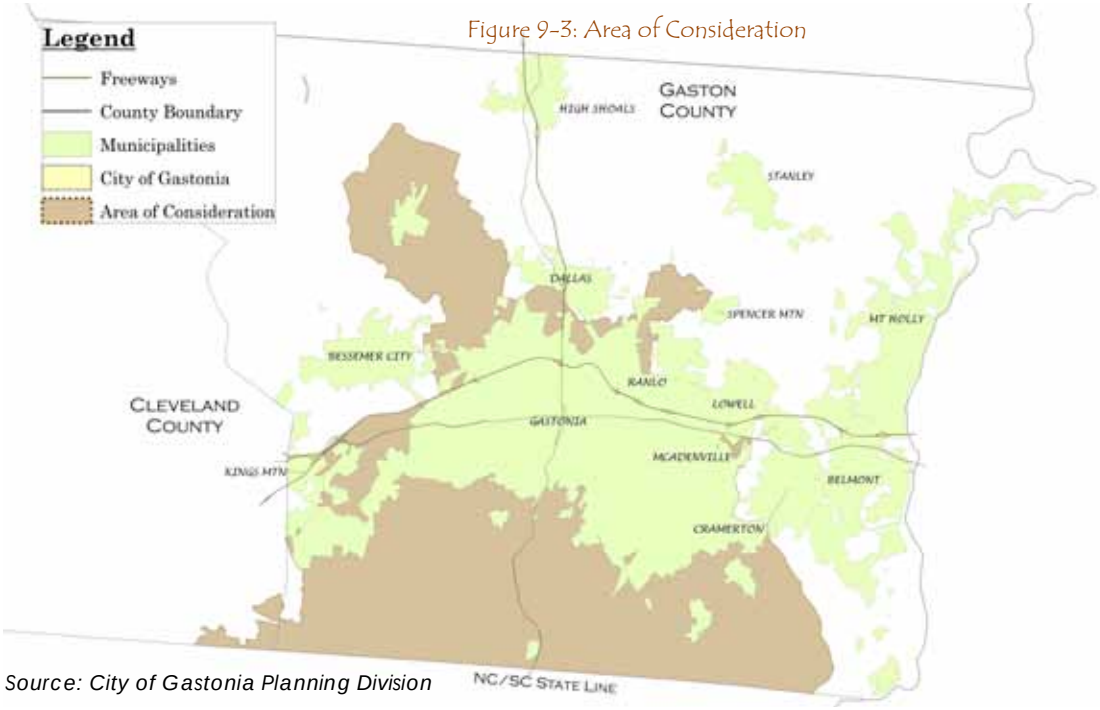
A growing community places greater demands on the school system, creating a need for more or expanded schools. Working together to find creative solutions to address the educational needs of the citizenry takes vision, leadership, and skill and will be essential for providing a high quality of life for the future.

Annexation

Annexation is a necessary means to provide for orderly urban growth, expansion of services, and a stable source of revenue. The entire community benefits from improved health and safety of areas with adequate urban services. North Carolina State law establishes the basic framework for a municipality to expand through annexation. The various methods and procedures by which annexation may be accomplished and the qualification criteria an area must meet in order to be considered for annexation are set forth in the State annexation statutes. Cities are the basic provider of essential governmental services needed to support urbanized areas. In return for the ability to annex, municipalities must extend local urban services such as police and fire protection, water and sewer lines, recreational services, solid waste collection and support for the local public street system.

Each municipality may develop its own annexation program within the guidelines and procedures set by the State's legislation. The City of Gastonia regularly uses two methods of annexation: 1) Petition annexation and 2) Involuntary or city-initiated annexation. The large number of incorporated places surrounding Gastonia limits the areas that are developed and open to annexation by the City. Agreements have been negotiated with all adjoining jurisdictions that determine who will annex land around Gastonia. The City will need to continue to review its annexation agreements and coordinate with adjoining municipalities to update them as necessary.

Figure 9-3: Area of Consideration



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Looking Ahead

Over the past few years, the Charlotte region has made enormous strides in opening and maintaining communications regarding regional growth and development issues. Specifically, increased communication has lead to new policies addressing issues related to population growth, economic shifts, transportation and air quality. However, the current housing crisis, coupled with a general downturn in the economy and resultant job losses, has impacted all sectors of the community, presenting a new set of issues, the effects of which are likely to be far greater than in previous economic downturns. Prior to the housing and economic crisis, regional partners were struggling with ways to manage resources and control rapid growth and development.

This map indicates the "area of consideration" or sphere of influence – an area around the city limits of Gastonia where future annexation into the city would be considered if conditions were conducive.

New realities have lead to the discovery of new issues centered on declining revenues. Public, civic, and private organizations have been forced to make tough decisions forever changing the way in which each operates. Cooperation and coordination will be essential, since recovery requires active dialogue at every level, and commitment to long term goals. Specifically, for local governments, it calls for controlling costly infrastructure spending in suburban fringe areas, looking seriously at alternatives to traditional transportation modes, and using existing utility capacities more effectively. Furthermore, regional cooperation should expand in the areas of recreation and open space planning, housing, water supply, wastewater treatment, and solid waste disposal. Gastonia should seek to maintain its leadership role within the region, and increase it's coordination efforts with regional partners encouraging even higher levels of stakeholder participation in future activities.

Issues

There are many planning and regional growth management issues, such as transportation and water quality management, that transcend jurisdictional boundaries. The environmental long term effects of a sprawling development pattern, lack of transportation funding, and scheduling of transportation improvements concurrent with development are all issues that could be better managed through a coordinated approach.

- The City of Gastonia has a long history of close inter-jurisdictional coordination between Gaston County and adjacent counties and municipalities. Regional planning has been an effort coordinated through the Centralina and Catawba Councils of government. In order for Gastonia to create a high quality of life for its citizens and address specific growth and development related issues, we must continue to reach across jurisdictional and governmental boundaries for effective solutions. Monthly staff review meetings and cooperation on development issues, as well as monthly attendance at meetings by a liaison planner from the county point to ongoing coordination and a close relationship between the City and County.

- Land use patterns throughout the region require long commutes resulting in an imbalance of services, jobs and housing. For many people concerned with the quality of urban life, the continuing outward explosion of urban growth patterns is a problem that needs a solution. Development patterns are inextricably linked to open space preservation, mobility options, and public service provisions. Jurisdictions across the region are recognizing the need for more compact, pedestrian friendly developments, which offer a greater use of mixes. The financial cost of supporting current land development patterns is greater than most communities can afford.

- Air pollution exceeds healthy levels on many days each year throughout the region. Along with increased population in cities and surrounding counties comes more cars, trucks, and industrial and commercial operations, generally resulting in more pollution. Not only does poor air quality compromise quality of life, but it threatens the future potential of the region to receive funding from federal sources for infrastructure improvement projects. The Charlotte region must collectively find ways of improving air quality, especially during this period of rapid growth when infrastructure needs become more critical.

- Over the past ten years, the region has seen huge losses of manufacturing jobs in textile and furniture businesses. Many counties throughout the region are in a state of crisis due to large layoffs and record high unemployment levels, while other counties are simply experiencing slow growth. Partnerships should be strengthened to address the new economic realities and help prepare citizens for the changing economy.

- With higher per-capita carbon emission rates than three-fourths of U.S. regions, the Charlotte region is facing critical environmental challenges. Regional partners are addressing environmental impacts through local action in an ad hoc fashion. In order to properly address environmental issues that affect the region's quality of life, partners must work cooperatively toward implementing air and water quality environmental policies on all levels.

ISSUES

- During the housing boom the region discovered that the result of sprawling development patterns could mean failure during times of resource constraint. Also, the melt down of the housing market coupled with the economic crisis caused a fundemental shift in the desire of people on where they live and work. Many local governments across the region have seen drastic reductions in tax revenues due to the economic crisis. Unemployed and impoverished workers pay less in income taxes and also purchase less, reducing sales tax receipts. While, property and business taxes have also been driven down by the foreclosure and financial crises. Regional leaders must acknowledge that future development will be sustainable only if the natural resource land is protected and if new growth is concentrated in existing population centers or suitable areas served by appropriate infrastructure.

- The revitalization of older, industrial cities starts with local leaders, who must develop and articulate their own vision for success, and the means by which to collaboratively realize it.

Objectives & Tools

Objective 1

Continue coordination of Development and Growth Management Issues.

Tools

a) The City shall resolve development and growth management issues having impacts transcending the City's political jurisdiction, by participating in the COG CONNECT Advisory Committees.
b) Issues involving Mount Island Lake water quality shall be coordinated with Gaston County and other agencies having appropriate jurisdiction. Issues of regional and state significance shall be coordinated with the regional or State agencies having jurisdictional authority.
c) Improve the communication and coordination of the planning and development permit process between City and County offices, the public and other governments agencies.
d) Encourage growth and reinvestment in areas with adequate access to area utilities and with convenient access to transportation corridors.
e) Determine most appropriate places for growth and place limits on extension of water and sewer infrastructure to ensure the plan works.
f) Collaborate on a multi-jurisdictional level to address stormwater issues.
g) Adopt development strategies that help protect and sustain the regional water supply.
h) Explore opportunities for further regional cooperation and coordination.

Objective 2

Continue to increase multi-jurisdictional communication with adjoining jurisdictions and regional planning agencies.

Tools

a) Increase involvement in regional planning agencies, i.e. Centralina Council of Governments, Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).
b) Increase participation and cooperation with Gaston County staff, and staff of other cities in Gaston County,and surrounding counties.
c) Increase knowledge of happenings, i.e. development decisions, events, etc. in adjacent counties and cities.
d) 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.

Objective 3

Continue to coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions regarding proposals for new development near common borders in order to foster a sustainable land use pattern.

Tools

a) The City will continue coordination with the surrounding jurisdictions of Lowell, Cramerton, Ranlo, Mt. Holly, Dallas, Bessemer City, Kings Mountain, Belmont, Charlotte, and Mecklenburg County in planning efforts, ensuring opportunities to review and comment on land use and development proposals within the defined areas of interest of these jurisdictions.
b) Continue to participate in multi-jurisdictional regional planning projects and activities that are administered by the Centralina Council of Governments.
c) Promote Gastonia's citizens' interests in regional and

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

state growth management decisions.

d) The City should support regional and state growth management decisions, while promoting policy that supports cities as the best building blocks of an efficient, stable, and compact urban region.

e) The City shall support regional growth management decisions that promote the development of an orderly efficient and compact urban form, prevent future unincorporated urban development, and favor development near existing municipal services.

f) Advocate coordinated public facilities and services necessary to support the regional land use pattern.

Objective 4

Coordinate transportation planning and service provision with regional transportation agencies.

Tools

a) Continue work with Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the regional transportation planning network to encourage local governments to implement a system of fully interconnected arterial and local streets, pathways and bikeways.

b) Promote the development and preservation of various freight modes and modal connections to adequately serve the movement of freight within the region and provide effective linkages that serve statewide, national and international markets.

c) Work with regional partners to encourage physical linkages, such as bike and pedestrian pathways between communities to connect important regional assets such as parks and community services.

d) Support the production and preservation of lifecycle and affordable housing with links to jobs, services and amenities accessible by auto, transit, biking and walking.

Objective 5

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.

Tools

a) Gastonia shall encourage the Gaston County School Board mutually agree on, promote and support high-quality community neighborhood development by coordinating site searches, planning and design public educational facilities as well as assuring the consistency of those facilities with the Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations.

b) Work to improve safe walking and bicycling routes to school.

c) Promote consistency in zoning through the UDO process.

d) Gastonia shall encourage the state, the region, adjacent municipalities and counties, Gaston County School Board and special districts to review their proposed public facility improvement plans and plan amendments with Gastonia for consistency with the policies and criteria of this Comprehensive Plan.

10

Overview

Air Quality

Water Resource Quality

Areas of Significance

Summary: Environmental Problems & Concerns

Issues

Objectives & Tools

Environmental Quality

GASTONIA 2025

10 Environmental Quality

Environmental Quality 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.

Overview

Gastonia's natural environment and features help define its quality of life and are linked to both social and economic facets of the community. The presence of clean air, water, and soil is important to maintain people's health as well as to promote a healthy business environment. Therefore, the conservation of Gastonia's natural resources will help to ensure that future residents and businesses have resources necessary for the community's continued vitality.

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 Sustainability

Environmental sustainability means the prudent use of physical qualities which are most valued in the natural environment without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It implies preserving, conserving, and intensively managing resources to minimize the impact of development on the environment. It also means ensuring that all residents live in areas free from the unhealthy effects of environmental pollution. Gastonia's challenge for the future will be to accommodate growth while slowing the loss of land, the consumption of resources, the pollution of waterways, congestion, and stress created by urban sprawl.

The 2025 Plan is based on sound principles of sustainability and offers a reasonable direction toward enhancing the City's environmental quality and livability. Over the long term, efforts to prevent pollution, increase energy efficiency and conserve water will produce economic benefits. Some of the Plan's other elements include goals and policies addressing how environmental values specifically relate to the topics covered in those elements. For instance, the Land Use element includes policies governing development near environmentally critical areas such as wetlands and stream corridors, and the Transportation element addresses possible environmental impacts and improvements associated with transportation choices. 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. Furthermore, the City also has an opportunity to inform its citizens on how changes in daily life can improve environmental quality through our quarterly newsletter communications, and other outreach opportunities. This element of the 2025 Plan contains broad environmental goals and policies.

This plan recognizes that the suitability of land for conservation or development is influenced by topography, geology, and soils; surface water and groundwater resources; wildlife and its habitat; flood hazards; and, air quality. One is related to the other, and as an urban community with considerable environmental resources, Gastonia continues its long-standing effort to maintain that fragile ecological balance.

Air Quality

Air is a resource we take for granted because it is everywhere around us, and we involuntarily breathe twelve times each minute. However, since the 1970s, there has been a heightened public awareness of the quality of the air we breathe. This awareness can be attributed to the various studies and news media reports that have linked ozone and fine particle pollution to premature death, cardiac arrhythmias, asthma attacks, and the development of chronic bronchitis and progression of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). In fact, although rarely talked about, poor air quality poses one of the greatest threats to public health and is particularly burdensome to children, the elderly, those with lower incomes, and those with chronic respiratory disease.

Standards & Measures

To ensure access to clean air, the federal Clean Air Act was created as the primary regulatory framework for national, state, and local efforts to protect air quality. Under the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for setting standards, known as National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), for pollutants considered harmful to people and the environment. Air quality planning is focused on meeting the NAAQS and setting deadlines for meeting these standards.

The Division of Air Quality (DAQ), of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR),) is responsible for protecting North Carolina's air quality by issuing permits, developing programs, and monitoring air pollution to ensure communities meet the NAAQS. The Air Quality Index is determined by measuring for five major air pollutants: ground-level ozone, particle pollution (also known as particulate matter), carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. Ground-level ozone and airborne particles are the two pollutants that pose the greatest threat to human health in this country. Air pollutants identified in the 2007 DAQ Air Quality Report as the greatest concern in the Charlotte MSA are:

- Ground-level ozone, the major component of what we commonly call smog, mostly from automobile traffic, and industrial pollution;
- Fine particulate matter, PM 2.5, mostly from electricity generation in Gaston County, but statewide and national major sources also includes waste disposal, smoke, wood combustion fires, industry and vehicles);
- Hazardous air pollutants, also called Air Toxics; and,
- Carbon monoxide, mostly from motor vehicles.

Gastonia's air quality is measured along with other municipalities within the Charlotte local network. The Charlotte local network includes Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Union, Iredell and York (S.C.) counties. Regional trends such as population growth, greater increases in vehicle miles traveled, and growing electrical power demands have had a negative impact on the quality of air in the region. Specifically, the eight counties in the Charlotte region are designated by the EPA as a non-attainment area because it exceeded, or has contributed to exceeding, the national eight-hour ozone standard over a three-year period for ground-level ozone. This means that on many days each year, air

Looking out across Gaston County atop Crowders Mountain on a "code orange" day.

pollution exceeds healthy levels. This designation also means that the region could face serious penalties involving the loss of federal funds if the air quality isn't improved. Poor air quality not only impacts residents of the region, but also impacts businesses in the form of lost productivity and the possibility of more stringent federal regulations. Once designations take effect, they become an important component of state and local government efforts to control ground-level ozone.

The Charlotte Urban Area recognizes that the problems with air quality are due to high levels of ground-level ozone caused by automobile traffic and industrial pollution. It is estimated that more than 55 percent of ozone air pollution in the region is caused by emissions from cars and trucks. The American Lung Association's 2003 *State of the Air Report* identified the Charlotte MSA as the 10th smoggiest metro area in the United States. Ground-level ozone is not a primary pollutant, meaning it doesn't come directly from a source such as smokestacks or tailpipes, but is created when two primary pollutants, oxides of nitrogen (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), are "cooked" by sunlight and high temperatures. This means we are most likely to see high ozone levels during the hot spring and summer months, May 1–September 30 each year. During this time, partners across the region post the color-coded Air Quality Index used by the DAQ to warn citizens of unhealthy air quality as illustrated in Figure 10-1.

Over the past six years, the Charlotte MSA has experienced an average of 35 days per year of unhealthy air. These unhealthy air days include orange, red, or purple coded days. Cars and other vehicles are the largest single sources for ozone problems. While Gaston County has little control over vehicle use in other counties in the region, Gastonia can contribute to the reduction of ozone by exercising its leadership role in transportation planning. Managing growth in ways to locate residences closer to and among employment centers, and encouraging carpooling and alternate sources of transportation is also an effective tool for addressing air quality. Public education regarding reducing ground level ozone is needed. As the region continues to grow, these efforts will be required on a regional basis to prevent an increase in ozone exceedances. Also, improvements to traffic flow and public transit, clean fuels for City vehicles, and regional bus service between Gastonia and Charlotte are all steps the City can advocate.

Figure 10-1: The Color-Coded Air Quality Index

Air Quality	Air Quality Index	Health Effects
Good (green)	0-50	None expected
Moderate (yellow)	51-100	Unusually sensitive people should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion.
Unhealthy for sensitive groups (orange)	101-150	Active children and adults, and people with respiratory diseases, such as asthma, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.
Unhealthy (red)	151-200	Everyone, especially children, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.
Very unhealthy (purple)	201-300	Everyone, especially children, should avoid all outdoor exertion.

Source: Division of Air Quality, NCDNR

The Charlotte local network is a collaborative group of multi-agency partners responsible for ensuring the region meets national standards, and develops the necessary plans to continue compliance. This network collectively addresses the air quality issues in the region through programs and public outreach activities. Gastonia can contribute to the reduction of ozone by exercising its leadership role in the local transportation-planning network. Network partners work together to educate the public about the air quality issues faced in the community, and develop policy options that help to address air quality. Examples of policies that are effective in addressing air quality issues include growth management tools, such as locating residences closer to and among employment centers and encourage carpooling and alternate sources of transportation. Most recently, the Gaston MPO placed Air Quality signs throughout the City of Gastonia. These signs were located at all municipal Fire Stations, Police Department buildings, City Hall, and various parks and recreation facilities. As the region continues to grow, these efforts will be required on a regional basis to prevent an increase in ozone exceedances. Also, improvements to traffic flow and public transit, clean fuels for City vehicles, and regional bus service between Gastonia and Charlotte are all steps the City can advocate.

Air Quality notice signs found throughout the city.

Water Quality

Clean, fresh water is necessary for drinking, bathing, swimming, fish and wildlife habitats, irrigated crops, food processing, and a number of manufacturing processes. Clean water is first and foremost a public health issue. Water quality refers to the ability of our water resources to support human, animal, and plant life, while water quantity refers to the volume and rate of runoff. Reliable, long-term supplies of clean water are essential for sustaining livable communities and regions. Therefore, the quality of the water in Gastonia is very important because of the strong relationship to the health and welfare of the community.

To limit harmful impacts from human activities on water quality, the Clean Water Act (CWA) was enacted. The Clean Water Act is the nation's primary legislation to establish surface water quality standards, protections, and pollution clean-up. In the State of North Carolina, the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has been charged with establishing standards, regulating, and monitoring North Carolina's waters for compliance with the CWA standards. The DEQ uses a non-regulatory basinwide water quality planning watershed based approach to restoring and protecting the quality of North Carolina's surface waters. The North Carolina Division of Water Quality (DWQ) prepares basinwide water quality plans (basin plans) for each of the 17 major river basins in the state. Their implementation, and the protection of water quality, requires the coordinated efforts of many agencies, local governments and stakeholders throughout the state.

Long Creek flowing near Rankin Lake.

Avon Creek restoration project at Lineberger Park.

Water supplies can be thought of as belonging to specific watersheds or river basins. Watersheds consist of the land area that drains into a particular river system, including tributaries. These areas rarely reflect political boundaries. Six watersheds cover Gaston County: Indian Creek, Upper South Fork, Dutchman's Creek, Catawba Creek, Crowders Creek and Long Creek. The City of Gastonia and the planning area are located in the Catawba, Crowders and Long Creek watersheds. All of the watersheds in Gaston County eventually empty into Lake Wylie, and the water quality in Gaston County has a direct effect on the water quality in the Lake. There are a number of factors that influence the condition of the watersheds, which include the functionality and integrity of local rivers, streams, floodplains, and wetlands as well as impervious surface cover, topography, tree cover, and soils and hydrology. These factors are described in the following subsections.

Water Resources

The water resources in the planning area are part of an ecosystem with two interrelated components that rely on precipitation for recharge and replenishment. The first major water resource component is surface water, which includes all the water we can see, including creeks, rivers, lakes, wetlands, riparian areas, and ponds. The second water resource component is groundwater, which is stored in underground spaces between deposits of sand, gravel, and silt, and in the cracks in bedrock. Nearly all surface waters interact with groundwater. As a result, removing water from streams can deplete groundwater supplies, and likewise, groundwater pumped from an aquifer can deplete water from streams, lakes or wetlands. For these reasons, polluted surface water can degrade groundwater just as contaminated groundwater can degrade surface water. These interactions influence water supplies, water quality and aquatic environment characteristics.

Mountain Island Lake, source of the Gastonia's drinking water.

Therefore, consideration of both groundwater and surface water is essential for watershed management and water quality protection.

Surface Water

The City has an abundance of surface waters, depicted on Figure 10-2, that are used for a variety of purposes including a wide range of recreational activities. Fish, wildlife, and native vegetation depend on these waters for survival. There are three sources of raw water for the 2025 Planning Area; South Fork River, Mountain Island Lake and Rankin Lake. However, South Fork River and Rankin Lake are not used as municipal drinking water sources. The City established Mountain Island Lake as the primary source of raw water in 1995. The lake has a significantly better water quality, largely due to the fact that Lake Norman, located immediately upstream, acts as an enormous settling basin helping to remove pollutants before the water flows into the lake. Approximately 114,000 residents in Gaston County draw their drinking water from a municipal surface water supply system, while the remaining 76,000 draw water from private or community wells. South Fork and Rankin Lake are used only for emergency backup.

All surface waters in North Carolina are assigned a primary classification. The state rates waters according to how well they are supporting their intended uses, whether that use is for providing animal habitat or drinking water. The rating takes into account water quality measures, such as fish and aquatic insect habitat, monthly chemical samples, fish tissue analyses, monitoring data from other agencies, and information from natural resource staff and citizens.

The following ratings are assigned to waters:

- **Fully Supporting:** waters meet designated use criteria,
- **Partially Supporting:** waters fail to meet designated use criteria at times, so are considered impaired,
- **Not Supporting:** waters frequently fail to meet designated use criteria, so are considered impaired, and,
- **Not Rated:** streams lacking data or having inconclusive data for rating.

Within the 2025 Planning Area, the state rates most streams as Class "C", meaning their intended uses include fishing and boating, agricultural uses, and wading. Swimming is not included as a use of Class "C" waters. Mountain Island Lake, parts of the South Fork River, and other waters located upstream of municipal drinking water intakes, are classified as "Water Supply Watersheds." Since their intended use is drinking water, these areas must meet higher standards in order to meet their intended use. The judgments, or assessments, to rate the quality of surface water are based on a variety of information, including data collected from monitoring programs, land use information and hydrologic connectivity.

Figure 10-2: Sources of Surface Raw Water

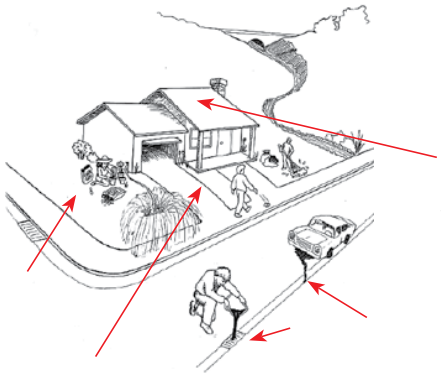
Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Groundwater

Groundwater is the other component of overall water quality. It is an important source of drinking water for private and community wells. The geological characteristics of Gastonia, in which the groundwater supplies reside, are typical of the central piedmont region. Groundwater is the water that seeps through the ground after a rain or snow that settles to a level called the water table. Below the water table, groundwater fills the spaces between the soil particles and within the cracks of the bedrock. These layers of soil, rock, and water are called aquifers. Groundwater contamination is just as possible as surface water contamination. Groundwater contamination can occur if pollutants seep though the soil and enter the

Surface Water Facts

Surface water is naturally replenished by precipitation and naturally lost through evaporation and sub-surface seepage into the groundwater.



Non-point source pollution

Point source pollution

aquifer. Potential sources of pollution include leaks from underground storage tanks, landfills, septic systems, excessive fertilizer application, oil or chemical spills, and animal waste.

Increasing concern in the State has been placed on underground industrial gasoline and domestic fuel oil tanks buried during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s that are failing and creating potential groundwater pollution. Within Gaston County's 356 square miles, groundwater supplies the 185,000 residents with half of their drinking water. Approximately 17,000 public wells and 220 private wells serve the population. Current groundwater related concerns for the area include the preservation of open space, groundwater contamination, and watershed protection. Groundwater monitoring has been limited to well sampling in Gaston County. However, Gaston County uses the Groundwater Guardian Program to raise public awareness through educational programs.

General Sources and Types of Pollution

Pollutants that enter waters fall into two general categories: point sources and non-point sources. While some pollutants may occur naturally, most water pollutants are the result of human activities. In fact, North Carolina Water Quality monitoring has identified non-point source stormwater runoff that is directly related to land use activities as a major source of water pollution. Point sources can be traced directly to sites such as sewage outfall pipes emptying into streams, rivers and lakes, while non-point sources come from dispersed and less identifiable locations such as lawns, golf courses, motor vehicles, parking lots, roof tops, etc. Non-point source pollution occurs when stormwater runoff carries pollutant particles into streams, rivers and lakes. These sources are from a broad range of land use activities. However, factors that affect stormwater runoff and non-point source pollution are generally development related. For example, as rural land uses in the planning area give way to residential and commercial development, there is an increase in the amount of impervious surface area. Impervious surfaces are areas, such as pavement or roofing, that do not allow stormwater to be absorbed into the ground.

The *2001 Catawba River Basin Natural Resources Plan* found that approximately 7.4 miles of the Catawba Creek was impaired due to both point and non-point sources of pollutions. The Plan found that the Gastonia Catawba Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant impacted the creek, along with urban runoff, and was therefore decommissioned. The removal of the discharge, and the operation of the Catawba Creek facility, improved the water quality of Catawba Creek. Much work has been done to address point source discharges in Catawba Creek and Crowders Creek.

However, as population increases within the planning area, so does the rate of urbanization and increased amounts of impervious surface will yield increased stormwater runoff. Stormwater runoff pollution is recognized by the EPA as the number one water quality problem in the United States. In the future, careful land use planning emphasizing pollution prevention and minimization will be necessary to maintain current water quality and to prevent further degradation.

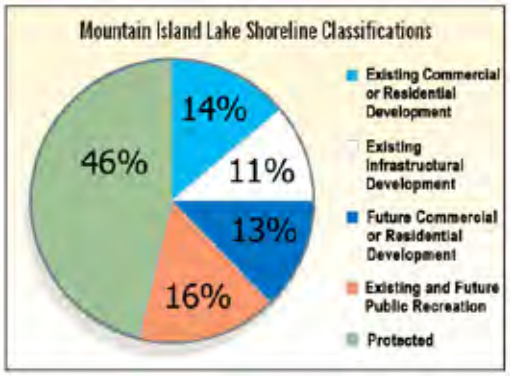
The City has an important role in improving water quality. For example, in 2001, the City of Gastonia Wastewater Treatment Division became the first certified public agency in North Carolina to develop and successfully implement an ISO 14001 Environmental Management System. The City is also involved in ongoing efforts to restore stream

health and associated riparian areas, educating the public about how individual actions can improve water quality, and coordinating policies and actions with other jurisdictions and agencies. Currently Mountain Island Lake has excellent water quality; however, as the area around the lake continues to develop the sources of water pollution will increase as will the potential for negative water quality impacts. In 2004, officials from Mecklenburg and Gaston counties realized that removing pollutants from Mountain Island Lake would be extremely costly, inconveniencing many people, a broad coalition of local government offices and non governmental organizations was formed with a goal of protecting the critical areas of land around Mountain Island Lake. The outcome of several meetings was the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing a framework for coordination of efforts to protect water quality conditions and creation of the Mountain Island Lake Watershed Protection Guidelines. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide the jurisdictions around Mountain Island Lake with watershed protection strategies and guidelines for use at their discretion in the protection of water quality conditions in the lake. This source water protection project is ongoing, but to date 2,361 acres of the lake's watershed have been protected, including nine miles of shoreline.

Each year, as required under the federal Clean Water Act, the North Carolina Division of Water Quality releases a listing of streams, or stream segments, not meeting water quality standards for their classified use, which is generally, to be "fishable and swimmable." Illustrated in Figure 10-3, the list of impaired waters for 2006 in Gastonia includes:

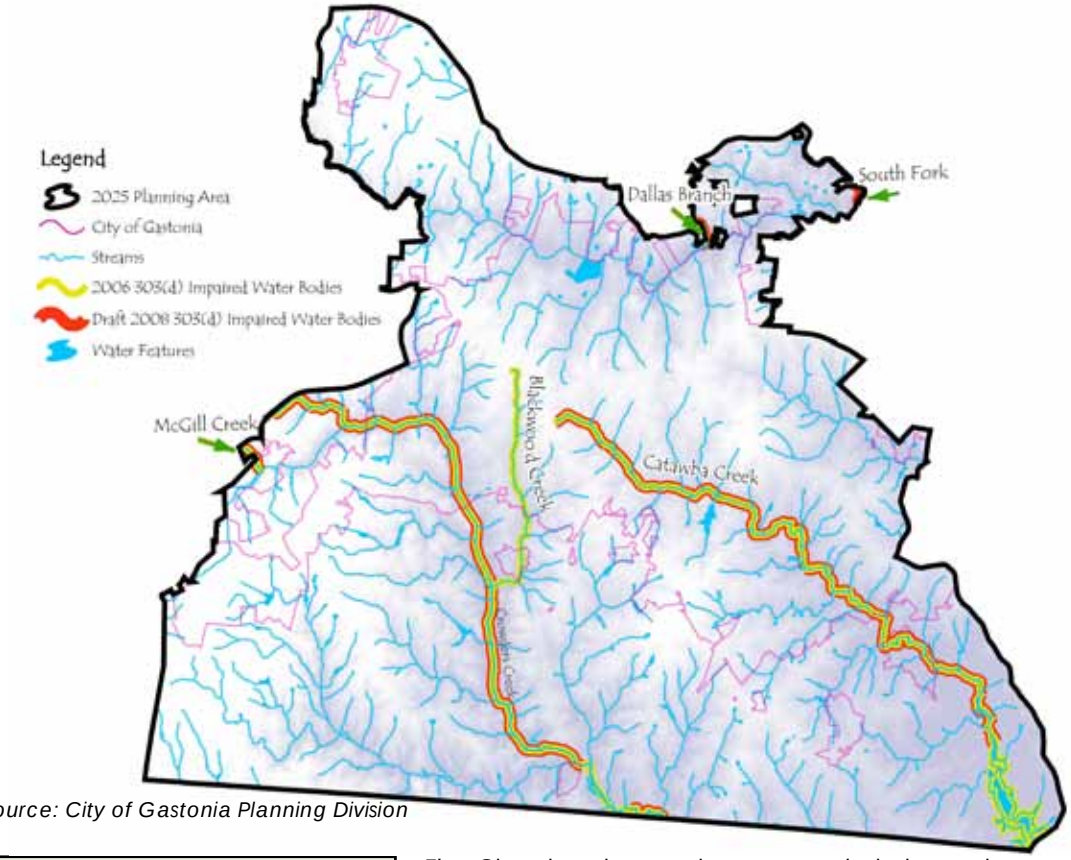
- Catawba Creek,
- McGill Creek,
- Crowders Creek,
- Dallas Branch, and,
- Blackwood Creek.

The report recognizes that stormwater runoff pollution is a potential source of water quality problems along these creeks. The creeks are plagued with sediment pollution, the most common type of physical water pollution in the region and in fast-urbanizing areas. Sedimentation makes water gritty, turbid (cloudy), and unfit for drinking and swimming. The South Fork River has a very high turbidity level. Again, careful land use planning that emphasizes pollution prevention is necessary to maintain a high quality water current water quality and to prevent further degradation.



Mountain Island lake is blue. Protected land bordering the lake is green.

Figure 10-3: NC Water Quality Assessment & Impaired Waters List



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Both stormwater runoff polution and sediment pollution are potential sources of water quality problems along our creeks, lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams. Sediment pollution is usually the product of accelerated erosion, which can come from any activity involving significant earth disturbance, such as crop planting and construction of buildings and roads.

The City also plays an important role in improving water quality. The City of Gastonia is a co-implementer of permits and associated plans through an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with Clean Water Services (CWS). This agreement outlines the functions the City must perform that are critical to the operation, maintenance, and management of stormwater and wastewater facilities, and to ensure compliance with the Clean Water Act. Separate from the NPDES permit process, CWS has developed a surface water management program to manage non-point source pollution impacts on water quality. The Healthy Streams Plan, a public education program, and watershed restoration projects are among several activities undertaken to improve water quality of streams and wetlands within the Catawba River basin. Gastonia also seeks to improve water quality by adopting land use policies and regulations to prevent erosion and protect floodplains and other sensitive lands including tree groves, wetlands, and stream corridors. Land use regulations can also help reduce water pollution by reducing impervious surfaces, and requiring stormwater retention and treatment on-site.

Stormwater

In July 2001, the City of Gastonia established a Stormwater Utility charged with protecting local creeks and streams. The utility focuses on compliance with the EPA Phase II mandates, maintenance of the City's storm drainage system, and assisting property owners dealing with problems associated with increased runoff. According to the Stormwater Phase II Rule, the City must reduce pollutants in stormwater to the maximum extent practicable to protect water quality. In addition, the City can provide education regarding low-impact development and green building techniques to conserve water and protect water quality. Furthermore, the City maintains a sewer extension program connecting properties to the City sewage system that reliant upon septic tanks and drain fields.

Human activities can negatively impact surface water quality, even when the activity is far removed from the waterbody. Water quality is affected by a number of factors including, sediment washed downstream, storage capacity of reservoirs and aquatic habitat.

Stormwater drainage is the overland flow of water during, and immediately following, a storm. In a natural environment the water flows by gravity toward the local point of lowest elevation. The areas of peak elevation—

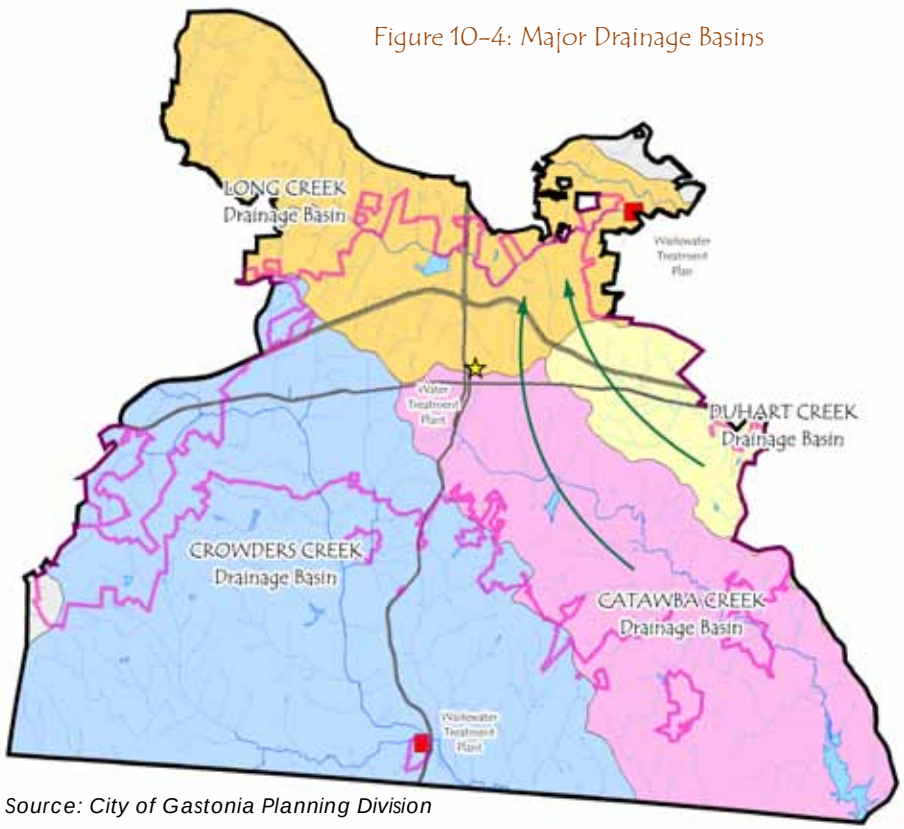
ridges—define the boundaries of a drainage basin. The basins direct the water toward a stream, river or lake. The land also absorbs rain in a number of ways. First, the trees, shrubs and ground cover absorb the impact of rain drops, allowing the water to slowly reach the soil, where most of it is absorbed and some of it flows along the surface to streams and rivers. The natural rise and fall of the land determines where the water will go. Vegetation slows the water and the roots help hold the soil in place; both retard erosion. Also, plants absorb the water through their roots and release it back into the air. The major drainage basins in the 2025 Planning Area are shown in Figure 10-4.

The need for an urban drainage system arises when land is developed. Water generally cannot percolate through construction materials and pavement. The natural situation is reversed: almost all of the water stays at the surface and very little is absorbed. Furthermore, the water running off is not slowed by vegetation. During a heavy storm, water can accumulate very quickly, and as it drains, can contribute to erosion and flooding downstream. Water that is not drained off, absorbed into the soil, or soon evaporated, can flood immediate areas for extended lengths of time. For this reason it has become necessary for cities to build drainage systems to efficiently remove the water and carry it to a stream or river.

Urban drainage and flood control have traditionally focused on removing the water as quickly as possible through structured systems such as curbs, gutters, pipes and culverts. We have come to realize, however, that emphasizing quick drainage can cause flooding and erosion downstream from the City as fast delivery of stormwater overwhelms the natural drainage systems.

The current emphasis in drainage is on-site management of stormwater. Rather than draining away all of the water at once during a storm, a portion of it is detained on the property for a period of time, then released slowly to the drainage system. Detention provides two benefits. First, the volume of water sent to the stream during the critical period of the storm is reduced. Second, some of the water is removed naturally on site by absorption into the soil and evaporation. Another related trend is the movement toward natural (rather than structural) drainage systems, such as swales and retention ponds that also allow the water to evaporate and percolate into the soil.

Figure 10-4: Major Drainage Basins



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Stormwater public education and awareness campaign involved Boy Scouts cleaning debris from storm drains and applying "no dumping" markers on storm drains.

Natural drainage system: retention ponds allow water to evaporate and percolate into the soil.

On-site management of stormwater: detention ponds detain stormwater for a period of time and releases it slowly to the drainage system.

The major problem with the drainage system has been maintenance. Currently the only drainage structures regularly maintained are those on public property, such as street right-of-ways or easements. Most drains, pipes and ditches, however, are on private property. Broken or blocked pipes and drains can cause regular flooding, sinkholes, erosion, polluted water and unsafe road conditions. The City requires all new commercial developments one-acre or larger to incorporate stormwater detention. Detention is not required for small commercial developments, single-family residences or streets.

