

REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION

**HENDERSON COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

MEETING DATE: February 15, 2023

SUBJECT: Henderson County 2045 Comprehensive Plan

PRESENTER: Autumn Radcliff, Planning Director
Janna Bianculli, Senior Planner

ATTACHMENT: 2045 Comprehensive Plan Outcome 1

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

Starting in July of 2021, the County embarked on developing its new comprehensive plan. Over the course of 19 months, thousands of community members actively participated in the planning process to shape the plan's vision for 2045. The December 5th draft plan was formally recommended by the Planning Board (pursuant to NCGS) and was presented to the Board of Commissioner's at their December meeting. The Board decided to review at least two goals at their mid-month meetings. Plan Outcome 1 is attached for reference. It contains goals 1 -3.

In an effort to provide clarification and address concerns voiced by the public, the following excerpt is quoted from the NC General Statute § 160D-501. Part C states, "Plans adopted under this Chapter shall be advisory in nature without independent regulatory effect. Part C also states, "Plans adopted under this Chapter shall be considered by the planning board and governing board when considering proposed amendments to zoning regulations as required by G.S. 160D-604 and G.S. 160D-605." Just like the current comprehensive plan, the draft plan would not supersede the County's codified ordinances nor would it bind the government to implement all statements contained therein.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED:

Board is requested to give planning staff feedback and direction.

Suggested Motion:

None.



PART 3

Outcomes

Objective 1: Intentional Land Use

Goal 1 – Coordinate Development

Goal 2 – Rural Character & Agriculture

Goal 3 – Resiliency

Objective 2: Connectivity

Goal 4 – Transportation & Connectivity

Goal 5 – Utilities & Networks

Objective 3: Opportunity

Goal 6 – Economic Development

Goal 7 – Housing Choice & Increase
Availability

Goal 8 – Public Health, Safety, &
Education

2045 PLAN OUTCOMES

OVERVIEW

The Future Land Use Map is supported by recommendations in the next three sections of the plan. Each section details policy recommendations and strategies that support goals and outcomes that were established based on stakeholder and citizen feedback. These outcomes are described below and in the following pages.

Outcome 1: Intentional Land Use

Henderson County is projected to continue growing between now and 2045. The importance of intentional land use planning and development design cannot be overstated. Land use and infrastructure decisions that will be made based upon this comprehensive plan will define the character of the County for years to come. Careful development strategy that guides growth toward existing community anchors and infrastructure can help protect open space and agricultural land, make utilities more cost-effective, keep taxes low, influence housing costs, and reduce the distance residents need to travel to reach destinations. The Future Land Use Map and associated goals and policies build on previous plans for communities in Henderson County and create a framework for growth that accommodates future residential and non-residential development while reducing impacts on existing agricultural operations and natural resources.

Outcome 2: Connectivity

The communities in Henderson County are more connected now than ever before; however, disparities still exist as it relates to access to infrastructure including major roads, utilities, and broadband. The Henderson County 2045 Comprehensive Plan addresses traffic and maintenance priorities, encourages new connections, and commits to improve access to safe, multi-modal transportation options. In addition, the plan emphasizes improved communications infrastructure throughout the County and links targeted utility expansion to land use, environmental, and economic goals.

Outcome 3: Opportunity

Goals and recommendations for this outcome seek to improve livability for all residents by encouraging economic development, improving housing availability, and supporting healthy, safe living. Henderson County has been successful in recruiting and retaining manufacturing employers over the past twenty years. This plan builds on that success by supporting small businesses, encouraging a diversified tax base, and specifying key sites for commercial and industrial uses that have good access to transportation and utility infrastructure. Recommendations address housing needs in a way that capitalizes on existing and planned infrastructure investments and protects agricultural areas and rural character. Improving healthcare, food access, and public services are also a key part of recommendations related to this outcome.



OUTCOME 1:

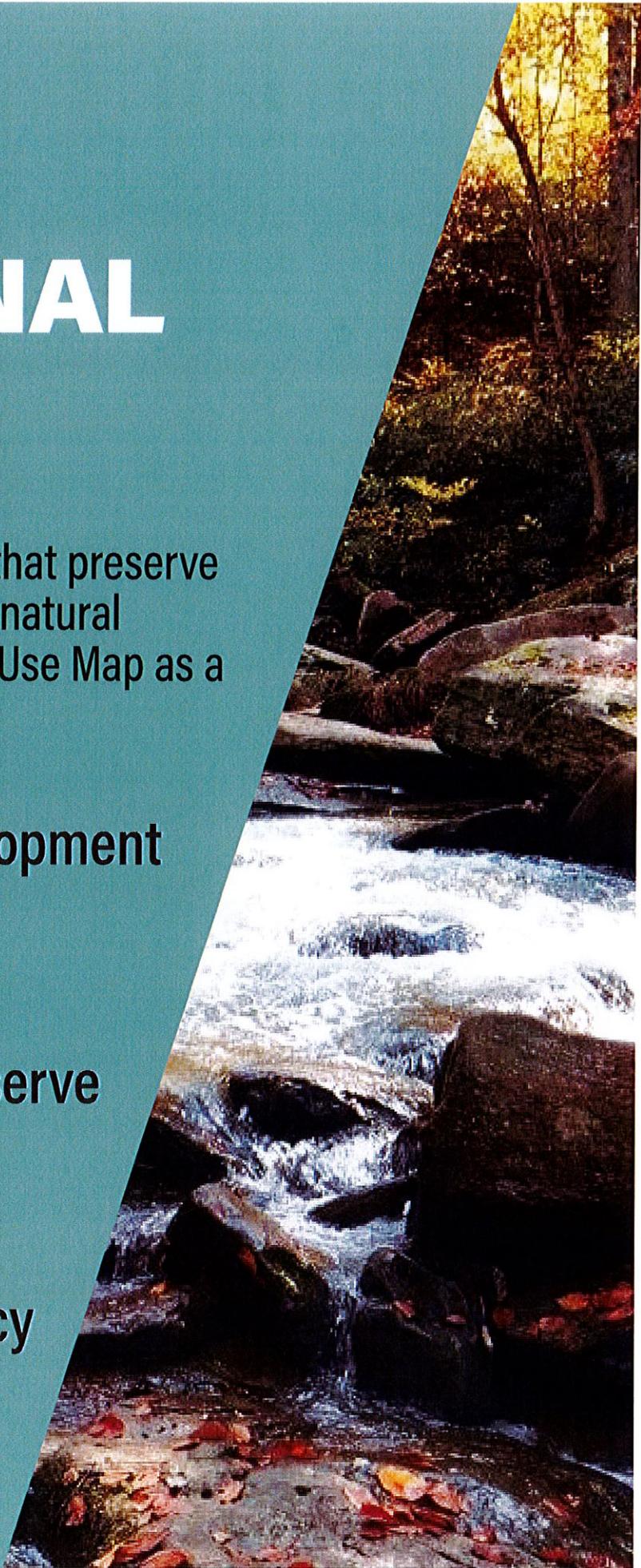
INTENTIONAL LAND USE

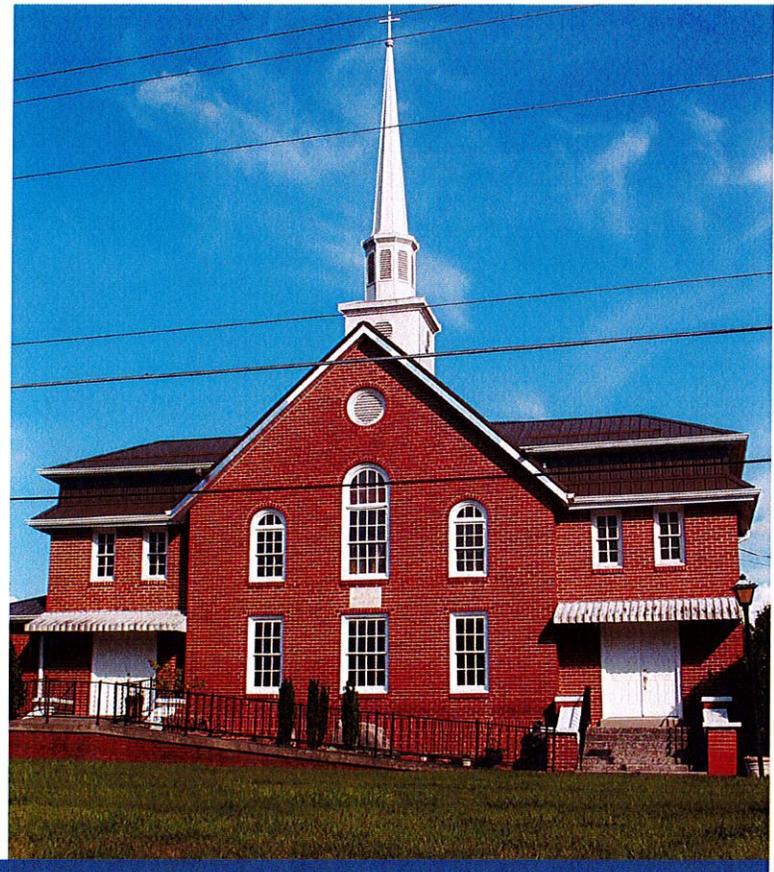
Make smart land use decisions that preserve agriculture, rural character, and natural resources with the Future Land Use Map as a guide.

GOAL 1: Coordinate development near existing community anchors.

GOAL 2: Protect and conserve rural character and agriculture.

GOAL 3: Improve resiliency of the natural and built environments.





GOAL 1: COORDINATE DEVELOPMENT NEAR EXISTING COMMUNITY ANCHORS

Henderson County is made up of a number of distinct communities. Each community has a unique set of anchors and assets. Recommendations related to this goal convey how the County can coordinate growth near existing Community Centers and Neighborhood Anchors. This strategy aims to focus growth where transportation infrastructure, utilities, and services exist or are planned.

This type of development pattern can help to reduce costs of public services and protect the rural character of the County. The Future Land Use Map and associated policies build on previous planning and public input to create a framework for growth that encourages cohesive, attractive development that is compatible with the existing character of the County's unique communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 1.1: Grow intentionally where infrastructure and services exist, in and around municipalities, community investments, and anchors.

A: Coordinate with municipalities and other service providers to update the [Utility Service Area \(USA\)](#) and utility service agreements to best fit the Future Land Use Map and municipal land use plans.

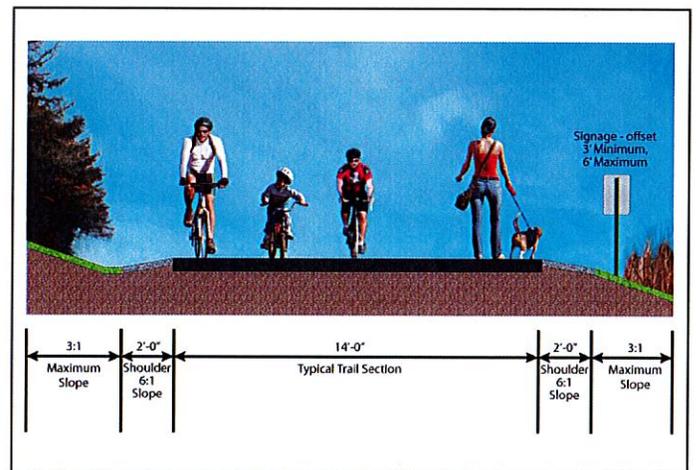
- B: Encourage high-density residential developments to be located within the USA.
- C: Locate commercial and residential growth near community anchors (i.e. Neighborhood Anchors and Community Centers on the FLU Map).
- D: Utilize tools such as utility provision, increased density or other incentives, zoning overlays,

and FLU consistency statements to encourage growth in-line with the Future Land Use Map.