On September 1, 2005, the City of Gastonia was permitted to discharge stormwater runoff from the municipal separate storm sewer system to the waters of North Carolina in compliance with the EPA's Phase II Stormwater Program. The permit regulations require the City to implement six minimum control measures to reduce the discharge of pollutants in stormwater, to the maximum extent practicable, and to protect water quality. These six measures are:

1. Public education and outreach about stormwater impacts.
2. Public involvement and participation.
3. Illicit discharge detection and elimination.
4. Construction site stormwater runoff control.
5. Post-construction stormwater management for new development and redevelopment.
6. Pollution prevention and good housekeeping for municipal operations.

In order to meet these requirements, the City developed a Storm Water Management plan (SWMP). The SWMP is the action plan by which the City will execute Best Management Practices identified in the permit to meet the six minimum measures. The plan includes: (1) Best Management Practices proposed to achieve each of the six minimum control measures; (2) measurable goals for each minimum control measure; and, (3) the timeline for starting, completing and addressing each minimum control measure.

Erosion control and stormwater management efforts in both the County and City are paramount for protecting our waterways from the adverse effects of development. These efforts can be expanded by improving surface water mapping and collecting additional water quality data to inform development management efforts. Also, more emphasis should be placed on educating homeowners and existing business owners on the benefits of retrofitting properties with small-scale Low Impact Development (LID) best management practices such as the use of permeable and porous pavements; bioinfiltration swales, rain gardens, xeriscaping or lowmoisture landscape plantings rain barrels.

Flood Control

Flooding in Gastonia's streams and watercourses has generally not been a critical problem as it has been in some areas, such as cities in mountain valleys and on plains along major rivers. The topography and soils of the Piedmont Region provide a relatively flood-resistant environment. Valleys are broad, and water rises slower and spreads further than it does in the mountains. In addition, Gastonia historically developed along natural ridges rather than valleys, following the pattern set by the location of the railroads. More recently, the City has grown into the lower areas between the ridges.

Flood control in Gastonia has been accomplished through participation in the National Flood Insurance Program. In exchange for guaranteeing flood insurance to people

who have property in the floodplain, the program requires cities to restrict development in the areas where floods cause the most damage. Gastonia restricts development in the floodplain by permitting construction and fill only when it will not increase the base flood elevation.
As the City continues to develop, more impervious surface will be added, more forested areas will be removed, and more development will occur close to the floodplains. Measures the City can take to lessen these impacts include thorough maintenance of the drainage system, stormwater detention for all new development, and maintenance of streams receiving the stormwater.

Some land use and design issues also have an impact on stormwater management. Establishing greenways around floodplains can give the City easier access to the streams for maintenance, as well as allowing residents to use the flood-prone land for trails. Clustering new developments away from streams, and reserving that land as open space, helps control floodplain development. Cluster development can also reduce flooding by reducing impervious street surfaces.

Soils

Soil conditions need to be considered in the planning and development process for several reasons. One is to ensure buildings and structures are adequately supported. Another reason focuses on soil conservation. Minimizing soil erosion can help control airborne dust as well as sediment deposition in watercourses. Soil depths must also be adequate for water to infiltrate into the ground and maintain groundwater levels in aquifers. Soils host a community of insects, fungi, roots, and bacteria integral to every natural ecosystem. Disturbances to this ecosystem may affect vegetation and decomposition, promote the colonization of invasive species, decrease water quantity, or degrade water quality.

Soils in the Gastonia vicinity can be grouped into five general categories, with varying suitability for land development, roads and septic fields. Soils have different capacities for drainage, load bearing, and fertility. Identifying soil characteristics allows us to evaluate land development with regard to its physical suitability. The following soil types are found in the 2025 Planning Area:

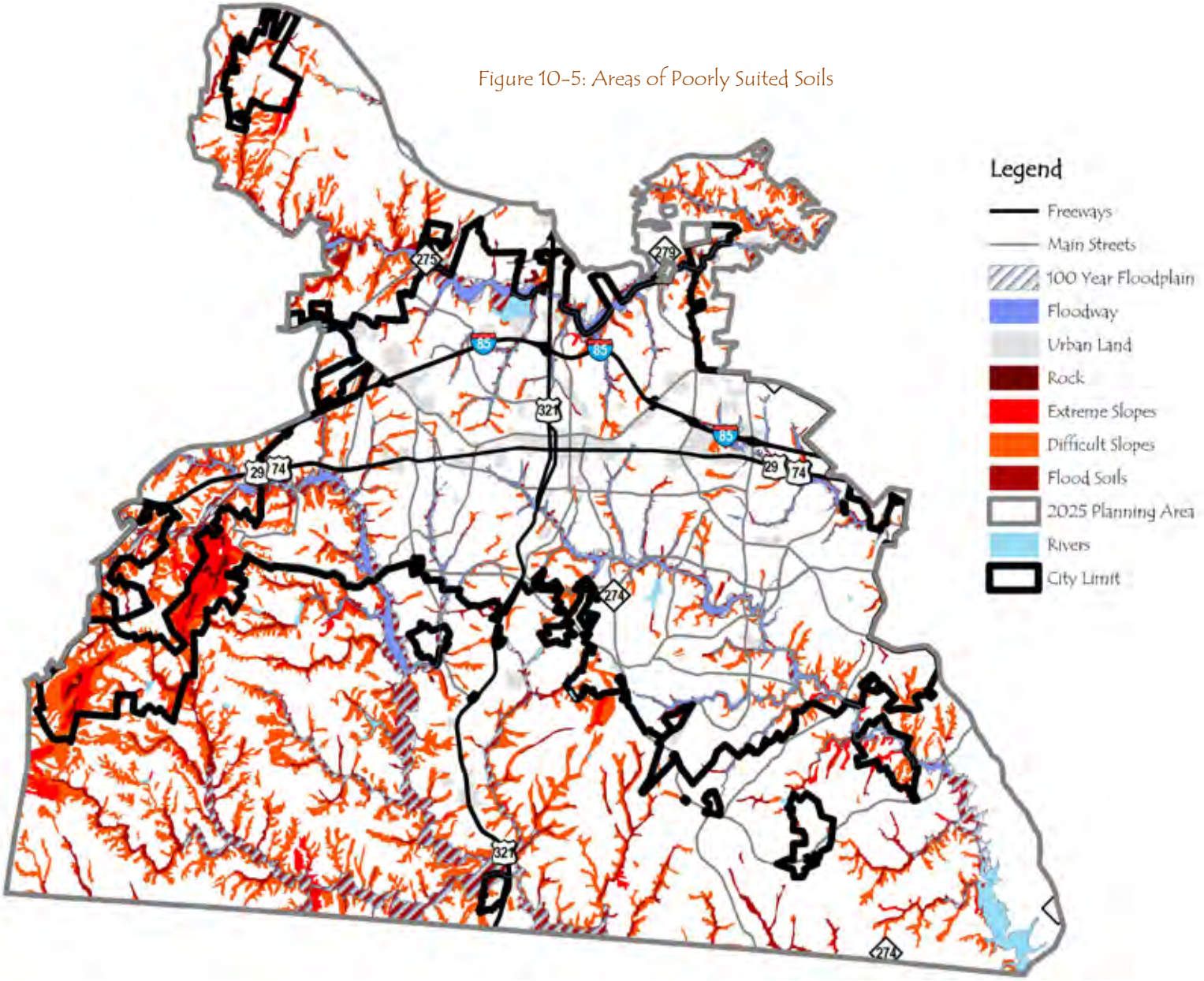
- Cecil-Pacolet: Mostly used for pasture and cropland. Erosion is a concern, particularly on steep slopes. These soils cover 11% of the planning area.
- Cecil: Similar in characteristics to Cecil-Pacolet, Cecil is formed from granite, gneiss, and mica schist. This soil is acidic and well drained. Slope varies from 2-25%. This soil type covers 27% of the planning area and is found mainly in the commercial, industrial and residential areas of Gastonia, radiating outward from downtown.
- Tatum: This soil presents hazards of erosion and shrinking-swelling. It is covered mainly with woodland, cropland and pasture. The soil covers 33% of the planning area and is found mostly at Crowders Mountain and the Northwest Sector.
- Madison: Found mainly in the Northern and Southwest Sectors of the planning area. This soil is covered with cropland or pasture on gentle slopes and woodland steep slopes. It is relatively unsuitable for urban development, due to erosion on steep slopes. Madison soils cover 14% of the planning area.
- Cewalca-Congaree: This soil group is found along major streams in the planning area. It is poorly drained and prone to flooding–the least suitable of the

Flood Control Measures:

Greenways conserve land along streams allowing for better flows.

Cluster development can reduce flooding by reducing impervious street surfaces.

Figure 10-5: Areas of Poorly Suited Soils



Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

planning area soils for urban development. This soil group covers 15% of the planning area.

Suitable soils are important to successful urban development. Certain soils have qualities that render them suitable for certain activities or unsuitable for others. Therefore, choosing an area with good soil for a building site can help property owners avoid flooding, erosion, foundation problems and septic tank failure. All of these problems can appear if a site has unsuitable soils. Areas with soils poorly suited for development are shown in Figure 10-5.

The prevalence of wells and septic tanks in Gaston County is an increasing problem as the County urbanizes. Gaston County contains the highest number of community wells in North Carolina and it is near the top in the number of septic fields. This can be a disastrous combination, especially at suburban densities. An excess number of septic fields, in close proximity to wells, can lead to contamination of those wells. Although individual wells and septic tanks are generally regarded as inappropriate for development that is denser than one unit per five acres, much higher density development supported by wells and septic tanks typically occurs.

Areas of Significance

Wetlands

Wetlands are areas inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs and similar areas. The ecological parameters for designating wetlands include hydric soils, hydrophytic vegetation, and hydrological conditions that involve a temporary or permanent source of water to cause soil saturation.

Farmland

An important component of the environment in Gaston County is open land used for agriculture. The Soil Conservation Service estimates that 42% of the soils are highly suitable for farming. Agriculture is on the decline, however, with just 2% of the rural population involved in farming. Many of these remaining farmers are part-time, with 65% working in some other occupation. As the County urbanizes, more and more farmland is converted to urban use. In some jurisdictions, tracts of prime farmland are being preserved by purchasing or accepting donations of development rights or easements, or the outright purchase of the land. In some urban areas, local private conservancies have been established to achieve this goal.

Crowders Mountain State Park

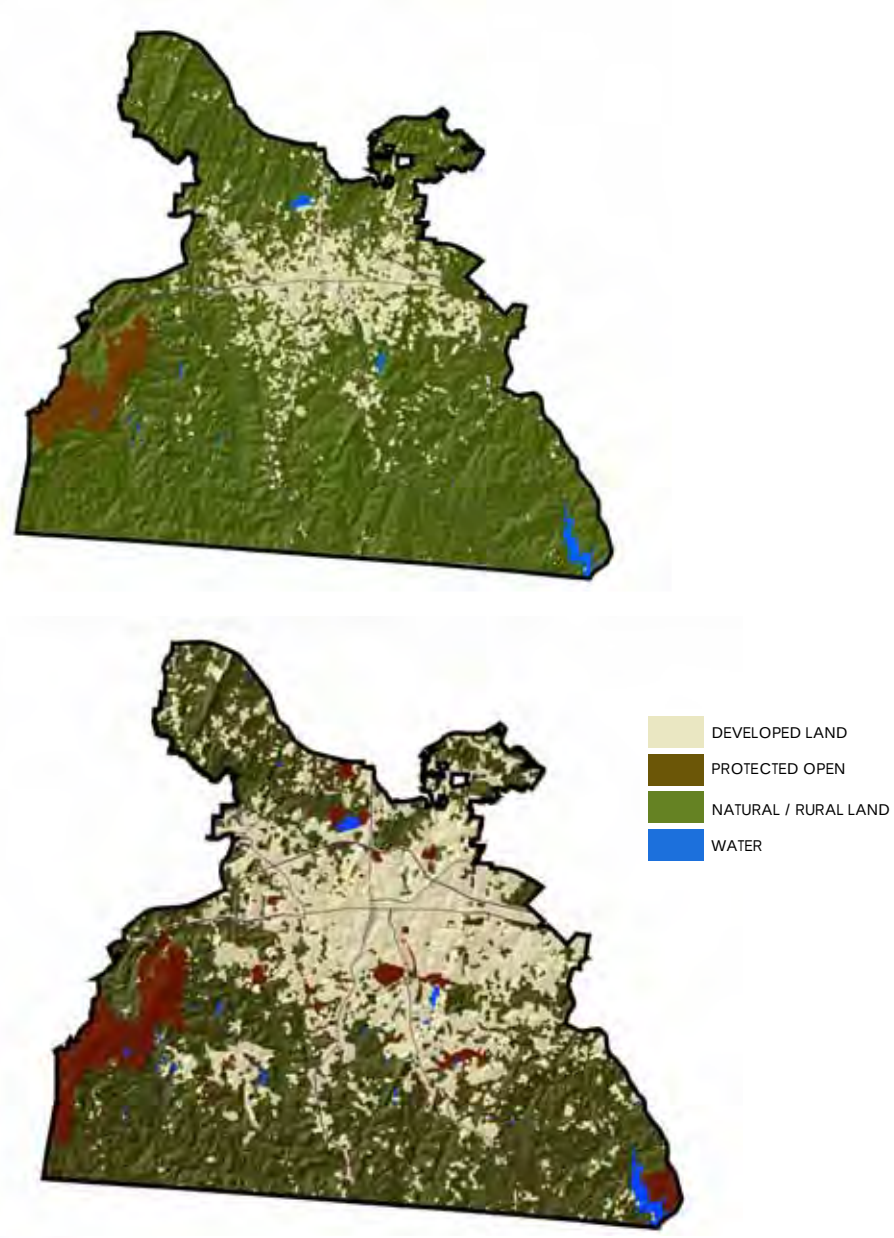
This park is of regional importance and it offers the closest mountain environment in the area. As Gastonia grows to the southwest, suburban development is occurring adjacent to the park. Since vistas are so important to the enjoyment of Crowders Mountain, the visual quality of this development is important to the future of the park. Further, Crowders Mountain offers a unique view of Gastonia. Future generations will be grateful to citizens who have the vision to work for the acquisition and protection of this unique natural feature for public enjoyment and conservation.

A preserved wetland area in Gastonia that catches runoff from Ashbrook High School and the surrounding residential area before it runs into Armstrong Branch.

Useable farmland is plenty in Gaston County, however very few farms are in production full time.

Crowders Mountain State Park offers unique vistas of Gaston County.

Figure 10-6: FUTURES regional growth model illustrating the spread of developed areas in the 2020 planning area. 1985, 2006 and projected to 2025

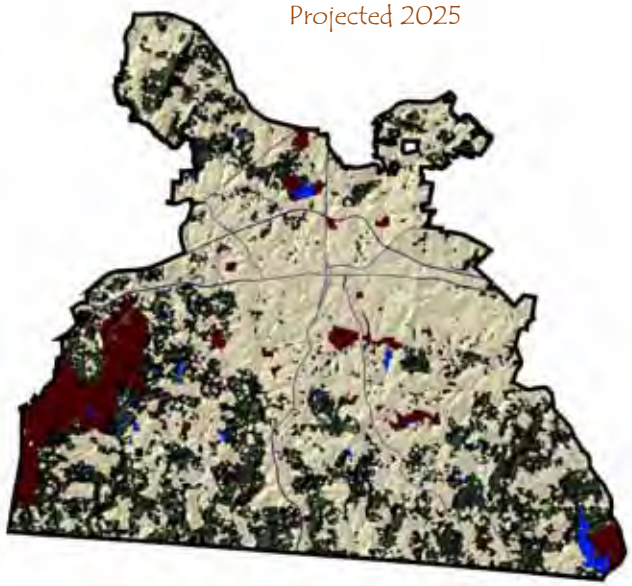


Source: ©2011 RENCI at UNC Charlotte

Trees & Development

Trees improve our environment by making oxygen, removing pollutants from the air, buffering noise, providing wildlife habitat, reducing stormwater impacts, and lowering air temperatures during hot summer months. Trees also provide psychological benefits and increase real estate values by as much as 15%, according to the National Association of Home Builders. For instance, the presence of large trees in urban neighborhoods has been linked to less crime. A 2010 U.S. Forestry study suggests hat large trees make a home seem more cared for, hence its residents seem more vigilant. For Gaston County as a whole, 25% of the total land area was developed between 1985 and 2006, according to analysis of satellite imagery by UNC Charlotte researchers. Figure 10-6 illustrates this trend for the Gastonia planning area, and suggests that as the city continues to develop, trees must be integral to that development.

Projected 2025



Summary

Environmental Problems & Concerns

As a community becomes urbanized, the natural environment suffers. Increased impervious surface creates more rapid runoff causing siltation problems in lakes and streams. Rooftops, streets and parking lots also cause a warming affect on cold-water streams, changing the habitat conditions and hindering the survival of some species. Increased residential development creates more lawns, which often means fertilizer, pesticide and herbicide. Fertilizers containing phosphorus wash into wetlands, lakes and streams and create new forms of growth hazardous to existing and native plant life. Urban growth creates more noise and air pollution as freeways and roads become more congested and more and more industry is developed to provide jobs and a source of living. Most of these problems are not new to Gastonia, nor are they unique. They are just as much of a regional issue as they are a local issue.

Virtually all of us want to meet our own basic needs and to see our City develop in a positive way. The trends as discussed in this chapter, if continued, will guarantee that in the near future more people will be competing for fewer resources in an increasingly polluted City. This can ultimately diminish the quality of life for future generations. While some of the damage cannot be corrected, making better choices to minimize impacts to the environment can put us on a path towards building a sustainable community enjoyed by generations to come.

The path towards sustainability starts by understanding the human modifications that have damaged the environment and working to develop policies that provide more emphasis on preserving the natural environment with less emphasis on the built environment. Simple steps include:

- Recognizing that a healthy environment is integral to the City's long-term economic and societal interests.
- Adopting principles of green infrastructure to improve levels of urban services for drainage, sewerage, public transportation and solid waste management.
- Promoting environmental values and understanding to help the community take responsibility for keeping the air and water clean and reducing carbon emissions.
- Ensuring well conserved and managed land with zero percent deforestation.
- Recognizing and addressing regional issues which contribute to poor water and air quality.
- Acting locally to address issues related to climate change and other global environmental issues, incorporating environmental considerations at all stages of the development review process, and supporting and implementing innovative programs that promote Gastonia's leadership as a sustainable City.
- Enhancing the participation of the public in the planning and implementation of natural resource preservation and protection programs.

ISSUES

Issues

- Past development patterns, including low-density single-family neighborhoods, jobs located far from the home, and the regionalization of shopping, have caused us to become dependent on our cars. This dependence has contributed to the air pollution problem in the area. Future development will likely need to employ design strategies such as clustering and mixed uses in order to reduce car trips and air pollution.

- Gaston County has more wells and septic tanks than any other county in North Carolina. Although groundwater quality has generally been good, little is known about the long-term viability of the wells. Threats to groundwater include landfills, hazardous waste sites, underground storage tanks and failed septic tanks. In the event of contamination, well sources (particularly community wells) may have to be abandoned in favor of City water. A regional approach to water supply is favored by the EPA, and it will present the best long-term supply of water for the area.

- As land is cleared for development, rare species are replaced by more common "backyard" species. Where once neotropical songbirds nested in the interiors of forests, common and sometimes non-native species such as starlings and cowbirds have moved in after development due to their better tolerance of disturbed habitats.

- Drainage structures are only maintained by the City if they are in the street right-of-way or an easement. The majority of structures, however, are located on private property and typically suffer from lack of maintenance.

- Our region is subject to periodic exceptional drought conditions, resulting in widespread record-low streamflow and ground-water levels. This is consistent with recent and emerging weather patterns, predicted to be evidenced by longer and more frequent droughts, coupled with shorter and more intense rainy seasons. In the face of emerging climate changes, the management of water, wastewater and stormwater systems will be essential.

- Stormwater drainage is a significant source of water pollution. Over the past decade the EPA has implemented new regulations that provide stricter controls on management of stormwater. Through the Stormwater Utility, the City focuses on the maintenance and expansion of the storm drainage infrastructure, compliance with EPA guidelines for Phase II MS4s, and a rigorous stormwater impact attenuation program. Managing stormwater is a essential component for providing public safety and protecting the quality of our local water sources

- As the region grows in population and development occurs, more impervious surfaces, such as parking lots, rooftops and roads appear, and sediment and nutrient pollution become a greater water quality concern. The volume and speed of the water reaching streams and rivers has increased, creating flood hazards and stream bank erosion. These conditions make the protection of our watersheds critical.

- Soils in Gastonia are generally well-drained, have good support for buildings, and are suitable for urban development. Soils that present problems for development are generally limited to floodplains and steep slopes. Some soils in our area are also unsuitable for septic tanks.

Objectives & Tools

Objective 1.

Protect watersheds, streams and wetlands to ensure excellent water quality that meets community needs.

Tools

a. Promote building methods that reduce the amount of impervious surface, such as pervious pavement, multi-story development and structured parking.
b. Continue to monitor water quality conditions to determine the effectiveness of regulations and recommend changes as needed.
c. Conserve wetlands and riparian areas that provide flood protection, sediment and erosion control, water quality, groundwater recharge and discharge, and fish and wildlife habitat.
d. Appropriately protect significant water bodies, riparian areas, and wetlands so that their important functions and values are retained as new development occurs.
e. Use best management practices to control sedimentation.

Objective 2.

Protect and improve Gastonia's air quality by reducing the amount of airborne contaminants.

Tools

a. Enable a variety of transportation alternatives such as walking, bicycling, ridesharing and public transit.
b. Promote land use patterns that reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled, such as, infill, quality design, mixed-use and transit oriented developments.
c. Develop a connectivity policy to improve efficiency of travel throughout the City for automobiles, bikes, and pedestrians. Explore ways to provide connections between non-residential uses linking residential areas to major destinations. Require new neighborhoods to connect to existing neighborhoods and undeveloped tracts, and provide multiple access points for large residential subdivisions.
d. Develop a collector street network plan to provide safe and efficient movement of all types of traffic.
e. Encourage the use of clean fuels, such as compressed natural gas and electric power, for public transit, school buses and personal vehicles.

Objective 3.

New development will be sensitive to the natural environment.

Tools

a. Promote development standards to protect the natural environment.
b. Consider a tree management program to reduce the negative effects of clear cutting and save heritage trees.
c. Encourage developments designed to maximize protection of ecologically valuable land.
d. Encourage a minimum density for new development along future transit corridors, specifically Franklin Boulevard.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

e. Require greenway construction when new developments occur along planned routes.
f. Support lighting policies that address glare and light pollution.
g. Balance the conservation of significant natural resources with the need for other urban uses and activities through evaluation of economic, social, environmental, and energy impact assessments.

Objective 4.

Use well-reasoned environmental regulations to ensure the protection of natural resources.

Tools

a. Practice fair, consistent and effective code enforcement.
b. Ensure adequately trained staff is available to monitor and enforce regulations.
c. Prepare and maintain a list of properties, in order of priority, desirable for public acquisition to ensure long-term natural resource conservation.
d. Actively solicit donations of property or easements to protect and enhance identified resources.
e. Actively manage the pruning and cutting of trees and shrubs on public lands with scenic designations and improve policies on clearing vegetation along utility lines and easements.

Objective 5.

Improve environmental awareness throughout the community.

Tools

a. Use all available media outlets to educate landowners and businesses about the benefits of best management practices.
b. Continue to enhance existing public educational programs to improve community wide advocacy and appreciation of water quality protection.
c. Continue to cooperate and pursue the development of inter-jurisdictional agreements to protect water sources, improve our air quality and minimize variability among environmental standards and regulations across the region.
d. Develop partnerships with land conservancies, and other public and non-profit environmental agencies, to protect environmentally sensitive areas.

11

Overview

Background & Trends

Community Character Areas

Community Design & Cultural Character

Policy Implications

Issues

Objectives & Tools

Community Appearance & Identity

GASTONIA 2025

11 Community Appearance & Identity

Community Appearance & Identity Goal

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

Overview

A well designed, properly maintained, functional, and economically vibrant City contributes to a high quality of life for residents as well as influences business investment or relocation decisions. A community's character, or image, is shaped by both physical and intangible elements. It is the essence of a place and what one remembers long after leaving.

The image of a community is not static, it can and will change overtime as a community grows and matures. Gastonia's image is in a state of transition from a series of textile mill neighborhoods, and industrial areas loosely grouped around an historic center, to a community of sprawl development and congested corridors. For many years Gastonia derived its image and sense of place from the textile mills and a historic center. The mill buildings were landmark of many neighborhoods as well as social and employment centers. The downtown and surrounding residential neighborhoods was equally as important and served as the center for banking, government and many civic, residential and institutional activities. With the decline of the manufacturing industry and the exodus of commercial and entertainment uses from downtown, the community has struggled to maintain a positive image and maintain a sense of pride. Coupled with the closing of mills, and the decline of downtown, the growth in population throughout the region has led to substantial new single-family residential development in Gastonia, particularly in the Eastern section of the City. Such rapid growth has presented the City with the challenge of accommodating and welcoming appropriate new development, while simultaneously preserving its local character. As Gastonia continues to evolve, it is important to preserve the positive aspects of the community and improve upon those not-so-positive aspects.

This section of the Gastonia 2025 Comprehensive Plan will influence the future physical form of the City by guiding the desired quality and character of future development, and protecting the positive aspects of the natural and built environment that define the image and the spirit of Gastonia. This section also recognizes that community appearance and identity is directly linked to its functionality, and its ability to attract and retain residents and desirable businesses to the City. Therefore, the strategies and tools laid forth within this section will guide future development and transform existing areas, creating functional, aesthetically appealing, cohesive and people-oriented places that foster civic pride.

Background & Trends

Over the past 50 years, the automobile has perhaps been the single most critical challenge to contemporary urban design. This challenge is largely the result of the large impact the automobile has made on human behavior such as mobility choices, lifestyle changes, and changes in the physical environment. While the automobile provides a convenient and comfortable mode of transportation, there are several negative contributions that have become a critical challenge in contemporary urban design. Increasing dependence on the automobile has led to such problems as urban sprawl, severe traffic congestion, widespread air, water, and noise pollution, increased fuel consumption, steeper infrastructure costs resulting from a need for a more extensive network of roads, and higher accident rates.

Post-World War II development throughout the country occurred in a typical suburban manner and was fueled by the rise of the private automobile. During this time, the immensely productive economy was re-tooled to produce consumer goods, infrastructure, and homes. Huge amounts of mortgage financing was made available by the Federal Home Administration and the Veterans Administration. Soon, many families realized the "American Dream" of owning a new house on a generous lawn with a growing family in a suburban neighborhood only accessible by vehicle. For the first time, it was commonplace for families to own cars. In many ways, the automobile embodied the freedom, power and wealth of the post-war era. During this time, residential and commercial development in Gastonia occurred within three miles from the Central Business District. Commercial development in the City emphasized highway visibility and automobile access, with little attention afforded to pedestrians. Landscaping, narrow rights-of-way, bike lanes, sidewalks, and pedestrian amenities were irrelevant to – and at worst in conflict with – the automotive ideals of fast passage for cars. The City's image became characterized by corridors filled with strip malls with vast parking lots and large lot single-family developments. These areas are now home to aging and some vacant commercial structures, obtrusive signage, and unsightly overhead utility poles. Over the past 20 years, there has been limited development in the Western Sector, typically characterized by constructed on single sites rather than entire blocks. Generally, new development has been limited to incremental, contextual infill.

In contrast, there are other areas within the City that have maintained some order and character that distinguishes them from the more recently developed areas. These areas include the City's historic districts, and Crowders Mountain, a growing year-round destination for recreation in the region. Our identity also includes the Hospital and Medical Center Area, which has rapidly become a major focal point for local health care activities in the City. These characteristics must be maintained and supported with clearly stated goals and objectives within this plan, appropriate Land Development Regulations. There must be a strong commitment to focus on pedestrian connections and sustainable developments and to diversity of our places to attracts residents and visitors. This commitment will foster a new since of pride in our community.

Gastonia is part of the spatially continuous urban region aligned along North Carolina's "Main Street," the I-85/I-40 highway corridors that traverse through the Piedmont.

Gastonia's new logo illustrates Gastonia's identity with its main street brick buildings, its hospital, and Crowders Mountain to the west. It also illustrates our regional connection to Charlotte, the airport and the Catawba River to the east.

Purpose & Vision

Community appearance and identity is a thread running through the entire Gastonia 2025 Comprehensive Plan. Every section of the Comprehensive Plan deals, in some manner, with the face Gastonia presents. The Comprehensive Plan seeks to maintain a positive community image by enhancing the City's positive characteristics and re-knit and restore portions of the City that have suffered from insensitive development in the past. The goals of this element are to:

- Simulate a development pattern that is well designed and sustainable.
- Enhance pedestrian connections.
- Continue and enhance marketing and branding strategies to promote the City.
- Promote a residential development pattern that encourages a sense of community and offers a variety of residential alternatives.
- Sustain livable neighborhoods and promote pride in property and community.
- Preserve and restore existing historic buildings and neighborhoods.
- Create and maintain an excellent system of parks, and open spaces with connecting greenways.
- Take public action to prevent blight and to promote reinvestment in existing buildings.

Ideally, a City's visual image matches the values and aspirations of its residents. Through the implementation of these values and goals, physical development takes place resulting in an image that residents can identify with and visitors can understand. Existing conditions research was conducted as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update. Information was compiled from a variety of sources such as field surveys, existing plans and codes, and public input from several public meetings. Outlined below is a summary of key findings related to Gastonia's community identity. Both positive and negative elements of the built environment contributed to the overall character of the City.

During a series of public meetings held in the Fall of 2004, approximately 130 individuals from the community participated in a community character survey. While most survey participants rated Gastonia's appearance favorably, the survey results revealed strong and consistent themes. These themes centered on the aesthetic appeal of neighborhoods, commercial corridors and centers including some functional components such as pedestrian circulation. Participants noted that the most appealing features of the City are the City's "green infrastructure" and scenic areas. The appearance of some of the historic and traditional residential neighborhoods located in the Center City was highly rated because many of these older neighborhoods contain large shade trees that provide natural canopy, helping to conceal overhead wires. In contrast, participants identified a number of appearance issues. The key issues include the following:

- Major thoroughfares lacked visual appeal and were overly cluttered with signage,
- Residential streets lacked sidewalks or street trees,
- Lack of open space, trees, and vegetation in non-residential developments,
- Design of a new residential development did not respect the community character and that more should be done with respect to historic preservation, and,
- Commercial zoning and land development practices along each of the major corridors has led to a pattern of strip commercial use.

Maintenance and enhancement of the visual environment and community character was one of the single largest concerns reflected in the resident's survey conducted at the beginning of the planning process. This has long been a concern, and over the years, the City has worked with residents, businesses, and other stakeholders across the City to develop both regulatory and non-regulatory measures to address community image issues. The efforts will ensure that the form and appearance of both new and existing development is consistent with the City's existing and desired long-term character.

Principles

A community's character evolves out of rich and complex interaction between people and their built and natural environments. The form and appearance of the City have significant impacts on the way people operate within their environment, how they perceive their environment, and what types of people and businesses are drawn to a place over time. Therefore, establishing principles from which standards can be developed from provides the framework. The principles listed in this section are not intended to restrict imagination, innovation, or design variety, but rather provide a basic parameter that promotes sustainable high quality development patterns. All principles relate to the strengthening of the community identity and were utilized in forming the objectives and strategies of this chapter.

The City and its partners should strive toward upholding these characteristics to ensure that as the City evolves and changes, it will maintain a high quality of life for existing and future residents. The principles include the following:

- The preference for accommodating future growth is in infill locations, then redevelopment opportunities, and then on the edge of existing developed areas;
- Established community gateways with attention to the appearance, quality and type of development; signage; and scale reflecting the desired image of the community;
- Buildings are oriented toward people and incorporate high quality, architectural facades, utilizing durable high quality, long lasting materials over a minimum percentage of surface area. Building scale and composition is well balanced and arranged to promote a high degree of human interaction;
- The community is pedestrian-friendly, with paths and sidewalks provided throughout to ensure that walking and biking are viable alternatives to driving;
- Community gathering places, large and small, are integrated throughout the community;
- Amenities such as street furniture, trash receptacles, a water feature, and quality lighting are provided throughout the community to create "a sense of place;"
- There is a connected pedestrian and recreational open space system composed of natural and improved open space, preserved view sheds of natural resources, sensitive slops, and tree groves;
- Downtown is vibrant, well-designed, visually appealing and includes a mixture of commercial, public, civic, and residential uses;
- Crime prevention design and defensible space is incorporated into new developments;
- New and redeveloped residential centers shall have strong neighborhood qualities;

Attractive amenities found throughout the community

Principles for strengthening community identity:

Development that encourages biking to destinations

Mature tree canopy along roadways

- New and infill development shall integrate environmentally-sensitive and sustainable practices, developments and redeveloped areas;
- Development and streets are tightly gridded and compact, maintaining a development radius that permits and encourages walking and biking—generally between one-quarter and one-half mile to key destinations;
- Residents are able to meet their daily needs within the community, minimizing the need to go outside the community for products and services;
- Development is generally well-balanced to include a mix of uses and a balance of different housing types to meet everyone's needs;
- Transitions between different types and intensities of development are logical and minimize negative impacts between potentially incompatible adjacent land uses;
- Mature tree canopy along larger roadways and smaller native vegetation along local streets provide a natural transition between uses and parcels. Significant sites, gateways, and entrances are enhanced by special plantings;
- Well-designed signage throughout the community is appropriately scaled and constructed of appropriate materials compatible with development; and,
- Public lighting for streets, parking lots, and plazas is calm, directed downward, uses attractive, long lasting fixtures, and is pedestrian in scale.

Attractive public lighting for streets

The City's Interest

The City of Gastonia is committed to preserving and enhancing its aesthetic character of the community and recognizes the importance of a healthful and attractive living environment as a means of maintaining property values and fostering positive community attitudes. Decisions affecting the development of land, funding of public improvements, operation of facilities and services, and other activities of City government reflects the City's concern for, and commitment to, achieving a highly attractive community. While the responsibility for enhancing the City's character is not limited to City government, the City plays a large role through the work of staff in the Code Enforcement Division and the Keep Gastonia Beautiful Committee to address community appearance issues. The specifics of each operation is highlighted below.

Code Enforcement Division

The City's Code Enforcement Division is charged with protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of Gastonia. In addition, code enforcement activity is designed to protect the aesthetics and quality of life in the City's neighborhoods. While the Code Enforcement Division primarily focuses on the City's residential neighborhoods, it does target special commercial areas such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) areas and redevelopment areas as designated necessary by City Council. These areas include downtown, Highland East and West, and the Oakland neighborhoods. Code Enforcement officers respond to citizen complaints concerning adverse conditions existing on adjacent properties that affect their right to enjoy their property and neighborhood. There are five categories of conditions that Code Enforcement responds to: (1) high grass and weeded lots, (2) public nuisances, (3) junk vehicles, (4) livestock, and (5) housing.

Over the past ten years, cases involving weeded lots and overgrowth have predominated Code Enforcement's case load. Public nuisances have also remained high. However, the most critical issues have involved housing conditions. Much of the City's housing stock is old and, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey, 63% of occupied housing units within the City of Gastonia were built prior to 1979. Older housing is most often affected by code enforcement activity, which many times lead to demolition of the structure. A map of Gastonia's 1950 city limits shows that 75% of the demolitions done in 2006 were to structures in the Center City. This directly correlates with the area in the City with the highest concentration of older housing. While condemnations and demolitions can be beneficial in removing problem houses from neighborhoods, demolitions in the Center City destroys the historic fabric of Gastonia and also decreases the number of affordable units available in the City.

Educating homeowners and renters about the benefits of home upkeep is vital to the protection of Gastonia's older housing stock and its neighborhoods. Code Enforcement responds to problems on a complaint basis. Many times, by the time Code Enforcement receives a complaint, it is too late – the home is dilapidated, ultimately leading to demolition. In response to this issue, the City considered adopting a systematic approach to housing inspections requiring rental properties to be registered in order to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy, and are set-up on a periodic inspection schedule. Many citizens expressed support of policy with a pro-active approach to enforcement rather than the current complaint-driven approach. In addition to establishing new innovative programs and initiatives to improve, preserve and highlight the overall appearance of the City, the City recognized the need to increase efforts aimed at preventing undesirable aesthetic conditions before they occur and to pursue more vigorous enforcement of existing regulations/codes aimed at outstanding violators.

Keep Gastonia Beautiful, Inc.

Keep Gastonia Beautiful is an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, Inc., a national nonprofit, public education organization dedicated to protecting the natural beauty and improving waste handling practices in American communities. The City has a staff coordinator who assists the committee with developing special programing and partnerships with individuals and community organizations. The key to Keep Gastonia Beautiful's success is dedicated volunteers who give over 100,000 hours yearly in a variety of programs and projects. For every $1.00 of support given to Keep Gastonia Beautiful, it returns $11.61 worth of benefits to our community. Keep Gastonia Beautiful, Inc. was the recipient of the President's Circle Recognition Award, awarded by Keep American Beautiful, Inc. for progressive programming and reporting.

Keep Gastonia Beautiful works to improve the aesthetic image of our City through a variety of programs, which include:

- Yard of the Week – A weekly competition that identifies and recognizes individual efforts in residential beautification.
- Neighborhood Cleanups – Bags, gloves, and pickup services are furnished for any neighborhood conducting a cleanup.
- Entranceway Enhancements – Through this program,

Some of the conditions that the City of Gastonia's Code Enforcement Division responds to; high grass and weeded lots and junk cars.

TREE CITY USA.

The City of Gastonia is a "Tree City" which is part of the "Tree City USA®" program, sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters. It provides direction, technical assistance, public attention, and national recognition for urban and community forestry programs in thousands of towns and cities that more than 120 million Americans call home.

enhancements are made throughout the city at strategic gateways and entranceways with tree plantings and beautification projects.

- Sign Patrol – Citizens are educated about the City's sign ordinance and staff the removal of any signs posted on utility poles. Gastonia has an ordinance against signs being placed on City utility poles.
- Tree Plantings – Encourages and sponsors tree plantings throughout our City, and we participate in tree plantings during Arbor Day and Earth Day.
- Great American Cleanup – A yearly community cleanup involving neighborhood watch groups, City employees, scouts, environmental clubs, businesses, churches, and civic organizations.
- Clean Business Brochure – Informational brochures are available to help businesses address waste issues, encourage recycling, and to recognize their waste stream.

Keep Gastonia Beautiful, in conjunction with other service organizations and a proactive code enforcement effort, could help the city address other property issues as well. These efforts could include nuisance prevention and abatement and providing assistance and education to homeowners.

Community Character Areas

Rather than evaluating the character of the community based on individual streets or properties, the community is organized into a series of places and community areas, categorized by type. The "Community Image Areas," as shown on Figure 11-1, are the places that combine to form the fabric of Gastonia. They include:

- Corridors , Gateways, & Streetscapes
- Centers and Districts,
- Natural and Scenic Areas

Corridors, Gateways & Streetscapes

The City's most important gateways and corridors are listed in Figure 11-2. These places are important business districts for development and reinvestment, but they also present challenges for community connections and to improve community appearance. The appearance of the corridors and gateways is perhaps the most significant issue pertaining to community appearance and image. After all, the corridors are the most frequently traveled roadways in the community and the gateways welcome people who are introduced to the community for the first time. Improving the corridors and enhancing the gateways is key to developing a positive image for the City.

Gateways

Gateways announce that you have entered into a special place or district and offer opportunities to establish an image, communicate community values, and attract attention to local attractions and destinations. Gateways can also define the boundaries of the City to distinguish it from territory outside of its jurisdiction. The general principles used to establish formal gateways include improvements to the roadways, such as well designed landscaped medians or freeway embankments, significant entry monuments, and wayfinding signage. An example of this kind of enhancement is the "Welcome to Downtown Gastonia" sign on the corner of Broad Street and East Main Avenue and the City limit sign located in the median of West Franklin Boulevard. Similar signs and landscaping

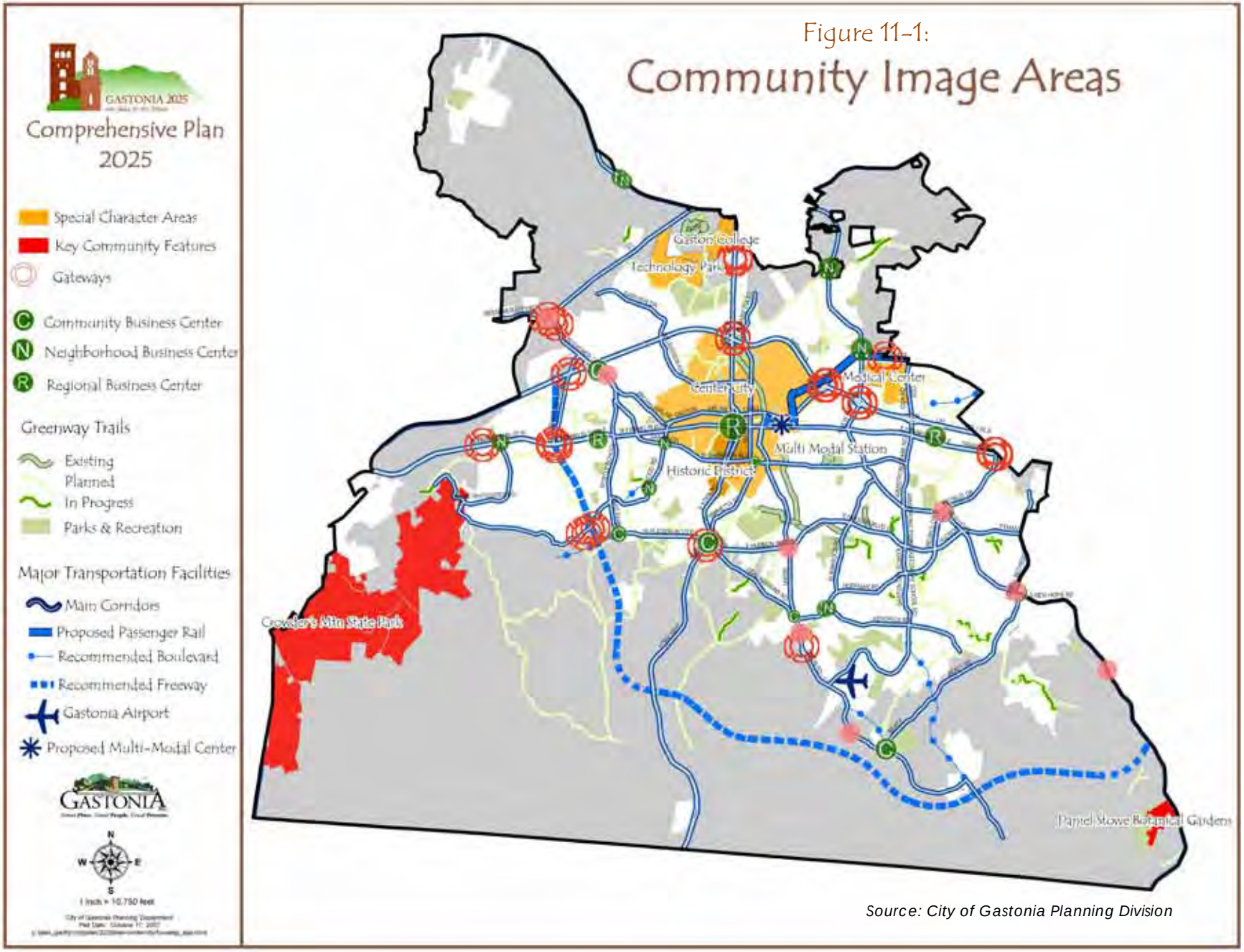


Figure 11-1:
Community Image Areas

Source: City of Gastonia Planning Division

Proposed enhanced eastern gateway along Franklin Boulevard

Figure 11-2: Major Gateways

NORTH	EAST
US 321	I-85
New Hope Rd	Franklin Blvd
	Ozark/Long Ave
SOUTH	WEST
New Hope Rd	I-85
Union Rd	Franklin Blvd
US 321	Bessemer City Rd

as proposed along the eastern gateway along Franklin Boulevard could be placed at all of Gastonia's major gateways.

Corridors

Corridors provide connections for people, commerce, and infrastructure. If you look along some of the major corridors throughout the City, you will see that there are a large number of illegal signs and non-conforming signs that over-dominate the streetscape. Because nonconforming signs are protected as "grandfathered," there is little incentive for sign owners to replace or upgrade nonconforming signs. Although the City has a strong sign ordinance, the City may consider adopting amortization and incentive programs to achieve greater compliance. Therefore, the City must continue to work to improve the aesthetic quality along these formal gateways. Adopting an overlay zone for major corridors may help to give the visitor a positive impression of Gastonia. A corridor overlay district providing requirements for landscaping can be established for public and private properties as well as providing restrictions on the type and size of signs. Additional provisions could include tools for protecting important views, and using distinctive pavement and architectural elements at intersections.

The key to developing gateways or entranceways throughout the City is to design each distinctly different so that they will reflect the particular characteristics of its setting and provide a welcoming introduction into our great City.

Streetscapes

A streetscape encompasses the elements within and along the street right-of way that define its character and functionality, including building material and design, land uses, street furniture, landscaping, trees, sidewalks, and paving materials. Effective streetscapes create a memorable pedestrian experience. Landscaping is one of the key elements of a quality built streetscape. The difference that good landscaping can make cannot be overstated. A well landscaped street is a pleasing one to drive on or walk beside, and the one with outstanding qualities makes that street something that people will seek out rather than just travel on by necessity. Gastonia has seen some new developments with fine landscaping, but it has been far from consistent. With the adoption of a new landscaping ordinance in 1994 and increased standards for residential and commercial development, Gastonia establishes that the quality of the landscaping and the visual impact of new development will at least follow a minimum standard. This standard of expectation for new development will go a long way toward providing continuity in the view from the street.

Centers & Districts

Centers and Districts represent the places that are unique and have individual identity. These are the places that commonly attract people for specific purposes, such as education, cultural and historic attractions, shopping, government, public gatherings, employment, health care and living. The prominent districts and centers within the City of Gastonia are detailed below.

Center City

This area forms the heart of Gastonia, encompassing the historic core of the city. The area acts as a central hub for government offices, law, medical, specialty retail and alternative transportation options. The Center City includes downtown and surrounding older established residential neighborhoods, including the historic district neighborhoods. The Center City is laid out, more or less, on

a grid pattern of streets that are well connected and is the most pedestrian and bike friendly area of the community. While diverse in nature, the aesthetics and architecture of the Center City helps create the area's sense of place and uniqueness and should be encouraged to continue in new developments within the Center City boundaries.

Regional Centers

These development nodes are large, educational, employment, medical and retail centers that draw people, business, and shoppers from the region. Some regional centers, such as Gaston College, draw commuters from Cleveland and Lincoln counties. The increasing sophistication and quality of Gaston Memorial Hospital is also drawing large numbers of people from the surrounding areas. Large retail areas, office spaces, and campus, manufacturing and distribution areas are present and regionally oriented. Another prominent regional center is the office and retailing concentration at Franklin Square Shopping Center in the Northeast Sector and the Dixie Village in the Southwest Sector.

Downtown

Downtown is one of the defining characteristics of Gastonia. It is full of history and home to some of the City's more dramatic buildings. It is the governmental, educational, cultural, and entertainment center of the county. The economic vitality of downtown is crucial for the health of the greater community. The success of downtown is dependent on a greater percentage of investment, business activity and mixed-use residential composition to assure overall prosperity within the community.

An essential aspect in the further development of these areas is the inclusion of live and work developments. The introduction of mixed-use properties should be encouraged in these areas to facilitate the growth in both density and size while maintaining smart development patterns. The creation of a diverse landscape containing commercial, residential, and office spaces will help create the areas own sense of place as well as uniqueness.

Neighborhood Districts

Neighborhoods serve as the primary building blocks of our community and focus on a range of mostly residential classifications, with a primary focus on single-family detached homes. Other community assets such as places of worship, schools and parks, are allowed within the residential neighborhoods. Most neighborhoods within the City are master-planned. Within these planned developments you will find a variety of residential densities and dwelling types, and different types of open and recreational spaces. As described within the Land Use Chapter, there are three Neighborhood Character Areas: High, Medium and Low Density Residential.

The Medium Density Residential Character Area consists of predominantly townhomes or condominiums and can include smaller lot detached and attached single-family developments with a density of five to eight dwelling units per acre.

The Low Density Residential Character Area consists of a mixture of single-family detached and attached units such as duplexes and townhomes with one to four dwelling units per acre.

High Density Residential Character Areas consist of multi-unit and multi-building developments such as townhome developments and apartment complexes with overall gross density of eight or more units per acre.

Neighborhood Centers are points of a neighborhood with higher density of housing, mixed-use residential

Historic buildings in downtown Gastonia

Historic District entrance signs

accommodating small retail, service commercial and small professional offices. These centers are distinguished by a mix of housing types, and a range of commercial and civic uses at the neighborhood scale. The neighborhood centers may feature predominately detached buildings, with a balance between open space, other trails, and buildings marked by sidewalks with strong pedestrian connections. Special care should be taken to provide adequate transitions between uses that have different intensities of development.

Historic Districts

Gastonia has both historic buildings and neighborhoods, which provide continuity to the past and help remind us of our history. Furthermore, because they have stood the test of time, historic buildings and areas tend to be architecturally pleasing and add variety to the community's built environment. Another pleasing aspect of our historic districts is the canopy of mature street trees, an asset that can only be gained over time.

The City has pursued preservation primarily through the establishment of historic districts and designation of landmarks. York-Chester and Brookwood neighborhoods are the City's two locally designated historic district. Historic district designation means that these neighborhoods have been recognized by the City of Gastonia as being architecturally or historically significant to the community. Historic district designation sets forth a special zoning overlay, which provides controls on the appearance of existing and proposed buildings within the district.

The City also has three national register historic districts, Loray Mill, Downtown and York-Chester. National Register designation is different than historic district designation. Buildings listed as National Register properties does not involve the building and land use guidelines as do local historic designation. Placement on the Register will, however, forbid the use of federal funds in projects (such as road construction) that would cause a house to be torn down. Federal tax credits are available in conjunction with renovation of National Register properties. Several landmark and historic buildings are scattered throughout Gastonia. Some of these properties may be eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places, a list maintained by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Figure 11-3 shows the properties in Gastonia that are on the National Register. Most of the historic designated landmark buildings are in downtown. Landmark buildings such as the Firestone Mill, the Lawyers Building and the Commercial Building can be seen from miles around and are part of Gastonia's identity and individuality. Other neighborhoods that have possible historic merit include: Fairmount Park, Old Country Club, Hillcrest, and the Firestone Mill Village.

Although the current standards have served to prevent the most egregious harm to downtown, they do not adequately protect downtown character and new investment. The process for design review should be made as predictable and expeditious as possible for entities reinvesting in downtown.

Figure 11-3: Gastonia Properties on the National Register

Name	Address	Year Built
Cephas Stroup House	2206 Armstrong Park Rd	1865
David Jenkins House	1017 E Airline Ave	1876
Ashley Arms	800 S York St	1922

Natural & Scenic Areas

These areas consist of areas of the environment that work together to form the City's natural landscape. The South Fork of the Catawba River defines the eastern boundary of the City and is an integral contributor to our way of life. The river serves as open space, a focus of scenic views, a fragile ecosystem, and a place for many types of recreational activity. The City's other creeks, streams, ponds, lakes and wetlands provide additional water resources and contribute to its natural landscape.

Crowders Mountain State Park is an enormous source of pride for Gastonia. Located just southwest of downtown Gastonia, Crowders Mountain is an outstanding scenic and recreational asset, attracting people from the entire region.

As communities develop, it becomes increasingly important to preserve the unique features that distinguish an area —its rock formations, mountain backdrops, forests, riparian areas, meadows, and expansive open spaces.

Rankin Lake

Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway

Crowders Mountain State Park

Catawba River

The unveiling of the John Biggers Commemorative Mosaic, residing on the front wall of the Schiele Museum in Gastonia. The glass tile mosaic mural is a recreation of Biggers' painting "This Little Light of Mine." depicting a woman standing beside a railroad track with rows of shotgun houses on either side of her, an illustration of Gastonia's textile history.

Community Design & Cultural Character

Gastonia has a unique character defined by strong neighborhoods, vibrant businesses, natural features and the people who live here. The distinctive appearances of these things are important in determining how we feel about our community. How one identifies a city is shaped by the overall appearance of the city's built environment and those social and cultural activities either absent or present. The Gastonia 2025 Comprehensive Plan recognizes the importance of a positive community image and quality community design in shaping the overall character and identity of the City.

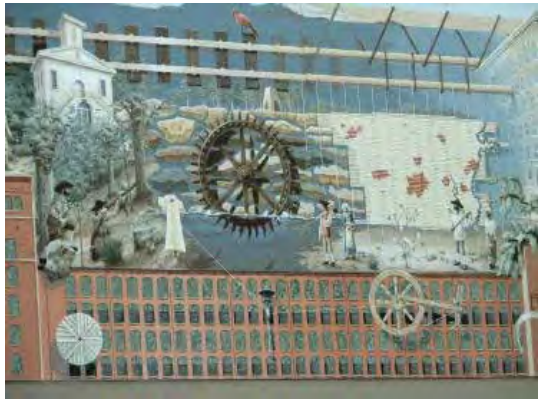
Cultural Character

Gastonia's identity, image and reputation have many components. Gastonia is a city that prides itself on hard work and producing excellent goods and services. It is a city of neighborhoods and homeowners. It's also a city that prizes family values and churchgoing, as evidenced by the prominence of its church buildings.

The City recognizes social and cultural activities are as important as effective development practices in establishing a place that is unique and that evokes a high degree of civic pride. With this understanding, the City actively seeks to develop partnerships with a range of social and cultural groups from arts councils, sporting clubs, environmental and historical clubs, senior citizens and community service groups to strengthen the social and cultural networks throughout the city. There are a number of conditions working together to establish community identity. These conditions are explained in detail below.

Textiles

Historically, the area's economy has been centered on textiles. Gaston County and Gastonia were leaders in textiles processing and manufacturing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At its peak in 1970, the textile manufacturing industry employed 27,880 people in Gaston County. Although there have been significant changes in the textile and manufacturing industry and the City has lost thousands of jobs and seen several mills close, the influences from this history still defines the City's image. There are several vacant mills throughout the Center City in the rush toward this new modern identity, however, Gastonia may be in danger of losing the buildings and landmarks that give the City its unique identity and sense of place. The commercial and industrial buildings of the textile industry are a nearly irreplaceable resource. These buildings are unmistakably unique and bound up with Gastonia's image.



Mural in downtown Gastonia celebrating the Arts Council's 30th year

Flowers and fruit – offerings at the downtown Friday Market

Influence of Arts and Culture

An important aspect of Gastonia's identity is its social capital. Art and cultural activities are important components of sustainable communities, supporting social and cultural expression. Active participation in these activities contributes to the City's social capital. The City supports arts and cultural activities sponsored by the Gaston Arts Council. Within the City of Gastonia there is a high percentage of people supporting, creating, and teaching arts and culture, and wide community participation in the visual and performing arts. Rich artistic and cultural activities are a "community draw" making the area an enjoyable, stimulating destination for many. Currently, the potential for public art has not been achieved. However, through initiatives spear headed by the City's Community Development Department in cooperation with Keep Gastonia Beautiful and the Gastonia Downtown Development Corporation, the arts and cultural programs are beginning to take shape, specifically in the Center City.

Quality Public School District

The Gaston County Public School District is recognized for its high performing schools with good facilities and programs. The quality of the school district is an influential factor in the continued growth of the community. A quality school district will continue to be an important source of identity in the community.

Quality College

Gaston College has created a high quality academic campus that create a sense of permanence that is a testament to the institutions' commitment to the community. The built environment of the college campuses provides the community with quality examples of pedestrian friendly environments and open spaces. The significant student population and academic staff and the walkable environment add to the appeal of the City. A strong relationship between the City and College will continue to be an essential element of Gastonia's identity.

Public Safety

Another important component of the City's identity is a strong commitment to community policing. The Gastonia Police Department works closely with neighborhood organizations, businesses and individual property owners to develop solutions to crime related problems and increase trust in police. This involves a concerted process to build the level of social capital to help address problems and support the will of the people to maintain a community free of violence, drugs, and crime. Social capital is a concept that expresses the trust and preparedness of people to voluntarily contribute to the richness and diversity of the City. The Police Department builds this

Inappropriate massing Appropriate massing

Pedestrian connectivity & open space

Mixed-use development

capital by assisting community groups with establishing and maintaining Neighborhood Watch Groups. Police also work with neighborhoods and individuals through the Crime Prevention Bureau with programs such as Citizen Patrol Academy, Explorers, McGruff the Crime Dog or John E. Law, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

Community Design

Community design is much more than landscaping, parks, building layout, and street networks. It involves the city's physical layout, the natural setting, and the visual relationships among the individual features that make up the community. Good community design results in a well functioning City that has a pleasant, visually appealing environment.

As the region grows, local community design issues will continue to be of major importance. New development will be integrated with the natural and built environments. The patterns of mixed-use development, and the appropriate integration of the automobile into the community fabric, must be addressed for Gastonia to renew and recreate the vibrant and pedestrian friendly neighborhoods of its past. The integration of land uses and street network within the Center City demonstrate the traditional development style.

The overall appearance of the City reflects a great deal about the community and the people who live in it. Visitors often look at the appearance of the City and determine whether or not the community has a progressive or active environment. A city that is well planned and attractive will draw shoppers, visitors, businesses, and residents. A review of the principal design characteristics in the Center City of Gastonia include the following features:

- Historic downtown with buildings fronting and abutting the street edge, a mix of residential and commercial uses, restaurants, gathering places, professional and non-professional services, and municipal government buildings.
- Prominent three and four story buildings with distinctive historic architectural styles centrally located along Main Street.
- Variety in building types and massing, roof pitches, with small variations in setbacks, open spaces, pedestrian paths, and other site features including fences and trees have served to create diversity throughout the City. The sustainable design characteristics of the Center City and the principals of massing that are evident there shall be considered in all new development throughout Gastonia.
- Compact central Business District, with a variety of integrated uses such as Churches, Banks, Office, Medical, Retail, and Residential. These mixed-use developments include a predominant office component and civic uses. Mixed-use developments may include some residential and retail uses convenient to work and civic amenities.
- Historic and traditional residential neighborhoods adjacent to downtown feature a diverse mixture of housing styles and sizes, office, and civic uses.
- Incremental growth and lessening of density outward from the Center City.
- Streets and roadways that connect and accommodate the movements of persons and commerce.

Another community standard that improves the quality of the built environment is good site design. The size and placement of buildings, the location of parking areas, the planting of trees and the design and placement of signs all have an effect on the perceived impact of new development. Good site design for multi-family and cluster housing can reduce the perceived density of those developments and foster acceptance of higher density and mixed-uses within traditional single-family neighborhoods. Thus, land can be used more efficiently, without degrading the character that we value in our City. As with landscaping, Gastonia cannot achieve this goal in any sort of unified fashion without first having a basic level of expectation for high quality site planning and design.

The design principles and character improvements described in this chapter may be applied universally. These sentiments or preferences help to define the community's values regarding design. They provide the basis for creating policies that will be supported and embraced by the community in order to help develop a sense of place and community pride.

The pattern of Gastonia contributes greatly to its overall appearance. Undoubtedly, it is the appearance of a community that draws people in to live, work and shop. In some ways the pattern is seen in two dimensions as though it were a map; in other ways it has a three-dimensional form. The City's two-dimensional pattern should not be viewed as a rigid order but, rather, as a sense of balance and compatibility among its residents and businesses.

Gastonia's built environment is an outward expression of the community's identity and heritage, and the built environment is perhaps the most important and influential part of the community's image. The built environment reflects both the positive and negative aspects of Gastonia's community image. Gastonia is a growing and changing community, increasingly part of an economically integrated modern urban region.

Good Urban Design

What is good urban design? Is it a nebulous term? Is style synonymous with design? These are a few important elements of good design.

- Context: Good designers consider the context in which they are designing. To quote Eliel Saarinen, a Finnish Architect, *"Always design a thing by considering it in its next larger context-a chair in a room, a room in a house, a house in an environment, an environment in a city plan."*

- The Built Environment: New structures should be in visual harmony with the surrounding built environment. Structures should not be out of scale with surrounding structures unless adequate distance and buffering are provided to create a harmonious separation. Structures along a vehicular corridor should not cause visual disharmony.

- The Human Scale: All features of a structure to be accessed or experienced by people should be of a scale that is functional and accessible.

- Function: Urban design should respond to the surrounding functions and uses.

- Aesthetics: The interesting, charming,pleasant,inviting, exciting,stimulating, organized, logical,harmonious, compatible, complementary, beauty, etc., are among some of the expected attributes of an aesthetic design.

Policy Implications

To summarize, Gastonia's built environment has a mix of both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths include good residential neighborhoods, strong community and neighborhood activity, mature street trees, historic neighborhoods and landmark buildings. The weaknesses include the presence of poorly defined entrances, areas of blight in prominent locations, poor pedestrian connections, and a cluttered appearance along major corridors. Each of the issues noted above have implications for the overall image of Gastonia. For instance, the need for additional parking areas would require strengthened urban design standards to encourage landscaping and pedestrian connections in and through parking areas in order to buffer parking from adjacent residential areas, while at the same time provide improved access for pedestrians to reach businesses. The inability of pedestrians to cross major streets, and the increased traffic congestion along the major commercial corridors, should prompt policy that encourages new development to be concentrated at neighborhood business centers with pedestrian paths and crosswalks in and around them. With distinct styles of architecture and historic structures throughout the Center City, we need policies that encourage the preservation of historic structures, as well as the development of specific building and architectural guidelines that ensure infill housing and new development are coherent and compatible with existing development. In addition, we need design guidelines to encourage landscaping, pedestrian movements and accommodations, and streetscaping within the downtown area in order to encourage infill development and revitalization. In an effort to improve the image and visual environment of the area, design guidelines are needed that encourage the placement of neighborhood entry markers and plantings at the edges of the neighborhoods, the preservation and maintenance of open spaces, the reduction of the amount of signage and more consistent signage.

Issues

- The visual quality of City entrances, the major thoroughfares leading into Gastonia, provide the visitor with his or her first impression of the community. The attractiveness of these entrances varies considerably. City leaders have expressed interest in improving the appearance of major entryways into the City. While there has been recent progress made to beautify the entrances in to the City, there is a lot to be done to enhance the attractiveness of Gastonia's entrances. We must work in partnership to take to improve the appearance of road corridors and entryways into Gastonia.

- Blighted areas draw negative attention to them, degrade the community's image, and discourage quality development in their vicinity. Most often these areas have a high concentration of vacant and abandoned buildings, poorly maintained property and public safety issues. This can result in visual blight that depresses property values and discourages investment.

- While signs are essential to the success of commerce, a balance must be gained between providing a reasonable opportunity to advertise and the tendency in some places to have too many signs and signs that are too big. A proliferation of signs has resulted in visual clutter along major thoroughfares. Problems include the size, height and number of on-premise signs, as well as a large number of off-premise signs and billboards. The City needs to work to reduce the negative community impacts created by poor sign arrangement, scale and size.

- Good site design for multi-family and cluster housing can reduce the perceived density of those developments and encourage greater community-wide acceptance of innovative developments and mixed-uses alongside traditional single-family neighborhoods.

- Vacant and underused buildings suffer from long term vacancies or underutilization and do not contribute to Gastonia's economy or the visual attractiveness of the community environment as a whole. Many of these buildings can be found along major corridors throughout the city. The city must continue outreach to owners of these properties to find solutions.

- Trees improve the natural environment of the city by providing shade, reducing erosion, converting carbon dioxide into oxygen and reducing the runoff that causes flooding. Trees also provide economic benefit by raising property values, visual benefit by screening unwanted views, and quality of life benefit by improving our sense of well being.

- The York-Chester historic district is an outstanding Center City asset, providing an excellent tree canopy, interesting architecture, and stable property values. Other areas should be considered for historic district status as they mature and qualify for designation.

- Preservation is important for maintaining Gastonia's heritage. Several neighborhoods and landmark buildings within the City may be eligible for local and national designation. They should be evaluated and considered for preservation and historic status.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Objectives & Tools

Objective 1

Display our pride by enhancing public spaces, roadways, and neighborhoods through tree planting, landscaping, limited signage and other improvements.

Tools

a. Develop gateway streetscape plans that establish a unique visual character along each entryway corridor. Include guidelines for public and private landscaping and the elimination of sign clutter.
b. Bring nonconforming signs into compliance with current regulations.
c. Develop streetscape design standards requiring more visually appealing, pedestrian-attractive streets with shade trees, center medians, and sidewalks that accommodate the necessary range of transportation modes, such as transit, pedestrian and automobiles.
d. Implement a program to selectively remove overhead utility lines at designated areas or along major corridors.
e. Coordinate visual improvements with land use planning during the study and redevelopment of underused roadway corridors, such as West Franklin Boulevard.
f. Where possible, locate parking lots behind buildings, in the interior of a block, or create buffers to ensure parking lots do not dominate the street front along major corridors.
g. Require internal landscaped medians in parking lots, offering safe pedestrian travel and breaking up the appearance of asphalt.

Objective 2.

Use public spaces and facilities as opportunities to highlight our community appearance and identity.

Tools

a. Place civic facilities, such as community buildings, government offices, recreation centers, post offices, libraries, and schools in central locations.
b. Design public spaces and civic facilities to set a standard in quality design, to provide a focal point and meeting place, and to express community identity within the context of surrounding private development.
c. Increase community-wide interaction by hosting a variety of cultural events.

Objective 3.

Promote the many benefits of good community appearance and the importance of aesthetics.

Tools

a. Develop and implement a coordinated program for the installation of attractive directional and informational signage throughout Gastonia, graphically consistent with a citywide image-marketing program.
b. Develop a strategy to attract innovative development of quality design.
c. Enhance and increase the promotion of the Yard of the Week program.
d. Working with Keep Gastonia Beautiful, identify areas for city beautification projects and allocate necessary funds to maintain an on-going beautification program.
e. Continue and expand homeownership programs to increase community pride through ownership.

f. Provide on-going training for boards and commission members involved in the development review process.

Objective 4.

Amend City regulations to strengthen and promote citywide beautification.

Tools

a. Strengthen and enforce codes pertaining to the unkempt appearance of private property.
b. Maximize the opportunity to be a good role model by maintaining public property in an exemplary manner.
c. Ensure adequate code enforcement staffing is available to implement desired code enforcement levels.
d. Explore regulatory approaches aimed at improving amenities and building materials for new construction.

Objective 5.

Increase the level of volunteerism and leadership from a broad citizen base.

Tools

a. Encourage strong and effective citizen participation in community and municipal affairs.
b. Use the City's website and possible e-mail distribution lists to keep citizens aware of the government process.
c. Help local civic groups, businesses and neighborhood associations identify and participate in community-wide clean-up and building projects.
d. Promote solid waste minimization and recycling programs.

Objective 6.

Identify and initiate funding sources.

Tools

a. Aid local businesses and neighborhood groups in locating funding sources for plantings and markers at key entrances and gateways.
b. Expand the existing façade grant program to other areas of the City.

12

Introduction

Challenges to a Growing Region

Transportation Networks

Public Transportation

Land Use & Transportation Coordination

Issues

Strategies & Tools

Transportation

GASTONIA 2025

12 Transportation

Transportation 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.

Introduction

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.

Transportation refers to the movement of people, goods, services, and information. It is a term that includes driving, bicycling, flying, transit, and walking. However, rapid growth, decentralized land use patterns coupled with new technologies, and other demographic and lifestyle changes has lead to increased reliance on cars as the sole means of transportation. This reliance has placed considerable demands upon the City's transportation system and has been responsible for an increase in transportation-related air pollution, increased congestion, longer driving distances and the loss of agricultural and open space areas to urban development.

Unlike past transportation planning strategies that responded to growth by identifying new road and other capital facility requirements, this element of the Comprehensive Plan proposes goals and policies which that prescribe a new direction for Gastonia that integrates land use and transportation system planning to allow the City to accommodate population growth and new development while maintaining community mobility and quality of life. Priority should be given to using the present road structure more efficiently, promoting alternative modes of transportation, and using traffic–calming techniques. This new direction recognizes the need to develop sustainable development patterns and, therefore, offers goals and polices that shift from narrowly tailored strategies focused on moving vehicles, to strategies that will result in an efficient, multi-modal transportation network that minimizes impacts to the environment and reinforces livability of neighborhoods.

If we successfully embrace and implement these strategies, then the City of Gastonia will be ready to take advantage of alternative transportation options that will contribute to an excellent quality of life. Strategic investment in new lanes, new corridors and new capacity for all modes will better connect the City with the rest of the region. Failure to reduce auto dependence will find us, in 20 years, with a degraded quality of life and much more difficult and costly transportation, land use and environmental problems to solve. 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.

Background

Access to transportation was pivotal to Gastonia's origin and growth, first as a settlement and later as a City. Gastonia began with the establishment of Gastonia Station on the newly built Charlotte & Atlanta Airline railroad, which is now the Norfolk Southern railroad running east-west through the county. The station was located at the junction of that railroad and a north-south railroad, now also part of the Norfolk Southern system. This junction, and the excellent access to rail service, spurred Gastonia's growth. Textile mills, freed from the necessity of locating near a river, began to locate along the two rail lines, which allowed them to bring in raw materials and ship finished products to distant markets. Gastonia eventually overtook Dallas, first as the business and population center of Gaston County, and later as the county seat.

Although rail transportation has declined in importance since that time, the overall transportation system has never been more crucial to Gastonia than it is today, and that significance is expected to grow over the next twenty years. Our physical transportation system consists of roads, sidewalks, bikeways, rails and airports. The operational transportation system includes cars, trucks, buses, airplanes, trains, bicycles, shuttle vans and pedestrians. Specialized transportation for products, such as water and natural gas, is provided by pipelines that run though Gastonia, giving customers access to these products.

Figure 12-1: Charlotte MSA, Employment 2000, 2005, 2008

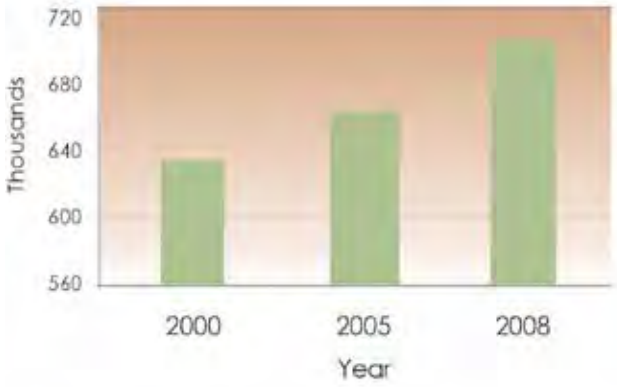
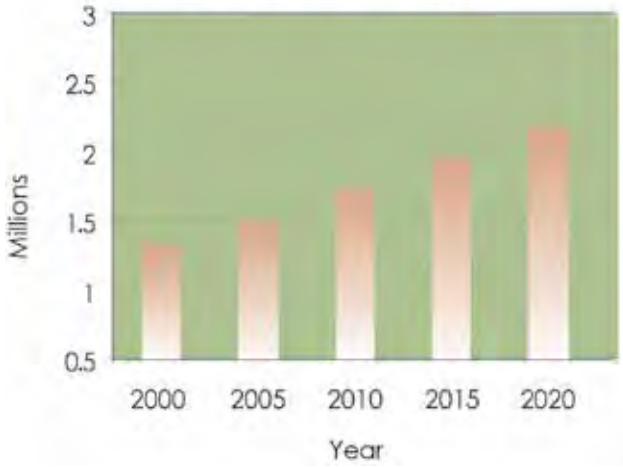


Figure 12-2: Charlotte MSA, Projected Population

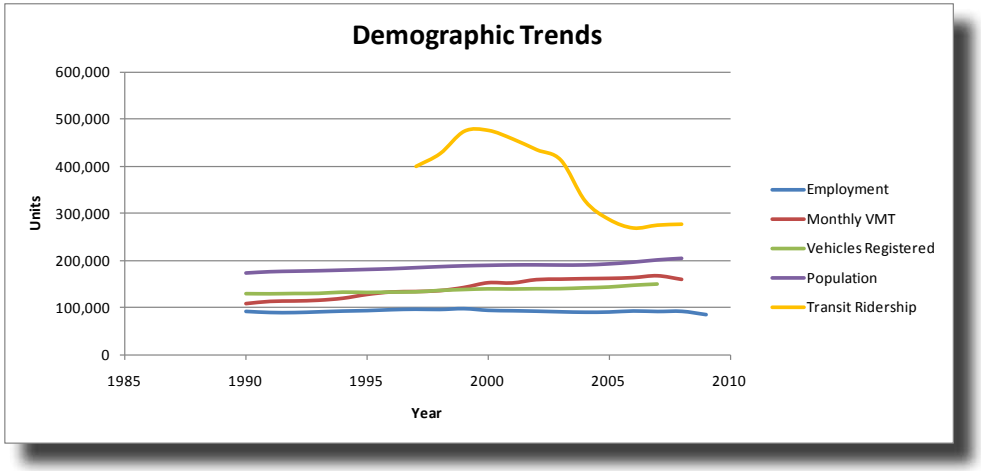


Challenges to a Growing Region

The Charlotte MSA population grew very rapidly over the course of the last four decades. The Charlotte MSA ranks seventh on the top ten list of the fastest growing MSAs in the country. Figures 12-1 and 12-2 display current and projected population and employment for the Charlotte region. This growth was largely attributed to newcomers moving to the region attracted by employment, affordable housing, and mild winters. However, with growth, came new realities which have strained counties and cities across the region as they struggle to keep up with the demand for housing, amenities, transportation and schools. Land development, which occurred over the past decade, has resulted in an acceleration of sprawl into the region's undeveloped outlying areas– specifically in counties immediately adjacent to Charlotte. The current regional rate of population increase, if continued, will result in a population of 3,228,000 by 2025.

Gastonia is the second largest city within the Greater Charlotte region. State estimates show Gastonia ranked as the 14th largest city by population in North Carolina. As shown in Figure 12-3, Gaston County experienced increases in population, the number of automobiles registered, and the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) from 1990 to 2010, despite employment remaining relatively flat. More recently, however, there has

Figure 12-3: Demographic Trends in Transportation, Gaston County



Sources:
LINC -NC Census Lookup (Population, Vehicles Registered)
NCDOT (VMT)
Employment Security Commission (Employment)
City of Gastonia Transit Division (Gastonia Transit Ridership)

been a slight shift in travel patterns for Gaston County. The number of automobiles in the region increased slightly and the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) decreased, despite a population increase of only seven percent. As the region continued to spread out, commuting patterns changed, trip lengths became longer and required the use of an automobile to complete. A large number of daily commuters are traveling out of the county for work. In fact, 2008 figures from the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina indicate that 48% of employed Gaston County citizens commute out of the county for work. Many of these workers drive alone. This is impacting both air quality and the demand for infrastructure as more vehicles are added and the labor force grows. Surprisingly, between 2005 and 2010, due first to rising gas prices and then the global recession, the number of daily vehicle miles traveled remained relatively flat, and transit ridership, which decreased steadily from 1998 through 2006, increased over the past two years. These patterns mirror regional, state, and national trends, where transit ridership is at the highest level since the early 1950s. The consequences of rapid growth have been both positive and negative. To continue to accommodate this growth and maintain a high quality of life, we must elect creative and innovative transportation approaches.

Many planning agencies across the region have been working in collaboration to develop a strategy to address the regional transportation related issues. However, proposals are limited to surface transportation and regional transit which focus exclusively on planning, prioritizing and building singular facilities. A reality that many have been forced to face now, more so than in the past, is that it is impossible to build our way out of existing problems. Rather, the proposed strategies should focus on developing a sustainable multi-modal system that provides access to users of all modes and abilities. The following is an assessment of the major transportation challenges within the Charlotte region.

Choice

The private automobile is the transportation mode of choice for citizens within the City, as is true for most within the region, state, and nation. The personal automobile with its instant availability, point-to-point travel, and high speed has made it an integral part of daily life for a multitude of people. Automobile dependency has deeply influenced people's lifestyles and subsequently, the physical landscape of the City. What makes people use, or prefer, the car more than public transport or some other mode of transportation? What will facilitate the use of public transport? An understanding of the factors that affect mode choice is essential to the promotion of more sustainable behavior and the achievement of developing and maintaining a multi-modal system.

As illustrated in Figure 12-4, conventional planning assumes that transport progress is linear, consisting of new faster modes of transport. While this perspective recognizes that there are various modes of transport, the model will

Figure 12-4: Transportation Progression Models

Conventional
Walk → Bicycle → Train → Bus → Automobile → Improved automobiles
Sustainable Model
Walk → Improved walking conditions
Bicycle → Improved cycling conditions
Train/Bus → Improved innovative public transit service
Automobile → Improved automobile travel conditions

always result in a single dominant mode and therefore, transportation strategies will almost never place biking, transit or walking as a priority over automobile travel. The result of this model is a system with limited choices for travel. Sustainability, on the other hand, reflects a parallel model, which assumes that each mode is useful, and strives to create a balanced multi-modal system where each mode is integrated into the transportation network for what it does best. This model, as illustrated in Figure 12-4, provides the community choices for transport and does not assume that improved transport necessarily means faster travel or more mileage. Improvements may increase comfort and safety, provide cost savings, or even reduce the total need for travel.

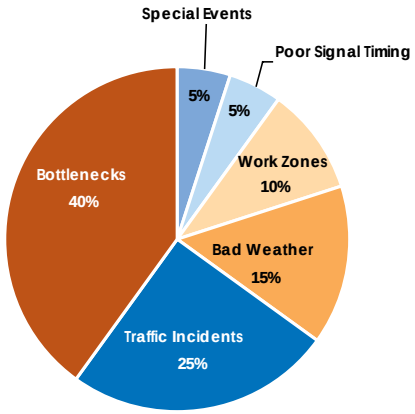
A multi-modal system recognizes that there are various modes used for transporting people and goods throughout the community. It also recognizes the importance of places and connecting people to these places. This system is the most effective solution to provide a sustainable network for all users at any scale. However, creating this system will require education on all levels from elected officials to citizens and business owners. This will involve the development of innovative ways to better inform and/or educate of the impacts of the current model and the benefits of a model centered on providing users of all levels more options for choice and connectivity. Therefore, the City must continue to conduct more comprehensive analysis of the issues and expand public involvement during transportation planning processes. Creating a transportation network with alternative modes of travel will not only enable the City to better manage cost, but it will allow the City's leadership to strengthen its role as environmental stewards in North Carolina. As needs and travel behaviors change over time, a multi-modal, multi-user system is essential for developing a sustainable economically viable City for future generations to enjoy.

Congestion

Congestion is an everyday occurrence within the City, county, and Charlotte region. Congestion results when the number of cars on the road exceeds the capacity of that road. While rapid growth—particularly in outlying suburban areas—has contributed to long rush hour commutes, much of the increase in traffic is due to our over-reliance on cars. Current data suggest that daily vehicle miles traveled continues to outpace population growth. Growth expected in population and employment will bring with it an increased need for travel. Based on the population and employment growth anticipated for the Charlotte MSA, general vehicle travel is expected to increase by 30 percent by 2025. Without improving the transportation network to meet this growing demand, additional street segments and intersections will experience congestion.

Not only does congestion cause delay and personal frustration, but it also affects the movement of people and goods, results in excess greenhouse gas emissions and increases stress on critical infrastructure. Congestion, (some of the major sources of which are described in Figure 12-5) means increased travel times and unreliable pick-up and delivery times for truck operators. To compensate, motor

Figure 12-5: Major Sources of Congestion



Source: Federal Highway Administration

Rendering of proposed multi-modal center to be located in downtown Gastonia. This facility will access a commuter rail line, Amtrak, Greyhound buses and the Gastonia Transit bus system. It will also provide park-and-ride parking, bike racks and pedestrian connectivity for those using these modes of transportation.

carriers will need to add vehicles and drivers and extend their hours of operation, eventually passing the extra costs along to shippers and consumers. Individuals and families are also affected; they both have financial budgets and "the cost of time" that are impacted by congestion. Regional economies are affected by these household and business-specific impacts which diminishes cost competitiveness and market growth opportunities and are practically the same as a reduced ability to maintain, develop, and draw businesses. Additionally, the relocation of business and household activity to other areas and the direct delay for trips that are not diverted or otherwise changed both lead to decreases in air quality, increases in public infrastructure investment requirements, and potential impacts on health and quality of life factors. As part of the region's long-range transportation plan update, decision-makers decide how to address congestion and mobility issues within the constraints of available revenue, while balancing the need to sustain our environment.