- E: Continue density bonuses for **conservation subdivisions** with access to water and sewer and evaluate additional density bonuses for the incorporation of **workforce housing** in new developments.
- F: Develop an overlay district within the **Edneyville Sewer** service area prior to construction. This overlay would limit uses that are incompatible with the existing rural, agricultural area.
- G: Preserve a portion of **Edneyville Sewer** capacity for **industrial** and agriculture uses.
- H: Develop a joint overlay district with the Town of Laurel Park and the City of Hendersonville for the Ecusta Rail Trail.
 - This overlay could expand allowable uses that are compatible with the trail. It may also include additional design criteria for properties adjacent to the trail.
- I: Ensure zoning districts around Neighborhood Anchors and Community Centers allow, by right, consistent land uses.



Edneyville is currently a patchwork of agricultural fields and lower density residential uses with some small-scale commercial development along US-64. Development pressure is likely to increase when sewer is extended to this area.

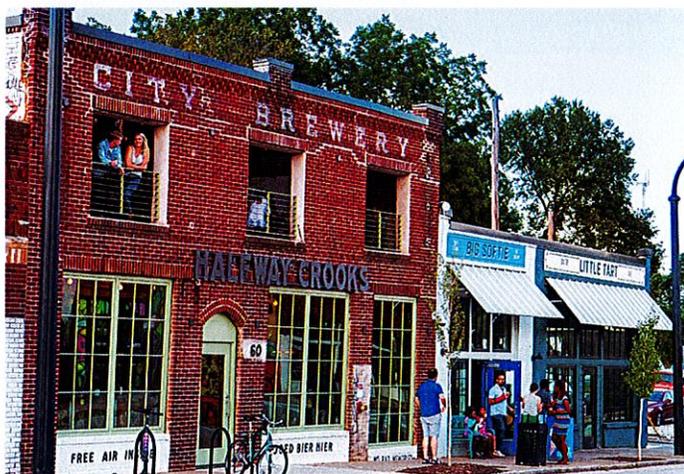
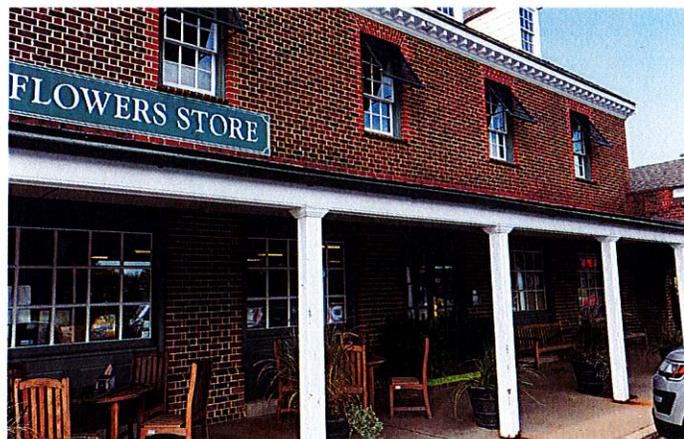


The completion of the Ecusta Rail Trail will prompt new businesses to open as well as vacation rental properties. Studying and implementing an overlay district will help Henderson County and the municipalities to shape the growth according to the community vision.

Rec 1.2: Use available zoning tools to encourage context-appropriate rural businesses.

- A: Continue to allow for administrative approval for small to medium-scale uses that meet basic standards in rural areas (e.g. AG on FLU).
- B: Modify thresholds for administrative approval versus conditional zoning or special use permit requirements for certain types or sizes of new nonresidential uses.
- C: Collaborate with the Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development to encourage redevelopment of underutilized industrial and/or commercial properties.
- D: The size and intensity of uses in Neighborhood Anchors should be evaluated to maintain the local business economy.

Public preference from the survey and public meetings indicated support for small-scale businesses and mixed-use development. The pictures below were among the development types that received the most votes during the public meetings. Buildings with a mix of uses received strong support, and some respondents specified that they should be located in activity areas.



GOAL 2: PROTECT AND CONSERVE RURAL CHARACTER AND AGRICULTURE



Agricultural land and rural character are two of the County's greatest assets, and have other economic benefits beyond the value of the crops. Farming is integral to the County's history and identity. Orchards, timber, and other crops support the economy and define much of the landscape in rural areas. **Agriculture** (including managed forests) covers 26% of land (60,000 acres) in the County.

Agritourism and the local food movement have grown significantly in recent years nationally and locally. Farmland grew slightly between 2012 and 2017, but increasing development pressure in many agricultural areas has led to a significant decline in farmland overall in recent decades. There is growing concern that if trends continue, the County will have significantly less agriculture land left in 2045 if the County does not follow the recommendations contained in this Comprehensive Plan. However, there are measures the County can take to increase the support systems for farmers, redirect development pressure, and encourage preservation of agricultural land.

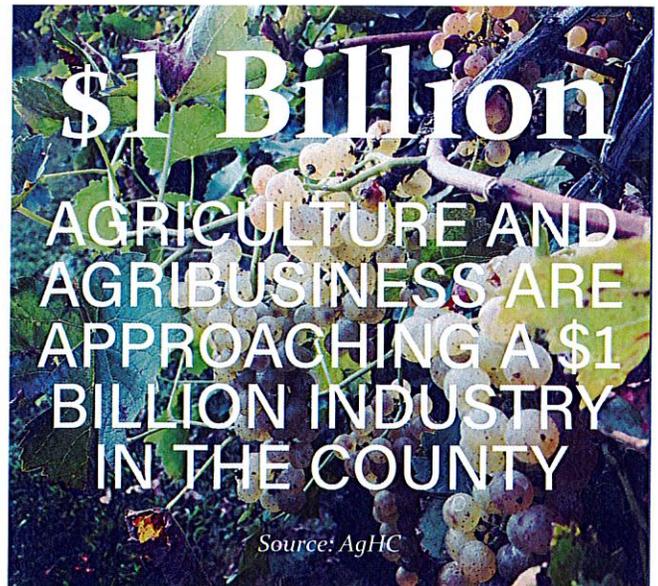
RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 2.1: Support agriculture as an economic driver.

A: Continue to collaborate with Agribusiness Henderson County (AgHC) on supporting existing agriculture and land use planning efforts related to agriculture, economic development and land use.

- B: Recruit and prepare the next generation of farmers through the 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) program and coordination with Henderson County Schools and [Blue Ridge Community College](#).
- Build on middle school farm field trips and exposure to careers in agriculture
 - Support and improve FFA programs in high schools

- Support Blue Ridge Community College programs including internships
 - Connect young farmers to jobs and agricultural leases
- C: Leverage partnership with Blue Ridge Community College to advance workforce development assets and respond to specific agri-business needs.
- D: Assist the three government-supported agricultural entities (AgHC, Henderson County Soil & Water Conservation District, and NC Cooperative Extension) on joint issues and encourage collaboration.
- E: Continue to allow for a flexible approach to rural business.
- Encouraging small-businesses in rural areas can indirectly support agriculture by allowing non-farm income.
- F: Reduce barriers to integration, extension, and diversification of agribusiness and agritourism (i.e. packing facilities, processing, value-added production, distribution, retail).
- G: Study the creation of an Agricultural Visitor Center in the County.
- This could include a visitors center with public restrooms, a place for events, or community meetings. Potentially could allow for the relocation of the Cooperative Extension Office or other agricultural related agencies.
- H: Collaborate with the NC Cooperative Extension and other organizations to connect current and future farmers to federal agricultural funding programs like the USDA's Farm Service Agency and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. A full list



Agricultural Trends

.....

Agriculture is an important component of Henderson County's identity. Henderson County is #1 in apple growing in North Carolina. Significant agricultural production operations exist in all parts of the County and are integral to the landscape and local history.

From 2012-2017, the County saw an increase in the amount of farmland and an increase in per-farm net income. It also showed that 1 out of 3 farmers are considered "new or beginning," an encouraging indicator that there are people entering the industry to replace those who age out.

However, long-term data shows a pronounced decrease in farmland county-wide. According to the Census of Agriculture, the County lost 1/3 of its orchard land between 2002 and 2017.¹

With farmland preservation ranking as a top-two priority in the community survey and a new commitment to intentional land use, many in Henderson County hope to stem long-term trends and see more new operations and agribusiness in the coming years.

¹ USDA Census of Agriculture, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017

of potential grant and loan programs are listed within the Supplemental Information Document.

- I: Work with the NC cooperative Extension and other organizations to help farmers to negotiate lease agreements that include the right of first refusal.

Rec 2.2: Preserve existing farmland.

- A: Encourage enrollment in Present Use Value (PUV) and Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) programs.
- B: Consider the creation of a Voluntary Farmland Preservation Program to purchase farmland development rights and establish agricultural conservation easements.
- C: Study potential mechanisms for transfer of development rights program to allow for transfer of density away from agricultural and natural resource areas to designated receiving areas

D: Study the creation of a County-wide Farmland Mapping & Monitoring Program. (Term listed in Glossary)

- E: Consider applying the County Voluntary Agricultural District to all Present Use Value enrolled farms to further protect farmland from development pressure.

Rec 2.3: Reduce conflict between existing agriculture and new residential development.

- A: Discourage rezonings for higher density residential subdivisions outside the defined Utility Service Area (USA) and in the Agricultural/Rural (AR) area identified on the Future Land Use Map.
- B: Continue to require and enforce the Farmland Preservation District Setback.

VOLUNTARY FARMLAND PRESERVATION in Henderson County



A new program, potentially called Agricultural Preservation & Protection of Land & Economy (APPLE), is needed to protect the essential resource of farmland. This voluntary farmland preservation program would enable the County to buy the development rights to agricultural land, thereby protecting it from development. A county program could be used to supplement the NC Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation program and other state and federal funding.

The land would have to meet certain standards, and the sale would be on a voluntary basis initiated by the landowner. Through this option, the land would remain undeveloped and allow the farmer to continue farming their land while benefiting financially.

This program could be funded through a number of funding sources (tax revenues, reallocation of funds, bond referendum, etc.). Through this setup, the County could make incremental yearly progress on farmland preservation that would add up significantly over time.

Alamance County, North Carolina provides a precedent for this type of program. The Alamance County Farmland Preservation Program has preserved hundreds of acres of farmland since its inception.

- This requires a 100 foot **setback** for all buildings from any **Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD)**.
- C: Consider zoning updates to reduce development pressure in agricultural areas.
- This could include implementing a new district that reduces residential density and / or the creation of a rural cluster option in the **Land Development Code (LDC)** that allows for smaller **setbacks**, building spacing, and innovative design.



The Carl Sandburg Home in Flat Rock is a National Historic Site. Source: Visit Hendersonville TDA

Rec 2.4: Incentivize non-farm development outside of agricultural areas.

- A: Provide incentives for revitalizing existing commercial and **industrial** sites.
- B: Focus on higher density housing closer to the city to reduce **sprawl**, provide affordable housing for workforce and relieve pressure on roads.
- C: Encourage **industrial** growth in areas away from large concentrations of farmland and agricultural operations.
- D: Carefully evaluate potential utility extensions that could impact large concentrations of productive farmland.
- Hold community meetings with targeted input from farmers and landowners when planning for future growth and utility provision. Modify plans for water and sewer line locations, size and access policies accordingly.

Rec 2.5: Utilize zoning tools to help conserve rural character.

- A: Study existing rural character and identify defining elements that can be modeled.
- B: Require lighting mitigation standards for all new commercial and **industrial** developments within proximity to an existing residential area.
- C: Work with developers to strategically locate required **open space** to increase visual compatibility.
- D: Consider requiring robust buffers or "green belts" between commercial development and residential and between residential development and farmland.

GOAL 3: IMPROVE RESILIENCY OF THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENTS



Protecting Henderson County's natural resources and increasing its resiliency are inextricable, increasingly urgent goals. Henderson County's natural areas provide immeasurable benefits to the community. These benefits include air and water filtration and flooding and erosion control, in addition to providing recreation opportunities, wildlife habitats, and contributing to the scenic beauty that residents and visitors enjoy. Encouraging subdivision design that protects natural resources and rural character is a key to many of the recommendations in this section.