Connectivity

Connectivity is about linking road, walking and cycling networks within the City that will support an integrated and sustainable transportation system long term. The street system in central Gastonia is primarily designed in a grid pattern, with most streets running north-south and east-west. Outside of the Center City, the road system is primarily built off a framework of old farm-to-market roads. The old farm roads tended to follow the ridgelines throughout the county, and as a result their path curves with the terrain. Roads that are parallel inside the City may intersect farther out in the county. Thus local knowledge of the road system is generally necessary for navigation in the more suburban and rural parts of Gaston County.

The Gaston Urban Area MPO, NCDOT, and the City of Gastonia have developed programs and projects that enhance the development, integration, and connectivity of a multi-modal transportation system. For example, the current proposed Gaston East-West Connector, also referred to as the Garden Parkway, is a proposed tolled highway from I-85 west of Gastonia in Gaston County to I-485 in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County. The approximately 22-mile long road would create a new connection between southern Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County across the Catawba River, and would improve east-west mobility and connectivity within southern Gaston County. This connector would provide another link for movement of goods between rail, highway, and air.

Ambitious transit plans in Charlotte-Mecklenburg will provide many opportunities for the region's population to enjoy a more mobile system to access the entire Region. Park-and-ride lots will provide auto commuters an opportunity to access the current bus system, and will be available for the planned rapid transit system. Bike racks on buses allow people the flexibility to access bus stops by bike, improving the efficiency of the system.

Funding

In today's economic climate, transportation infrastructure dollars are scarce and decisions are harder to make because there are many competing projects and construction cost continue to increase. However, it is important to realize that if we do not continue to support our infrastructure, the problems will grow progressively worse. Regular maintenance of our aging infrastructure is just as important as future projects. Since we are in a non-attainment area, we need to find solutions to mitigate our air pollution. Not only should money be invested in roads and highways, we also need to look for solutions in other modes of transportation.

One of the particular problems of this area is the numerous substandard North Carolina Department of Transportation maintained streets within the 2025 Planning Area. Many of these roads have only nine to ten-foot travel lanes. New residential development is occurring rapidly on these substandard roads. Lack of lane width contributes to crashes. The substandard roads provide no accommodation for pedestrians and cyclists.

The City's funding sources for roads are shown on Figure 12-6. One funding source for road projects is mandated through the State Street-Aid Allocation Law, commonly referred to as Powell Bill. Powell Bill allocations are made to incorporated municipalities that establish their eligibility and qualify as provided by G.S. 136-41.1 through 136-41.3. The general statutes require that a sum be allocated to the qualifying municipalities equal to the amount produced during the fiscal year by one and three-quarters cents on each taxed gallon of motor fuel. The statutes also provide funds be disbursed to the qualified municipalities on or before October 1, thereby allowing sufficient time after the end of the fiscal year for verification of information and to determine the proper allocations and preparation of disbursements. Powell Bill funds must be expended only for the purposes of maintaining, repairing, constructing, reconstructing or widening of local streets that are the responsibility of the municipalities or for planning, constructing, and maintaining bikeways or sidewalks along public streets and highways. In 2007, the City of Gastonia received $1,438,239 in Powell Bill funds.

The primary, consistent source of construction funding for new transportation projects is the NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), which improves safety and sets highway and bridge priorities consistent with environmental policy. Committed STIP projects presently in various stages of development, such as planning, design, land acquisition, and construction, will help meet local travel demand for future growth.

The State of North Carolina uses an Equity Formula [G.S. 136-17.2(a)] to divide the federal and state road funds among local areas. An important component of the Equity Formula is the number of unpaved road miles in each county, but Gaston County has fewer unpaved roads than any other county in NCDOT Division 12. However, Gaston County has more narrow (substandard) roads than any other county in the division, placing it and other urban counties at a relative disadvantage.

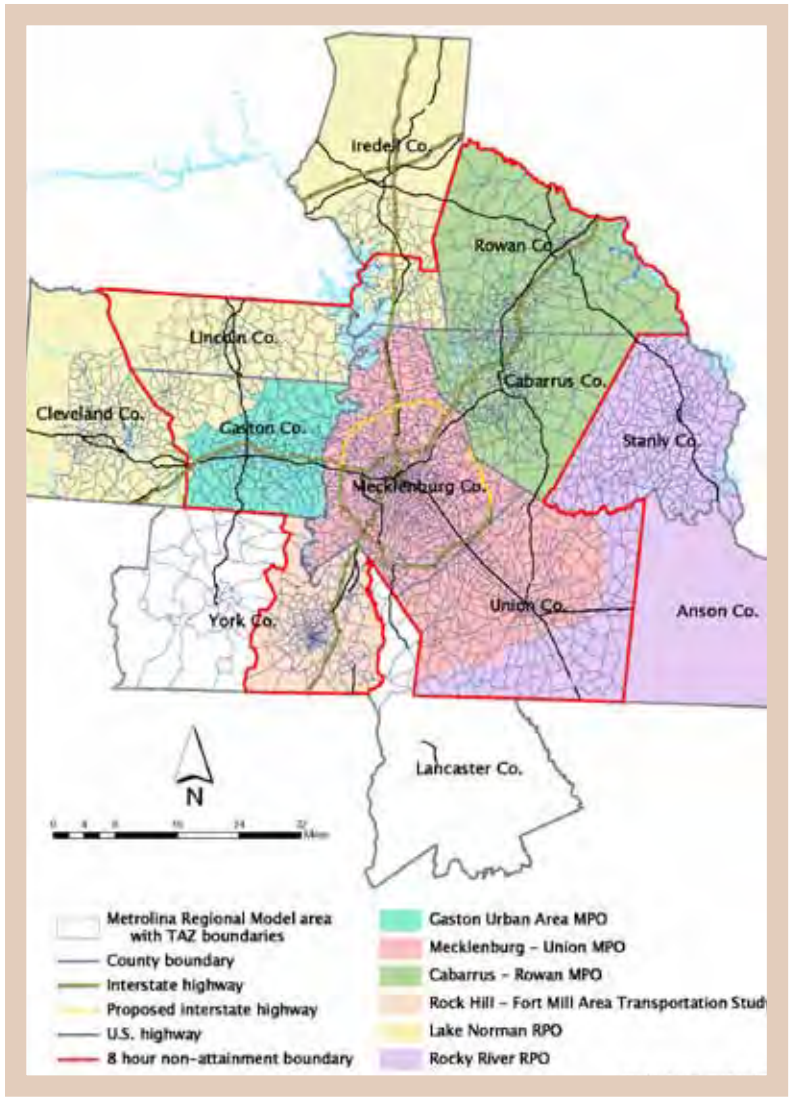
The problem of funding maintenance projects points to another difficulty that the City will need to deal with often in the future. In 1989 the General Assembly approved the Highway Trust Act to develop a statewide intra-state system of roads. In recent years, however, a decreasing number of local projects have been funded through NCDOT. The State's inability to fund many of its road projects is due, in part, to the General Assembly's action of moving $180 million annually (one-third of the fund) from the Highway Trust Fund to other priorities. If this trend continues into the future, Gastonia, and many other cities, will suffer from mounting unmet transportation needs.

The need for additional funding was recognized by Gastonia when voters approved a $40 million + bond referendum to improve and build roads within the City, many of which are maintained by the State. The Citizens Advisory Committee on Surface Transportation was formed by City Council in June, 1985 to study Gastonia's road needs and to recommend solutions to street and road problems. The Committee initially recommended a $5 million bond issue for roads, passed in 1986, and later recommended an additional $35 million bond issue, which the voters of Gastonia approved in 1990. Gastonia

Figure 12-6: Funding Sources for Roads

Source	Purpose
Powell Bill	Maintain, repair, construct, reconstruct, widen local streets, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes.
STIP	Improve safety, highway & bridge priorities, provide alternative transportation choices.
Highway Trust Fund	Develop a statewide intra-state system of roads.
Local Bonds	Widen roads, make intersection improvements, construct new roads and sidewalks, and acquire rights-of-way.

Figure 12-7: Metrolina Regional Model and Non-attainment Area



voters have acknowledged the need to locally fund transportation projects, and again approved a two-third bond reissuance for $2,700,000 in 2002 and most recently approved a $27.4 million bond measure in May 2010. Two-third bonds are general obligation bonds which are limited to two-thirds the amount of principal debt retired in the previous fiscal years, and do not require voter approval. The bond money has been used to fund road widenings, intersection improvements, new construction of roads, sidewalk construction and right-of-way acquisition. These include the Armstrong Park Road/Gaston Day School Road extension and widening, Hudson Boulevard (completion of a four lane divided facility from York Road to S. New Hope Road) and the extension of Hoffman Road from Gaston Day School Road to Hudson Boulevard (four lanes divided).

A new development for the City is participating in the development of the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT). The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional trail network that will eventually reach 15 counties and over 2 million people. The City of Gastonia received funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act OF 2009 (ARRA) for the Marietta Street Bridge Improvement project which includes a Downtown Gastonia Carolina Thread Trail Bicycle/Pedestrian connector. The City of Gastonia also received a design grant from the first Carolina Thread Trail Implementation grant. This grant, coupled with City funds, will be used to expand the City of Gastonia's greenway system. The City will continue to look for innovative funding and financing approaches to help meet the dual challenges of better managing demand, particularly in congested areas, and increasing investments in capacity.

Figure 12-8: Roadway Map

Comprehensive Plan 2025

City of Gastonia, North Carolina

- Future Garden Parkway
- Existing Freeway
- Expressway, Existing
- Existing Boulevard
- Boulevard, Needs Improvement
- Recommended Boulevard
- Other Major, Existing
- Other Major, Recommended
- Existing Minor Thoroughfare
- Minor, Needs Improvement
- Recommended Minor Thoroughfare
- Regional Roads
- City Limit
- Water Features

N W E S

1 inch = 12,000 feet

Plot Date: April 28, 2011
Path: u:/plan_gis/LRP/CompPlan/2020plan/Transportation/Roadway_map.mxd
Source: City of Gastonia Planning Department

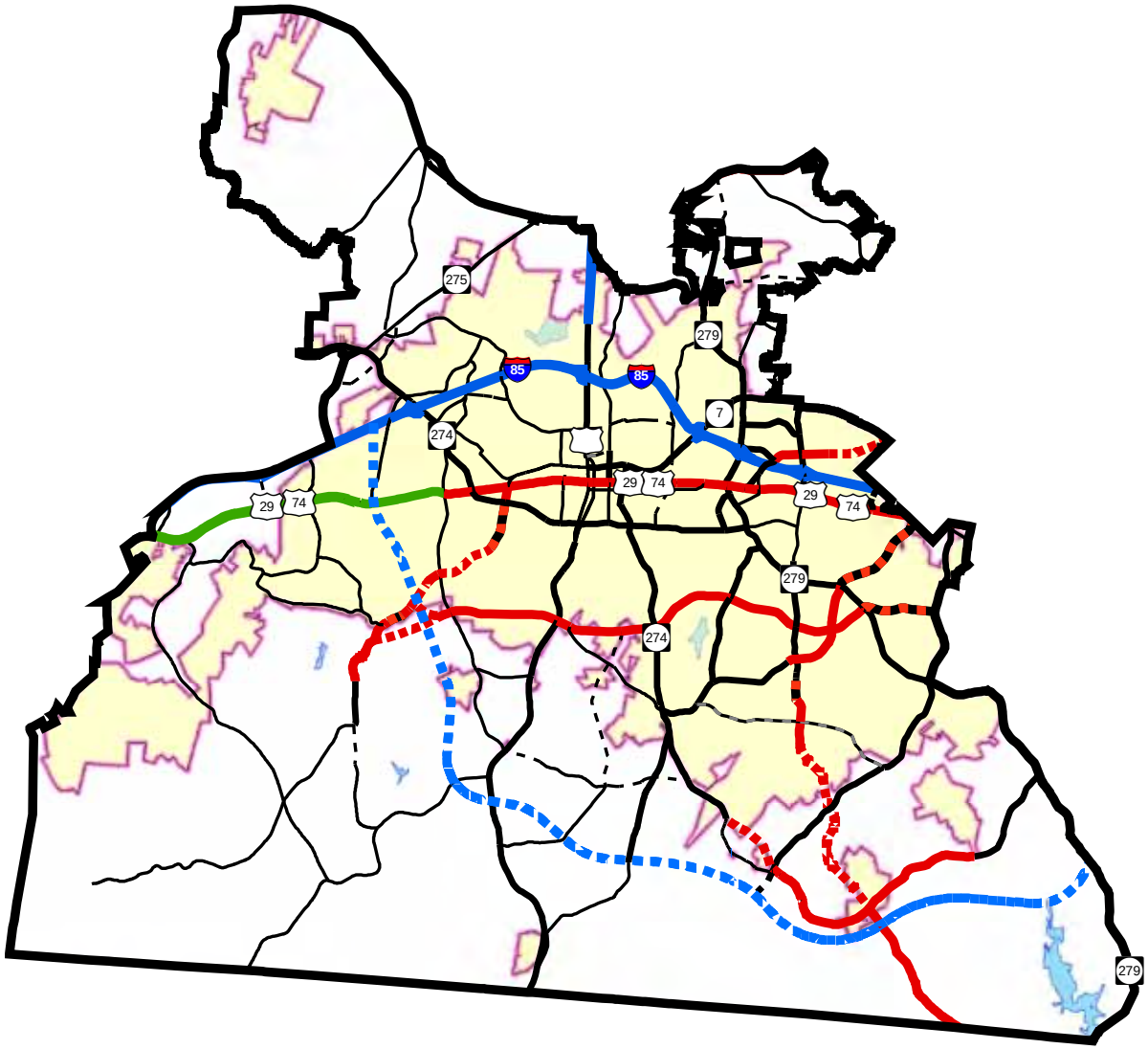


Figure 12-9: Summary of Thoroughfare System Classification

Classification	Typical Average Daily Traffic Volumes	Typical Section	Typical Characteristics	Examples
Interstate or Freeways	48,000 – 120,000 Vehicles Per Day	A minimum of four lanes with continuous median	Carries regional traffic at high speeds. No at-grade intersections and no driveway access from adjoining land.	I-85
Major Thoroughfares	15,000 –35,000 Vehicles Per Day	A minimum of two lanes in each direction with medians or center turn lane	Carries traffic that is primarily moving through the City or to points outside Gastonia. Although local access to the road is permitted, the primary function of the road is for through traffic.	Franklin Blvd, Wilkinson Blvd, Long Ave, Garrison Blvd,
Minor Thoroughfares	8,000 – 20,000 Vehicles Per Day	A minimum of one lane in each direction without median (ultimately no more than 3 lanes)	Moves traffic between major thoroughfares. Minor thoroughfares typically have two or three lanes and can also serve as collector streets.	Hudson Blvd,
Collector Street	2,000 –8,000 Vehicles Per Day	One lane in each direction	Provides for traffic movement between arterials and local streets and carries moderate traffic volumes over limited distances. Collector streets are distinguished from minor thoroughfares in that collector streets are not intended for through traffic from outside the neighborhood.	Arnstrong Park Rd, Ozark Ave, Rosebude Dr.
Local Streets	300-1000 Vehicles Per Day	One lane (26 to 38 feet) in each direction	Provides access to abutting properties, tends to accommodate lower traffic volumes, serves short trips, and provides connection to collector streets.	Main Ave, Second Ave, Rankin Ave

Poor Air Quality

The USEPA designated Gaston County as a non-attainment area for ozone pursuant to a one-hour dissipation standard. In 2005, Gaston County was designated as non-attainment for the eight-hour ozone designation. Gaston County was previously designated a non-attainment area for the one-hour ozone designation. Shown in Figure 12-7, Gaston County is included in the overall greater Charlotte region for non-attainment. Certainly this designation can be attributed to increased trips by motor vehicles, increased travel time, congestion, and longer trips all of which contribute to deteriorating environmental quality. Changes to the transportation system will improve local, regional, and global environmental quality, protect the quality of life in residential areas, and reduce the use of energy and the consumption of undeveloped land. The City of Gastonia has in recent years taken a more active role to educate citizens about the air quality issues and incorporates environmental stewardship into transportation programming whenever possible. Environmental stewardship means we must adopt policies to reduce car use, support transit, and encourage walking and bicycling as key to reducing transportation-related environmental impacts.

Figure 12-10: An illustration of a typical "Complete Street"

planning agency for the City of Gastonia, the Gaston Urban Area MPO works with municipal staff and developers to acquire right-of-ways for future corridors, thoroughfares, widenings or new alignments and to implement multi-modal design elements to accommodate for alternative modes of transportation. Figure 12-9 summarizes the thoroughfare classifications system.

Transportation Network

Roadway & Highway System

Gastonia's existing roadway network is extensive, with thoroughfares ranging from two-lane minor thoroughfares to eight-lane major freeways. Figure 12-8 illustrates the City's major roadways and the proposed connections and expansions as adopted in the Thoroughfare Plan for the urbanized area. Currently, the way a road is designed is based on the functional classification as described in the thoroughfare plan. This functional classification for the thoroughfare system refers to a prescribed hierarchy of street types typically including major and minor thoroughfares, collectors, and local roads. The current classification system provides little flexibility in road design and does not consider the surrounding land uses and the potential users of the corridor. Using such as guideline has proved effective in accommodating vehicle movement throughout the City; however there have been unintended consequences of this system. As the lead transportation-

The main focus of road function is centered on the automobile. Specifically, many of the streets are designed primarily for automobile traffic, with less regard for other users of the transportation network. This creates potential conflicts between bicyclists, pedestrians and vehicles, and limits opportunities for bicyclists and pedestrians. In order to meet the needs of all users, streets and corridors should consider multiple modes of transportation. It is recommended that the City develop a "complete streets" policy approach that recognizes transportation corridors and networks are more than just places for automobiles. The City's roadway network should be designed to accommodate the needs of all users. Those users include motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities–including children, the disabled, and elderly people. This concept focuses on changing long standing transportation planning practices that narrowly focus on moving as many cars as possible to one that seeks to reflect a balance between various modes and surrounding land uses.

What are Complete Streets?

"Complete Streets" is an initiative by which cities, states, and other jurisdictions adopt a policy that future roadway projects will safely accommodate all users- pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, transit riders, drivers of motor vehicles, and people of all ages and abilities, including children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

Many bicycle and pedestrian crashes are preventable. Better engineering, innovative and widespread education strategies, and enforcement of laws can make the difference. The number of crashes involving cyclists and pedestrians is greater than generally recognized. Gaston County ranked #11 in the state in the number of bicycle crashes occurring from 1997 to 2007, the second highest in the Charlotte region.

Source: NCDOT Division of Bike/ Pedestrian Transportation

The concept of complete streets is a transportation policy that is rapidly gaining favor both in the Charlotte MSA and nationally. Complete streets are streets that are designed to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities should be able to use the road networks in ways other than strictly for use by motorists. This requires engineering design standards for adequate sidewalk widths, bicycle lanes, buffers, and landscaping. Streets designed for multiple modes and users lead to improved safety, increased transportation options, and creates access to the transportation network for the young, old and disabled. There is no single design that works in all instances; therefore ,not all streets should accommodate all modes of transport. Traffic volumes, types of adjoining land use, and right-of-way widths are some of the factors that will influence the facilities included in a street designed under the complete streets concept. Not every street will require dedicated bike lanes or bus and transit features to make it multi-modal or a complete street. The important point is that streets are designed with all anticipated potential users from the beginning, rather than relying on expensive modifications at a later date. Gastonia's streets should be thought of as an integral part of the community and transportation network, not just a bare thoroughfare serving only the automobile. Therefore, the City should study, and possibly implement, a complete streets policy. This policy would serve as the guideline for street design whenever new streets are created or existing streets reconstructed or upgraded.

Air Travel

Located off Union Road just south of downtown, Gastonia Municipal Airport was built by the City of Gastonia in 1946 and is a self-supporting department of the City of Gastonia. The City contracts with a private firm to direct daily operations and derives revenue from fuel sales, hangar rentals, land lease fees, and tax revenue. The Airport receives Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and North Carolina grants for airport improvements and maintenance and is generally considered one of the most active general aviation facilities in North Carolina.

Gastonia Municipal Airport serves a growing number of corporate aircraft that are powerful and quiet enough to use the convenient and economical facility. Private aircraft owners occupy more than 30 hangars with easy access to the runway and value the full parallel taxiway and brief wait times. Area emergency medical services and law enforcement agencies use Gastonia as a heliport and transport point. Charlotte Douglas International Airport is located just 10 miles east offering scheduled commercial service to Gastonia and Gaston County residents.

Bicycle & Pedestrian Circulation

Whether it is on either end of an automobile trip, to and from a transit stop, or during a recreational activity, it is imperative that pedestrians and bicyclists are accommodated with safe, accessible pathways. Walking and bicycling can be practical alternatives to driving and should be viewed in a broader context. The bicycle and pedestrian system, as described here, is one interconnected system consisting of all non-motorized travel including: bike lanes, sidewalks, crosswalks, trails, and greenways. They are a means of circulation that strengthen business centers, contribute greatly to neighborhood quality and vitality, and help achieve safety, environmental, open space, and public health goals. Therefore, non-motorized travel paths should be coordinated with roadways in a comprehensive system that assures continuity for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In recent years, the City has constructed walkways, bicycle lanes, and greenway trails through neighborhoods,

commercial corridors, and within existing City parks, but these remain fragments of an overall planned system. The City realizes the importance of creating a strong pedestrian and bicycle network throughout the City with particular emphasis within the Center City and is in the midst of strengthening those connections by the Highland Rail Trail, the Downtown Pedestrian Connector and the Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenways as illustrated in Figure 12-11. Once complete, the real potential for integrating alternative modes of transportation into the Center City will be realized. The City has worked with the Gaston Urban Area MPO and NCDOT to develop several programs and projects to strengthen pedestrian paths throughout the City. Also, with the adoption of the Unified Development Ordinance and the changes made in the subdivision ordinance, the City has adopted an overall policy designed to enhance pedestrian circulation, access, and safety along corridors, downtown, in new residential developments, employment centers, and near schools, libraries, and parks. Some examples include:

- Crosswalks, including the necessary improvements, may be required at or near the center of any block that is more than 1,000 feet long, or at the end of cul-de-sac streets, where deemed necessary, for pedestrian circulation and for access to schools and commercial areas.
- Supporting Safe Routes to School, an infrastructure improvement program that encourages children to walk and bike safely to school. The City coordinates with the Gaston Urban Area MPO to identify projects eligible for program funding.
- Adopting new sidewalk standards to require: sidewalks on both sides of any major or minor thoroughfare that traverses through a subdivision; sidewalks placed on one side of any collector street that traverses through or abuts a subdivision; sidewalks placed on one side of all local subdivision streets with the exception of cul-de-sac streets that are less than 250 feet in length, or that provide access to 10 or fewer dwellings; and, sidewalks where a subdivision abuts an existing street, other than a thoroughfare.
- Supporting Rails-to-Trails to develop greenway trails along existing rail corridors.
- Conducting a sidewalk inventory to identify gaps in connectivity and to locate areas that need maintenance or rehabilitation.

A lot has changed over the last decade and policies have been updated to promote a more pedestrian-friendly environment within various locations throughout the City. However, many gaps in bicycle and pedestrian networks exist, particularly in key locations such as downtown, retail centers, schools, libraries and in some residential neighborhoods. Therefore, it is imperative that the City work together with its partners to create a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian plan. This plan will ensure the improvement and further development of a well connected system of bicycle routes and pedestrian facilities that meets the needs of City residents. Improvements to this network are further identified in the *2030 Gaston Urban Area MPO Transportation Plan*. Modifications to these planned corridors will jointly occur through the Gaston Urban Area MPO process and update of the twenty year plan.

Figure 12-11: Bicycle and Pedestrian circulation in Center City Gastonia

Existing and planned Gastonia greenways and rail trails will take pedestrians and bikers from Rankin Lake Park to downtown Gastonia, connecting by sidewalk to destinations such as the County Courthouse, the Schiele Museum and the Main Library. From there one could take the existing Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway to further residential or recreational destinations. Once complete, the real potential for integrating alternative modes of transportation into the Center City will be realized.

Figure 12-12: Bike Routes, Gaston County

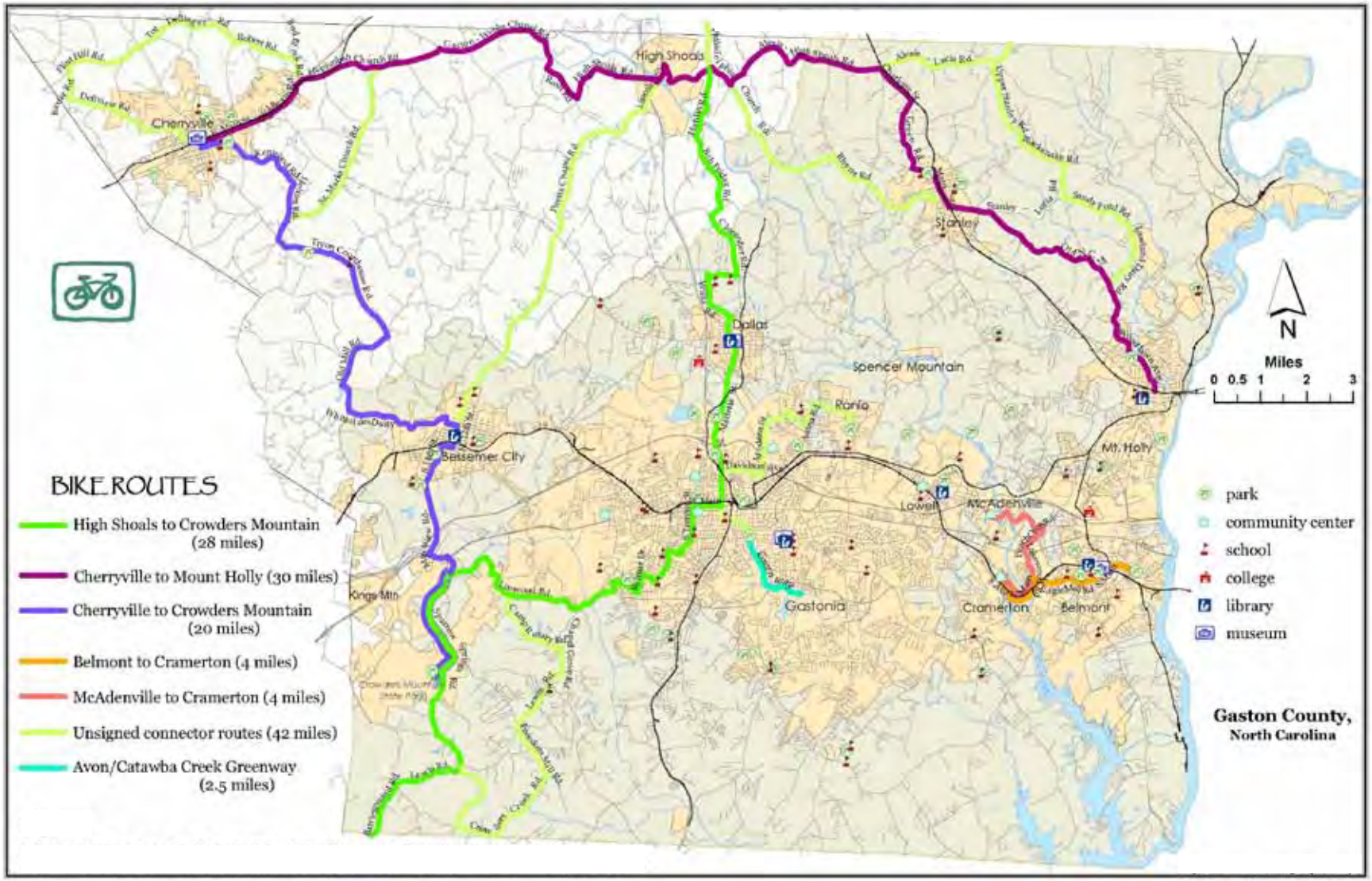
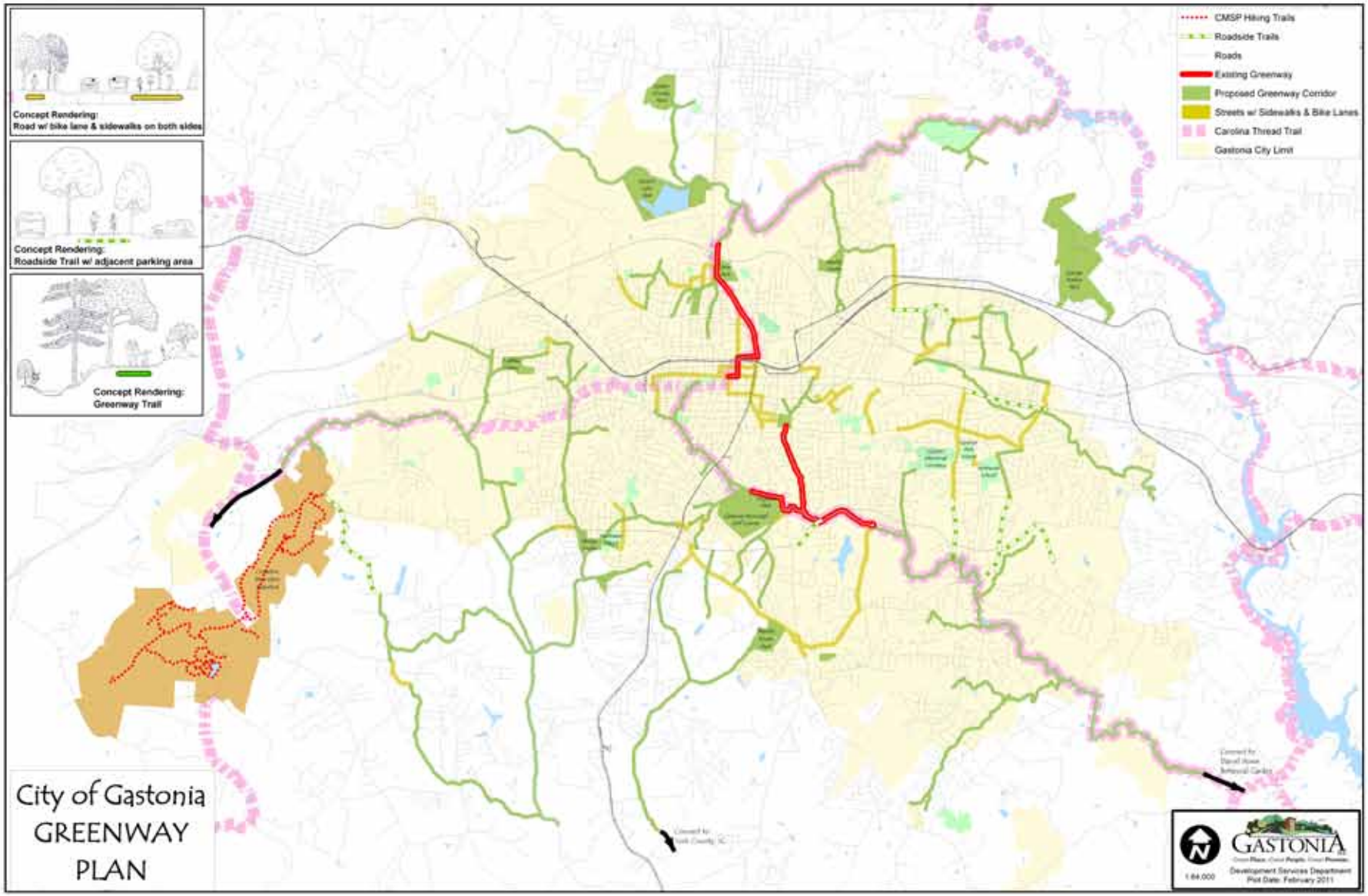


Figure 12-13: Gastonia's Greenway Plan



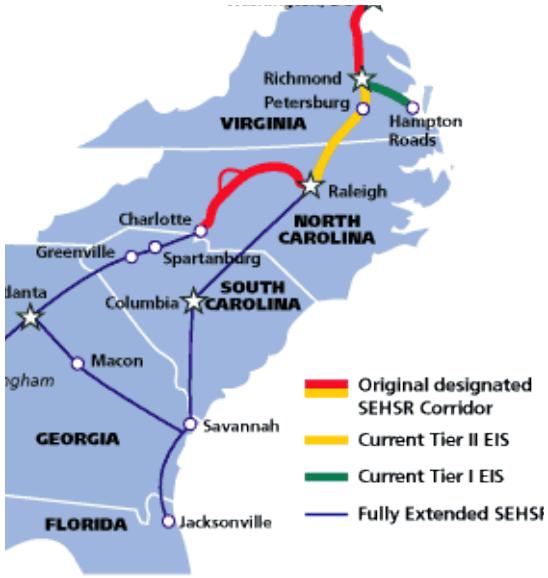


Figure 12-14: South East High Speed Rail (SEHSR) Corridor

Public Transportation

Rail line from Washington to Atlanta

As Gastonia's population and traffic grow, development of rail transportation becomes increasingly important as an alternative to auto and air transport for both freight and passengers. The NCDOT works with local communities and host railroads to plan for future services that will meet growing transportation needs.

In October 2002, the Federal Railroad Administration and Federal Highway Administration confirmed and approved the preferred Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor, shown in Figure 12-14. North Carolina and Virginia are now identifying the next steps necessary to develop high-speed rail in each segment of the corridor and soon will begin more detailed environmental and engineering studies to examine different track configurations.

Gastonia Transit

The City of Gastonia has operated Gastonia Transit since 1978 when it acquired the assets of a private transit company. There are two types of service provided by Gastonia Transit, fixed route and complementary American Disability Act (ADA) para-transit bus services. As its name suggests, the fixed route system follows the same schedule on each trip arriving at set locations at pre-determined times. The para-transit system, however, is designed to be flexible and serves disabled members of the community who lack access to the fixed route system.

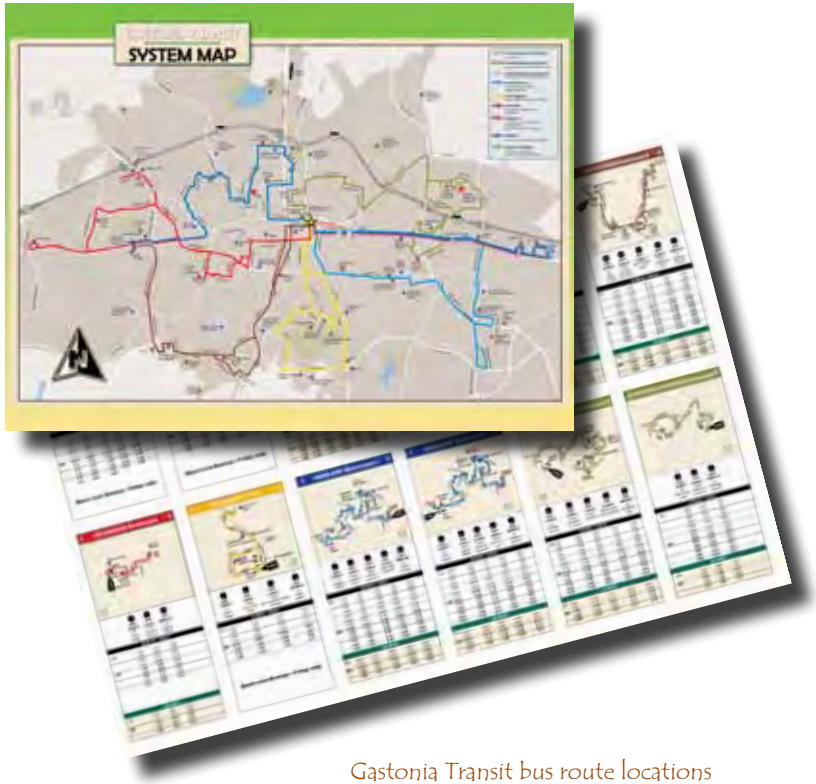
Two Gastonia Transit para-transit vans are equipped with wheelchair lifts to handle the special needs of disabled patrons. While geared towards the physically or mentally challenged, the service is open to the general public. The service area is confined to the City limits of Gastonia, serving a population of approximately 72,000 people.

In June 2009, Gastonia Transit purchased 5 low-floor 35-foot buses fueled by clean diesel fuel. Gastonia Transit also utilizes a 40-foot low floor bus that operates on compressed natural gas (CNG).

A central transfer point is located at Bradley Station in downtown Gastonia. Most of the routes are operated as one-way loop routes and operate on a "pulse" schedule system so that all the buses arrive and depart from the station at the same time. This allows for easy transfers between routes as well as greater service coverage; however, the indirect routing results in increased travel times for some passengers. The City of Gastonia also provides intra-city bus service, through Gastonia Transit, with eight transit routes running on 45 minute headways.

Gastonia Transit's bus fleet consists of seven 35-foot transit buses, three demand response vans, and the only compressed natural gas ("CNG") bus in the state of North Carolina. All buses pass through the Downtown Transfer Terminal, the Bradley Station. This allows for easy and quick transfers. Gastonia Transit covers over 292,000 miles per year, providing service to over 325,000 passengers annually.

The Gaston Urban Area MPO and the City of Gastonia, initiated a transit expansion study in the spring and summer of 2007. *The Gastonia Transit Expansion Study* was primarily to assess the feasibility of expanding current transit operations to better serve other municipalities outside of



Gastonia Transit bus route locations and schedule.

Gastonia in Gaston County; however, it is also taking a more comprehensive look at service needs in general, including the need for additional hours of operation, improvements to the frequency of service, development of expanded services to neighboring counties, and other enhancements. Currently, transit services operated by Gastonia Transit (the local urban transit system) are limited to the area inside the City limits of Gastonia. Some general public transportation is provided by Gaston County ACCESS (the local community transit system), but it is limited in scale and scope. ACCESS primarily serves clients of human service agencies and other customers with special transportation needs.

The plan provides a prioritized list of eight responsive strategies to transit needs. The recommendations addresses concerns regarding the efficiency of the current system, as well as opportunities for future expansion.

Gastonia Transit Van Services

The ADA Van Service operates curb-to-curb van service for passengers who cannot use the fixed route bus system due to a physical or mental disability. Service is operated during the same hours and days as the fixed route bus service. Service must be scheduled at least one day, but not more than 14 days, in advance. Trips may be scheduled for any purpose and are handled on a first call basis. The ADA Van Service is only operated in the City limits of Gastonia and the cost for this service is two dollars per trip. Family members of van riders, or a social agency, supplies personal care attendants, who assist passengers on trips. At times, the vans carry multiple passengers from different locations.

Express Bus Service

In 1996, the Gaston Urban Area MPO conducted a survey of citizens regarding transportation issues. According to that survey, over 50 percent of residents used, or would be willing to use, alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle, including staggered work hours, bus service, and car or vanpooling. Further, a Route and Schedule Evaluation performed by the Institute for Transportation Research and Education found that peak hour service (6:30 AM to 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM to 5:30 PM) constituted only 30 percent of all trips on Gastonia Transit. This is significant in that it shows that the traditional work commuter is

Bradley Transit Station, home of Gastonia Transit

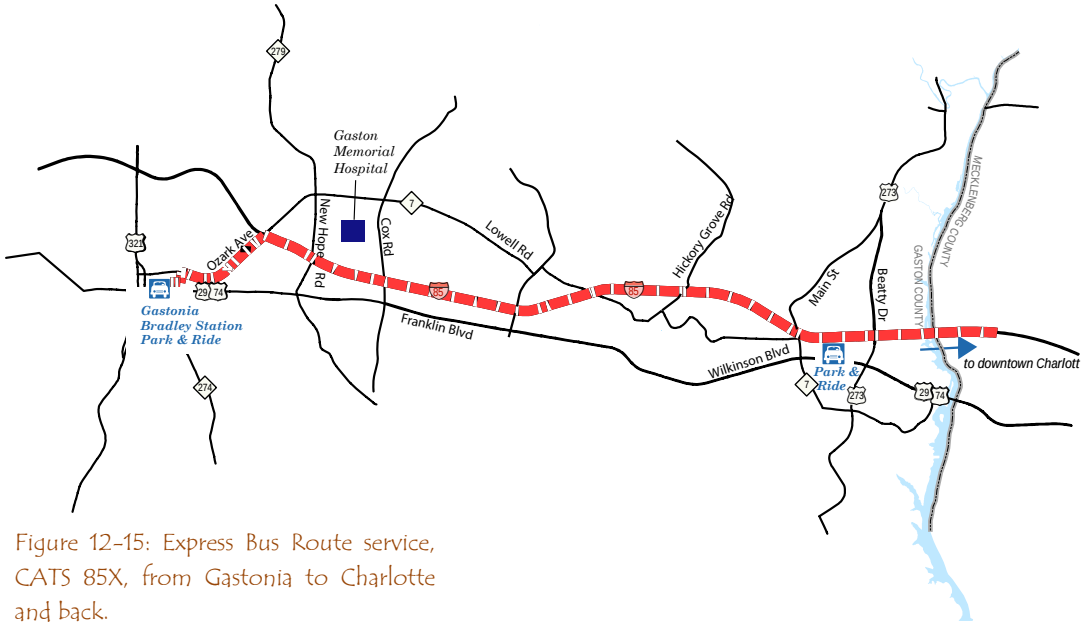


Figure 12-15: Express Bus Route service, CATS 85X, from Gastonia to Charlotte and back.