Reducing the risk exposure of structures and vulnerable populations is a high priority. Where risk reduction is not possible, careful planning and strengthening emergency response will help make recovery faster and more efficient when hazards do occur.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 3.1: Protect and conserve sensitive environmental habitats, steep slopes, and ridge tops.

A: Strengthen conservation subdivision design in areas with sensitive environmental resources.

B: Consider allowing for administrative approval for conservation subdivisions that meet certain criteria.

C: Implement minimum open space requirements and prioritize the reservation of sensitive natural resources as open space in new development.

- D: Limit development on steep slopes and mountain ridges by lowering the slope threshold for density reductions and consider requiring geotechnical review of developments with slope greater than 40%.
- E: Study the creation of a Conservation Overlay District for all County public lands.
- F: Consider increasing the **open space** requirements when developing within a Farmland Preservation District.
- G: Consider incentivizing **open space** conservation in new **industrial** developments of a certain size and where appropriate.
- H: Consolidate steep slope requirements within the **Land Development Code** for transparency.

New incentives for "rural cluster subdivisions" could require lower density development that is more compatible with existing agricultural uses, while still allowing some new residential development.



Rec 3.2: Improve the resiliency of natural areas and critical assets against hazards.

- A: Collaborate with existing organizations to protect sensitive habitats, farmland, and land adjacent to creeks and rivers throughout Henderson County.
- B: Coordinate efforts between Emergency Services and the Planning Department regarding emergency response and critical infrastructure.
- C: Regularly review implementation progress and update the **Hazard Mitigation Plan** to strengthen emergency management and response in the County.

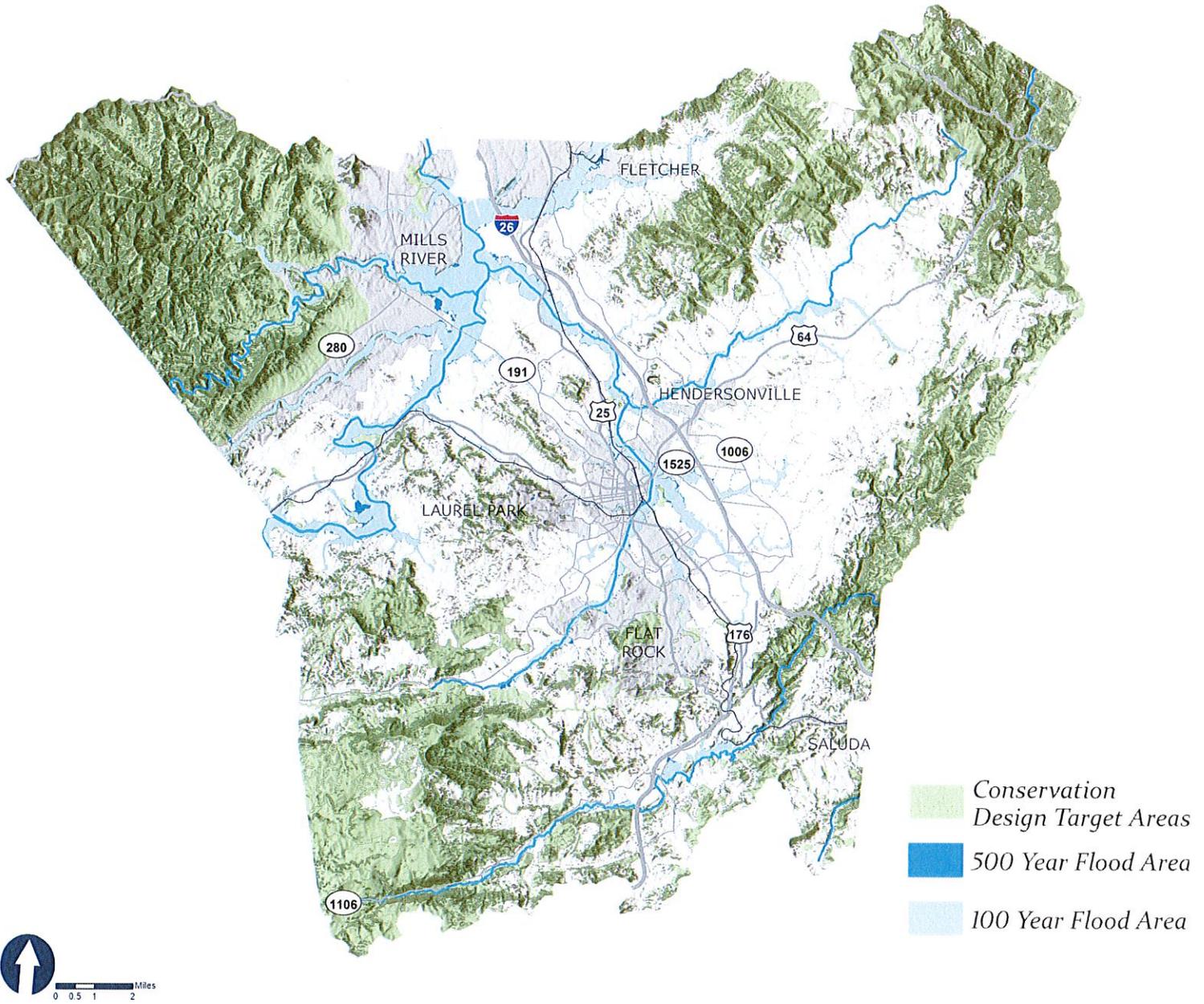


NATURAL ASSETS
in Henderson County

Henderson County's natural resource areas are home to some of its most cherished, valuable, and delicate assets. Currently, there are 39,811 acres in managed areas across the County, accounting for about 16.6 percent of the County's land area. These spaces contain 64 designated Natural Heritage Natural Areas, which are home to 25 documented rare species occurrences. Additionally, there are three subwatersheds with federally listed species. Major natural asset areas include the Pisgah National Forest, Green River Game Lands, Dupont State Forest, French Broad River, Green River Headwaters and Gorge, and Big Hungry River.

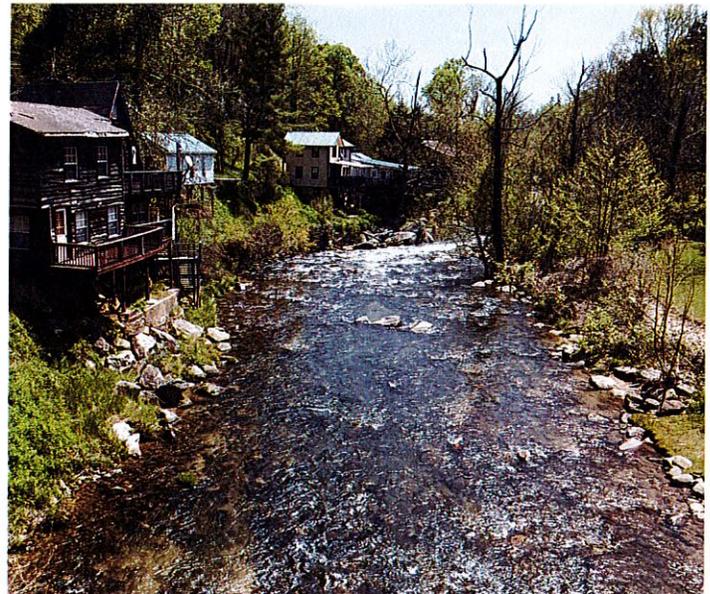
The Hellbender Salamander, an endangered species found in the County's waterways.

CONSERVATION DESIGN TARGET AREAS MAP



Conservation Design Target Areas were determined based on environmental restrictions including 100 and 500 year floodplains, steep slopes (>15%), protected ridgelines, wetlands, potential debris flow pathways, Natural Heritage Natural Areas, public lands, and areas high in biodiversity and wildlife habitat value.

- D: Ensure federally required emergency service regulations are reflected in the [Land Development Code](#).
- E: Consider lowering the threshold for required additional ingress/egress for developments and requiring reasonable connection between developments.
- F: Protect critical infrastructure facilities, especially utility and emergency facilities through facility upgrades and site design.
- G: Develop ingress/egress emergency plans for areas that may become inaccessible if landslides occur.
- H: Develop a flood early warning system for areas that may become inaccessible if roadways are flooded.
- I: Work with local, state, and federal land managers to develop plans for wildfire management, especially in interface areas. (See also Rec 3.3 F)
- J: Work with the community to increase emergency preparedness awareness and educate the community regarding existing response plans.



Many homes and roads in the Gerton area are vulnerable to flooding and landslides.

Rec 3.3: Decrease the potential exposure to hazards by managing future development

- A: Within new subdivisions consider the reservation of [open space](#) and [conservation areas](#) in and around areas with a high potential for landslides.

- Maps of past debris flow and area of potential debris flow pathways are maintained by the NC DEQ. See landslidesncgs.com for more information.
- B: Use existing vulnerability and risk assessments (such as the regional Land of Sky vulnerability and risk assessment) to guide development design and [rezoning](#) decisions.
- C: Discourage the amount of land disturbed in steep slope developments, including construction of roads, as well as decrease density.
- D: Continue to limit fill in [floodplains](#) unless additional standards are met.
- E: Utilize the fire, building, and land development codes to mitigate risk of fire hazards in areas with limited access.

F: Encourage wildfire mitigation principles in new developments located in the [Wildland Urban interface](#) including:

- Design recreation space and access roads to double as firebreaks
- Design each home site to have defined defensible space
- Encourage fire resistant building design and provide defensible space around clustered development

G: Encourage best practice design standards for new construction within the [Wildland Urban Interface](#).

H: Encourage additional street trees within new developments to enhance the environmental benefits of the requirement.

C: Consider additional site development standards to reduce stormwater and erosion impacts of new minor and major subdivisions.

- These could include changes to minimum disturbance thresholds that require stormwater devices or adjusting impervious surface lot coverage maximums.

D: Identify regulatory barriers and consider incentives for green infrastructure projects, which can lessen stress on natural systems.

Rec 3.4: Improve stormwater management strategies and water quality protections.

A: Limit built-upon area within the watersupply watersheds and provide standards for [storm-water management](#).

B: Monitor water quality trends to determine effectiveness of existing regulations and other trends.

Threat Assessment Summary

Types and levels of existing vulnerability vary across planning areas. For the County as a whole:

Flooding vulnerability driven by structures in the floodplain constructed pre-Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM)

- 8% of all commercial properties
- 2% of all residential
- 18 critical facilities (including churches, utilities, medical)

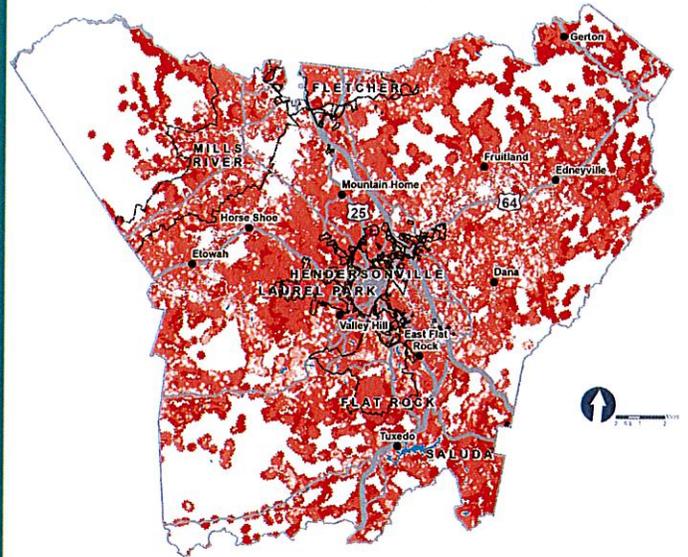
Landslide vulnerability increased by land disturbance

- 4% of all residential
- 16 critical facilities

Wildfire vulnerabilities

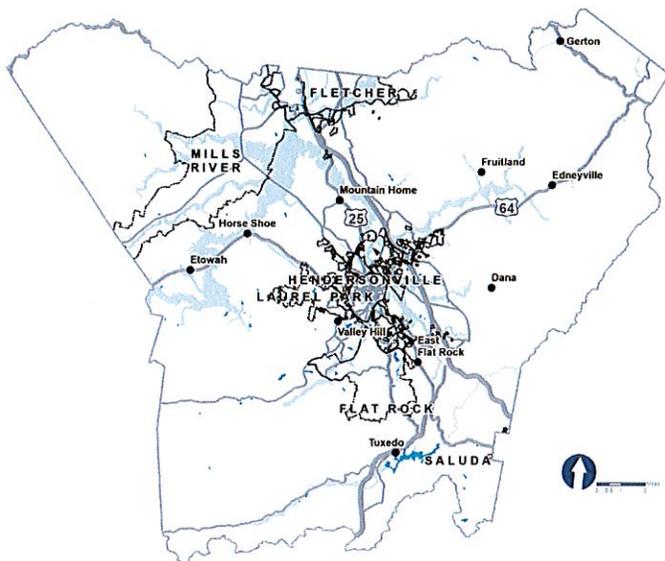
- Wildland Urban Interface areas outside a 5-minute emergency response drive time
- Increasing vulnerability is a concern due to increasing heavy precipitation, aging and sensitive populations, and growth in areas of risk

Source: Land of Sky Regional Council Vulnerability Assessment



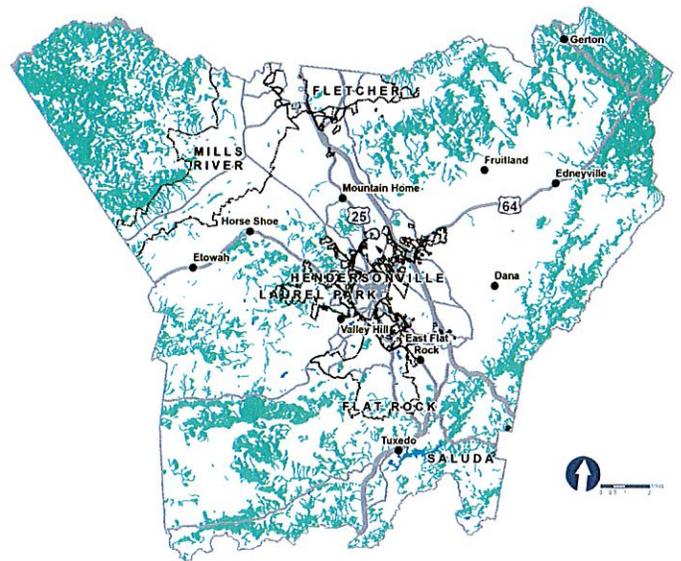
Wildfire Hazard

Source: wild/urban interface index, Southern group of state foresters



Floodplains

Source: FEMA



Landslide Hazard

Source: NCDEQ

Larger versions of these maps can be found in the Appendix

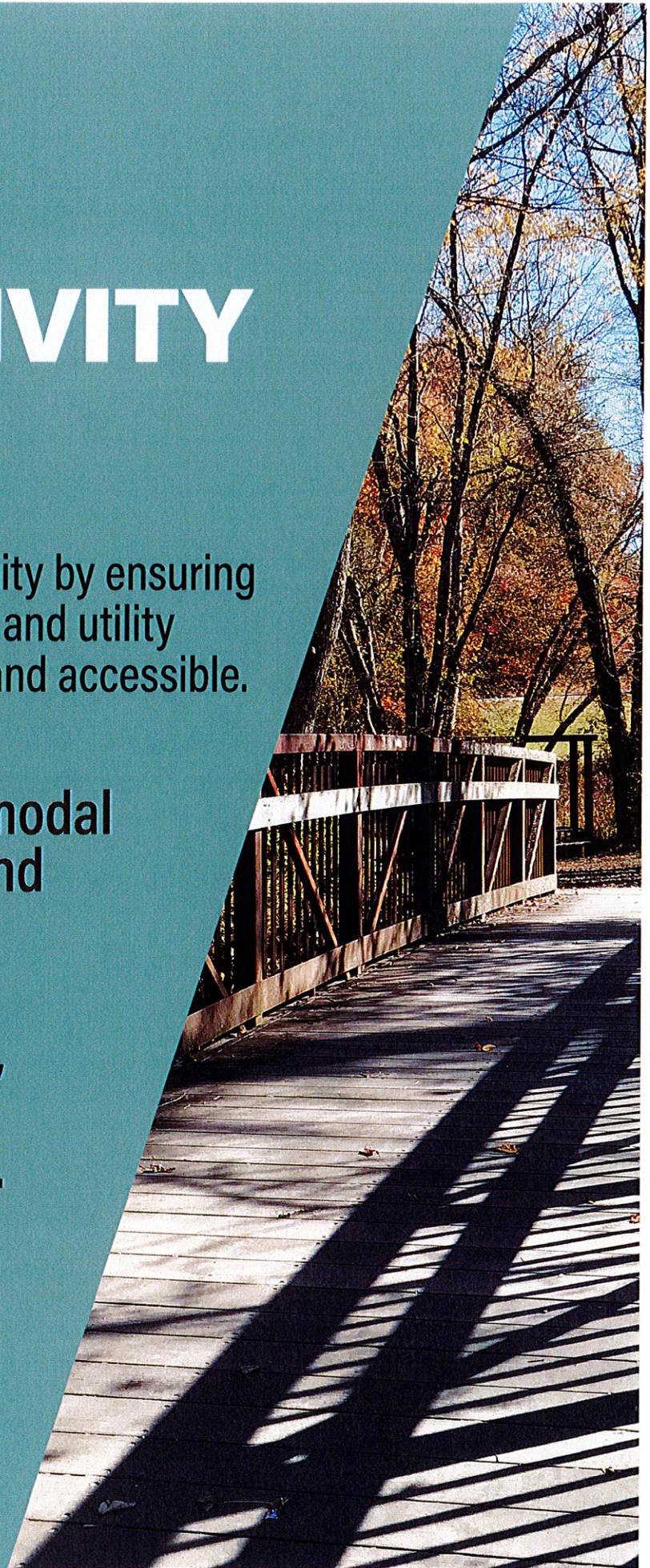
OUTCOME 2:

CONNECTIVITY

Connect and serve the community by ensuring transportation, communication, and utility infrastructure is safe, efficient, and accessible.

GOAL 4: Prioritize multi-modal transportation options and connectivity.

GOAL 5: Create a reliable, connected utility and communication network.



GOAL 4: PRIORITIZE MULTI-MODAL TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS AND CONNECTIVITY.



Henderson County will continue to improve and expand its transportation systems so residents can travel efficiently and safely by multiple modes. Road and traffic issues were some of those most common issues identified on the community survey.

Growth has exacerbated concerns about road conditions and capacity. The County's population has grown by 30 percent since 2000, but many of its roads remain largely unchanged over the same time period. Though NCDOT maintains the roads in the County jurisdiction, establishing policies for new development that limit impacts on roadways and documenting County transportation needs can help make the most of existing infrastructure and guide improvements in the future. Transportation planning over the next twenty five years will not just focus on automobile transport, but will include bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation within the Utility Service Area (USA).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 4.1: Address traffic and road maintenance priorities.

A: Advocate for the County's transportation priorities at the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (FBRMPO) board meetings regarding project prioritization, roadway design, and safety.

B: Coordinate with NCDOT and municipalities via the Henderson County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).

C: Advocate for the French Broad River MPO to update the Comprehensive Transportation Plan, which was adopted in 2008, and focus improvements around active transportation options and transit.

- D: Collaborate with [NCDOT](#) and the [French Broad River MPO](#) to develop a county-wide Rural Roadway Design Manual to provide clear recommendations to [NCDOT](#) and developers for expanding and improving the transportation network throughout the County.

Rec 4.2: Adopt policies and regulations that reduce or mitigate impacts of new development.

- A: Encourage adequate roadway connectivity with appropriate access (ingress and egress) and limited dead ends/cul-de-sacs in new subdivisions.
- B: Consider reducing Henderson County's Traffic Impact Study (TIS) threshold for developments located along specific road classifications.
- C: Create access management standards for private roads and driveways in Henderson County, limiting the number of curb cuts on specific road classifications.
- D: Consider amending the [Land Development Code](#) to allow for integration of residential and commercial uses to allow for shorter travel time between destinations.
- E: Consider additional sidewalk/trail connections for new commercial developments, especially when adjacent to an existing trail.
- F: Consider requiring connections between existing and new commercial developments to reduce curb cuts and make it easier to access the businesses.



Many roads are “farm-to-market” roads that have narrow lanes and limited shoulders. Improvements to these roads and key intersections are needed to address safety issues and accommodate development in some areas of the County.

Rec 4.3: Ensure that the development of Henderson County's transportation system benefits the community.

- A: The County should continue to seek grant funding (through the [French Broad River MPO](#) and other sources) for corridor studies along primary roadways throughout the County.
- B: Establish a vision for significant roadway corridors and its surrounding land use, with input from the community they serve.
- C: Identify creative solutions for roadway congestion and safety during seasonal peak demand and at public schools.
- D: Support [NCDOT](#) with the on-going corridor studies for US-64.

- E: Address intersections with safety and congestion issues in the County.
- F: Communicate the desire to [NCDOT](#) for prioritization of continuous traffic flow alongside safer speeds, EMS access, sustainability, and aesthetics in strategic rural intersections.

Rec 4.4: Improve active transportation options (i.e. transit, sidewalks and bicycle facilities) in the County.

- A: Identify opportunities to incorporate transit, cycling, and pedestrian facilities into roadway upgrades.
- B: Advocate for [NCDOT](#) to install wide, buffered multiuse paths along key roadways, giving people an option for bicycle and pedestrian commuting and recreational use when applicable.
- C: Conduct studies of the transportation network surrounding County schools to identify deficiencies in safety and access.
- D: Identify safe cycling routes and create and distribute maps to community members and visitors.
- E: Support the State Legislature to improve solutions for the funding, construction, and maintenance of bike, public transit, and pedestrian infrastructure.
- F: Work with [NCDOT](#) and the municipalities to create guidance for businesses that want to connect to a [greenway](#) identified in the Greenway Master Plan.

- Ensure safety of pedestrians and bicyclists through parking lots and via roadway access.
- Encourage adjacent businesses to develop connections along existing trails.

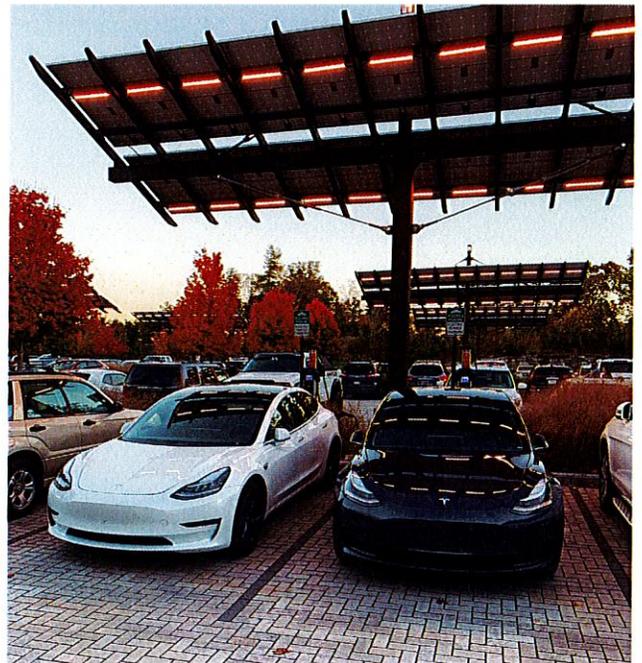
Rec 4.5: Maintain Apple Country Public Transit’s service levels and invest in infrastructure to support transit.