85X Bus Route and departing bus, leaving from downtown Gastonia to deliver riders to downtown Charlotte.

not using transit service. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 23,101 Gaston County residents commuted to Mecklenburg County for employment.

The idea of implementing an express bus service to Charlotte came forward during the last Long Range Transportation Plan process as a way of increasing vehicle occupancy, reducing congestion, and improving air quality. The first Gastonia Express Route bus left Bradley Station on March 5, 2001. This service is a combined effort of the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) and the City of Gastonia, with CATS operating and marketing the service and Gastonia contributing 50 percent of the operating costs.

The Gastonia Express, the route along I-85 through Gaston County illustrated in Figure 12-15, provides commuters with four departure times from Gastonia every weekday morning. After making a stop at Belmont's Abbey Plaza, the route travels along I-85 to Freedom Drive and makes several stops in uptown Charlotte. The bus departs from the Charlotte Transportation Center in uptown Charlotte each afternoon at four departure times, with each trip taking approximately one hour. For those patrons who have an emergency during the workday and need to return home early, the CATS Guaranteed Ride Home Program is available.

Over the past five years, Gastonia Express ridership has increased significantly. In January of 2005, there were 3,090 riders, compared to January of 2009 where there are 5,557 riders per month. This service has become a welcome service for commuter, which is evident by ridership number which increased by 80% during this time.

Land Use & Transportation Coordination

Development patterns and community characteristics considerably influence the distance and manner in which people travel. Over the past several years, the increase in sprawl and development patterns meant that people spent more time on the road traveling to jobs, services and their homes. When residential, commercial, employment and other uses are separated by significant distances, more of the trips and errands will be made by automobile, as walking, cycling and public transit become less practical.

Projected population increases within the 2025 Planning Area will place added pressure on the current road system to move more people. The amount of commuting from Gastonia to Charlotte, and other areas in the region, has increased over the past 20 years. New and expanding retail centers in the eastern part of the City create traffic congestion areas. How effectively the City deals with growth, traffic congestion, and land use planning will influence the future quality of life in Gastonia.

Transit, car and van pools, walking, and bicycling are more viable in areas where activities are concentrated and travel distances are less. Short vehicle trips can also be more effectively distributed over a well–developed network of local streets, freeing up capacity on freeways and major thoroughfares for longer trips. The investment in planning to develop a better integration of land use and transportation planning is an important way to reduce traffic congestion and help develop smart growth.

ISSUES

Issues

- The need for increased compatibility between transportation infrastructure and land use is essential to developing a sustainable community.

- Reducing automobile dependency through the promotion of public transit, construction and rehabilitation of walkable neighborhoods.

- As the City grows, planning for additional public transportation services, including the need to support flex route services, extended service hours, van fares and Gaston County Access is to address the needs of the citizens of Gaston County. There is also a need to explore bus trolley service linking the downtown businesses, offices and government buildings.

- The development of a regional commuter rail public transportation system is needed to serve adjacent counties.

- Applying context-sensitive design principles to new or expanded infrastructure projects. Context-sensitive design seeks to develop transportation facilities that fit their physical settings and preserve scenic, aesthetic, historic, and environmental resources while maintaining safety and mobility.

- There is a need to continue to establish an integrated network of greenways, open spaces, trails and sidewalks for non-motorized traffic connecting residential, commercial, mixed-use and recreational areas.

- Regional Transportation Coordination. The growing problem of congestion is not unique to Gastonia; it also affects Gaston County, Charlotte, and all the surrounding communities. Enhancing road connectivity and reducing traffic congestion by providing multiple routes to major destinations within the region is crucial. Therefore, linking the transportation planning work of the Gaston Urban Area MPO, with Charlotte Area Transit, Cabarrus-Rowan Urban Area, Mecklenburg-Union Urban Area and the Rock-Hill – Fort Mill Area Transportation Study, plus the Lake Norman and Rocky River Rural Planning Organizations is important. Both the State and the Federal government have been encouraging MPO's that are obviously linked by transportation demands to work together.

- Projected transportation funding is not sufficient to construct all of the projects that have been identified as priorities. The challenge is to provide the highest level of service possible using the limited amount of funding.

- While the City has various well managed transportation components, there is a need for an efficient multi-modal transportation system. An efficient and seamless multimodal transportation system would effectively meet these critical transportation demands and efficiently move both passengers and freight throughout the community.

Objectives & Tools

Objective 1

Ensure that transportation plans are coordinated with land use goals.

Tools

a) Design a transportation system supportive of land use goals for compact, accessible, walkable neighborhoods.
b) Develop a transportation and land use vision for a regional or multi-jurisdictional corridor and evaluate future transportation and land use scenarios.
c) Prioritize transportation improvements based upon improving existing efficiencies, available right-of-way, and consistency with future land uses.
d) Base development approvals upon adequate transportation system capabilities.
e) Concentrate higher density development along transit corridors.
f) Coordinate transportation improvement projects with water and sewer extensions considering the growth this plan anticipates.
g) Improvements to, and new construction of roads, should be designed to minimize negative impacts to established neighborhoods.

Objective 2

Develop an efficient street and highway network capable of providing an appropriate level of service for a variety of transportation modes.

Tools

a) Enhance mobility by increasing connectivity of existing and future street network.
b) Continue to evaluate the timing sequence and implement optimum phasing of all signals on major thoroughfares.
c) Increase transportation alternatives by adopting a "complete streets" policy that accommodates all street users: bicyclists, pedestrians and transit riders.
d) Implement transportation system and demand management techniques to maximize road capacity and improve traffic flow. Transportation system management improvements include: exclusive turn lane, access management programs, high occupancy vehicle lanes and other measures that improve efficiency while requiring minimal construction. Transportation demand management improvements are congestion-reducing travel demand programs, like ride sharing, flextime, transit use, walking and bicycling.
e) Create a network of bicycle-safe streets and bikeways serving bicyclists' needs, especially for travel to greenways and recreational destinations, commercial districts, transit stations, institutions, and recreational employment centers within Gastonia.
f) Develop citywide guidelines and regulations to mark safe bike lanes in every public parking facility.
g) Re-mark traffic lanes with a two-foot wide edge of pavement line on the Freedom Mill-Linwood Road-Neal Hawkins-Robinson Road-New Hope Road route; on the Gardner Park-Armstrong Park-Garrison Boulevard to Union Road route on Union Road; on the Redbud connector; and on New Hope Road from the Stowe Botanical Garden to NC 7.
h) Develop and implement education and encouragement plans aimed at youth, adult cyclists,

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

and motorists to increase public awareness of the benefits of bicycling and of available resources and facilities.

i) Develop a connectivity policy that addresses intersection spacing, number of cul-de-sacs and their length, number of access points, connections to adjoining property and bike and pedestrian facilities.

j) Develop a collector street plan to determine long range connections for new development.

k) Develop a street type zoning overlay that defines the street use and design features that support adjacent land uses.

l) Continue the planning and development of the Multi-modal Center. The multi-modal tansportation center, located in the Center City, should serve as the primary passenger rail and intercity bus terminal in Gastonia, providing direct connections between buses, passenger rail, taxis, and airport bus shuttles.

Objective 3

Increase the community's use of the transit system and pursue objectives that support rapid transit to Charlotte.

Tools

a) Develop and establish minimum land use densities near transit centers and corridors.

b) Consider adding new routes and possibly expanding the service to other communities.

c) Provide affordable, practical, dependable, comfortable and desirable transit service.

d) Continue to address the needs of the transit-dependent population, persons with disabilities, and other special needs groups.

e) Prioritize the completion of sidewalk connections serving transit stops.

f) Increase the number of bus shelters, especially at high usage stops such as shopping centers and medical facilities.

g) Continue methods to increase transit use marketing, special programs and service analysis.

h) Once determined, protect the right-of-way for a rapid transit corridor to Charlotte.

Objective 4

Develop a transportation system that promotes healthy neighborhoods and improves environmental quality.

Tools:

a) Develop transportation systems and programs that maintain or improve air quality.

b) Accelerate the development of the greenway system in order to increase the number of bicycle and pedestrian trips.

c) Develop safe, accessible and attractive street corridors that are desirable for walking and bicycling.

d) Encourage private sector participation in vanpool programs.

e) Design transportation systems and facilities that preserve and complement the area's natural features.

Objective 5

Ensure regional programs and projects are consistent with the City's plans and policies.

Tools:

a) Continue to work with established regional transportation organizations.

b) Continue planning and coordination efforts to develop the regional trail system.

c) Promote additional bridge crossings over the Catawba River to handle increases in traffic on I-85 and US 29/74.

Objective 6

Expand transportation funding levels to maintain and improve the transportation system.

Tools

a) Work with the local legislative delegation to revise the State's Highway Equity Formula and Highway Trust Fund to increase the amount of road dollars that come to the Gaston Urban Area MPO area.
b) Consider seeking or establishing alternative funding sources for roadway construction.
c) Support regional, state and federal transportation initiatives to increase transportation funding.
d) Coordinate transportation facilities and improvements with development activities, and with regional transportation and land use plans to achieve maximum benefit with limited funds.

Objective 7

Apply context sensitive design principles to new or expanded infrastructure projects.

Tools:

a) Implement guidelines or standards developed for local streets that permit or specify widths, street geometry, utility placement, and provision of bicycle and pedestrian facilities that promote walkable, human-scaled communities.
b) Use designs for transportation projects and facility design oriented toward meeting the needs of users, the community served, and the natural environment.
c) Adopt transportation project selection criteria for the long-range transportation plan (LRTP) or transportation improvement program (TIP) that consider "smart growth" criteria, consistency with a state or regional land use plan or vision, and other land use objectives and criteria.
d) Raise the level of awareness about the connection between land use and transportation and how different options support each other.
e) Develop a transportation and land use vision for a region or multi-jurisdictional corridor and evaluate future transportation and land use scenarios.
f) Integrate design of new or expanded capacity road projects to minimize barriers and reduce visual and noise impacts to neighborhoods.

13

Land Use & Development

Land Use Trends

Land Use Principles

Existing Land Use

Future Land Use

Issues

Objectives & Tools

Addendum: Sectors

Land Use & Development

GASTONIA 2025

13 Land Use & Development

Land Use & Development 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.

Overview

This Chapter provides the land use framework for future City growth through 2025. This framework illustrates the desired pattern of development in the city. The Land Use Chapter is the culmination and primary implementation tool of the Gastonia 2025 Plan. This plan will guide public improvements and public decisions about how and where to build roads, schools, parks, and other public facilities. However, the Map is not intended to be a fixed predetermination of land use for the next decade. The Map and the policies are fluid and will be amended at regular intervals to accommodate unforeseen circumstances and changing trends, just like other policies in this plan.

The Land Use Plan will be implemented through the careful and strategic use of various urban planning tools such as the City's Unified Development Ordinance, official zoning map, annexation policy, and the capital improvements program. This Chapter should be used as an essential daily decision making guide for all land use related decisions made over the next decade. Successful implementation of the Land Use chapter will require a sustained effort by the public and private sectors. Therefore, it is through the incremental, daily decisions of the Planning Commission, City Council, major state and regional institutions, neighboring jurisdictions, private property owners, developers and other interest groups that will help to ensure that the City's vision for its future will be realized.

Practically every development related decision that a community makes will have some impact upon the way the land is used. When a community makes a decision related to zoning or infrastructure development, it is establishing land use policy. Therefore, it is most important that there be an overall plan for coordinated land use development in order to make optimum use of this limited resource.

Development Patterns

Current land use in Gastonia reflects the City's development from its historic roots in the Southern Reconstruction Era. Population and demographic trends reveal that Gastonia, like most medium size cities in North Carolina, followed growth and development patterns that center on the birth of the textile industry. Gastonia was born of a railroad junction established when the Charlotte and Atlanta railroad by passed Dallas and was routed along an east-west ridge line in Gaston County, which is now the Norfolk Southern railroad running east-west through the County. At the time of incorporation, the City boasted a population of approximately 200 people; however within the next thirteen years, by 1890 the city was home to the County's largest bank (First National), three mills, a newspaper, two hotels, a variety of stores, a YMCA, and a population of 1,033. The textile industry was the County's largest employer and residents within Gaston County moved to housing closer to the mills, which, in some cases were right outside of the City limits. Elected officials quickly moved to annex these areas and by 1911 Gastonia more than doubled in size through population

growth as most of Gastonia's textile industry and the City's older neighborhoods formed.

The catalyst for Gastonia's growth over the next 40 years was fueled by the building of many textile mills, and the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Textile mills, freed from the necessity of locating near a river, began to locate along the two rail lines, which allowed them to bring in raw materials and ship finished products to distant markets. Surrounding each mill was a cluster of small villages, which are still present throughout present-day Gastonia. These mills employed thousands of workers, who, along with their families and need for goods and services, created the urban areas in the Center City. The pattern of mills and mill housing was heavily influenced by the railroads, resulting in a linear development pattern concentrated on the ridgelines of the City.

With the beginning of streetcar service in 1911, Franklin Avenue, which was eventually renamed Franklin Boulevard, began to develop as a commercial strip, stretching beyond downtown to approximately Church Street on the east and Webb Street on the west. Evidence of this early transit-influenced commercial development can still be seen with many of the buildings having a uniform setback (adjacent to the sidewalk now because Franklin has been widened), no side yards and traditional storefront architecture (large display windows, recessed doors). Gastonia has been driven by those early economic and transportation advancements.

Due to the influence of the railroad on the City's development, the oldest parts of the City are generally located on some of the highest elevations, with later infill development occurring between the ridges. The opposite situation was prevalent in many communities developing prior to the advent of the railroad, where settlements concentrated along waterways.

Closer to downtown, Gastonia's business leaders and emerging professional class built their housing chiefly south of the central business district, the area now known as the York-Chester neighborhood. East of York-Chester and north of the (C.D.A.) mill village is a neighborhood consisting of more modest middle-class houses, but were individually built and owned. Further east along Franklin Boulevard are two other neighborhoods built in this same time period, Fairmount Park and Franklin-Craig. North of downtown, an African-American community was formed as the Highland neighborhood, between Chester and Oakland Streets. Highland, in addition to the usual churches and schools, has a portion of its neighborhood business and cultural center remaining along North York Street. The Highland neighborhood was largely working class but economically mixed and home to professionals as well. Many physicians lived in Highland near the hospital. The neighborhood was developed along a north-south grid pattern and consisted of typical Carolina worker cottage-type houses, some civic uses, and commercial uses along York and Chester Streets.

The streetcar system in the early 1900s (as seen above) influenced commercial development nearby. The evidence is seen on Franklin Boulevard, today with many of the buildings having a uniform setback, no side yards and traditional storefront architecture.

From 1950–1970 the City's growth and development patterns followed state and national patterns. Automobiles and trucks replaced rail and water as the travel mode of choice for Gastonia's people and goods. Historic reversal of out migration from the Center City to the suburbs was made available by improvements in regional transportation networks. During this period downtown was no longer the primary commercial center for the City. Changes in land development patterns followed the changes in transportation mode of choice. Later commercial development occurred in both commercial strip and shopping center form. Commerce continued to flow outward along Franklin Boulevard, past New Hope

Suburban Development & Wildlife

Suburban development can cause dramatic changes to the landscape, the alteration of ecological functions, and a reduction in biodiversity. With the spread of suburbia, however, comes opportunities for some species to exploit new resources. While many wild creatures can enrich the lives of suburban dwellers, large increases in the population of species such as deer, beaver, and coyotes can lead to a change in status from resources to pests. Today, management of suburban areas challenges wildlife agencies on two fronts: the threat to human habitat and biodiversity; and, the problem of "overabundant" wildlife. This is not only a tremendous management challenge, but also an educational opportunity to help people understand the natural world and their place in it.

***from Exploring the Ecology of Suburban Wildlife* by Stephen DeStefano and Richard M. DeGraaf.**

and Cox roads on the east and past Myrtle School Road on the west. Additional commercial areas developed on sections of most of Gastonia's major thoroughfares. The expanding urban highways improved automobile access to urban fringe areas, thus encouraging a more dispersed, automobile-oriented development. Franklin Boulevard still has the most commercial land use of any thoroughfare in the City, as significant portions of Gastonia's other thoroughfares remain residential.

Between 1970 and the mid 1980s, the growth was modest, due to the City's cautious annexation policy, and slow economic growth. However, when the economy improved in the late 1980s Gastonia became more aggressive with annexation, boosting Gastonia's population by 7,000 and annexing the airport in the southeast and the industrial area of the northwest. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the City annexed large residential areas, primarily in the southeast. Annexation remains a significant tool for growth today.

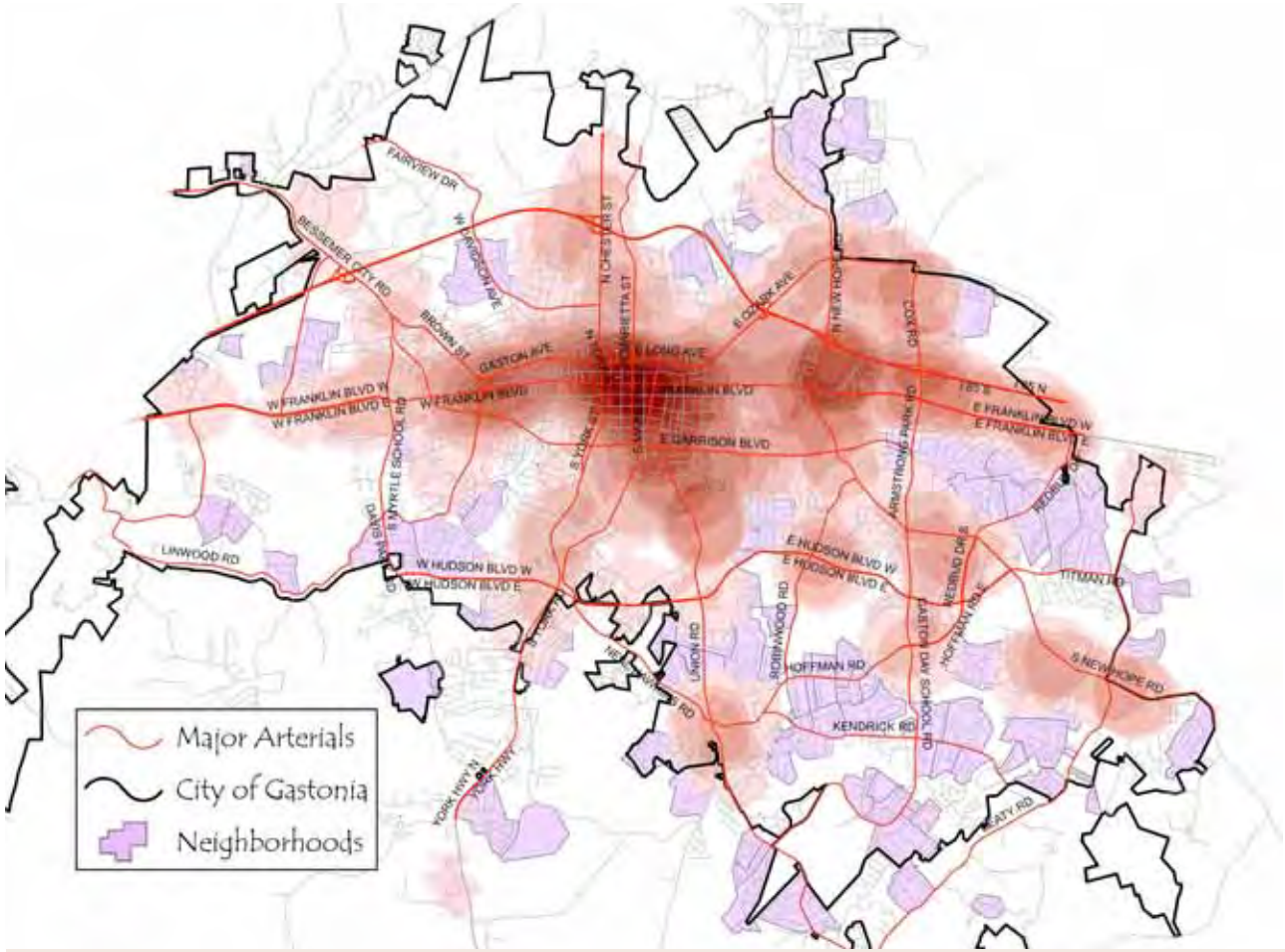
Beginning in the early 1990s and continuing to the present, most of the City's growth and development took place as sprawling residential subdivisions with curvilinear streets and irregular spacing. These development patterns within the Planning Area have been driven by regional conditions related to changing demographic and economic expansion. Specifically, node to node development patterns occurred in the eastern parts of the City. These patterns were established early, well before mid-century, but have continued to the present. Also, regional population increases have pushed the demand for housing, which is followed by commercial development, shown in Figure 13-1 on the following page. Figure 13-2, on page 13-5, indicates a large proportion of the City's recent new residential development has occurred in the east where the following conditions are present.

- Large lots and low density discourages walking and bicycling.
- Street networks tend to consist of two-lane roads handling far more vehicles than they were designed for funneling traffic onto major arterials, causing and congestion on major streets.
- Roads are designed for mobility of cars as opposed to accessibility for all modes of transportation.
- Streets with multiple lanes of traffic; often lack sidewalks.

Recent land use and development trends have presented a challenge for the City. Besides radically transforming the City's landscape, the ongoing decentralization of urban land uses and associated social and economic impacts have dramatically affected how people live, work, recreate, and use energy, as well as overall quality of life. These development patterns have also had significant impacts on the environment and, at times, conflict with wildlife habitats, scenic views, and open spaces. If continued, this development pattern will alter the way services and facilities are offered to residents, since historic and current services and facilities may not be compatible with future demands. This pattern could also impose considerable economic, emotional, aesthetic, and physical costs on residents. Unfavorable economic costs could include higher taxes, higher costs of providing infrastructure, adverse fiscal impacts on the City government, ill-health from air pollution generated by traffic, and a negative business climate. Emotional costs may include loss of community spirit and values and loss of a sense of place. Aesthetic costs can include less leisure time and more suburban landscapes, which lack aesthetic appeal. Physical costs include over-crowded schools, increased traffic congestion, longer commuting times, and more aggressive driving patterns. Therefore, it is essential that the City encourage smart growth

and sustainable development principles, which will build from the City's source of strength–structured around a historic and vibrant downtown, diverse residential neighborhoods, infill development within the Center City, and nodal development along the commercial and institutional spines of the City's major corridors like Franklin Boulevard and US 321.

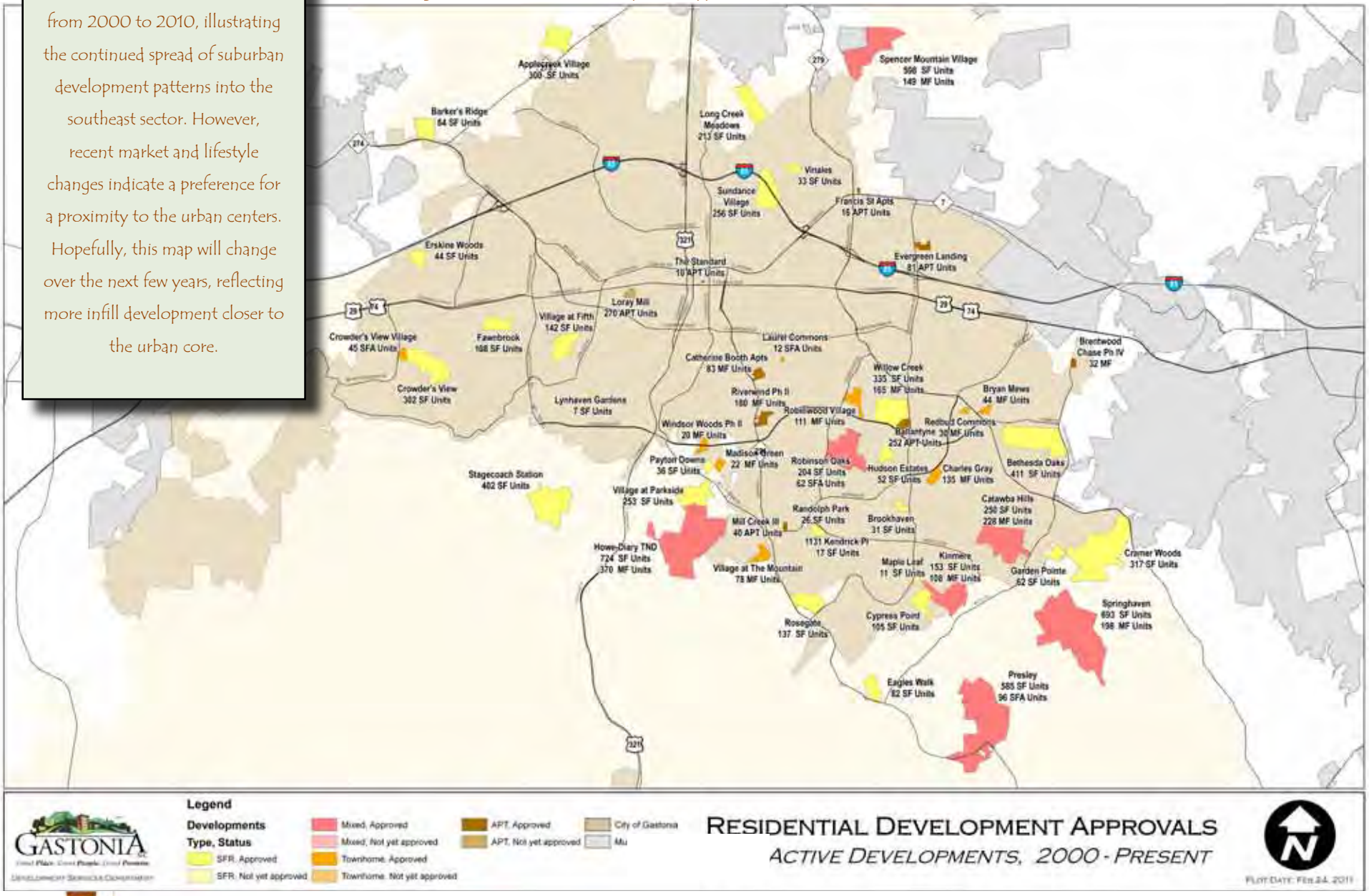
Figure 13-1: Commercial Density Map



This density map indicates commercial density in red along Franklin Blvd, with pockets along other major thoroughfares. Neighborhoods are in purple. In the southeast, the neighborhoods are not connected to each other via an interconnected street network. This kind of development forces one out to a major arterial to drive to ones destination, instead of offering opportunities for short trips and/or non auto transporation.

Residential development is shown from 2000 to 2010, illustrating the continued spread of suburban development patterns into the southeast sector. However, recent market and lifestyle changes indicate a preference for a proximity to the urban centers. Hopefully, this map will change over the next few years, reflecting more infill development closer to the urban core.

Figure 13-2: Residential Development Approvals



GASTONIA 2025

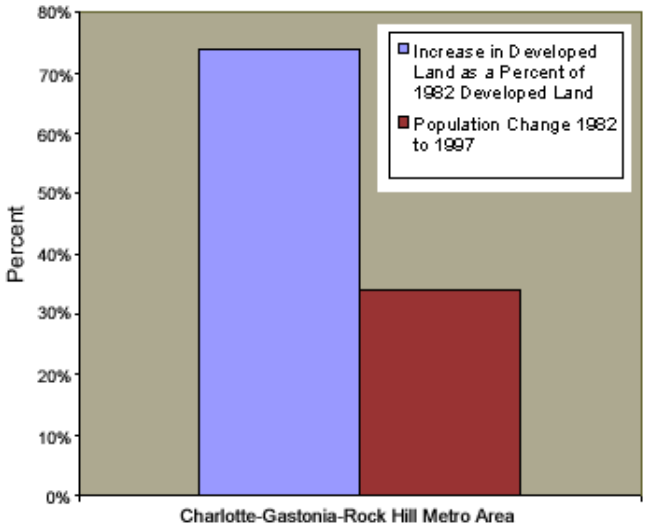
Land Use Trends

Many factors influence development and land use patterns in Gastonia. Among them are the physical characteristics of the environment, proximity to regional resources and markets, the economy, employment opportunities, transportation and other infrastructure systems, government regulations, and community attitudes. Over the past 10 years, Gastonia has positioned itself as not only a player within the commercial market via regional shopping centers, but as an increasing player in the medical and residential market. Business parks have developed along US 321, neighborhood service centers follow rooftops, and the medical district is vastly expanding. The following is a list of local, national and regional trends that are guiding land use trends in Gastonia. While there are numerous trends related to land use in Gastonia that could be discussed, this chapter will present the *major* trends as they relate to development patterns.

Population Increase

Over the past ten years, North Carolina has become one of the fastest growing states in the country. Recent statistics indicate that, if regional trends continue, the Charlotte MSA population will likely reach 3.3 million by 2025. This regional trend has had huge impacts on the City's population in terms of number of new residents added as well as the location of those new residents. Trends show that Gastonia's population gains were realized several miles from the City's core, particularly in the southeastern part of Gastonia and areas outside Gastonia's southern City limits. Population projections indicate that Gastonia's greatest rate of growth will continue in a suburban manner in the southeastern part of the Planning Area. A rapidly growing populations will mean that there will be a higher demand for housing, schools, public services, recreation and commerce. The challenge for the City lies in managing this growth in a manner that not only maintains but improves the quality of life for residents.

Figure 13-3: Increase in Developed Land Vs. Population Increase



Source: Quality of Natural Resources Commission (QNRC) Gaston County & North Carolina State University (NCSU) Cooperative Extension, Environmental Report, 2003

Regional Demographic Shifts

Recent statistics indicate that a rise in population has increased the diversity of the region. The region is attracting a large number of Baby Boomers with higher incomes, young professionals, and a large increase in immigrant population. Latino population growth is the fastest-growing population segment in the Charlotte region. These regional demographic shifts will significantly increase the need to develop land use policies, which help create communities that are more livable, walkable, senior-friendly, and accessible to recreational and healthcare facilities. Our challenge will be to manage growth to enjoy the benefits it can bring and limit its potential negative consequences.

Regional Influences

Regional growth patterns in the past forty years have changed the face of our community. New development in the form of low density, single-family subdivisions spread across the landscape and commercial activities strung out along major roads has prevailed. The hidden costs of this type of development pattern are now becoming evident in escalating costs to maintain roads and utilities, massive impacts on the health of the environment, and erosion of the vitality of downtown. Development and its effects often extend beyond municipal and county boundaries in a dense metropolitan area. Most municipalities in the region,

G - T O W N
I D E A L

Investment in Downtown
Economic Assistance and Livability

"IDEAL," a downtown incentive program, is designed to attract new businesses to downtown and help upfit their buildings and ease their monthly lease burdens

and especially Gastonia, have been challenged with trying to work to develop regional solutions to address the negative impacts of these growth and development patterns.

Residential Development Patterns

Over the past ten years, population growth, regional job markets, and proximity to area amenities have fueled residential development patterns in Gastonia. While the majority of single-family residential developments have continued in the southeast sector, within the past five years, residential development has spread in the northeast, northwest, and southwest sectors taking a more multi-directional approach (see Figure 9-2 on page 9-5). Also, market changes indicate that the pattern of low-density, large lot, single-use, and scattered development is changing as population shifts have increased the demand for single-family attached and townhome developments. This is directly related to lifestyle changes, the decrease in the household size, and the increase in the number of older adults retiring within the region.

Recent regional housing sales indicate that homes close to urban centers, or those that have convenient access to transit, are holding their value better than houses in suburban communities. This trend is partly due to the changes in the economy and rising fuel and energy costs. The sub-prime crisis has accelerated an underlying trend. That trend demonstrates that a lifestyle predicated on cheap gas, subsidized infrastructure and long commutes will not last. The case for investing in more public transportation and walkable communities that afford people the option of traveling by other modes is fast becoming one of economic competitiveness. Accommodating a growing population in the era of high gas prices will mean increasing density and mixing land uses to enhance walkability and public transit.

Shifting Economy

Gaston County is in the midst of a dramatic shift: the textile industry, its long-standing economic engine, has largely been shuttered. There has been a shift in local economies from a traditional manufacturing and industrial based economy to a service and knowledge based system. Gaston Memorial Hospital has positioned itself in the region as a distinct institution, and it is located on a site that has excellent potential for growth and expansion. Associated medical services have also grown at a fast rate.

Downtown Revitalization

Throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, both public and private stakeholders worked tirelessly to increase investments and activities in the downtown area. The downtown plan calls for urban intensity and diversity, public investments and redevelopment, all of which require a long-term political commitment for success. The benefits of revitalization can be profound in terms of the economy and sense of place for the downtown area. The costs of allowing downtown to decline can be even greater. In recent years, however, the City has been proactive in helping downtown, and the return has been significant. For example, economic incentive programs such as IDEAL, Investment in Downtown Economic Assistance and Livability, have helped to stimulate retail investment in downtown. Albeit slow, the fruits of past public and private efforts have appeared with the opening of storefronts on Main Avenue and the increase in entertainment activities. This resurgence can be attributed to numerous factors, but the economy and the City's recent focus on reinvestment in downtown are the primary reasons. Increasing the vitality of the downtown area is essential to the success of the City and dependent on continued reinvestment by public and private partners.

Strengthening Existing Neighborhoods

Older residential areas within the Center City that have been characterized by blight and disinvestment such as Highland, Oakland, and Loray Mills, are now experiencing growth and reinvestment. Private developers have shown interest in developing infill housing. Residents are showing an increased pride in their neighborhoods. The City, along with public and private partners, are collaborating on several neighborhood revitalization and stabilization efforts. The City has focused on place-based public investments, including infill housing, infrastructure improvement strategies, updates to the Planned Residential Development (PRD) standards which incorporate sidewalks and open space requirements, storm water ordinance, targeted code enforcement efforts, and infill development.

The City invested in quality-of-life interventions such as the street sign topper project along York and Chester. In recent years, several active community based organizations have worked with the City of Gastonia's Police and Code Enforcement officials on beautification projects and on efforts to improve neighborhood safety. Hope for Gaston, a partnership between the City and the faith-based community, has received national recognition impacting over 50 homes and bringing food to families in need. Regional population shifts will continue to increase the demand for the traditional neighborhood models focused on walkability, proximity to jobs, shopping, and recreational activities. Therefore, in order to meet the need of current and future residents, it is essential that we continue to develop creative strategies to strengthen existing neighborhoods across the City.

Recognition of Historical & Cultural Significance

Preservation is a very essential function of creating a sustainable development strategy. Farmland, open space, and historic preservation are all on the rise with legislation providing the tools to regulate manage and control growth. Gastonia's residents are realizing the historical and cultural significance of older buildings and landmarks in the community and the fact that Gastonia has a unique identity that is worth preserving. Since the adoption of the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, the City designated the Brookwood neighborhood as the City's second local historic district and established the Oakland Design District, the Downtown National Register District, and the Loray Mill National Register District.

Transportation Challenges

Not surprisingly, most communities throughout the state tackle issues related to traffic congestion and the lack of road improvements. A continuing trend of an increase in the daily vehicle miles traveled has contributed to road congestion on local roads and along I-85—a problem that is likely to worsen with increases in population and sprawling development patterns. The Charlotte MSA is heavily dependent on private mobility and this dependency is increasing over time. Approximately 80% of Gastonia's commuters drives alone to work and another 12.5% carpool to work. In addition, travel times for Gastonia workers follow regional and national patterns. The average travel time for all commuters is about 23 minutes, up from 19.1 minutes in 1990. We will not meet all future travel demands merely through construction of new or wider roads. Therefore, Gastonia must develop strategies that promote and provide multi-modal transportation options. The North Carolina Turnpike Authority (NCTA) is proposing to construct a toll road, known as the Gaston East-West Connector, from I-85 west of Gastonia in Gaston County to I-485/NC 160 in Mecklenburg County. The purpose of the connector is to improve east-west transportation mobility in the area around the City of Gastonia, between Gastonia and the Charlotte MSA and to establish direct access between the rapidly growing area of southeast Gaston County and west Mecklenburg County.

Investment today in pubic transportation will give a current and growing population alternative transportation choices. Residential development around transportation hubs cut down on pollution, commuter travel time and congestion.

A new trend: Coworking

Coworking is a style of work which involves a shared working environment, sometimes an office, yet with independent activity. Unlike in a typical office environment, those coworking are usually not employed by the same organization. Typically it is attractive to work-at-home professionals, independent contractors, or people who travel frequently and work in relative isolation. Typically customers can pay a monthly or per use fee for the space.

Source: www.wikipedia.com

New Communication Technologies

Personal computers connected to the Internet and other new communication technologies such as cellular phones and video conferencing devices are important because of the instantaneous access they give people to other people and to information. Some experts feel this new ease of communication is probably the most important trend shaping communities today. The commercial real estate market will be affected by the new communication technologies, which reduce the value of location. These technologies reduce the need for people to physically come together to do their job and conduct business—the reason cities originally came into being. Employers looking for ways to cut costs and improve the bottom line have a big incentive to embrace the new communication technologies to reduce office space needs. One study estimated that the demand for office space could be reduced 10% by these technologies. In the future, new communication technologies will provide people more options in choosing where they live, alter travel patterns and affect the need for and location of new office, retail and industrial space. The City must prepare to plan for the impacts of these technologies on our community.

Greenways in the Growth Area

Greenways and trails not only encourage friends, families and communities to interact with each other and nature, but they also provide a venue for physical activities such as walking, jogging, running, in-line skating and biking. Hence, the reason for their popularity. In fact, the Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway, Gastonia's first greenway, has weekly visits totaling around 2000 in good weather. Overall, the community has embraced the greenway trail program. They also value water quality and access to nature. Linear parks provide these benefits and can serve as safe walking and cycling routes to a variety of destinations. Acquiring linear patterns of land for greenways requires a long-term strategy to acquire property through purchase and dedication during platting.

Development Fees

Development fees, also referred to as impact fees, are one-time charges generally imposed at the time of connection to the infrastructure system or when development permits are issued. These charges are designed to recover all, or a portion of, the capital investment made by a local government to provide sufficient capacity in a utility system to serve new users. In June, 2009, Council adopted a system expansion fee policy. As of July 1, 2009 anyone who obtains a building permit now owes the City of Gastonia $1,800 as a system expansion fee for water and sewer service. The rate increases to $3,600 in 2011, for every permit.

Conclusions

As we plan for the kind of community we would like to become in the new century, we must seize opportunities presented by some of these trends and limit the potential negative impacts of others. Most importantly, we must continue to track land development and the conditions that have lead to sprawl, and adopt policies that will create a desirable, economically viable, and sustainable City for existing and future residents. The policies must embody smart growth principles of land development to manage and direct growth in a way that minimizes damage to the environment, builds livable communities, supports economic development and jobs, and reduces sprawl. To achieve these goals, smart growth invests time, attention, and resources in restoring community and vitality to center cities and older suburbs. Smart growth emphasizes the concept of developing a livable City. Livability suggests, among other things, that the quality of our built environment and how well we preserve the natural environment directly affects our quality of life.

Land Use Principles

Smart Growth

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. The following core principles serve as the foundation of the land use policies of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan:

Integrate Action

Land use policy should be integrated with and supported by all other City policies and programs, including facility planning and construction for services such as wastewater and transportation. This ensures that the community objectives identified through this plan are attained efficiently.