- A: Conduct a transit feasibility study to identify gaps in transit service, particularly to schools, large employers, and [greenway](#) and recreation facilities.
- B: Use the Future Land Use Map to identify potential stops along transit routes.
- C: Support higher density housing developments along transit routes.



Henderson County staff are beginning the Apple Country Transit Feasibility Study (2023) to provide a comprehensive understanding of Henderson County’s current and future transit needs over the short- and long-range planning horizons.

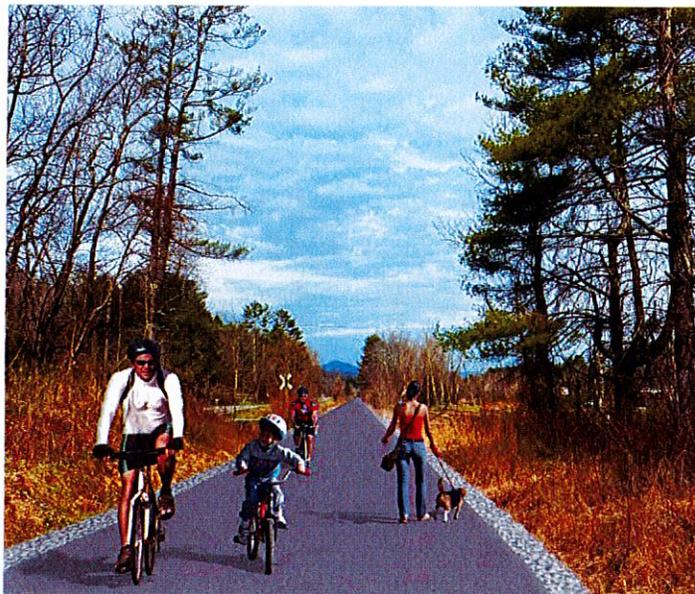
- D: Consider increasing the percentage of Henderson County's population living within 3/4 mile of the fixed-route transit system by extending the distance of the routes, adding new routes, as well as by supporting denser housing.
- E: Continue to work with regional partners and explore the concept of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) that would focus on regional transit service while preserving local control of existing systems.
- F: Explore mechanisms to provide express routes to connect Hendersonville to Asheville and other destinations in Buncombe, Madison, and Haywood County, while focusing on regional mobility management, employee training, maintenance, and funding administration.
- G: Create connections between transit and [greenways](#) to help reduce traffic and vehicle miles traveled.
- H: Continue to improve existing bus stops through amenities like benches and shelters.
- I: Explore solutions to solve the garbage collection issue at bus stops.
- J: Collaborate with the City of Hendersonville on a joint planning effort for a more robust transfer station in downtown Hendersonville.
- K: Encourage diversification of the Henderson County vehicle fleet, including transit buses, for optimum resiliency.



There are multiple EV charging stations in Henderson County, like this one at Sierra Nevada Brewery, but many more are needed. A map of these locations would be helpful to users. In 2022, the County received over \$200,000 from the VW Settlement funds to create a fast charging and Level 2 charging stations at the County's '95 courthouse, as well as a Level 2 charging station at the Tourism Development Authority's visitors center on Main Street in Hendersonville.

Rec 4.6: Complete the trail and greenway network.

- A: Implement the Greenway Master Plan's policy to incorporate the use of existing and future sewer utility easements for public use **greenways**.
- B: Work with the City, employers, nonprofits, and schools to provide additional amenities for existing **greenways** and trails (i.e. parking, benches, lighting, restrooms, water fountains, bike repair stations, mile markers, and educational signage).
- C: Coordinate with partners to advance, complete, and maintain the entire 19 miles of the Ecusta Rail Trail.
- D: Coordinate with **NCDOT** to ensure that all Ecusta Rail Trail roadway crossings follow safety standards for vehicles and pedestrians, are highly visible for drivers, and have appropriate signage.
- E: Coordinate with the Rail Trail Advisory Committee, Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), **Planning Board**, and Recreation Advisory Board on priority **greenway** implementation.
- F: Prioritize planning and design for **greenway** segments to connect existing trails.
- G: Incorporate spurs and short connections to hospitals and County-owned properties, like schools and parks, into **greenway** planning.
- H: Update the Henderson County Greenway Master Plan to reflect current progress, new



The 2012 Ecusta Rail Trail Planning Study & Economic Impact Analysis documented that initial construction would infuse \$42 million into the community plus an annual benefit of \$9.4 million in tourism revenue, health care cost savings and increased values of property along the trail.

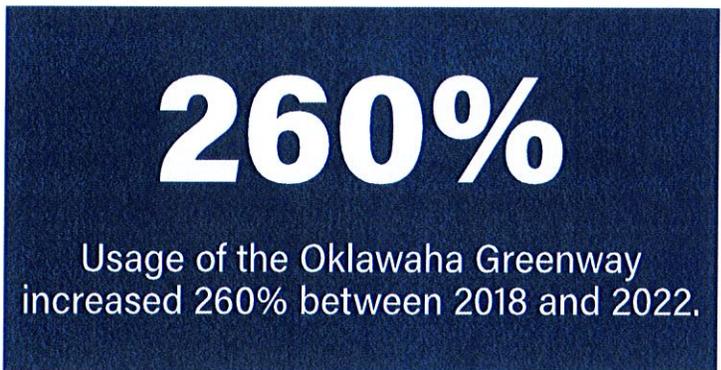
initiatives, updated funding opportunities, and tentative community partners.

- I: Ensure that new trails are adequately designed to be resilient and withstand extreme weather events, as well as design for stormwater best management practices (BMPs) and other flood prevention strategies.
- J: Appropriate hydraulic modeling should be performed whenever a **greenway** is to be constructed in a **floodplain**.
- K: Create a user-friendly, online method for people to report maintenance issues on County-maintained **greenways**.

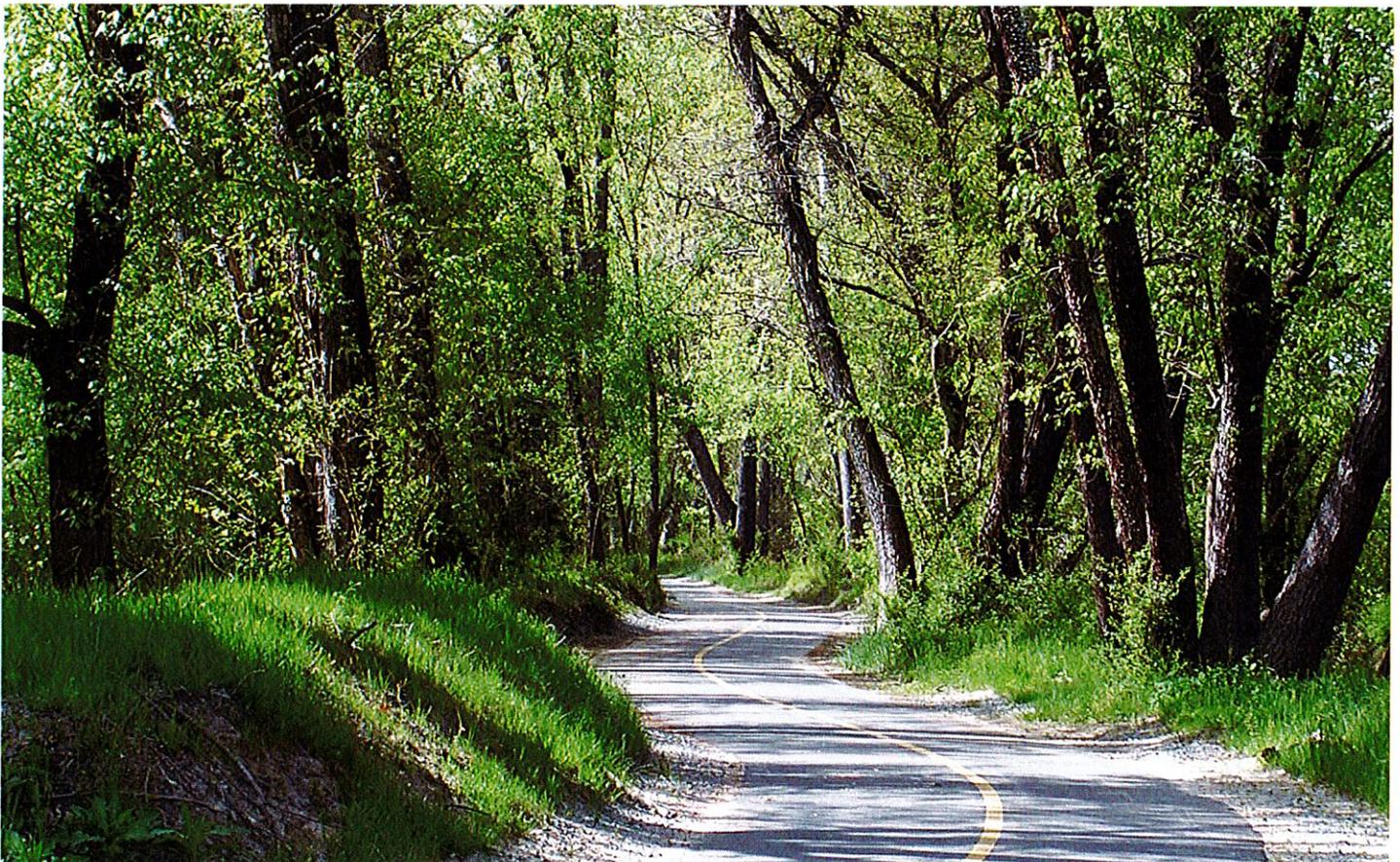
- This could be done via a smart phone application, a specific telephone line, or an email address dedicated to the **greenway** system.

Rec 4.7: Support education and encourage activities related to bicycling.

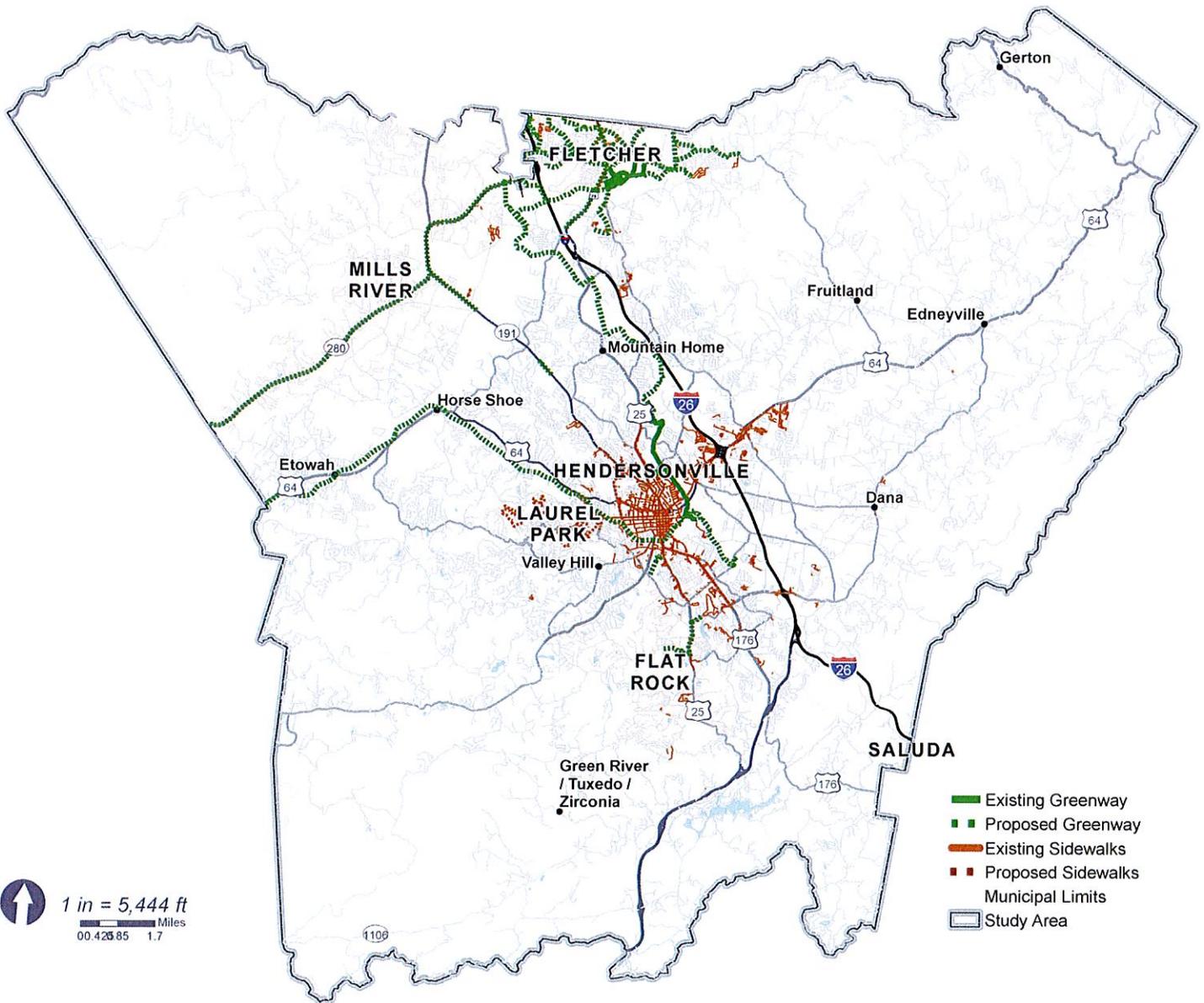
- A: Encourage skills clinics that teach novice riders how to ride safely and efficiently when riding alone or in groups.
- B: Encourage bicycle rides along designated rural routes in Henderson County and utilization of the Ecusta Rail Trail and other **greenways**.



The Oklawaha Greenway is a heavily used greenway in Henderson County. There are currently seven miles of existing greenway in the County. Greenways and trails were the highest priority of parks and recreation facilities identified at the public meetings for the Comprehensive Plan and have grown in popularity in recent years.



GREENWAYS AND SIDEWALKS MAP



The map above shows existing and planned [greenways](#) in Henderson County. The County's Greenway Master Plan identifies three priority greenways. Two of those greenways are fully planned and the Ecusta Trail will be fully built in the next 3-4 years. Future planning and design for greenway segments should seek to extend and connect existing facilities. Specifically connect Ecusta Trail's eastern terminus to the Oklawaha Greenway, Mud Creek Greenway, 7th Avenue, and the Clear Creek Greenway. Connect the Advent Health loop with the Cane Creek Greenway and also connect the Mills River Valley Trail to the French Broad River priority greenway & Ecusta Trail on the western side.

GOAL 5: CREATE A RELIABLE, CONNECTED UTILITY AND COMMUNICATION NETWORK.



Reliable, well-planned infrastructure systems keep a growing County functioning. Henderson County will expand and strengthen the systems that support everyday life for residents, specifically public utilities and communication infrastructure.

Smart utility planning creates a more cost-effective, efficient system, and will be a key tool in guiding development. This section also addresses ways to improve **broadband** access and cell coverage for County residents, which were common priorities specified in the community survey. While the County does not control these services, there are ways in which the County can work with partners to plan and support the develop the infrastructure that residents need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 5.1: Improve communications infrastructure.

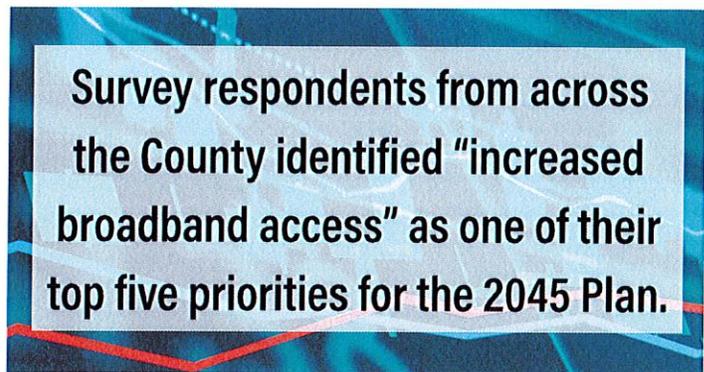
- A: Improve the County's **Broadband Availability Index** ranking per the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office.
- B: Pursue the extension of **broadband** Internet, especially trunk-line improvements or extensions between major population centers, including improvements along I-26.
- C: Continue participation in **broadband** planning programs. Work with the State to receive and distribute funding for building **broadband** infrastructure grants, such as the Completing Access to Broadband Grant Program.
- D: Continue County participation in the BAND-NC grant program to complete the county-wide **digital inclusion plan**.
- E: Implement the **Henderson County Broadband Taskforce's** recommendations concerning the most effective and legal role for Henderson County to take in assisting and promoting improvements and growth of **broadband** infrastructure.

Rec 5.2: Locate utilities to maximize efficiency of services, minimize cost of service, and minimize impacts on the natural environment.

- A: Initiate and conduct utility planning efforts that align with land use policies and community goals.
- B: Coordinate with local governments and regional entities to address service issues and secure long-term water and sewer capacity.
- C: Coordinate targeted utility and service enhancements within the defined **Utility Service Area**.
- D: Discuss with Henderson County Schools regarding alignment of future school planning with water and sewer infrastructure planning.

Rec 5.3: Use utilities to incentivize economic development and conservation opportunities.

- A: County staff and elected officials should coordinate with partners to plan for effective site readiness for specific economic development projects.
- B: Reserve a percentage of new sewer infrastructure capacity for economic development. Recalculate/reaffirm the percentage on an annual basis based on projection versus actual demand.
- C: Encourage conservation subdivision designs for all new major residential subdivisions residential growth in **unincorporated areas** tied to sewer infrastructure.



Rec 5.4: Take a leadership role in sewer and water planning by helping to foster intergovernmental cooperation.

- A: Recommend a water and sewer management structure including County and municipal participation to guide growth within the entire County.
- B: Conduct interchange studies with the City to evaluate and prioritize development potential of key interchanges for future commercial and/or industrial development.
- C: Begin the development of a three, five or ten-year capital improvement program and capital reserve fund to help implement planned investments in sewer infrastructure and other services.
- D: The Environmental Health Department should identify areas of septic failure, areas where future septic systems may fail, and address these through existing remediation programs and by leveraging state and federal grants.

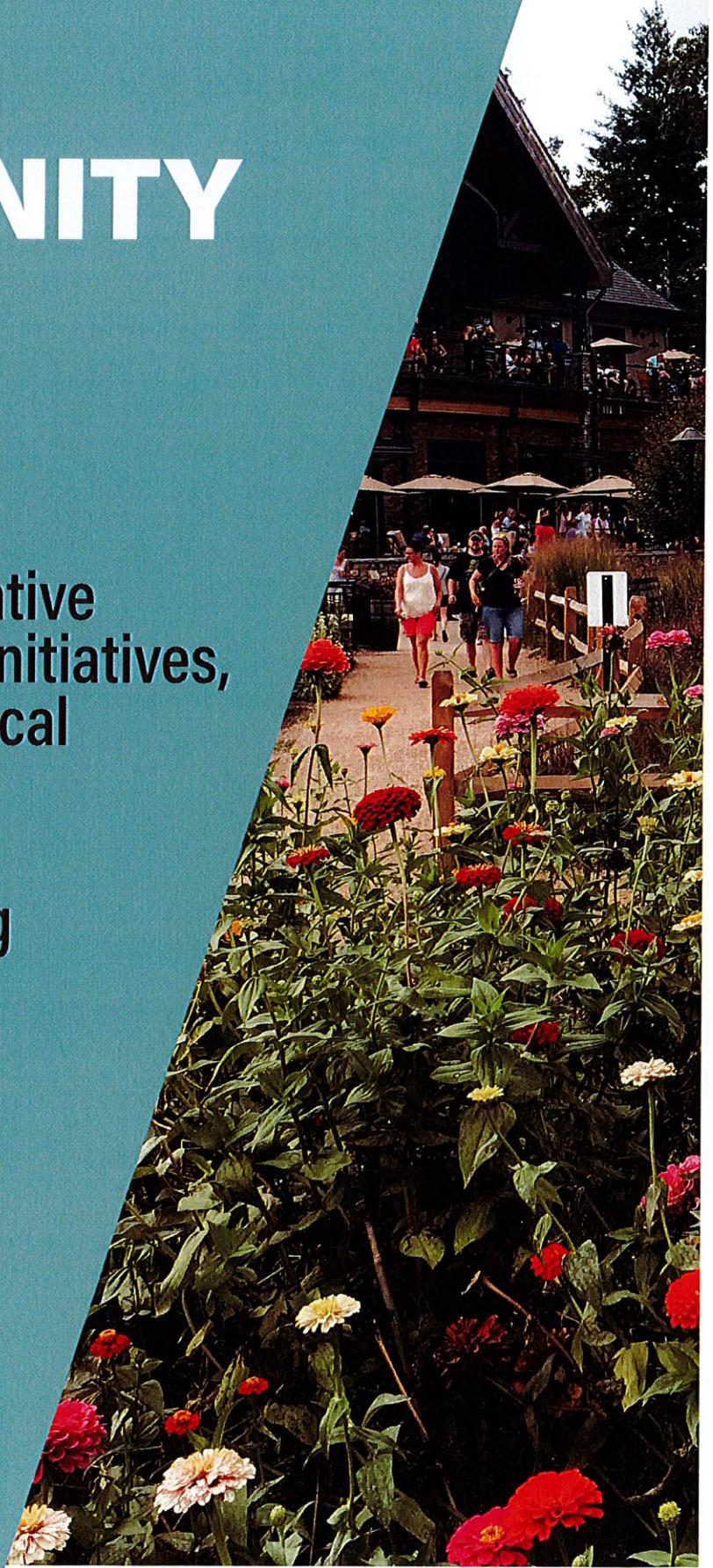
OUTCOME 3:

OPPORTUNITY

GOAL 6: Stimulate innovative economic development initiatives, entrepreneurship, and local businesses.

GOAL 7: Diversify housing choices and increase availability.

GOAL 8: Promote healthy living, public safety, and access to education.



GOAL 6: STIMULATE INNOVATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND LOCAL BUSINESSES.



Henderson County will continue to develop a thriving economy across all scales, from smaller local businesses to large employers. This robust and resilient economy will employ the County's abundant local talent pool and provide opportunity to residents.

The community's vision is for Henderson County to be a place of opportunity for all, where workers and businesses from every neighborhood can fully contribute to and participate in innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. To accomplish this, the County will bolster qualities that attract large employers while supporting, celebrating, and expanding the local small business network. It will encourage local higher-education to align today's students with tomorrow's employment needs. This will help County residents find work near home, keeping younger people in the County, and increasing community prosperity. Collaboration with partners such as BRCC and HCEDP is instrumental in accomplishing this goal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 6.1: Increase high-wage employment and foster growth in the local tax base.

- A: Using the Future Land Use Map, identify and publicize key sites for diverse industrial development in cooperation with The Partnership.
- B: Encourage rezonings to commercial and industrial zoning districts in areas identified as

Employment and Industry on the Future Land use Map.

- C: Allow for small scale businesses to easily develop in the Neighborhood Anchors to promote local spending.

Rec 6.2: Coordinate workforce education.

- A: Leverage partnership with Blue Ridge Community College to advance workforce development assets and respond to specific industry needs via curriculum updates and employer partnerships.
- B: Support Blue Ridge Community College in their mission to educate students for direct, local employment including new industry like greenhouses and other high-skilled work.

Rec 6.3: Advance small businesses and entrepreneurs.

- A: Encourage development of office, retail and light industrial space through land use and zoning decisions.
- B: Prioritize expansion of small business infrastructure needs such as high-speed broadband.

30%

of the County tax base is from manufacturing businesses. Each year manufacturing and industrial development contributes over \$5,000,000 in tax receipts to the County.