Think Sustainability

Providing for the needs of today's residents and visitors should be done in a manner that does not jeopardize the quality of life, including the natural environment, of future residents. Careful community design and thoughtful development can serve the community well, both now and in the future.

Invest in Existing Neighborhoods

The neighborhood unit is the building block of the community. There is strong public support for the preservation of existing neighborhoods and the development of new neighborhoods which are mixed-use, safe, and walkable. This idea includes the strengthening and support of existing neighborhoods through adequate infrastructure maintenance, infill development strategies, beautification, and other actions. To foster walkability, we must mix land uses and build compactly, and ensure safe and inviting pedestrian corridors.

Develop a Sense of Place

Gastonia is unique and not simply a bedroom community for the City of Charlotte. Gastonia's character includes the sense of place created by our historic downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, historic mills, cultural icons like Tony's Ice Cream, and regional attractions such as the Schiele Museum and the The Gastonia Grizzlies. Preserving Gastonia as a unique place, rather than just a bedroom community of Charlotte, is important. This concept was strongly supported throughout the public outreach process. The existing downtown business core was the overwhelming choice for the location which best represented the "heart" of Gastonia.

Expand the Range and Choice of Housing

One of the central goals of smart growth is to expand the range and choice of housing, both in location and style. As detailed in Chapter 2, Gastonian's are getting older, and fewer households have children. Both of these demographic trends contribute to growing demand for more varied neighborhood and housing styles. There is growing evidence that demand is strong for the types of neighborhoods that were common before World War II–compact, walkable neighborhoods with access to shopping and services. Established Center City neighborhoods, such as Belvedere, York-Chester, and Brookwood, are evidence of neighborhoods meeting demand. Many young professionals and empty nesters have relocated to these neighborhoods because of their livability. However, these types of development still account for only a tiny fraction of all residential

Champion Good Urban Design

Expand the Range and Choice of Housing

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

The North Carolina 21st Century Communities Task Force was created to study growth around the state. From that emerged a Smart Growth Network, which gained broad support among planners, developers, real estate interests, builders, business leaders, environmentalists, historic preservationists, professional organizations, academicians, and local and state government entities who share the following goals:

- Create integrated transportation choices
- Protect community character and identity
- Build walkable communities
- Preserve our rural heritage and economy
- Protect a network of green space
- Enhance the civic realm
- Invest in existing neighborhoods
- Ensure affordable living
- Promote regional cooperation
- Build disaster-resistant communities
- Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective

development and often times are not affordable for lower and middle class families. While recent changes to the zoning code have allowed developers to build more innovative development with unique design elements, there are deficiencies in terms of affordability in both new residential development as well as rental units. The City supports the construction and rehabilitation of homes to meet the needs of people of all abilities, income levels, and household types, and encourages the building of homes near jobs, transit, and services. The opening of Gateway Village in 2008, a 40-unit apartment complex for seniors, is an example of the City's commitment to partner with others to expand the availability of affordable housing. The City recognizes the need for more affordable rental, and smaller single-family homes. These housing types should be constructed in a way that is compatible with the character of the neighborhood and provide new housing choices for people of all means.

Promote Community and Stakeholder Collaboration

Citizen participation can be time-consuming, but encouraging community and stakeholder collaboration can lead to the creative, speedy resolution of development issues and greater community understanding of the importance of good planning and investment. The City will work to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders and the programs to address them are best defined by the people who live and work there.

Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices

The City recognizes that transportation and land use are undoubtedly linked. Transportation investments and policies influence development patterns as well as travel patterns. For example, a connected system of streets with higher residential densities and a mix of land uses can facilitate travel by foot, bicycle, and public transportation, in addition to automobile. In order to meet the needs of all users and properly accommodate all modes of travel, the City should adopt a Complete Streets Policy that implements new approaches to transportation planning, such as better coordinated land use and transportation; increased availability of high quality transit service; creating redundancy, resiliency and connectivity within road networks; and ensuring connectivity between pedestrian, bike, transit, and road facilities. The transportation network must accommodate various modes, and users of all abilities.

Preserve and Protect Green Spaces

We are consuming land at a pace that far exceeds the rate of population growth. A study, Urban Growth Mapping and Forecasting, conducted by the Renaissance Computing Institute (RENCI) at UNCC, projected that after 2010 nearly 50% of the land in Gaston County would be developed, compared to 6.7% in 1976. Development is responsive to the natural amenities to help keep Gastonia beautiful and vibrant for future generations. We must continue to reduce pressure to develop open spaces and farmland by reinvesting in the City's existing neighborhoods and downtown where infrastructure exists and making them better places to live.

Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost-effective

In order to be successful in implementing smart growth, the City must work with the private sector by collaborating and implementing incentives and policies which help support successful ventures. If the City makes the right infrastructure and regulatory decisions we will create fair, predictable and cost effective smart growth.

Champion Good Urban Design

Urban design takes into consideration density, street

layout, transportation and employment areas and urban design issues. Growth management issues such as urban sprawl, growth patterns and phasing of developments also heavily influence urban form. It is important that we understand the elements that comprise the City's urban form so that development policies can be drafted to preserve, nurture, and capitalize upon the strengths of the community. This plan supports compact building design as an alternative to conventional land consumptive development. Furthermore, we will find creative means to preserve open space and construct buildings in a way that make more efficient use of land and resources.

Encourage Center Based Development

Strengthen a pattern of community development oriented on centers, which incudes a series of centers, cores, and nodes. The center-based development pattern is supported in this plan by locating centers at the intersection of arterial and collector streets. Such locations allow not only immediately adjacent residents, but also passing travelers, to support the commercial activities. These centers will vary in size depending on location.

Plan Regionally

The City recognizes that the activities within its corporate boundaries impact other jurisdictions within the region and vice versa. Therefore, the City is committed to further our work on regional planning issues for the Greater Charlotte Region by participating in planning forums and through intergovernmental communication. The City supports the development and implementation of local, regional, state and interstate plans that have broad public support and are consistent with smart growth principles. Through the activities of the City's elected and appointed officials, Gastonia will continue to foster development projects, land and water conservation, transportation and housing that have a regional or multi-community benefit.

REGIONAL PLANNING SPOTLIGHT

During several meetings spanning the entire year of 2008, the City of Gastonia along with other respresentatives from Gaston County, York County and Lincoln County participated in planning local segments of the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT). The CTT offers a network of greenways and trails that ultimately will link 15 counties in North and South Carolina.

See www.carolinathreadtrail.org.

Existing Land Use

The 2025 Planning Area's existing land use patterns are illustrated on Figure 13-4, on page 13-15. Each parcel within the Planning Area was classified into one of eleven land use categories, which describe the primary use of the parcel as it was in 2008. The generalized classifications, as listed below, are similar to the descriptions in the previous comprehensive plan:

- Industrial
- Commercial
- Office Centers and Health Services
- Public and Institutional
- Residential
- Mixed-Use Areas
- Open Space, Parks and Recreation Areas
- Vacant and Undeveloped Land
- Transportation,Communication,Utilities

A generalized map is one that does not show minute detail, but rather combines, or eliminates, some elements to increase the readability and clarity of the map. Thus the existing land use map does not show individual lots, except where a single lot and land use would be large enough to be readable at the map scale. The existing and future land use maps presented in this chapter use the minimum land use categories as described in Figure 13-3 on page 13-14. Figure 13-3 provides a description and profile for existing land use categories within the plan area.

In addition, in some areas, which have a single prevailing land use, small exceptions to that land use are ignored. An example of this would be a single-family neighborhood, which contains a small church or some vacant lots. Those individual vacant lots (or church) are not shown because first, they are too small or scattered to contribute to our understanding of Gastonia's land use pattern, and second they are sized and situated so that it can be reasonably assumed that any future development will be consistent with the surrounding neighborhood.

Using the same reasoning, the office land use category is confined to large office developments only. Individual offices, permitted in all of the City's business zones, are shown as part of either commercial or mixed-use. Public and institutional uses are grouped together because they share several common characteristics. Mixed-use, a land use largely confined to downtown Gastonia, is a functional category. That is, downtown has several different functions, none of which are confined to a single part of downtown. The uses are mixed, and it is this circumstance that characterizes downtown Gastonia as a mixed-use area.

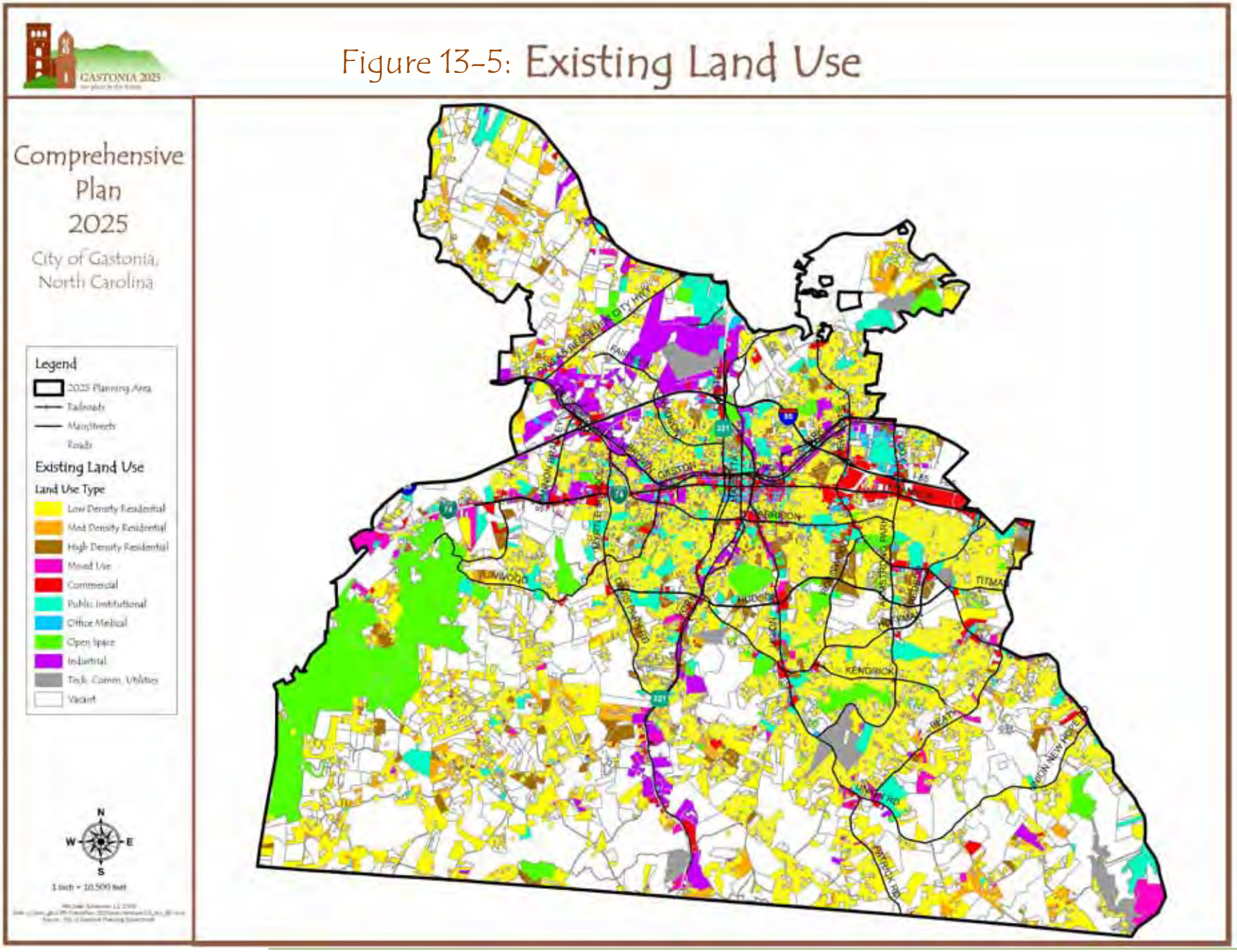
The only roads shown on the Existing Land Use Map are the major and minor thoroughfares, both existing and proposed. These are shown mostly to help the user orient himself or herself. The actual acreage taken up by the roads, although a significant percentage of the total land use, is not shown on this map. Again this has been done in the interest of clarity. Showing all the roads at their actual scale would have created an unreadable map.

The purpose of the Existing Land Use Map is therefore to show the patterns of land use in Gastonia and the 2025 Planning Area. The map is used in this plan as a baseline tool for constructing a future land use map. The Future Land Use Map is shown and described in the Objectives and Tools section of this chapter.

Figure 13-4: Current Land Uses

	Description	Acres	Percentage of the Planning Area
Residential	This category is comprised of residential uses such as single-family attached and detached, and multi-family units or planned developments where a majority of the land area, or floor area, is devoted to residential uses.	23,392	30%
Residential, Low Density	Density–One to four units per acre. Mixture of single-family detached and attached units such as duplexes and townhomes.	19,799	30%
Residential, Medium Density	Density–Five to eight units per acre. Predominantly townhome or condominiums; can include smaller lot detached, and attached, single-family developments.	1,732	2%
Residential, High Density	Density–Eight or more units per acre-multi-unit and multi-building developments; higher density townhome developments and apartment complexes.	1.861	2%
Commercial	This category is for land dedicated to non-industrial business uses, including retail sales, office, service, and entertainment facilities. Commercial uses may be located as a single use in one building or grouped together as in a shopping center.	1,805	2%
Mixed-Use	Area that contains two or more different uses such as, but not limited to, residential, office, manufacturing, retail, public or entertainment.	1,203	2%
Office Centers and Health Services	Employment intensive uses that contain low-rise office parks, single freestanding office buildings, depository facilities such as banks and residential structures converted for office uses. Also includes hospitals, dental services, medical services or clinics, nursing homes, convalescent homes, rest homes and sanitariums.	357	0.5%
Industrial	This category contains lands used for manufacturing, processing plants, offices, showrooms, warehousing, distribution, wholesale trade facilities, auto salvage yards and other similar uses.	2,634	3%
Public and Institutional	This category includes government, education, non-profit, religious, arts and cultural uses.	3,242	4%
Parks and Open Space	This category is for land dedicated to active or passive recreational uses. These areas may be either publicly or privately owned and may include playgrounds, public parks, nature preserves, golf courses, recreation centers, natural areas, such as flood plains, wetlands, utility easements, ditches and similar uses.	5,687	7%
Vacant, Undeveloped and Underdeveloped Land	This category is for land not developed for a specific use, or land that was developed for a particular use, but that was subsequently abandoned. This category includes woodlands or pastureland and undeveloped portions of residential subdivisions and industrial parks.	76,200	47.5%
Transportation, Communications and Utilities	This category includes power substations, railroad facilities, radio towers, public transit stations, telephone switching stations, airports, water towers, water treatment plants, offices and storage areas of utilities, landfills, and other similar uses.	1,429	2%

Figure 13-5: Existing Land Use



Existing Development

Existing land use was calculated using the Gaston County Tax Parcel database inventory of land. The results, indicating the amount of land by use category, is shown in Figure 13-3 on page 13-14.

The total Planning Area contains approximately 140,000 acres, of which approximately 63,000 or 50.5% is developed. Developed land is grouped into eight separate land use categories, as indicated in Figure 13-5 on this page and described in detailed in the following section.

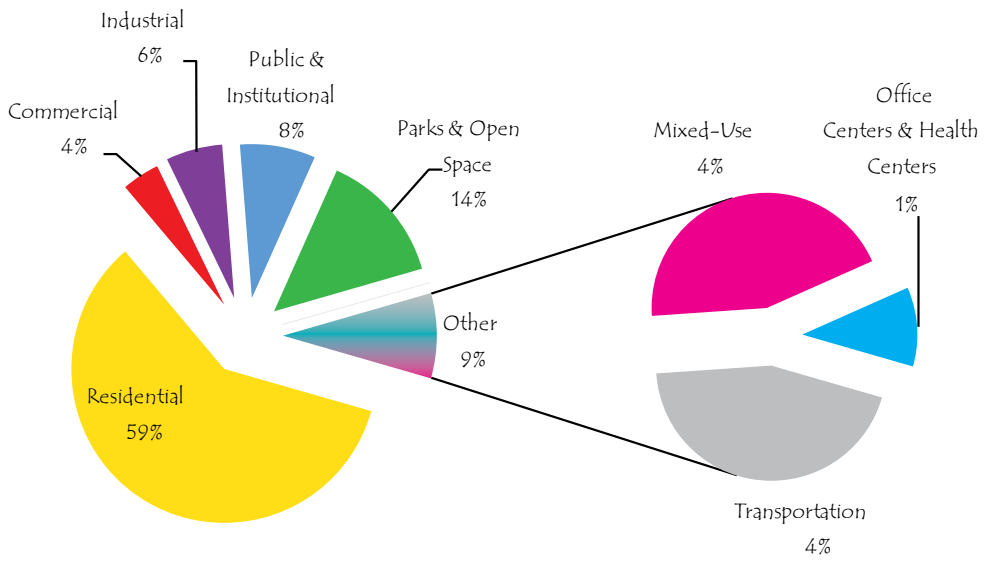
Residential Uses

Residential land use represents the largest category of developed land within the Planning Area. The residential land use category consists of various types of dwelling units, including single-family detached units, single-family semi-detached units, single-family attached dwellings, apartment buildings and complexes, and mobile homes. Single-family detached dwelling units represent, by far, the largest single type of land use within the residential category. Low density, single-family development is the dominant land use consuming 19,799 acres or 26% of the total land area, while 4% is being used for medium and high-density residential development. This residential development follows a suburban development pattern. The mean parcel size for a single-family home is .64 acres. This use, more than any other, drives land consumption patterns and requires continued investment in road capacity and water and sewer infrastructure.

Parks & Open Space

The third largest land use is parks and open space at 7% of the land area; however, nearly half of this amount is located within Crowders Mountain State Park. Open space

Figure 13-6: Total Developed Land



associated with schools and churches are not included in this acreage; however, existing City parks, greenways, the Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, and recent conservancy acquisitions are included. A number of demographic trends, with respect to Gastonia's parks and open spaces, have influenced the City's policy direction. These include a greater interest in outdoor recreational activities that allow appreciation and interaction with the natural environment in Gastonia, ranging from walking trails, bicycle paths, parks for both active and passive uses, and boating facilities. The provision of adequate parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities is an important indicator of quality of life and will be instrumental in attracting a diversified economy.

Industrial & Commercial

It is important that industrial and commercial needs are supported by appropriate land use designations. The commercial and industrial categories include all businesses that are non-agricultural in nature. Together they are the fourth largest land use category and account for

Some of the land uses found in the city

approximately 4,440 acres or 5% of the existing developed land. Specifically, the commercial land use category includes uses such as retail stores, personal services, gas stations, banks, offices, and other similar facilities. These facilities typically require good vehicle access and high visibility. Because of their needs, these types of uses tend to be located along heavily traveled roadways that they are easily accessible to customers, employees, and deliveries. Commercial uses are found at nodes and along major thoroughfares; however, heavy concentrations are found along Franklin Boulevard in the Center City and at the Franklin Square development. This development is a regional shopping destination. Industrial uses are lands used for manufacturing, processing plants, offices, showrooms, warehousing, distribution, wholesale trade facilities, auto salvage yards and other uses. These uses are concentrated along US 321 and Bessemer City Road, an area that has some of Gastonia's largest employers.

Public and Institutional

Public and Institutional uses include government facilities, schools, arts and cultural facilities, and semi-public uses such as hospitals and other similar uses. This land use category shows no concentration in any particular section of the City and accounts for approximately 8% of the developed land within the City.

Mixed-Use

Mixed-use areas are characterized by a range of residential, commercial, institutional, and public uses. They emphasize pedestrian-oriented activity centers, which may contain a mix of retail, office, multifamily residential, cultural, educational, open space, and other public and private. A mix of uses can occur in a single structure, in a group of structures on a parcel, or on a group of parcels. Approximately 1,200 acres or 2% of land in the Planning Area is categorized as mixed-use. Mixed-uses are typically found in the Center City and at nodes along major thoroughfares.

Office Centers and Health Services

These employment intensive uses contain low-rise office parks, single freestanding office buildings, depository facilities such as banks, and residential structures converted for office uses. This category also includes uses concerned with the diagnosis, treatment, and care of human beings, including hospitals, dental services, medical services or clinics, nursing, convalescent homes, rest homes, and assisted living centers.

Transportation, Communication, & Utilities

These land uses make up approximately 1,429 acres or 2% of land in the Planning Area. Typically, transportation uses can include land used for railroad transportation, automobile transportation, right-of-way (private and public), and parking. Roadways and right-of-ways account for the majority of transportation land uses, especially since Gaston County has portions of I-85, US 321, and US 74 running through it. This category also includes support services for communication land uses such as telephone communication facilities, radio broadcasting towers, and television broadcasting facilities. Utility land uses include electric, gas, water, sewage disposal, and solid waste disposal.

Vacant and Undeveloped/Underdeveloped Land

The largest land use category within the Planning Area is vacant and undeveloped / underdeveloped land, which accounts for 76,200 acres or 47.5% of the area's total land area. Vacant and undeveloped/ underdeveloped land includes parcels with no active use, or land that is occupied by a use but contains enough land to be subdivided for future development. For example, parcels

within platted subdivisions that are not yet built on are considered vacant and undeveloped, while a single house on a 10 acre parcel, where the parcel could be subdivided, is considered vacant and underdeveloped. Vacant land is defined as undeveloped, even though there may be residences located on a large parcel currently used for agricultural purposes. Underdeveloped land includes larger tracts of land near the limits of the City as well as what could be considered as infill lots in developed industrial, commercial, and residential areas.

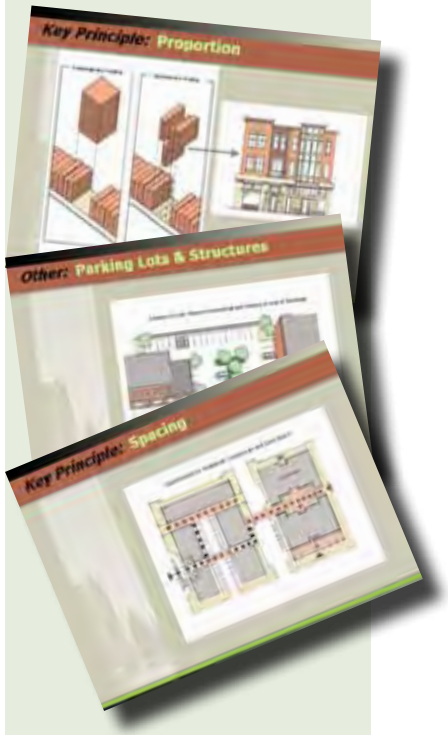
Urban Design Standards

Increasingly, communities are developing urban design standards to help better define a sense of place and enhance the quality of the built environment. Typically, zoning codes define districts wherein certain uses are permitted and defined development standards that apply both city-wide and uniquely to specific districts (setbacks, parking requirements, signage limitations, etc.). More and more, however, land use regulations are becoming more flexible in terms of permitted uses and more oriented toward development standards and design issues such as landscape treatments, construction materials, building form, design of vehicular parking and pedestrian movement.

The City has adopted overlay districts such as the Historic Districts and the Center City Design District, which have design standards that are applied to new development or changes to existing development. Within these areas or districts, the City uses design review as a tool for maintaining the special character and the historic character of the area, and to ensure that new development, or changes to existing development, are compatible with the defined design standard. Design standards not only provide architectural guidance, but define elements which contribute to a successful urban environment, such as how streets and buildings relate to each other, to the neighborhood, to open areas, to the streetscape and to the automobile. Design standards encourage development to be "pedestrian-friendly" and to include landscaping, art, and spaces for people to socialize.

This plan points out the overall inefficiencies of maintaining existing development patterns dependent upon the urbanization of farmland and rural areas, and stresses the importance of infill development. In addition, the image, feel, and mobility of our community is important because it shapes the perceptions of those who live, work, and visit here. The elements that make our downtown, neighborhoods, and commercial centers special should be incorporated throughout the City, helping to set us apart from surrounding communities. Therefore, we must continue to promote design elements which will increase the quality of life in our community and, if necessary, strengthen the urban design components of the City's Unified Development code and establish design standards for public spaces.

The City has successfully created incentive programs which encourage infill development in the Center City. We must continue to promote these programs and develop similar opportunities within other areas of the City. A renewed emphasis on infill development can reverse growing problems fueled by sprawl development. These new infill projects should be sympathetic to the adjacent residences in terms of scale, design, setbacks, and building materials in order to preserve the existing character of the neighborhood.



Urban design standards approved for the Central Business area of the city

Development Constraints

The Development Constraints Overlay Map, Figure 13-6, illustrates physical conditions that may pose a barrier to using land for residential, commercial, or industrial development. Figure 13-7 illustrates the number of acres in and percentages of the total Planning Area where these physical conditions occur. A natural constraint, such as steep gradients, can be problematic for construction, impacting the viability of development, and can counteract planning objectives of delivering high-density development and affordable housing. Man-made constraints, such as brownfields, are perceived to be contaminated and are often not appealing to businesses because of concern for future liability. The Development Constraints Overlay Map should be an integral part of the review of all development proposals. By using this map early and routinely in the development process, all parties can evaluate and mitigate potential negative impacts, and conserve valuable resources more effectively.

Figure 13-7: Development Constraints

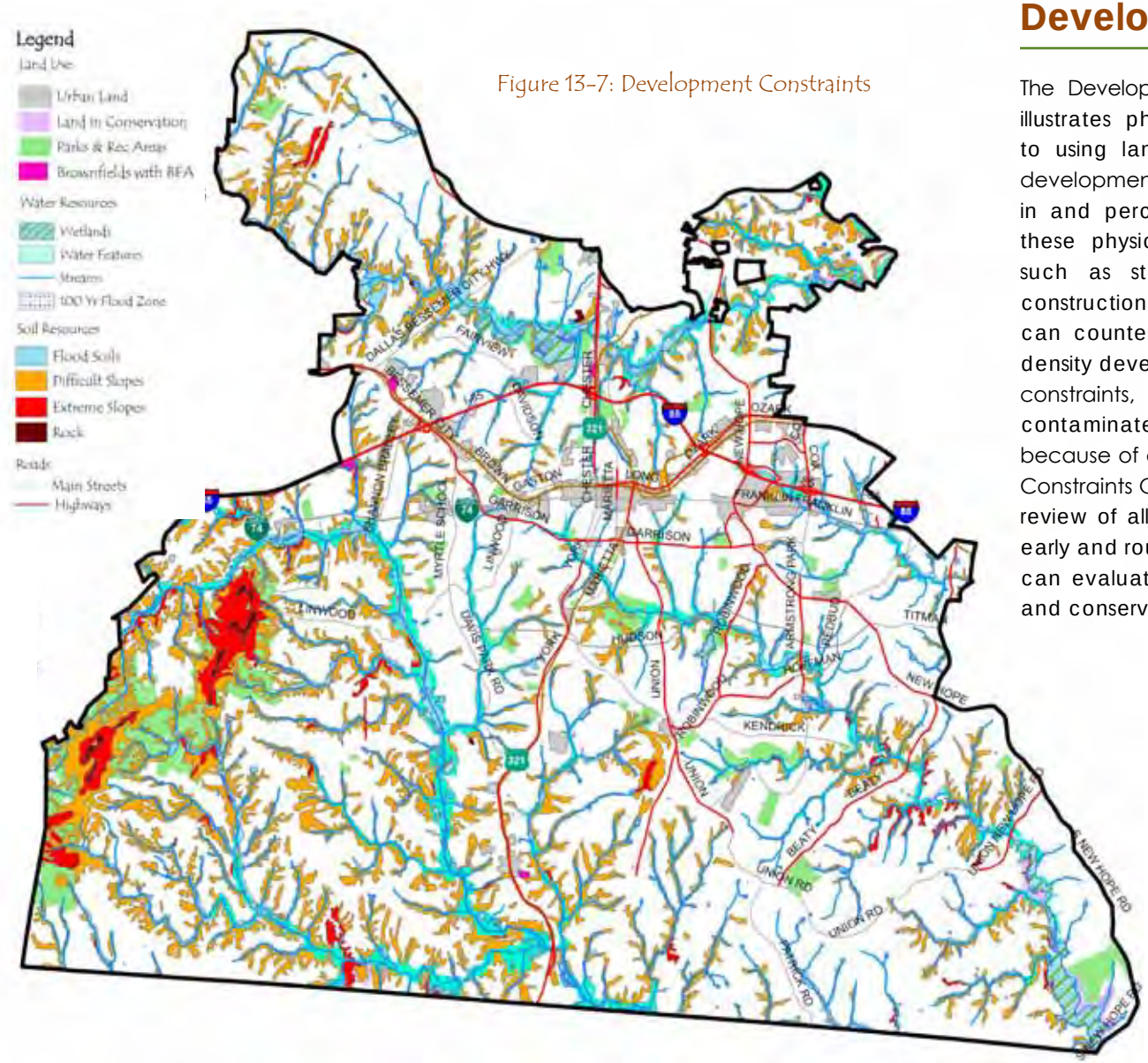


Figure 13-8: Development Constraints in the Planning Area

	Acres	Percent
Difficult Slopes	12,576	15.1%
Extreme Slopes	1,604	1.9%
Urban Land	2,706	3.2%
Rock	132	.16%
Flood Soils	12,235	14.7%
Parks & Rec	5,698	6.8%
Land in Conservation	565	.68%
Brownfields	40	.05%
Wetlands	2000	2.4%
Flood Zone	4352	5.2%

Data sources: Land Conserved by Land Trust: Catawba Lands Conservancy, 2011, Wetlands: National Wetlands Inventory, 2007; Brownfields: North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, 2010; Soil Resources: Gastonia Planning Department, 2002; Flood Zone: Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2008; Streams and Water Features: North Carolina Center for Geographic Information and Analysis, 2001; Streets and Highways: Gaston County GIS, 2008.

Future Land Use

The desired land development patterns for Gastonia and the 2025 Planning Area are shown in Figure 13-8 on page 13-21, the Future Land Use Map. Gastonia's Future Land Use Map builds upon the City's existing land use patterns and provides a generalized guide for development and conservation decisions. The Future Land Use Map is an integral part of the 2025 Plan and both a physical vision of Gastonia in 2025 and a policy guide for future decision making. The Future Land Use Map shows the recommended general land uses in the following categories:

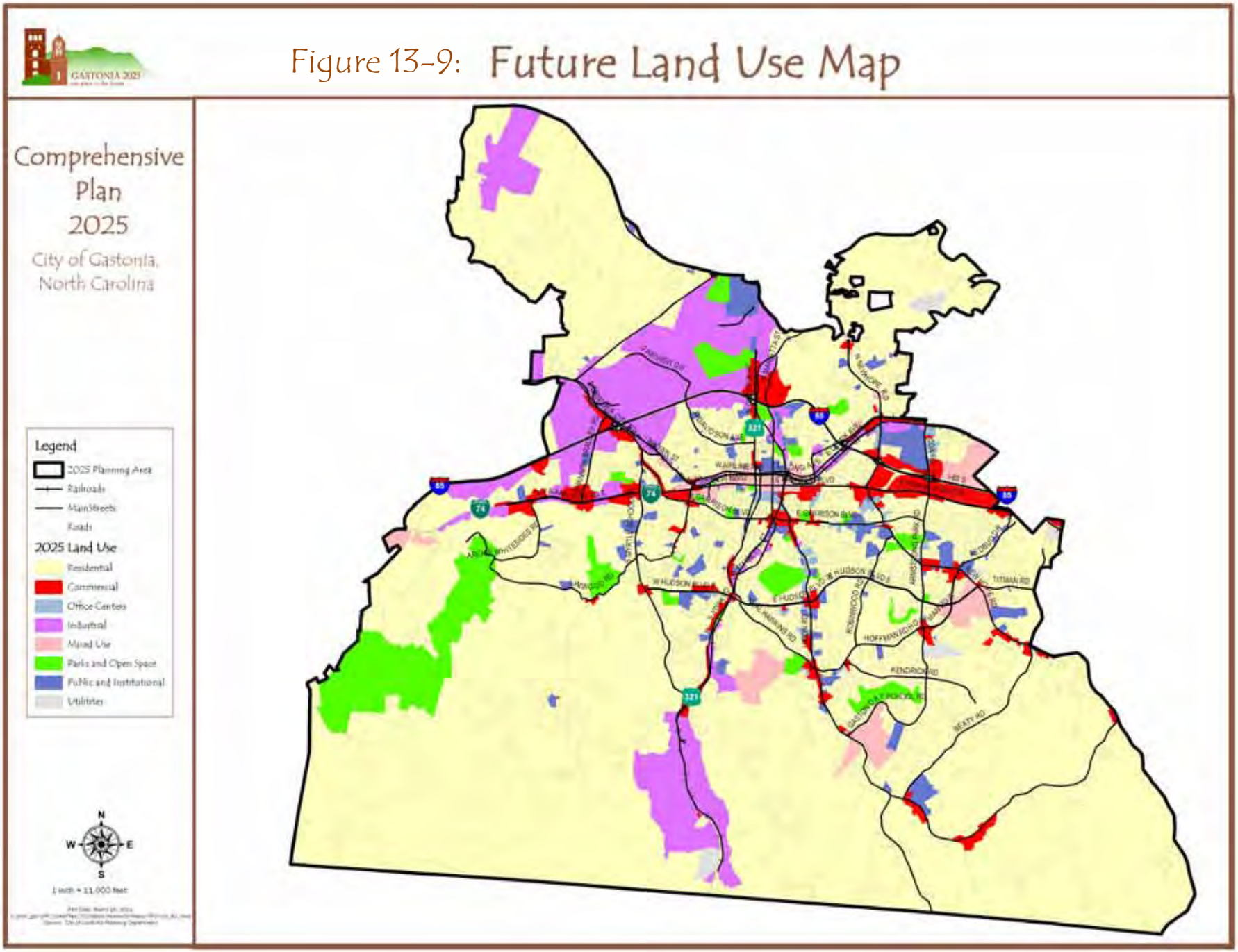
- Residential: Includes both high and low density single and multi-family neighborhoods.
- Commercial: Includes retailing, light wholesaling and individual office and institutional uses. Typical commercial uses include supermarkets, larger drug stores, department stores and price point retail store, clothing stores, banks, offices, restaurants, movie theaters, hotels, and similar uses.
- Industrial: Includes manufacturing and heavier trucking, wholesaling and distribution operations.
- Office: Includes business and professional offices and "light" services such as medical services.
- Mixed-use: Includes areas that contains two or more different uses such as, but not limited to, residential, office, manufacturing, retail, public or entertainment.
- Public/Quasi-Public/Institutional: Includes publicly-owned land and non-government, community land uses. These lands include: government-owned administration buildings, churches, fire stations, hospitals, utilities, service clubs, schools, colleges and educational research lands, YMCAs, and others.
- Parks, Open Space: Includes public parks, public and private golf courses, natural areas, cemeteries and other such uses. Possible greenway corridors are shown on the Gastonia's Greenway Plan Map in the Open Space, Parks and Recreation Chapter.

The Future Land Use Map will be amended from time to time, keeping up with changing trends and local needs. It will not prescribe land use, as a zoning ordinance does, but rather serve as a guide to rational planning and decision making. By necessity, the map is drawn in fairly broad strokes, leaving out some of the fine-grained detail found in some areas of Gastonia. Detailed, parcel by parcel, land use is more a function of zoning than the Future Land Use Map.

The Future Land Use Map and strategies will have their greatest impact on vacant land and undeveloped areas, as this is where the majority of Gastonia's new development is taking place. For some areas that are already developed or built out, the future land use designation is the same as the existing land use; in other cases it is different. As a rule, land with contrasting existing and future land use is envisioned for new uses. The strategy maps in the sector plans will also show priority areas for re-use, development and new investment.

The Future Land Use Map is but one of the guidelines provided in this plan for land use. The objectives and tools in this chapter give criteria for evaluating the suitability of an area for various types of development, such as business, office or multi-family development. These criteria should be regarded as equally important to decision making as the future land use designation.

Figure 13-9: Future Land Use Map



Issues

- There are a number of regional growth and development issues, such as transportation and air quality management, that transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Coordination of land development patterns and cooperation in service provision is vital to the sustainability of the region.

- An efficient and sustainable multi-modal transportation system is only achievable by coordinating land use and transportation. Land use patterns can either aid or impede the movement of people and goods. Conversely, a healthy, convenient and comprehensive transportation system can improve and sustain the quality-of-life in Gastonia.

- Past development patterns have placed pressures on regional local governments and planning agencies to keep transportation needs in alignment with sprawling growth patterns. Effective long-range transportation planning requires a significant amount of time and dedicated financial resources. Locating sources of funding for transportation options in the future will present long-term challenges given the current economic and spatial realities.

- Demographic trends indicate that the traditional family is shrinking in size. This, in combination with the increased number of households comprised of singles, working parents, and elderly, will prompt a demand for higher density, infill housing located near services, jobs and transit. Yet much of the housing being built in Gastonia is designed for the traditional family—detached two-story homes on big lots in the suburbs. Gastonia's zoning and subdivision regulations must be responsive to changes in the demand for housing. Shifts in the housing market should not be hindered by land use regulations that were devised in an earlier era.

- Gastonia continues to grow disproportionately to the east and southeast. The unbalanced growth undermines the Center City and requires additional investments in infrastructure, schools and police protection. The projected population growth in the east and southeast, coupled with the projected improvements of transportation linkages with the rest of Gaston County, will increase the demand for additional commercial facilities in the future. A large portion of this demand, however, could be met through the redevelopment of existing commercial areas. Our Center City is a vital component of the City and its health and viability is critical to the success of the City as a whole.

- Increased population and shifting demographics has also increased the need to plan for additional open space and other institutional uses. Thus, the consideration of adding parks, open space and schools must be balanced between the needs, opportunities, and the cost to the City and county. However, while there is a growing need for new recreational facilities and schools, finding good locations for them is becoming difficult as the amount of developable land dwindles.

- Energy and related issues continue to dominate the headlines, from concerns about greenhouse gas emissions and climate change to the impacts of growth and consumption on our planet to the cost and availability of energy. Increasing demand around the world is affecting both the cost and availability

ISSUES

of energy. Energy is necessary for human progress, economic productivity, transportation, safety, communication, and every facet of contemporary life. Providing a sustainable future is critical for future generations, as is demonstrating environmental leadership, especially as it relates to sustainability.

- Historically, Gastonia's economy was centered around manufacturing of products and goods. New economic realities will result in a need for shifting land use priorities. New markets will call for more emphasis on technology and less on location. The future attraction of industries such as healthcare, research and development activities, and communications should create a demand for land and facilities to support such activities, and therefore decrease the need to continue to preserve vast amounts of land for large scale industrial use.

- Retail activities, particularly within downtown and along the west side, have struggled as recent trends in retail shopping have been dominated by the expansion of big box retailers. The number of specialty stores and stores selling appliances, furniture, electronics, lawnmowers and other durable goods are limited or nonexistent. The present situation requires travel across the City, from the west to the east side, for many goods and services.

- Gastonia's downtown, its surrounding neighborhoods, and nearby mill villages have suffered from disinvestment and blight over the past 15 years. Ironically, these are the areas that are key to Gastonia's character and identity. While redevelopment work is underway, there is much more to do to create a vibrant Center City that is an energetic, economic, civic, cultural, and entertainment destination for our growing population. Continued revitalization and reinvigoration of these areas will keep Gastonia from becoming "just another suburb" of Charlotte.

- Gastonia's low-density single-family zoning in much of the suburban area is contributing to urban sprawl. Sprawl requires more infrastructure per household than well-designed, high quality compact development.

- There are a number of design-related issues, such as pedestrian access, child-safe bicycle routes, roadway landscaping and medians, shopping centers, and parking lots that should be addressed to sustain community pride and encourage investment in Gastonia.

- School assignment zones influence the housing market in Gastonia. Differences in the perceived desirability of the schools can either inflate or depress the price of housing in a neighborhood, directing investment away from neighborhoods where schools are perceived to be a problem.

While the City has made progress towards addressing some of these issues, there is more work to be done. Growth has brought significant benefits and serious challenges to the City. However, there are abundant opportunities for better ways to grow, and we must capture the benefits of economic growth without incurring the mounting costs of poorly planned development and heavy fossil fuel consumption. How our City grows will have a direct impact on community services and facilities, such as police, fire and emergency services, recreation, and building inspection as well as water and sewer. We must act, and act wisely, at this critical time.

Objectives & Tools

Objective 1

Incorporate sustainability principles and goals into the City's land use regulatory scheme.

Tools

a. Proximity, association, and accessibility between home, work, and leisure activities are essential factors in building places with a strong sense of community. Therefore, the City will continue to work with the development community to achieve a development pattern that reflects this belief.
b. Identify locations for infill, which present opportunities for developments consisting of a variety of land uses adjacent to existing development, that take advantage of the existing infrastructure network.
c. Promote Traditional Neighborhood Development as a method for integrating various housing types with small-scale neighborhood services.
d. Identify locations throughout the City for neighborhood or village centers where growth is clustered in dense concentrations to produce compact population centers, preserve open space, minimize the negative impacts of low intensity and non-contiguous development, and improve the performance of transportation networks, where the cost of providing public services is minimized.
e. As part of Plan implementation—including development review, capital improvement programming, and preparation of detailed area plans—foster close land use and transportation relationships to promote use of alternative transportation modes.
f. Ensure that land proposed for annexation have adequate services available or is capable of being adequately serviced.
g. Encourage community & stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.
h. Encourage high-density development adjacent to the proposed multi-modal center.

Objective 2

Establish land uses that encourage cost-effective development.

Tools

a. Maintain adequate subdivision and zoning regulations designed to prevent fragmented, inharmonious, and disorderly development.
b. Pursue public and private partnership opportunities for redevelopment of vacant structures and construction of infrastructure and public facilities generated by new development.
c. Encourage new development, consisting of a variety of land uses adjacent to existing development, that takes advantage of the existing infrastructure network.
d. Leverage public investment throughout the City to encourage private development.
e. Condition development approvals to ensure adequate public services at the time of occupancy.
f. Emphasize the importance of the Center City, and specifically the downtown area in the growth and development of the City and continue to work with investors and developers to continue development/ revitalization while strengthening the vitality and livability.
g. Work with neighborhood groups within Oakland, Highland and other Center City neighborhoods, to analyze and identify land use needs and to create, update and implement neighborhood plans.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

Objective 3

Promote reinvestment, and diversification in downtown and the Center City, to reinforce its importance as the economic, cultural and civic center of the City.

Tools

a. Maintain a proactive program of City initiatives to promote downtown development.
b. Aggressively maintain and expand public realm improvements in downtown including, but not limited to, sidewalks, street trees, street lights, street furniture, public parking, and landscaping.
c. Continue to use existing authority (land assembly, bonding, etc.) to complete designated reinvestment projects.
d. Develop integrated "way finding" signage for downtown and other areas of the Center City.

Objective 4

Encourage new investment in areas that have undergone residential and retail disinvestments.

Tools

a. Continue to provide incentives through the City's Economic Development Incentive Program to promote economic investment throughout the City.
b. Encourage the revitalization of downtown through redevelopment of exiting buildings, new streetscaping, increased residential density, and increased economic activity.
c. Support ongoing and future catalytic projects such as the Conference Center, Gaston Mall redevelopment, and the Gateway Village Senior Center, and educate the public as to how these projects benefit all City residents by stimulating additional development and creation of tax revenue for the City.
d. Continue to expand the services of the Economic Development arm of the City to include technical and financial assistance for small business.
e. Develop partnerships and strategies aimed at recruiting targeted uses that fill niches in the Center City, in abandoned strip malls, and in vacant shopping centers.
f. Continue the implementation of the Loray Mill Village Redevelopment Project.
g. Reserve and acquire key properties that can serve as catalysts or anchors for redevelopment and use public-private partnerships and deed restrictions to ensure they develop as planned.
h. Develop a strategic small area plan for the Oakland Neighborhood.
i. Continue to use promotional and public relations materials specifically aimed at attracting uses that are desired for specific areas.
j. Identify missing or under served areas on the north and west sides of the City and actively pursue the creation of new incentives and other economic development tools crafted for residential and commercial investments.
k. Encourage neighborhood commercial uses to locate in areas convenient to existing residential development. Provide exceptions to parking and site design requirements, as appropriate, to encourage pedestrian activity.
l. Encourage residential development within the downtown area.
m. Use the natural beauty of Crowders Mountain and the surrounding area as a marketing tool for the whole west side of Gastonia.
n. Improve the visual appearance of City gateways and corridors by improving landscaping, signage and providing other streetscape enhancements.
o. Establish appropriate transitional uses adjacent to

industrial areas.

p. In cooperation with Gaston County, study the need and feasibility of opening a full-service branch of the public library on the west side of Gastonia.

q. Encourage the establishment of additional primary health care services on the west side of Gastonia, such as dentistry, family, and pediatric medical offices.

r. Encourage the establishment of businesses and services that are lacking such as home improvement stores and dining restaurants.

Objective 5

Make zoning decisions based upon the long-range impact to adjoining areas and the City as a whole.

Tools

a. Zoning decisions should be guided by and consistent with the Future Land Use Map. The Future Land Use Map should be amended as appropriate from time-to-time to reflect changing trends and community objectives.

b. Zoning decisions should also be consistent with Sector and Small Area plans.

c. Evaluate the impacts of major developments on the transportation system, infrastructure capacity, natural environment and built environment.

d. Make sure that the zoning designation for developed and built-out areas generally reflects the actual use of the land.

e. Ensure that zoning decisions support the city's reinvestment strategies, where applicable

Objective 6

Ensure that local ordinances reflect a high priority for environmental concerns and that policies promote efficient use of public infrastructure.

Tools

a. Establish and maintain zoning districts consistent with availability of public infrastructure and services.

b. Acquire land through fee simple purchases, easements or other feasible methods for possible multiple uses such as stormwater management, greenway, walking, biking, hiking, and utility areas.

c. Ensure that private developers provide adequate open space in residential developments.

d. Develop incentives in the UDO to encourage developers to provide open space amenities beyond the minimum requirements.

e. Work towards maximizing tree coverage in the City.

f. Assess the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) process and incorporate appropriate levels into the development process.

Objective 7

Promote convenient and concentrated commercial development that serves residents and strengthens both the local and regional market.

Tools

a. The City will accommodate commercial land uses that are compatible with the surrounding area and provide a needed service for the area including light industrial, agricultural, retail, wholesale sales and services, and professional services.

b. The City will continue to develop an attractive Central Business District, and to revitalize declining commercial areas outside the City's core, through building code compliance, incentives, and quality development standards.

c. Encourage expansion of commercial opportunities in existing commercial corridors and nodes, as appropriate, where infrastructure can support growth.

d. Ensure that development and redevelopment of

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

commercial property located along major thoroughfares takes place in accordance with the principles of access management.

e. Provide opportunities for neighborhood commercial nodes by rezoning appropriate areas accommodate the development of convenience goods and other neighborhood business services.

Objective 8

Maintain and strengthen the character of the City's various residential areas.

Tools

a. Preserving the character of residential neighborhoods through compatible design.
b. Encourage the rehabilitation of older and historic housing stock over demolition.
c. Ensure that City grants and programs are targeted to housing development and rehabilitation that reflects the traditional architectural character of residential areas.
d. Infill development standards must reflect the setbacks, orientation, patterns, materials, height and scale of surrounding one and two family dwellings.
e. Create traditional setbacks, orientations, pattern, heights and scale of dwellings in areas where no clear architectural pattern exists.
f. Establish appropriate transition uses adjacent to residential areas.
g. Establish a philosophy or strategy for buffering residential areas from impacts associated with incompatible uses.

Objective 9

Promote planning as a positive, cooperative community function.

Tools

a. Promote and participate in cooperative planning efforts with Gaston County and its cities, especially related to countywide and sub-regional issues such as transportation, economic development, and affordable housing.
b. Continue to support coordinated planning initiatives with Gaston County, local jurisdiction staff and Planning Commissions to coordinate land use issues of mutual concern.
c. Ensure that Development Services staff has adequate capacity to meet the needs of the community.
d. Review the Comprehensive Plan and assess the relevance of its goals and policies every year. Conduct a full review every five years.

Objective 10

Promote the highest and best use of land with special attention to use options in transition areas.

Tools

a. Consider the site characteristics, market realities, and local development pattern when determining what use would develop the highest value.
b. Ensure that new development is sensitive to and compatible with existing land uses, and, where necessary, require developers to mitigate nuisances associated with new developments that conflict with adjacent uses. Mitigation can include physical barriers, such as vegetative berms, hedges or other landscape cover, and walls or fences aesthetically designed for screening and noise reduction purposes.
c. Develop a set of criteria to determine the circumstances in which it would be appropriate for residential property owners to mitigate nuisances associated with conflicting uses in transitional areas

and amend the zoning ordinance to allow for it.

Objective 11

Develop objective and rational criteria for subdivision and rezoning requests. Apply the following guidelines when reviewing applications for subdivision or rezoning anywhere in the City.

Tools

a. Official Map: Ensure that the development proposal is consistent with the City's Official Map of roads, utilities, drainage and parks.
b Land Use Plan: The proposed land use should be in conformance with the City's Land Use Plan.
c. Residential Density: Should be in conformance with the City's land use plan.
d. Design Standards: Encourage design standards that promote appropriate scale, height, mass, and design of the structure that is compatible with both neighborhood and community character.
e. Public Utilities: Public sewer and water shall be when necessary economically and efficiently retrofitted.
f. Access Management: The spacing of driveways and public street intersections shall conform with the City's access management guidelines.
g. Future Public Roads: Public road access shall be easily provided in the future to the portions of the tract not adjacent to the county roads.
h. Environmental Protection: Conform to the City's regulations for the protection of wetlands, floodplains, slopes, trees and water quality.
i. Affect on Surrounding Properties: Determine whether the use and density is consistent with surrounding properties and work to mitigate and inconsistencies through addressing design.
j. Conflicts in Commercial Zones: Certain uses that have a potential for adverse effects should not be located in excessive concentration. Examples include: convenience stores,and fast food establishments and consider performance standards to reduce potential conflicts.

Objective 12

Continue efforts to achieve a more balanced residential and retail growth pattern.

Tools

a. Foster the development of housing, particularly multi-family and smaller single-family homes, in a way that is compatible with a community's character and vision and by providing new housing choices for people of all economic means.
b. Continue the investment in new sewer and water infrastructure on the west side of Gastonia.
c. Support the redrawing of school attendance zones and other measures to ensure a continued socio-economic and racial balance in the Gaston County public schools.
d. Include recruitment of retailers to under used sites as part of our economic development efforts.
e. Include the objective of a balanced growth pattern in the decision making process when deciding on the location of major public buildings and investments.
f. Support neighborhood efforts to reduce crime, litter, juvenile delinquency and other blighting influences.
g. Use targeted, concentrated code enforcement to improve and ensure the maintenance of housing.
h. Use concentrated investment, such as the CDBG-funded investment on Vance Street, to turn around threatened neighborhoods and to spark private investment.
i. Continue to support other catalytic projects, such as the adaptive re-use of the Firestone Mill, to draw attention and investment to West Gastonia.

OBJECTIVES & TOOLS

j. Encourage the redevelopment of the Dixie Shopping center and assist the Economic Development Commission in the recruitment of a discount home goods store in West Gastonia to better serve area residents.
k. Secure private sector cooperation, such as banks, realtors and developers, in the encouragement of balanced growth in Gastonia.
l. Use a targeted, site-specific enhancement strategy to create high-potential nodes of growth on the west side of Gastonia.

Objective 13

Promote preservation as a tool for economic development and community revitalization.

Tools

a. Use historic preservation goals to encourage development and reinvestment in the City.
b. Promote and support the redevelopment of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods by promoting development that is compact, conserves land, protects historic resources, and integrates uses.
c. Promote the historic qualities of Center City neighborhoods as high quality, architecturally interesting, readily available and affordable housing stock.
d. Continue to identify, designate and protect sites, buildings and districts in the City that have historic or architectural significance.
e. Protect designated structures, sites and districts from demolition, neglect and inappropriate modifications.

Objective 14

Ensure that transportation and land use planning decisions are complementary rather than contradictory.

Tools

a. The City recognizes that land use patterns affect travel behaviors, which sometimes have unintended consequences that negatively affect overall community quality of life.
b. Encourage pedestrian-oriented "nodes" of commercial development at strategic locations along major corridors, and discourage auto-oriented commercial development.
c. Promote residential and commercial development that is located and designed for reduced automobile ownership and use.
d. Implement a citywide traffic-calming program to reduce traffic volumes and speeds.
e. Develop community planning processes to establish standards and priorities for parking, streetscape and pedestrian circulation, bikeways, transit amenities, greenways, and public amenities throughout the City.

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Addendum

East
- Issues
- Vision
- Future Land Use
- Development Strategies

Northeast
- Issues
- Vision
- Future Land Use
- Development Strategies

Southeast
- Issues
- Vision
- Future Land Use
- Development Strategies

Northwest
- Issues
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- Development Strategies

Garden
- Issues
- Vision
- Future Land Use
- Development Strategies

Crowders
- Issues
- Vision
- Future Land Use
- Development Strategies

Southwest
- Issues
- Vision
- Future Land Use
- Development Strategies

The 2025 planning area was divided into eight smaller geographic sectors. The Sectors were culled from the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. While the overall goals and strategies as defined in the previous chapters apply to the entire 2025 planning area, these small planning areas provide a list of issues specific to the geographical area, the vision for the sector, and specific policy recommendations to serve as a guide for future growth and development. The Sectors are complimentary to the future land use plan are intended to guide applicants, staff and City decision makers to site development projects and to guide the City in addressing future development.

These policy recommendations were developed from input gathered during the community workshops that were held in each Sector during the visioning phase of the planning process. These workshops provided insight into public opinions, interest, concerns, and aspirations. The most commonly expressed concerns for each of the sectors include the following:

- Rapid growth and traffic congestion.
- Lack of accessible community commercial amenities such as grocery stores and retail shopping centers.
- Schools are overcrowded and in disrepair.
- Lack of pedestrian connectivity (sidewalks are not contentious).
- Lack of accessibility to alternative modes of transpiration.
- Lack of a cohesive community identity and image (i.e. community gateways are in poor condition).

Sector Profiles

EAST

SECTOR PROFILES

Issues

- A strong housing market, available land and public investments give the East Sector a strong potential for continued population growth. Over the past 10 years, this sector has seen an increase in the number of families with children.
- The land use patterns for the majority of the northern portion of this sector have already been established and should be maintained.
- Increasing traffic on New Hope Road, and other major thoroughfares, creates pressure for converting land use from residential to commercial.
- Commercial encroachment into established neighborhoods is a concern, especially for neighborhoods adjacent to Franklin Boulevard, Garrison Boulevard, and New Hope Road.
- Franklin Square, a regional shopping destination, lacks access from the north.
- The major thoroughfares Franklin Boulevard, Garrison Boulevard, and South New Hope Road serve as prominent gateways into the City or as gateways to cultural attractions. These gateways give tourists, visitors, and businesses their first impression of Gastonia. Issues to be addressed along these prominent gateways include landscaping, lighting, signage, access, outside storage, and other aesthetic elements.
- The East Sector's older retail areas such as Westfield-Eastridge Shopping Mall, although healthy, remain vulnerable as they face direct competition with new and emerging regional retail shopping centers, such as Franklin Square .
- Two of Gastonia's most frequently used public facilities, the Schiele Museum and the Gaston County Library, are located in the East Sector.
- The East Sector has no public parks or recreation centers, although recreational opportunities are available through the schools and the Schiele Museum.
- A lack of southwest-to-northeast thoroughfares has created a traffic bottleneck on New Hope Road, requiring a compromise road solution.

Sector Vision

- Improve connectivity to commercial retail development and integrate transit and pedestrian options throughout the sector.
- Construct pocket parks on undeveloped publicly-owned land adjacent to Ashbrook High School.
- More compact, higher density development (traditional neighborhoods, Transit-Oriented Development, mixed-use, and walkable neighborhoods) within appropriate infill locations.
- Promote the redevelopment of Aker's Center into a mixed use neighborhood retail center.
- Encourage the development of walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.
- Improve internal circulation in commercial development to prevent traffic problems common in "strip" commercial development.
- Context-sensitive street design giving equal value to various modes of travel including pedestrian and cyclist.
- Streets should not sacrifice the safety of neighborhood residents for additional traffic and higher speeds.
- Preserve and enhance visual character through a variety of design requirements.
- Support the revitalization of declining neighborhoods.
- Encourage the development of neighborhood restaurants in commerical centers.
- Promote mixed use type development such as high density residential, office, and neighborhood commercial on the large tracts of land located in the southern part of the sector.
- Construct safe, well connected bicycling routes on all major streets.
- Use traffic calming measures other than speed humps to reduce cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets.

EAST SECTOR PROFILES

Future Development Strategies

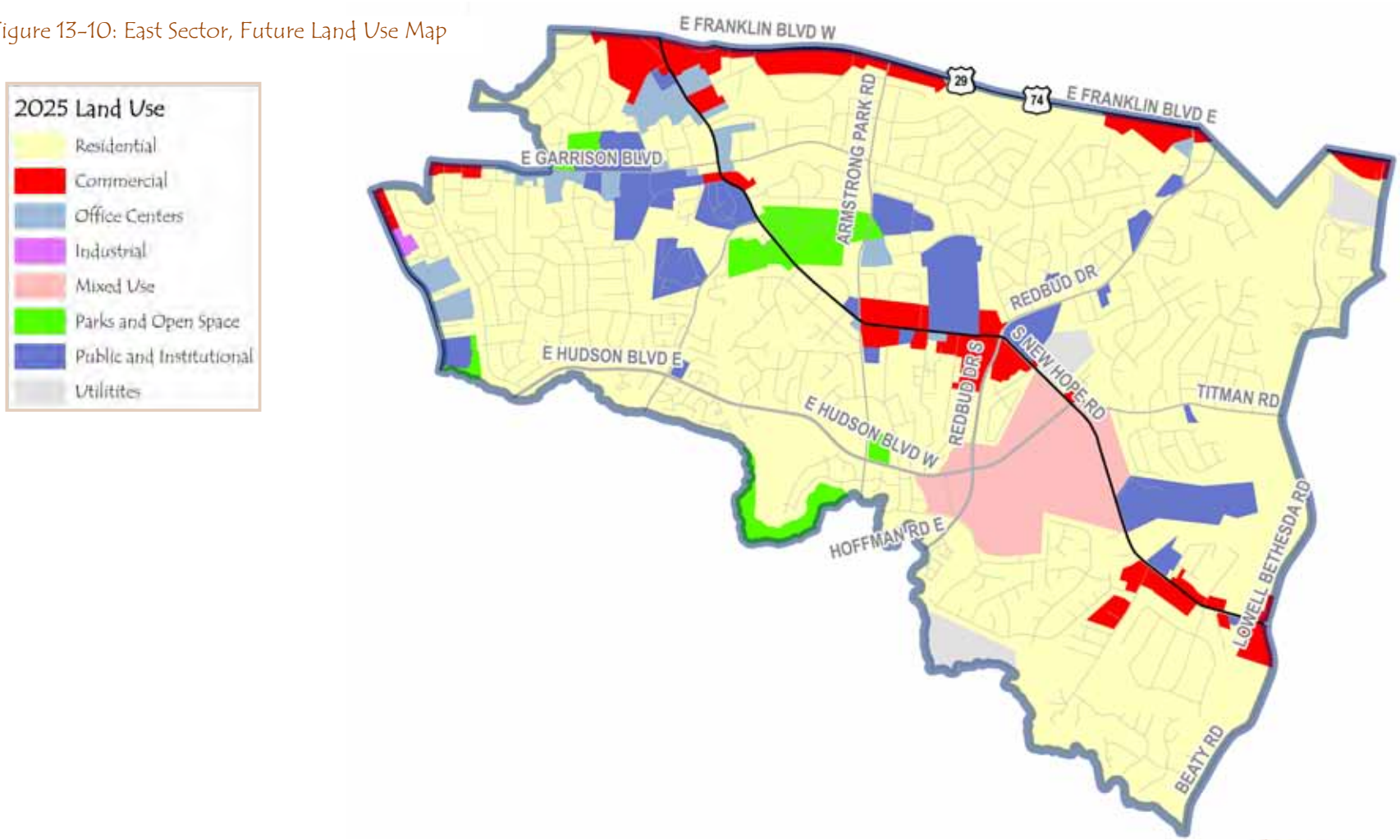
- Develop strategic gateway improvement plans for entranceways to Gastonia, which include attractive signage and beautification strategies to direct and promote the Schiele Museum and the Stowe Botanical Garden.
- Promote more compact, higher density development (traditional neighborhoods, transit-oriented development, mixed-use, and walkable neighborhoods) within appropriate infill locations.
- Maintain residential land use in the Owens-Kendrick neighborhood and along Armstrong Park Drive, especially at the intersection of Armstrong Park Drive and Gardner Park Drive.
- Use appropriate design, transition, or buffering elements to mitigate adverse visual, audible, aesthetic and traffic impacts to residential neighborhoods when considering commercial or mixed use development proposals.
- Encourage neighborhood centers, and walkable neighborhoods, with development patterns replicating the scale and character of the Sector's more traditional neighborhoods (compact development, interconnected streets, and sidewalks).
- Develop a corridor overlay zoning district for both New Hope Road and Franklin Boulevard.
- Identify area for transit oriented development along Franklin Blvd.
- Use buffering and transportation enhancements to minimize the negative impact of new thoroughfares on the Bradford Heights area.
- Identify nodes fort ransit-oriented development along major thoroughfares such as Franklin Boulevard and South New Hope Road.
- Mature neighborhoods shall be preserved, sustained and improved through appropriate and selective high-quality redevelopment.
- Consider historical designation for Fairmont Park neighborhood.
- Continue to cluster neighborhood, and community level business development, at major intersections along New Hope Road.
- Support innovative residential developments for medium to higher density infill.
- Support the redevelopment of declining commercial centers and vacant land into mixed-use office and residential development along the eastern part of Hudson Boulevard, near New Hope Road.
- New commercial development should be designed in a pedestrian-friendly manner, with outdoor seating and other amenities.
- Support the development of greenway connections to parks, and schools.
- Consider the development of pocket parks on undeveloped publicly-owned land.
- Develop greenways according to a future adopted greenway plan. Possible greenway locations in the East Sector are shown on the East Development Strategy Map, Figure 13-10.

The East Development Strategy Map, Figure 13-10, is a graphic representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.

EAST

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-10: East Sector, Future Land Use Map



EAST

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-11: East Sector, Development Strategy Map

NORTHEAST SECTOR PROFILES

Issues

- The Northeast Sector has emerged as a regional retail and medical service center, drawing from Gaston County, and the surrounding counties.
- The diverse land use patterns within the sector lack a sense of cohesiveness and in some areas are conflicting.
- Schools and public facilities have struggled to accommodate the rapid population growth.
- The location and accessibility of The Medical District, on New Hope Road and Ozark Avenue from I-85, is advantageous for new development.
- While a balanced jobs to housing ratio is generally considered a positive factor, the higher number of jobs in the Northeast Sector compared to residents results in increased daytime traffic congestion, particularly at critical intersections of Cox Road, New Hope Road, Franklin Boulevard and I-85.
- Growing retail development and traffic has begun to encroach on residential neighborhoods, particularly along North New Hope Road.
- A large amount of land within the Sector is vacant, which presents opportunities for further land development to accommodate projected population and economic growth. The main issue is to ensure redevelopment provides sufficient choice in the types and locations of development that people and businesses are seeking and maintains balance.
- The major shopping centers in the Northeast Sector are served by limited public transportation and have few pedestrian linkages among them.
- The strong commercial and service market in the Northeast has created an opportunity for a mixed-use business development north of I-85. Specifically, land uses along the Southern Railroad and US 321 North have gradually evolved into smaller, non-textile industries.
- Housing deterioration and blight is present in some of the older Northeast Sector neighborhoods.
- While this sector has several major gateways into the City, they lack visual appeal and provide no distinctive sense of arrival to Gastonia. Franklin Boulevard presents an opportunity for a first-class entrance to Gastonia. To serve as a gateway to the community, US 321 should be upgraded through the addition of mixed-use development and light industrial and manufacturing uses.
- Commercial encroachment into established neighborhoods is a concern, especially for neighborhoods adjacent to the medical district and the mall area.
- Access to shopping, greenspace, and recreational destinations from employment and residential locations within the sector continues to be important to residents and business. New and infill development plans should focus on creating a mixed-use, walkable urban environment with improved access to desired destinations.
- A lack of southwest-to-northeast thoroughfares has created a traffic bottleneck on New Hope Road, requiring a compromise road solution.

NORTHEAST

SECTOR PROFILES

Sector Vision

- Make improvements to pedestrian paths and create walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.
- Context-sensitive street design giving equal value to various modes of travel including pedestrian and cyclist.
- Support the revitalization of declining neighborhoods.
- Increased opportunities for homeownership for various housing types.
- Mixed-use Transit Oriented Development centers that combine retail, services, and offices with medium-scale residences that can fill the transition from commercial uses to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Safe, well connected bicycling routes on all major streets.
- Promote regional cooperation to ensure development is complementary.
- Use traffic calming measures other than speed humps to reduce cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets.
- Opportunities for retirement and senior facilities and activities, as well as senior housing.

NORTHEAST SECTOR PROFILES

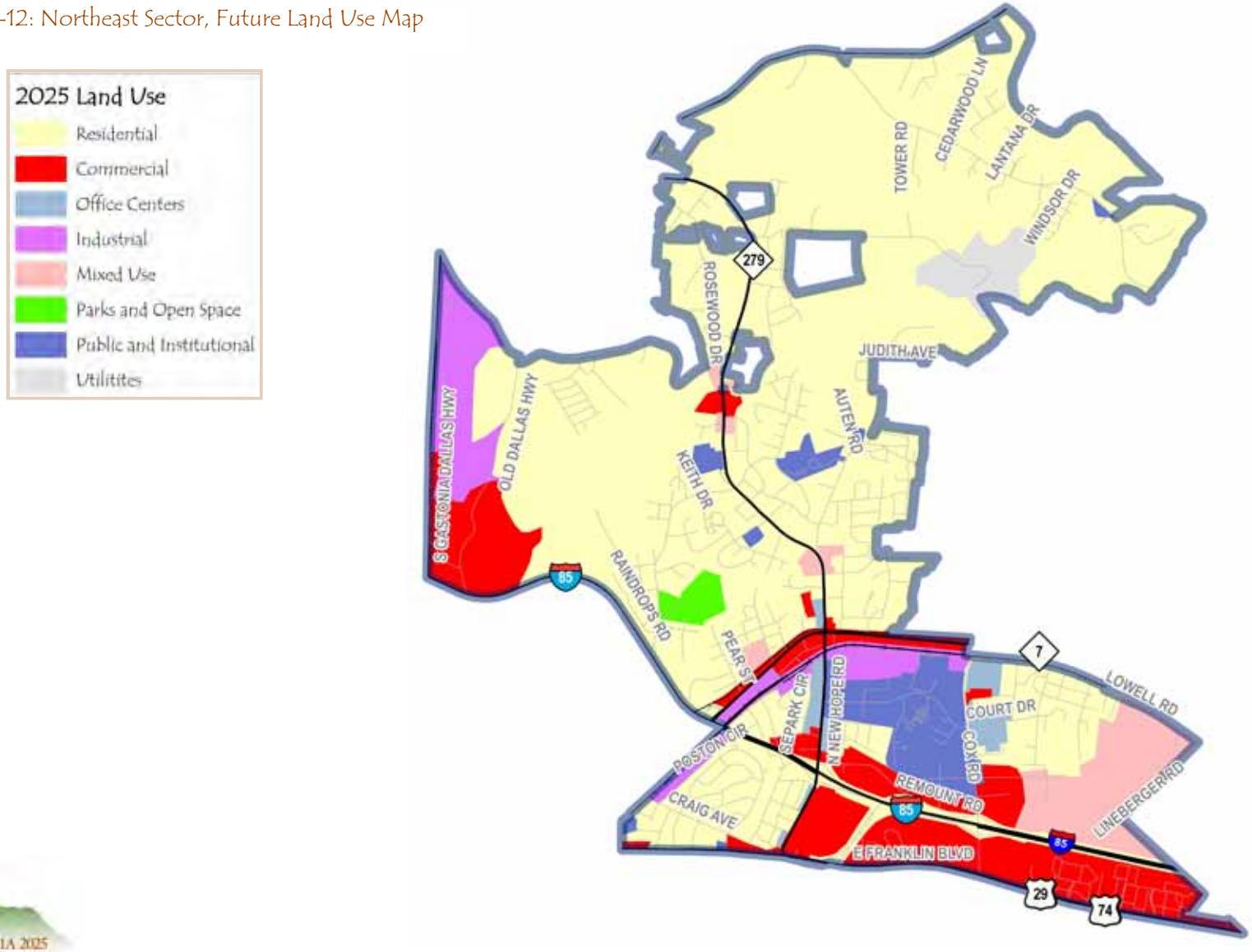
Future Development Strategies

- Develop greenways according to a future adopted greenway plan. Possible greenway locations in the Northeast Sector are shown on the Development Strategy Map.
- Continue to implenent the strategies of the North New Hope Road Small area plan to prevent strip development along North New Hope Road.
- Continue expansion of medical uses in the vicinity of Gaston Memorial Hospital. The Court Drive mixed-use area, as shown on the Future Land Use Map, should be limited to hospital related uses, including medical offices, medical research and laboratories, and similar uses supportive of the medical center.
- Attracts new high revenue mixed use development along 321 North Chester Street.
- Support redevelopment plans for the use of the Piedmont and Northern, otherwise known as the P & N corridor.
- Improve pedestrian linkages among major developments (shopping centers, community facilities, hospital).
- Develop a master plan in cooperation with Gaston Memorial for the medical and health services area, specifically around the Court Drive mixed use area.
- Transit-oriented and pedestrian-oriented development: Within targeted development areas, cluster development along major transportation corridors thereby creating transit oriented development "nodes" and encouraging pedestrian access.
- Focus larger development projects to Austen Road Intersection.
- Use appropriate design, transition, or buffering elements to mitigate adverse visual, audible, aesthetic and traffic impacts to residential neighborhoods when considering commercial or mixed use development proposals.
- Focus Community Development housing rehabilitation efforts on the older mill villages of the Northeast Sector.
- Develop a revitalization plan for the Smyre neighborhood to plan for and encourage appropriate and selective high quality residential redevelopment, which preserves the character of the neighborhood.
- Encourage new large scale subdivisions south of Robinson Clemmer Road and North of I-85.
- Support the preservation and adaptive reuse of Hancock School for institutional, office and residential use.
- Continue to cluster neighborhood and community level business development at major intersections along New Hope Road.
- Promote innovative residential development for seniors.

The Northeast Development Strategy Map, Figure 13-12, is a graphic representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.

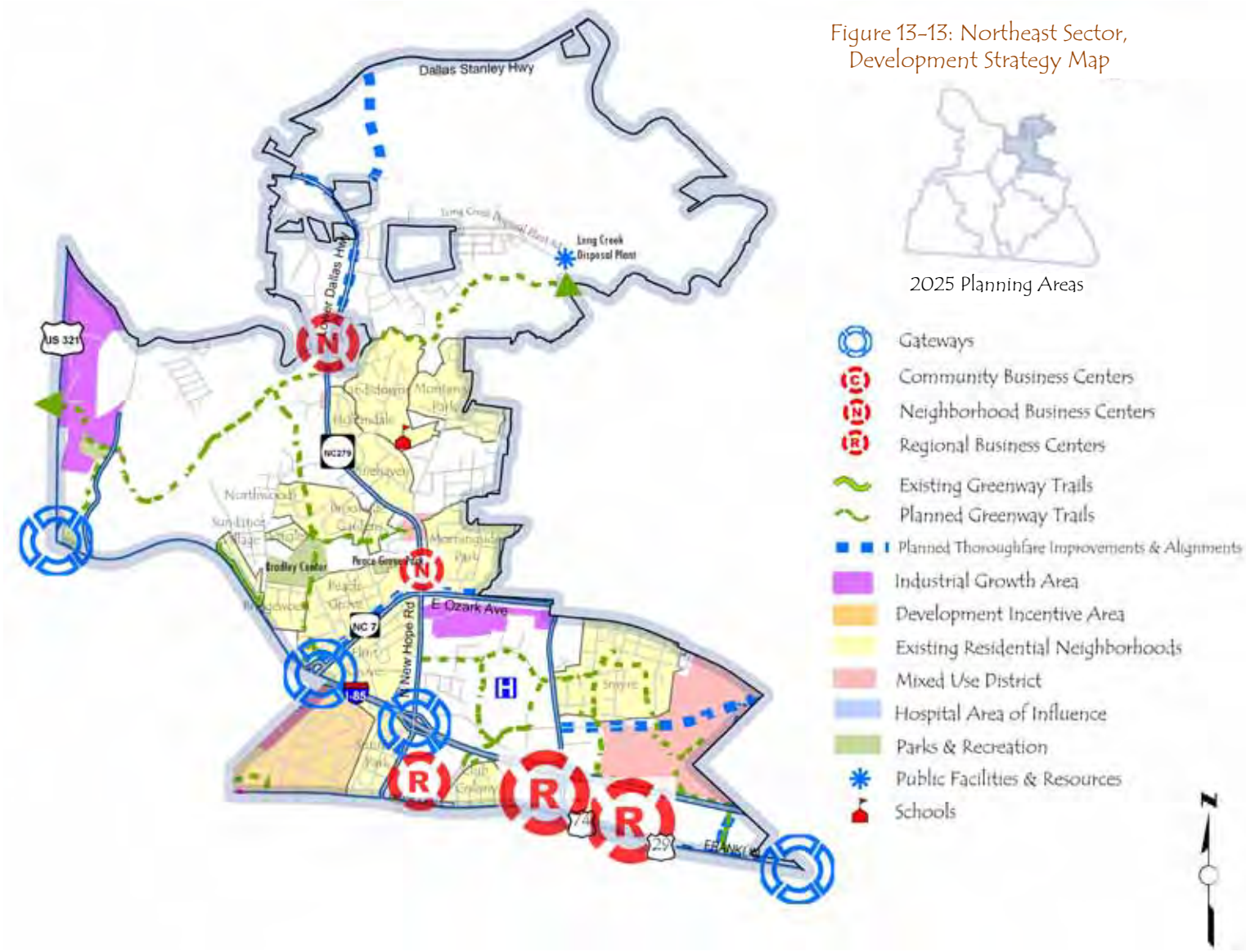
NORTHEAST SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-12: Northeast Sector, Future Land Use Map



NORTHEAST SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-13: Northeast Sector, Development Strategy Map



SOUTHEAST SECTOR PROFILES

Issues

- Strong population growth in the Southeast Sector will create a demand for additional roads, utilities, parks and schools.
- The rapid increase in the Sector's school-age population has resulted in overcrowding of schools.
- An increasing number of Southeast Sector neighborhoods are self-contained units, with little or no connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Traffic is growing as fast as population in the Sector.
- Population growth, along with an increase in the number of regional commuters and constraints on existing roads, all contribute to a need for the US 74 Bypass.
- The current southeast recreation center is only a part-time facility shared with the National Guard and residents have expressed the desire for a full time facility.
- Regional shifts of population will, a strong housing market, and available land and rapid commercial investments present the potential for give this sector a strong potential for continued population growth. Schools and public facilities have struggled to accommodate the rapid population growth.

Sector Vision

- A community that opens its doors to new residents and visitors without effecting the values and lifestyles of its current residents.
- A sustainable development pattern which creates, and enhances, the development of communities with increased quality of life.
- A multi-purpose recreational facility within close proximity to area neighborhoods.
- Diversity of housing types, and price ranges, to meet the needs of the population.
- Attractive mixed-use development centers integrating retail, services, and offices with medium-scale residences to fill the transition from commercial uses to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Greenways throughout the sector with linkages to local destinations such as Stowe Botanical Gardens, schools, and local recreation centers.
- Safe, well connected pedestrian and bicycle linkages to schools, residential neighborhoods, recreational areas, and retail and commercial centers.
- Use traffic calming measures other than speed humps to reduce cut-through traffic on neighborhood streets.
- Neighborhoods of the highest standards in terms of attractiveness, stability and viability.
- Residential developers are encouraged to provide traffic calming measures in new residential neighborhoods, and emphasize pedestrian parks.

SOUTHEAST SECTOR PROFILES

Future Development Strategies

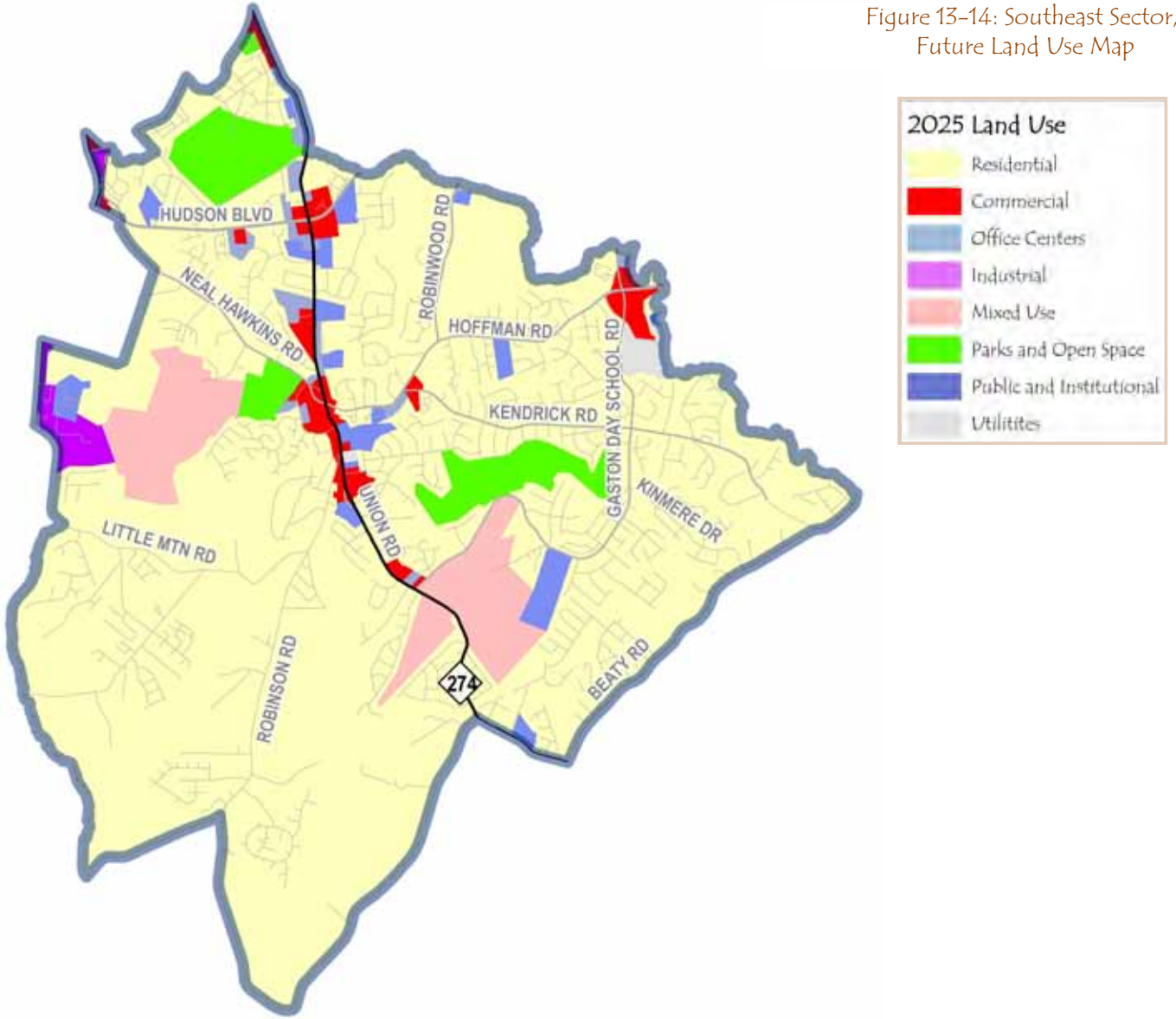
- Cluster neighborhood and community level business development at selected intersections of thoroughfares creating transit oriented development "nodes" and encouraging pedestrian access.
- Use appropriate design, transition, and buffering elements to mitigate adverse visual, audible, aesthetic and traffic impacts to residential neighborhoods when considering commercial or mixed use development proposals.
- Support innovative residential developments for small-tract infill development.
- Develop a new community recreation center.
- Use design features and planning strategies to improve the safety of new developments.
- Enhance safety and perception of safety by prioritizing CPTED on residential, commercial, and industrial projects.
- Introduce sidewalks and paths between buildings and through parking lots to provide opportunities for pedestrian use. Direct linkages to existing bus routes will be made.
- Conduct a land use study to insure high-quality development and a parkway atmosphere on the Proposed US 74 Bypass.
- Support the renovation and redevelopment of existing housing.