Source: Henderson County Economic Development Partnership

- C: Apply Blue Ridge Community College assets to respond to industry, consumer trends, and emerging opportunities.

IMPORTANCE OF MANUFACTURING in Henderson County



Henderson County has a successful history of supporting and attracting high-wage manufacturers. Currently, the more than 5,000 employees at local manufacturers earn, on average, 31 percent above the county-wide non-manufacturing average wage. Those residents with a high school degree earn 33 percent more in local manufacturing than the average worker with the same level of education in other local industries. Attracting and keeping manufacturers depends on the availability of suitable sites, good schools, and a high quality of life.

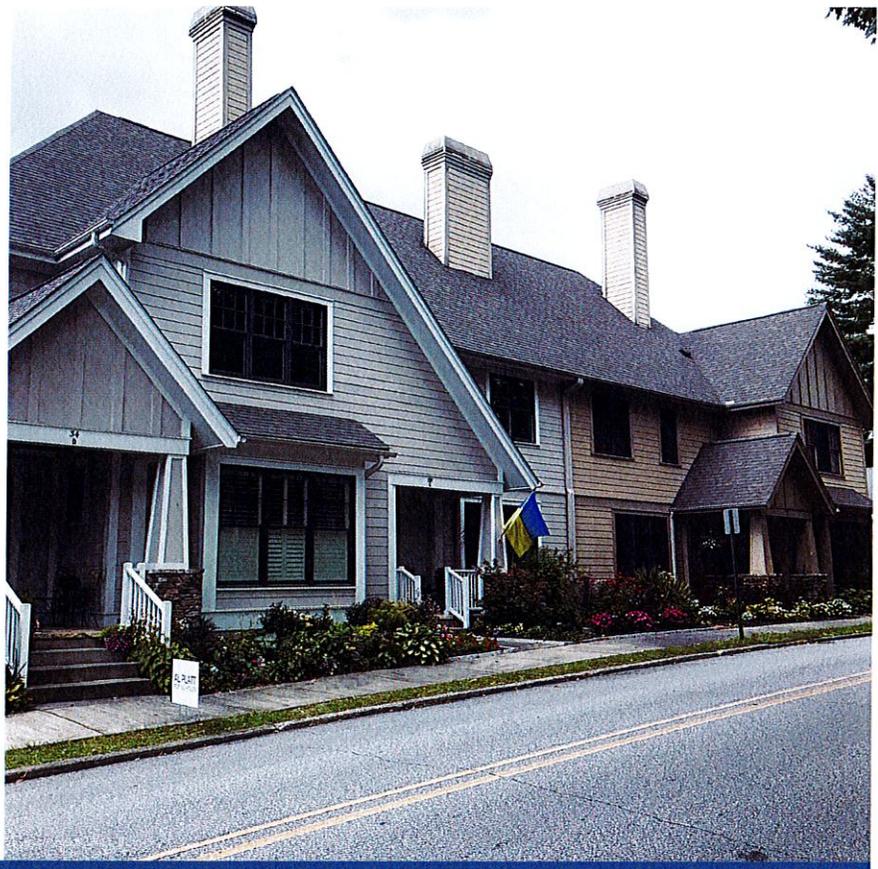
Rec 6.4: Facilitate placemaking efforts to reinforce community character and attract businesses and investment.

- A: Work with the Henderson County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) to develop a uniform signage style and place directional, gateway and/or historical signage within established community centers.
- B: Encourage NCDOT to improve the safety of intersections for pedestrians.
- C: Encourage TDA and the City of Hendersonville to locate an outdoor amphitheater space.
- D: Create a permanent shelter/farmers market space.

98%
of local businesses employ fewer than 100 workers, together accounting for 64% of all County jobs.



GOAL 7: DIVERSIFY HOUSING CHOICES AND INCREASE AVAILABILITY.



Concerns about housing access were well-documented throughout the public engagement process. Addressing housing availability and cost concerns is a significant task that will have implications for economic development, land use, transportation, public services, quality of life, and beyond.

Henderson County will utilize tools within its power to address both housing supply and housing accessibility. This will involve examining unintended obstacles to housing development within ordinances and proposing changes that will allow different densities and housing types. In order to realize the community vision of minimizing sprawl, vacant lots will need to become sites for infill, dis-invested places will need investment, and underutilized land will need to be repurposed for higher and better uses that improve the quality of life. The plan also looks at the particular needs of certain groups, such as the workforce, the elderly, and agricultural workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 7.1: Increase housing in the Utility Service Area (USA).

- A: Encourage rezonings to high density housing and mixed-use development within the USA.
 - Areas within the USA have access to transportation, utilities, and services. In addition, growth in these areas is less likely to create conflicts with agriculture and natural resources.
- B: To avoid conflict with agricultural areas and natural resources, major subdivisions should be located near defined centers and within the Infill and Transitional Areas as defined on the Future Land Use Map.
- C: Allow for a variety of housing types, including condos, townhomes, and multi-family complexes, in the defined [Utility Service Area](#).

- D: Re-evaluate standards for intermediate and maximum residential density within all zoning districts.
- E: Consider allowance for small-scale multi-family units (3-4 units) without a Special Use Permit if design criteria is met.
- F: Eliminate the requirement of a Special Use Permit for developments with attached residential units within the USA and keep the existing Special Use Permit for areas outside the USA.
- G: Encourage subdivision design to aesthetically mirror rural surroundings by developing a rural cluster option in the Land Development Code (LDC) that allows for smaller setbacks, building spacing, and innovative design in exchange for preservation of open space and views.
- H: Continue to provide a density bonus for conservation subdivisions.
- I: Consider administrative approval for conservation subdivisions.

- C: Allow for cottage clusters (pocket neighborhoods) and for multi-family developments that meet affordability standards in certain zoning districts.
- D: Allow for a variety of housing types and mixed-use development at appropriate key locations along the Ecusta Rail Trail within the potential overlay district.
- E: Support affordable housing developments within rural, agricultural areas and residential zoning districts.

Rec 7.2: Encourage development of affordable and inclusive housing.

- A: Encourage developers to offer at least two lot size options and/or varied housing product types in major residential subdivisions.
- B: Consider creating incentives for the inclusion of affordable or workforce housing in new developments.
 - Incentives could include a density bonus or reductions in site design requirements (i.e. amount of required open space).



TRAIL-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

in Henderson County

The Future Land Use Map encourages mixed-use development near and around the future Ecusta Rail Trail. When these areas are developed, they should be encouraged to orient their structures toward the trail to fully maximize their location. Adding features such as seating areas and service windows on the trail side of the building will encourage users to stop and patronize their businesses, and can contribute to the social quality of the trail. The photo here shows an example of an active trailside business along the Baltimore and Annapolis Trail.

(Source: via arlnow.com)

Rec 7.3: Support the ability to "age in place."

- A: Encourage age-sensitive design in all residential developments to appeal to a variety of residents.
- B: Consider adjustments to the [Land Development Code](#) to allow for assisted living residences that meet supplemental standards and have water and sewer connections within the USA without a [special use permit](#).
- C: Provide option for administrative provision of a percent reduction in parking space requirements for retirement and/or age-targeted housing developments.
- D: Consider accessibility for seniors when creating new recreation spaces.
- E: Promote the "Village Network" model, similar to that of Saluda, among older populations.
 - Saluda ([SLIPNC](#)) provides a model of a "Village Network" where neighbors help each other age in place.

25%
of the County's population is age 65 or older, compared to 16% statewide.
Source: 2021 Community Health Assessment

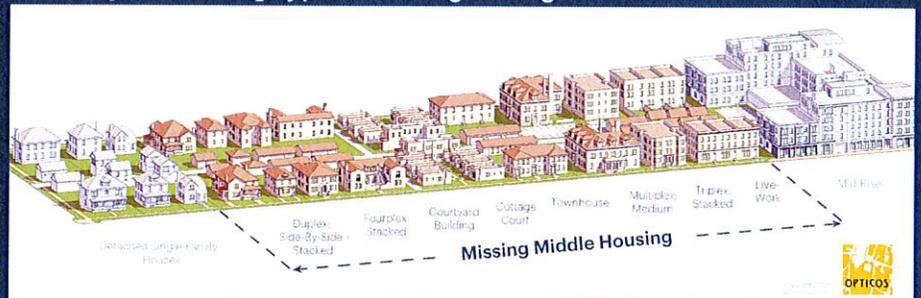
- F: Continue to allow for accessory dwelling units.
- G: Partner with municipalities to study housing needs, disseminate information on housing options, and increase supply of affordable, workforce housing.

Rec 7.4: Locate workforce housing near jobs.

- A: In accordance with guidance from the Future Land Use Map, support residential development near employment areas and in and around commercial centers.

MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

Research shows there are numerous benefits to mixed-income and mixed-use communities, including encouragement of wealth building and opportunity for all residents. The anchor strategy of the plan supports this concept, which includes quality housing that is affordable and attainable for a variety of income levels. These kinds of communities should see investments focused at anchors and in Neighborhood Anchors, along with a variety of housing types meeting a range of household sizes and incomes. Housing developments should include attached and detached housing in the form of missing middle housing, which can include live/work units, townhouses, courtyard apartments, fourplexes, and more. (Source: missingmiddlehousing.com)



- B: Coordinate with municipalities to jointly plan for areas near new employment areas that share municipal and County jurisdiction.
- C: Educate the community regarding the North Carolina Migrant Housing Act that requires standards for living quarters.
- D: Increase awareness of USDA Farm Labor Housing Direct Loans and Grants.
- E: Support innovative housing solutions that serve seasonal and year-round farm workers.

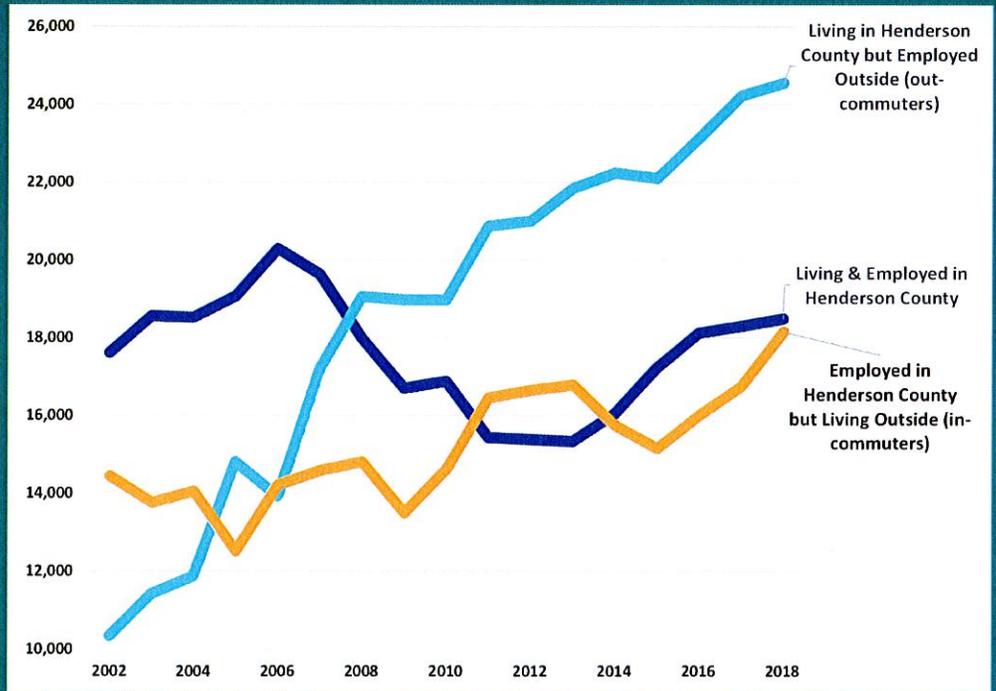
WORKFORCE COMMUTING

in Henderson County

As of 2018 around 18,000 workers in Henderson County commute from other counties. The cost of housing in Henderson County contributes to this trend. Stakeholder interviews stressed that lack of housing and housing prices make it difficult to recruit highly attractive workers. Providing more workforce housing in and near municipalities can help reduce commute times and allow public and private employees to become more invested in the County.