Figure 13-14, the Development Strategy Map, is a graphic representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.

SOUTHEAST

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-14: Southeast Sector, Future Land Use Map



SOUTHEAST

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-15: Southeast Sector, Development Strategy Map

- Gateways
- Community Business Centers
- Neighborhood Business Centers
- Regional Business Centers
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Planned Greenway Trails
- Planned Thoroughfare Improvements & Alignments
- Industrial Growth Area
- Development Incentive Area
- Existing Residential Neighborhoods
- Mixed Use District
- Hospital Area of Influence
- Public Buildings
- Schools
- Parks & Recreation

NORTHWEST SECTOR PROFILES

Issues

- The diverse land use patterns within this sector lack a sense of cohesiveness, and in some areas, are conflicting.
- Housing deterioration is a concern in the older neighborhoods and many dwelling units are at risk of demolition due to failure of meeting the minimum housing code.
- The Franklin Boulevard commercial corridor is suffering from commercial vacancies, under-use of buildings, general urban clutter and a lack of buffering between pedestrians and traffic.
- The Northwest Sector has had a decline in shopping and retail outlets, requiring a trip to the east side for all but groceries and the most basic goods and services.
- Rankin Lake Park developed a negative image, and general feeling of insecurity, resulting in fewer visitors and illicit activities.
- The Northwest Sector has a lack of primary care health services, such as family physicians and dentists.
- A large amount of land within the Sector is vacant, which presents opportunities for further land development to accommodate projected population and economic growth. The main issue is to ensure that redevelopment provides sufficient choice in the types and locations of development people and businesses are seeking.
- The northern and western gateways into the City lack visual appeal and provide no distinctive sense of arrival to Gastonia. Dallas Bessemer City Highway and Franklin Boulevard present an opportunity for a first-class entrance to Gastonia.
- Commercial encroachment into established neighborhoods is a concern, especially for neighborhoods adjacent to Dallas Bessemer City Highway.
- Speeding, traffic flow and signalization issues at several intersections including Sharon Bradley and northbound Myrtle School Road at Franklin Boulevard.
- Creating safe, and well maintained neighborhoods continues to be important to residents.
- There is an increase in various crimes, including burglary and vandalism.

Sector Vision

- Make improvements to pedestrian paths and create safe, walkable, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.
- Support the revitalization of declining neighborhoods.
- New and improved lifestyle shopping center at Dixie Village location.
- Increased opportunities for homeownership for various housing types.
- Vibrant recreational centers, including walking trails, and connections to area greenways.
- Mixed-use transit oriented development centers combine retail, services, and offices with medium-scale residences to fill the transition from commercial uses to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Promote regional cooperation to ensure development outside the City's municipal boundary is complementary.
- Increased opportunities for mixed used high density residential development with commercial business and health service centers.
- Redevelopment of abandoned commercial and industrial sites.

NORTHWEST SECTOR PROFILES

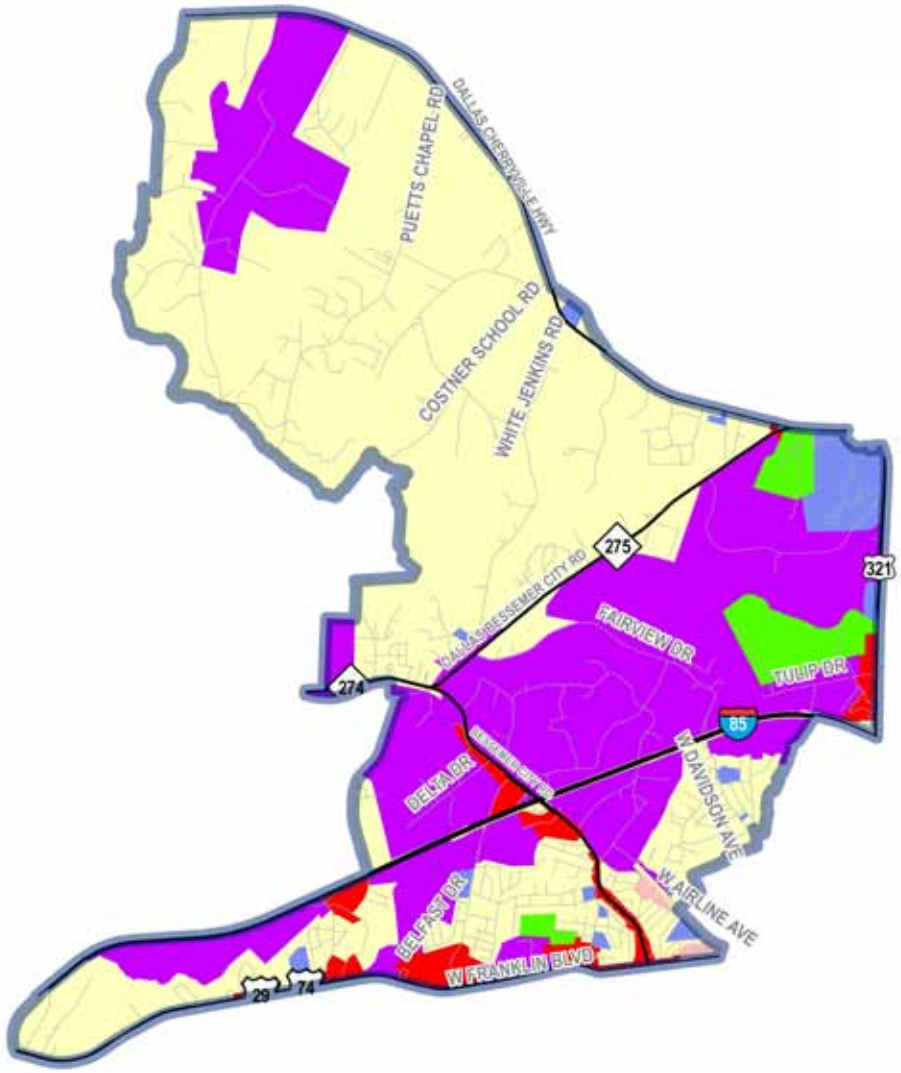
Future Development Strategies

- Encourage mixed use neighborhood business development along with community business centers within the following nodes: Shannon Bradley Road/West Franklin Boulevard, Airline Ave/I-85, Bessemer City Road/Dallas Bessemer City Highway, and Cosner School Road/Dallas Cherryville Highway.
- Currently undeveloped property, particularly in areas outside of the municipal boundary, should not be developed in the absence of necessary infrastructure. To manage the ultimate use of this land it should primarily be identified for residential development.
- Use traffic calming measures to reduce speed and cut through traffic on neighborhood streets.
- Revitalize Rankin Lake Park according to the adopted Master Plan.
- Develop greenways according to a future adopted greenway plan. Possible greenway locations in the Northwest Sector are shown on the strategy map.
- Expand police enforcement to reduce traffic speeds on neighborhood streets.
- Attract new high revenue mixed use development along US 321 (North Chester Street).
- Avoid the placement of additional group homes, or assisted family housing projects, in the Northwest Sector.
- Commercial and industrial properties that have become surrounded by less intense uses will be permitted to remain commercial and industrial uses; however, in the event that these properties are made available for sale or transfer, less intense uses compatible with surrounding parcels are preferred.
- Vacant commercial or industrial sites available for redevelopment and reuse should be redeveloped to complement surrounding uses.
- The land use on major arterial streets such as West Franklin Boulevard, Bessemer City Road, and Dallas Bessemer City Highway that are primary gateways into the city should be highlighted with appropriate landscaping, attractive lighting and gateway signage.
- Encourage redevelopment of Dixie Village Shopping Center and work with Gaston Economic Development Commission to identify and attract businesses.
- The City should organize and initiate a major public-private effort to implement the Franklin Boulevard Corridor Study to establish a vibrant neighborhood business environment along West Franklin Boulevard.
- Support the establishment of primary health care practices on the west side.
- Develop a systematic, rotating code and zoning enforcement strategy for endangered neighborhoods.

The Northwest Development Strategy Map, Figure 13-16, is a graphic representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.

NORTHWEST SECTOR PROFILES

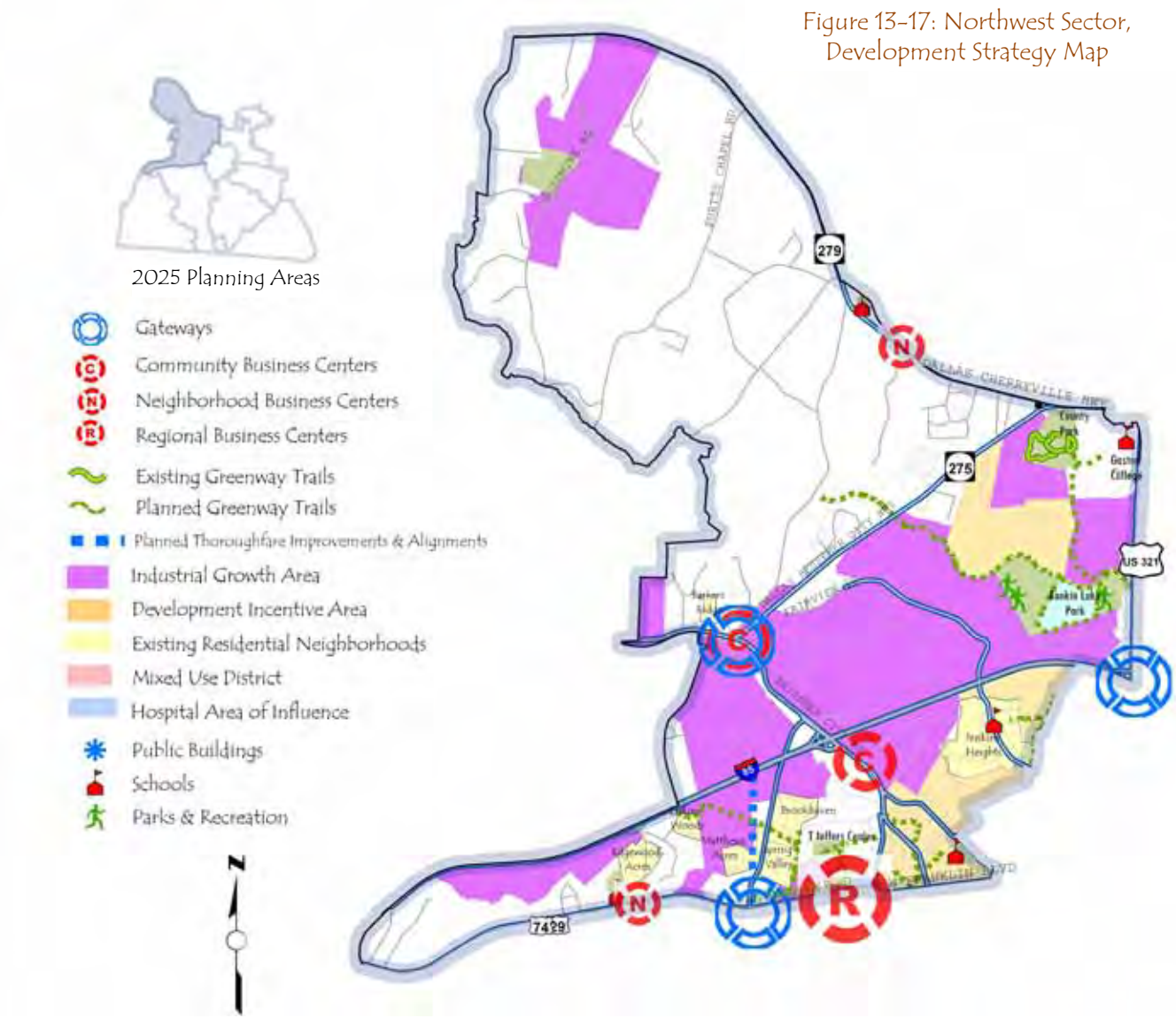
Figure 13-16: Northwest Sector, Future Land Use Map



2025 Land Use
- Residential
- Commercial
- Office Centers
- Industrial
- Mixed Use
- Parks and Open Space
- Public and Institutional
- Utilitites

NORTHWEST SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-17: Northwest Sector, Development Strategy Map



GARDEN

SECTOR PROFILES

Issues

- Strong population growth in the Garden Sector will create a demand for additional roads, utilities, parks and schools.
- The current transportation network does not sufficiently support efficient movement using various modes of transportation.
- Lack of neighborhood commercial services such pharmacy, medical, and grocery.
- Lack of adequate recreational facilities.
- An increasing number of Garden Sector neighborhoods are self-contained units, with little or no connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods.
- Regional commuters, coupled with increased population growth, has placed constraints on existing roads.
- Negative impacts of agricultural uses along Union New Hope Road on adjacent residential neighborhoods.

Sector Vision

- A balanced land use pattern providing for an adequate inventory of land for employment as well for a diverse choice of housing, recreational opportunities and commercial services.
- Continue to protect and preserve natural resources.
- Promote the diversity of housing types, and price ranges, to meet the needs of the all sectors of the population
- Future development shall exhibit design quality and sustainability in both the public and private realms.
-

GARDEN

SECTOR PROFILES

Future Development Strategies

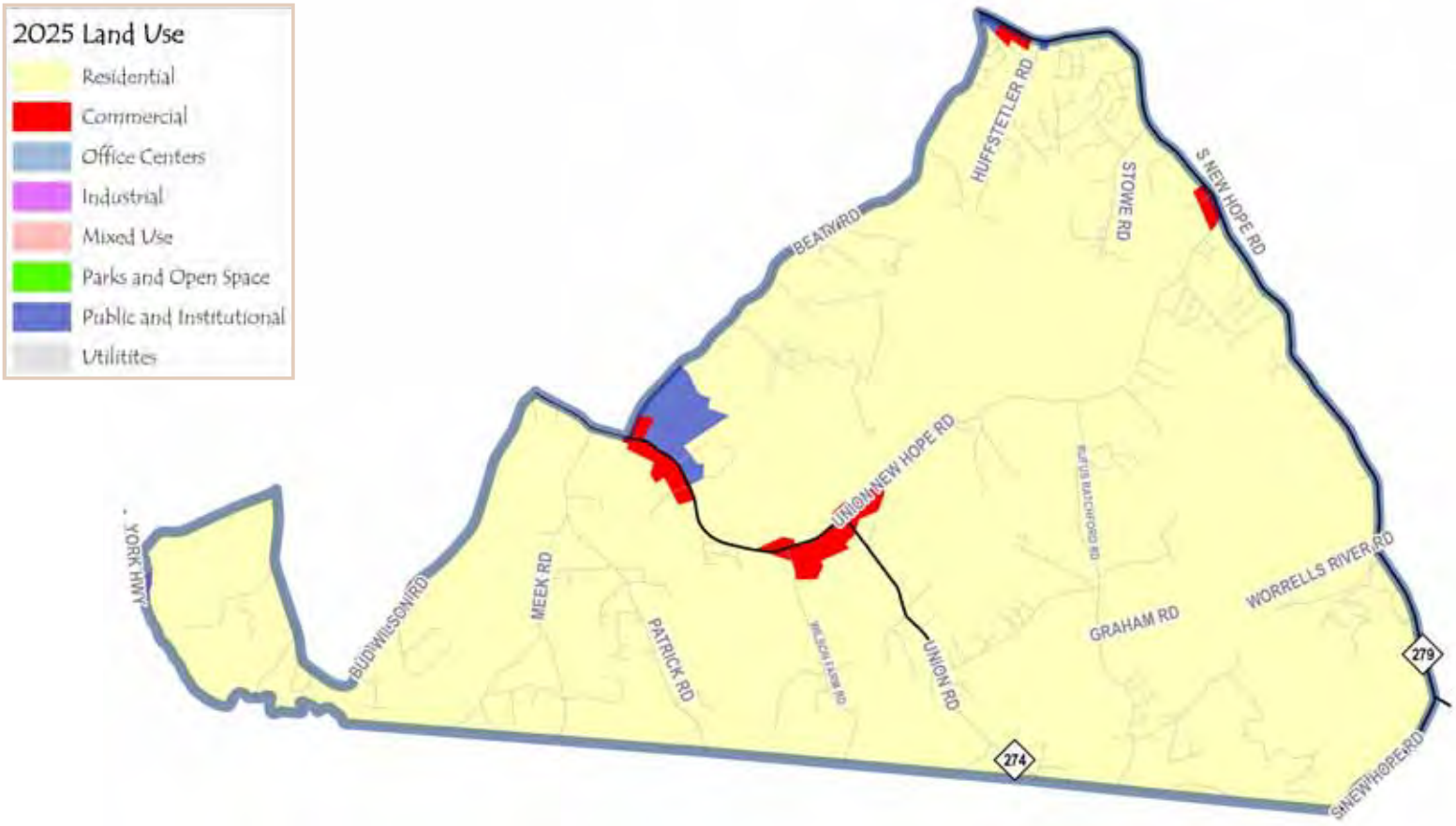
- Work in cooperation with Gaston County to conduct a land use study in the area of the Proposed US 74 Bypass to insure high-quality development and a parkway atmosphere.
- Consider the compatibility between agricultural activities and non-farm development in reviewing development proposals.
- Require planned, staged growth that builds upon existing infrastructure, avoiding "leap-frog" development patterns.
- Continue to preserve the natural environment.
- Connect internal street networks between adjacent developments wherever possible to avoid concentrating traffic on major roads
- Create concentrations, or nodes, of development at strategic locations.
- Minimize conflicts between residential-agricultural and exclusive industrial. Widen Gaston Day School Road to a divided four-lane to accommodate increased traffic.
- Identify and highlight gateways into the City and to cultural resources throughout the Sector.
- Support the establishment of primary health practices.
- Coordinate with Gaston County and the Town of Belmont on their future growth areas and the character of development in these areas.
- Provide adequate, attractive infrastructure and community facilities to serve the area including schools, transit, sidewalks and trails, parks, cultural amenities, police, fire and emergency services, health care, libraries, and basic services such as roads, water and sewer, telecommunications, and solid waste are a few of the services and facilities that need to be upgraded.

The Garden Development Strategy Map, Figure 13-18, is a graphic representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.

GARDEN

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-18: Garden Sector, Future Land Use Map



GARDEN

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-19: Garden Sector, Development Strategy Map

CROWDERS

SECTOR PROFILES

Issues

- Threats to natural scenic assets in the face of development pressures. Crowders Mountain State Park is an outstanding natural asset and tourist attraction, and it should have compatible development in its vicinity.
- A large majority of the sectors is located outside of the City limits.
- Residents are concerned about the effects of growth on quality of life and community character.
- Parks and recreation contribute to neighborhood stability and are an important amenity. While Crowders Mountain State Park is a great community asset, there is a lack of a recreation facility for youth and families.
- Future development is not likely to expand very quickly in the Crowders Sector due to the difficulty in providing adequate connections to public utilities. Many of the homes in this area are located outside the city limits in Gaston County. These residences have private wells and their own septic systems.
- Lack of primary care health services and neighborhood-serving retail services causes residents to commute outside of the sector. Need for basic services: hardware store, pharmacy, grocery stores, etc.
- Future trail connections within the sector may help to provide connections to important destinations such as Crowders Mountain.
- A number of neighborhoods within the Crowders Sector are self-contained units, with little or no connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods.

Sector Vision

- High quality infrastructure (roads, water and sewer lines, fire and police facilities, and schools) adequate for current development and anticipated growth with facilities in place as development occurs.
- A sustainable development pattern that creates and enhances the development of communities with increased quality of life.
- A multipurpose recreational facility within close proximity to area neighborhoods.
- Attractive mixed use development centers that integrate retail, services, and offices with medium-scale residences that can fill the transition from commercial uses to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Increased medical service locations throughout the sector.
- Quality residential development that protects housing values and promotes pride of ownership.
- Quality development of retail and services including medical facilities convenient to residential areas.
- Quality industrial development to provide high paying jobs which does not encroach on nearby residential and commercial areas.
- Green paths throughout the sector with linkages to local destinations such as Crowders Mountain State Park, schools, and local recreation centers.

CROWDERS

SECTOR PROFILES

Future Development Strategies

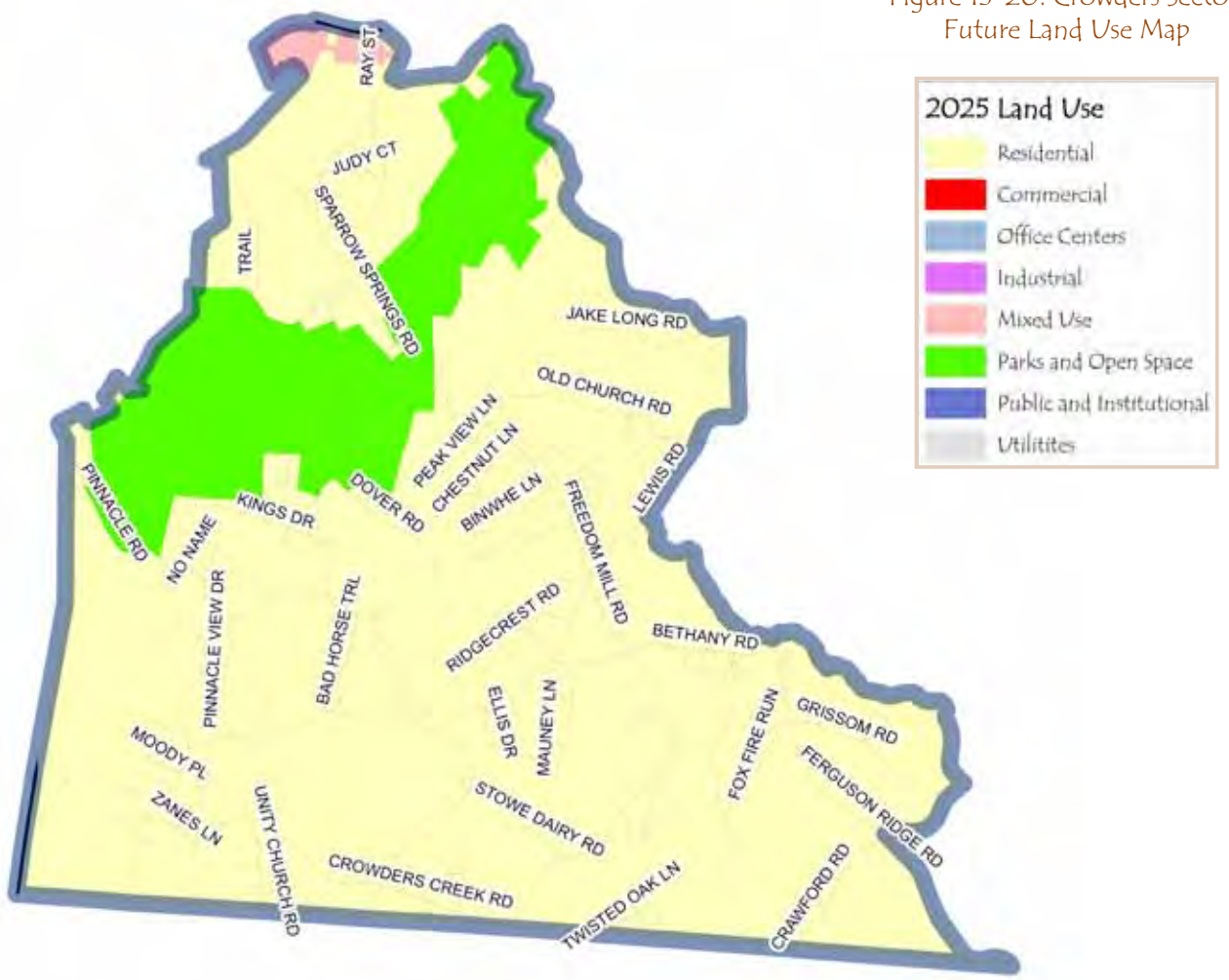
- Allow commercial development within the urban growth area that is appropriate to an urban context, enhances community appearance, is limited to uses providing neighborhood services, and is scaled to serve the needs of residents in adjacent areas. Discourage strip commercial development.
- Use appropriate design, transition, or buffering elements to mitigate adverse visual, audible, aesthetic and traffic impacts to residential neighborhoods when considering commercial or mixed use development proposals.
- Promote industrial development that is compatible with surrounding properties. Minimize adverse impacts including traffic volumes, noise, dust, fumes, proliferation in the number and size of signs, and unsightly appearance on surrounding properties.
- Use development incentives to encourage neighborhood retail and service activities to new or under-used sites as part of our economic development efforts.
- Use design features and planning strategies to make new developments safer.
- Conduct a land use study to insure high-quality development and a parkway atmosphere on the Proposed US 74 bypass.
- Support the establishment of primary health care practices.
- Continue to update annexation strategy focused on the Crowders Sector to bring City services to some of the unincorporated parts of the Sector.
- Continue to develop a plan for trails and greenways.

The Crowders Sector Development Strategy Map, Figure 13-20, is a graphic representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.

CROWDERS

SECTOR PROFILES

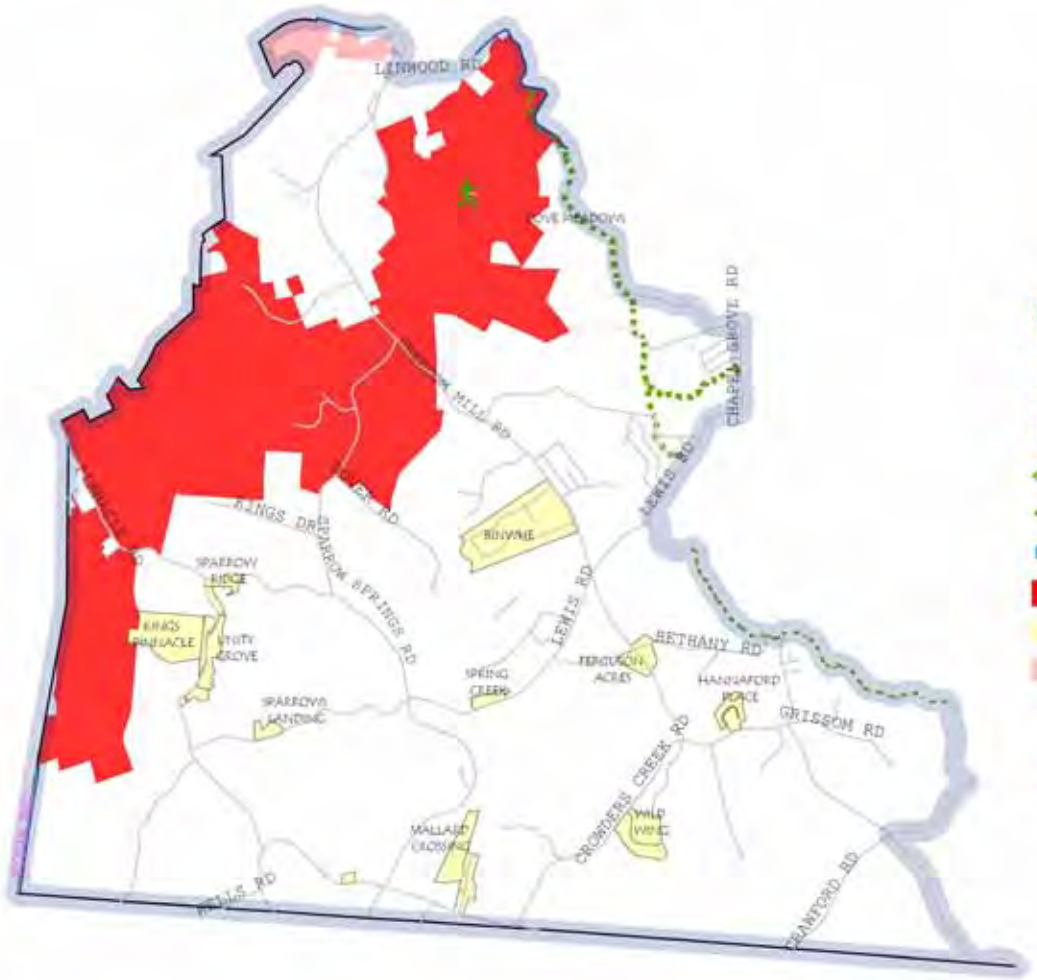
Figure 13-20: Crowders Sector, Future Land Use Map



CROWDERS

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-21: Crowders Sector, Development Strategy Map



2025 Planning Areas

- Gateways
- Community Business Centers
- Neighborhood Business Centers
- Regional Business Centers
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Planned Greenway Trails
- Planned Thoroughfare Improvements & Alignments
- Regional Centers & Cultural Areas
- Existing Residential Neighborhoods
- Mixed Use District
- Public Buildings
- Schools
- Parks & Recreation

SOUTHWEST SECTOR PROFILES

Issues

- The Southwest Sector has some attractive and viable neighborhoods, but housing values in these neighborhoods have not kept up with similar neighborhoods in the East and Southeast Sectors.
- Housing deterioration is a concern in the older neighborhoods of the Southwest Sector.
- The West Franklin Boulevard commercial corridor is suffering from commercial vacancies, under-use of buildings, general urban clutter and a lack of buffering between pedestrians and traffic.
- The Southwest Sector has had a decline in shopping and retail outlets, requiring a trip to the east side for all but groceries and the most basic goods and services.
- The Southwest Sector has a lack of primary care health services, such as family physicians and dentists.
- Many of the older Southwest Sector neighborhoods are "aging out," with fewer families and children, and a stable or declining population.
- The housing stock in the Southwest Sector is aging, but it is also an important source of quality affordable housing, and it should be conserved.
- Real estate markets apparently reflect a perception of Southwest Sector schools as less desirable than schools in the East and Southeast Sectors.
- Many area neighborhoods lack access to high-frequency public transit.
- There is a need to plan for future senior housing needs.
- The rapid increase in the Sector's school-age population has resulted in overcrowding of schools.
- An increasing number of Southeast Sector neighborhoods are self-contained units, with little or no connectivity to adjacent neighborhoods.

Sector Vision

- A community that opens its doors to new residents and visitors without affecting the values and lifestyles of its current residents.
- Maintained high quality public schools.
- Stable neighborhoods with affordable housing.
- A sustainable development pattern that creates and enhances the development of communities with increased quality of life.
- Promoted shared use of community resources such as schools, recreational and cultural centers, libraries, parks, and churches.
- A multipurpose recreational park within close proximity to area neighborhoods.
- Diversity of housing types and price ranges to meet the needs of the population.
- Attractive mixed-use development centers that integrate retail, services, and offices with medium-scale residences that can fill the transition from commercial uses to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Increased medical service locations throughout the Sector.
- Transit service frequency is increased and routes are expanded.
- Green paths throughout the sector with linkages to local destinations such as Crowders Mountain State Park, schools, and local recreation centers.
- Safe, well connected pedestrian and bicycle linkages to schools, within residential neighborhoods, recreational areas, and retail and commercial centers.

SOUTHWEST SECTOR PROFILES

Future Development Strategies

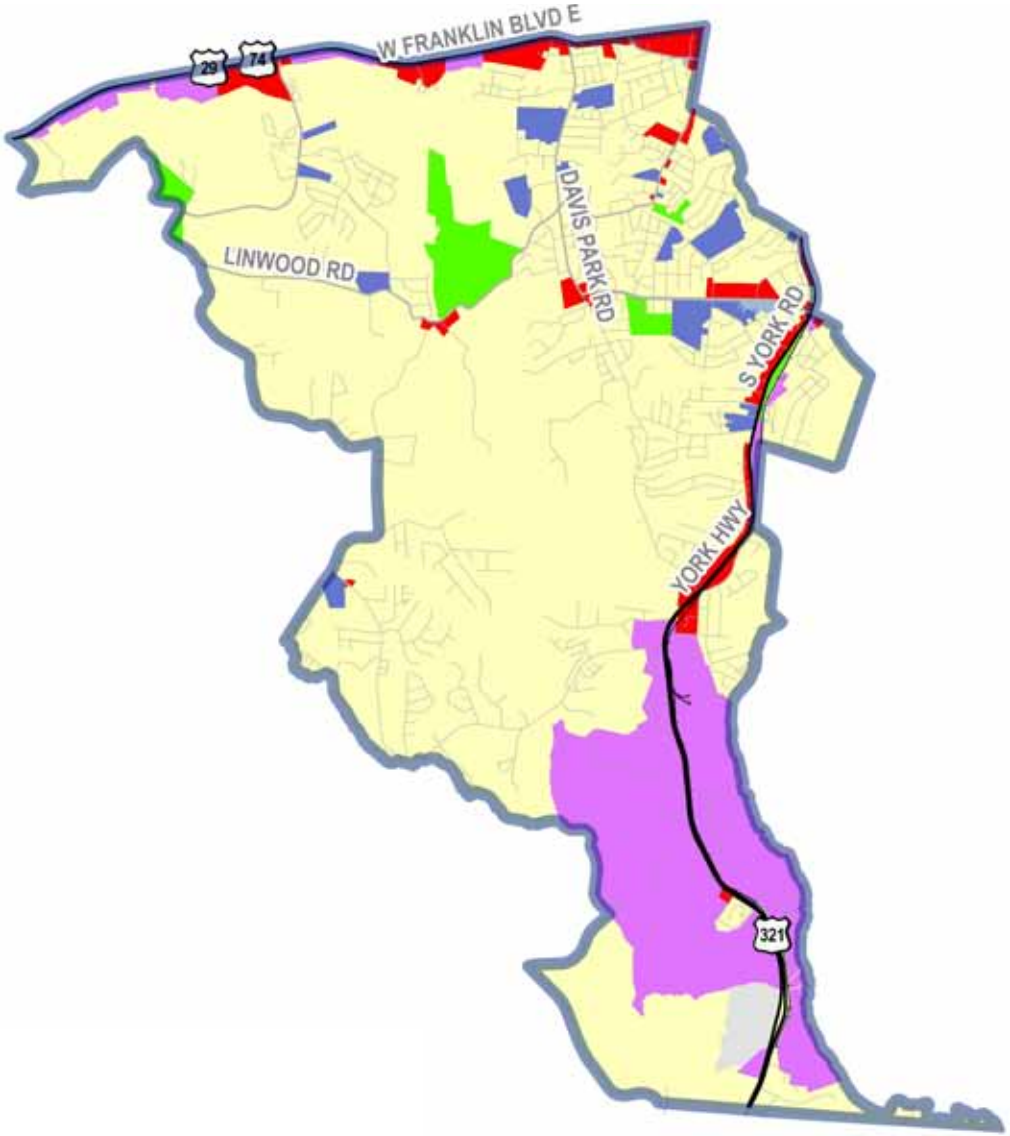
- Cluster neighborhood and community level business development at selected intersections of thoroughfares thereby creating transit oriented development "nodes" and encouraging pedestrian access.
- Use appropriate design, transition, or buffering elements to mitigate adverse visual, audible, aesthetic and traffic impacts to residential neighborhoods when considering commercial or mixed-use development proposals.
- Support innovative residential developments for small-tract infill development.
- New Community recreation center.
- Use design features and planning strategies to make new developments safer.
- Enhance safety and sense of safety by prioritizing CPTED on residential, commercial, and industrial projects.
- Introduce sidewalks and paths between buildings and through parking lots to provide opportunities for pedestrian use. Direct linkages to existing bus routes will be made.
- Conduct a land use study to insure high-quality development and a parkway atmosphere on the Proposed US 74 bypass.
- Include recruitment of retailers to new or under-used sites as part of our economic development efforts.
- Develop a retail and office marketing package, providing information necessary for promoting new retail and office development.
- Establish neighborhood conservation strategies for stable Southwest Sector neighborhoods which may become threatened in the future.
- Develop a plan for trails and greenways.
- Support the establishment of primary health care practices on the west side.
- Use a targeted, site-specific enhancement strategy to create high-potential nodes of growth in the Southwest Sector.

The Southwest Development Strategy Map, Figure 13-22, is a graphic representation of some of the future development strategies. The map is generalized, showing approximate locations for the various strategies.

SOUTHWEST

SECTOR PROFILES

Figure 13-22: Southwest Sector, Future Land Use Map



SOUTHWEST SECTOR PROFILES

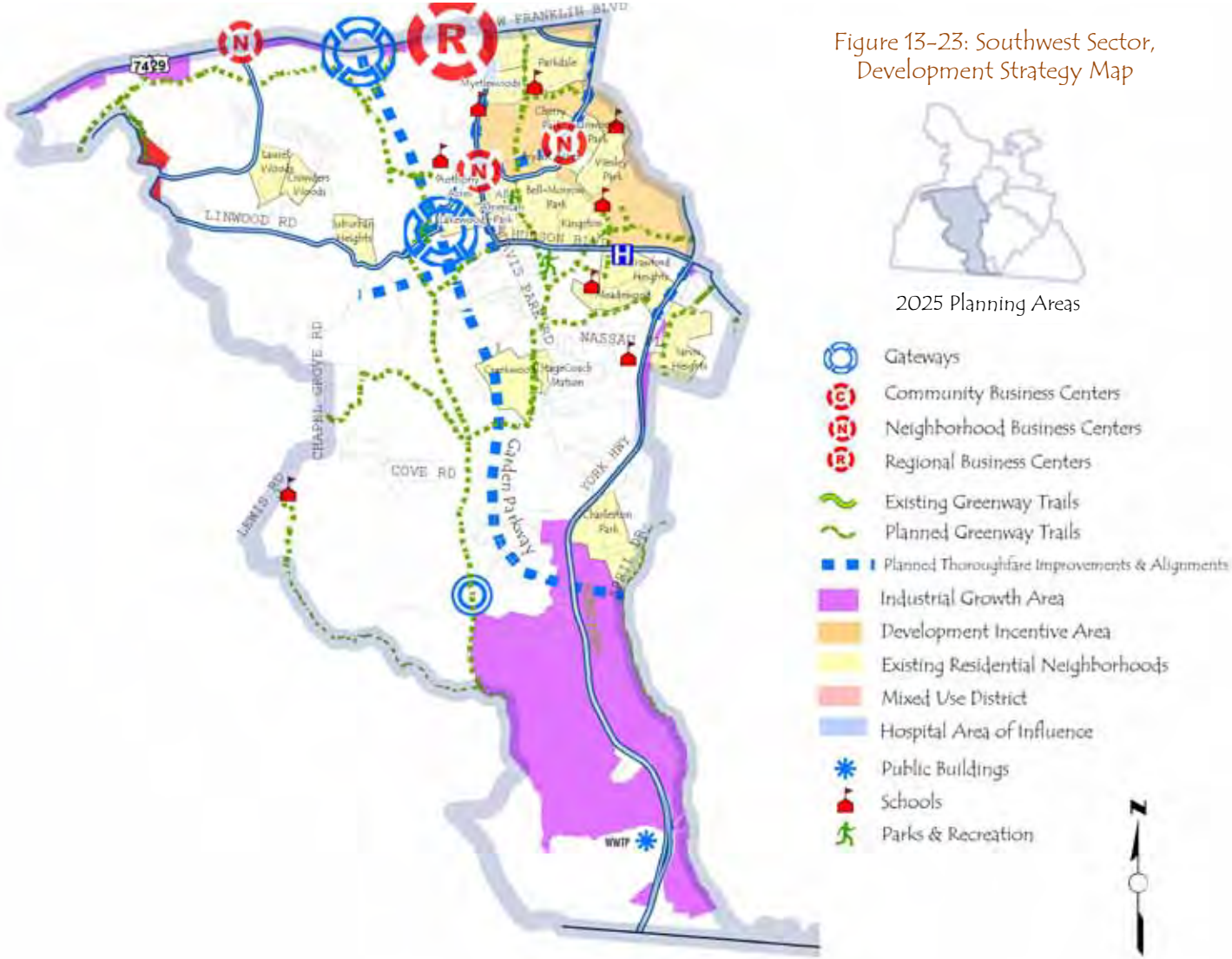


Figure 13-23: Southwest Sector, Development Strategy Map