Workforce Commuting Trends

As of 2018, 24,000 residents commuted outside of Henderson County to work. Although commute times are below the North Carolina average (21.8 Minutes compared to 24.8 minutes in NC) these trends contribute significantly to traffic on major roadways. Providing more jobs and housing locally could help to slow growth in out-commuting and in-commuting.



GOAL 8: PROMOTE HEALTHY LIVING, PUBLIC SAFETY, AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION.



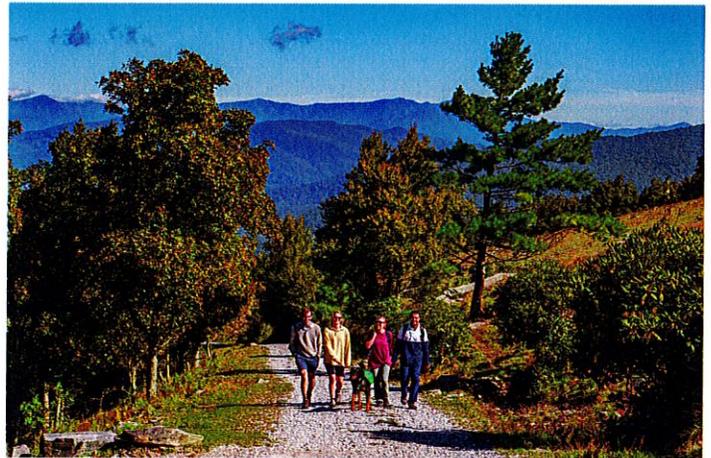
Community health and safety, educational access, and access to parks all play a role in contributing to quality of life. The 2045 Comprehensive Plan identifies improvements and promotes the programs, spaces, and civic infrastructure that supports a high quality of life. Using this Plan, the County will create safe and accessible places to recreate that will promote active living for residents, and bolster tourism. The County will also work to increase access to medical care and healthy food, and address public safety issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 8.1: Encourage healthy living by expanding access to parks, greenways, and other recreational amenities.

- A: Plan for recreational needs of the communities in Henderson County.
- B: Address facilities and programming priorities, document ongoing maintenance needs, and provide benchmarking related to facilities and staffing within a master plan.
- C: Develop a multi-year capital improvement plan for park facilities that includes planning for major maintenance expenditures.
- D: Continue to support the development of all-inclusive playgrounds in the County.
- E: Develop a master plan for Jackson Park. The master plan should address connectivity, parking issues, facility enhancements, and involve a variety of user groups.

- F: Pursue grant funding and other funding sources for the replacement of playgrounds at Etowah and East Flat Rock park.
- G: Consider additional county-owned parks, including pocket parks, in areas of the County with under-served populations.
- H: Enhance programming to address the needs of senior and disabled populations.
- I: Improve access to rivers for recreational purposes through partnerships with RiverLink and other stakeholders.
- J: Coordinate with municipalities, [Conserving Carolina](#), the US Forest Service, the North Carolina Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to improve and increase access to existing hiking, camping, fishing, and additional recreational opportunities.
- K: Encourage new development to incorporate recreational needs into the [open space](#) design of new subdivisions.
- L: Encourage major subdivisions to provide pedestrian connections or provide easements to immediately adjacent greenway facilities.
- M: Work with the [Henderson County Tourism Development Authority](#) to provide support for safe and sustainable recreational tourism.



PARKS AND RECREATION

in Henderson County

The Henderson County Parks and Recreation Department (HCPRD) oversees the programming, maintenance, rental of facilities, safety, and usage of twelve parks in Henderson County. County maintained parks include the Athletics & Activity Center, Blantyre River Access, Dana Community Park, East Flat Rock Park, Edneyville Community Center, Edneyville Community Park, Etowah Park, Jackson Park, Tuxedo Park, Upper Hickory Nut Gorge Trailhead, and Westfeldt Park. The County is also home to many large tracts of public lands including Pisgah National Forest, Dupont State Forest, the Green River Gamelands and a portion of Chimney Rock State Park. Conserving Carolina, the local land trust in active in permanently protecting sensitive lands in the County and manages a number of properties for conservation, though many do not have public access.

N: Consider investment of a county-owned indoor and outdoor sports complex.

Rec 8.2: Improve and coordinate access to health services.

- A: Coordinate with the County Health Department and non-profit partners to promote physical and emotional resiliency through the utilization of existing parks for physical and mental health programs.
- B: When expanding public transit and para-transit services, consider connecting areas with medical services to residential areas for easier access.
- C: Address substance misuse and mental health by utilizing the opioid litigation settlement funds to support programs and spread awareness of *Strategy-Specific Resources* for addiction recovery.
- D: Consider creating a collaborative "Recovery Court" (also known as drug diversion court) in Henderson County for low-level offenses.

What are "food deserts"?

Food deserts can be defined as an areas that lacks access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet.

Source: Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

22.4%

of adults in Henderson County reported that they get the recommended amount of physical activity

Source: 2018 Community Health Assessment

Rec 8.3: Expand access to healthy food.

- A: Review zoning ordinances to facilitate grocery stores, farm stands and other commercial food retail establishments in rural food deserts.
- B: Increase local retailers' awareness of the North Carolina Healthy Food Retail Designation Program.
- C: Study the creation of a farm-to-foodshare program, a farm-to-school program, or similar programs to connect local farms with food insecure residents and students.
- D: Support and expand farmers markets in rural areas, either by introducing new traditional farmers markets or creating a mobile version.
- E: Identify and work with partners to establish an organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of local food products from a variety of sources including new and urban farms.

Rec 8.4: Provide high-quality public and emergency services.

- A: Plan for expansion of public services, capital projects, and personnel, in proportion to increasing demand.
- B: Incorporate emergency service access into planning decisions.
- C: Discourage high-density growth in areas not currently served by fire, police, and emergency

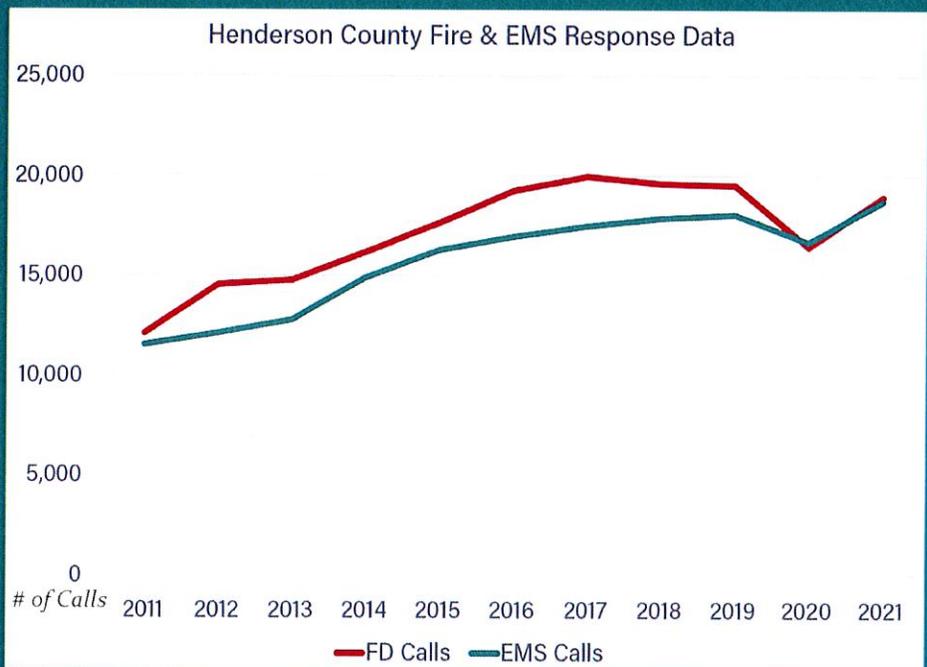
services. Substations should be considered for areas that have suburban densities.

- D: Plan for mental health needs and encourage best practices during healthcare, public safety, and emergency response interactions.
- E: Ensure efficient and equitable public service by providing information in other languages. Consider contracting an on-call interpreter firm to better serve non-English speaking community members.

DEMAND FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

in Henderson County

The County's increased population means an increased need for emergency services. The graph shows the increase in County Fire and EMS calls since 2011, which have been steadily rising, with the exception of during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. According to County emergency service data, Edneyville's calls alone increased from 863 in 2011 to 1,312 in 2021. As growth continues, the County will need more fire and emergency services stations to efficiently serve residents. This will become increasingly important with an aging population and as natural hazards become more frequent.

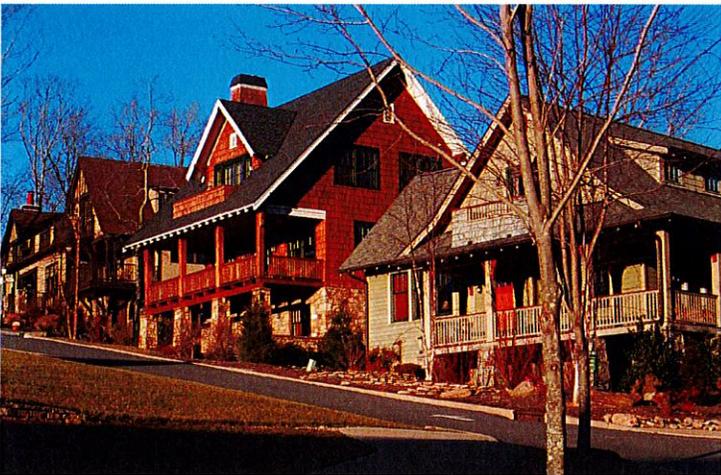


Rec 8.5: Coordinate and support the school system.

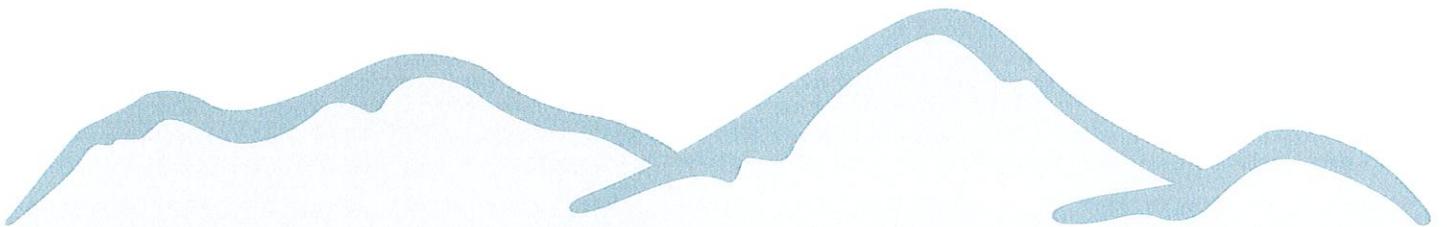
- A: Collaborate with the School Board to plan for capital needs as the County grows.
- B: Partner with nonprofits and other organizations to expand services for early childhood education including Head Start.
- C: Support programs that help underserved students stay in school.
- D: Assist [Blue Ridge Community College](#) to maintain low tuition costs for all students.
- E: Support [Blue Ridge Community College](#) to provide a variety of training courses focused on workforce readiness.

Rec 8.6: Increase access to education for every community member.

- A: Support nonprofits in their endeavor to assist non-English speaking community members with government services including student applications to [Blue Ridge Community College](#).
- B: Offer courses for technological literacy and educate the public on internet safety.
- C: Ensure public libraries are adequately equipped for future growth and are placed in multiple locations around the County to increase access.
- D: Support the County libraries in their programming and outreach efforts.



Blue Ridge Community College offers multiple education options that benefit the diverse community needs. The school's success will continue to help make Henderson County a wonderful place to learn.



Page Left Intentionally Blank