

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental relationship exists among human beings, the land on which we live, and the environment that sustains us. All of our activities tend to create demands for land and natural resources. As these demands grow with increases in population, land and other resources become more precious to us. With this realization comes the recognition of the need to plan for the utilization and development of these scarce resources. When this planning is viewed as a process, it evolves into a series of decisions regarding not only the utilization of land, but also the development of the wide range of facilities that occupy the land and influence its utilization.

Such a comprehensive planning process was undertaken for Henderson County, North Carolina, with the development of the Henderson County 2020 Comprehensive Plan (hereafter, "Comprehensive Plan"). This Comprehensive Plan represents the latest in a series of major planning initiatives by Henderson County. Others included the 1993 Comprehensive Land Use Plan; the Henderson County, NC, 2000 Study: Blue Ribbon Study on the Future Growth and Development of Henderson County; the Henderson County Land Use Plan (1977); and numerous municipal plans.

Credit for this meaningful undertaking belongs to the collective vision of the individuals serving on the Henderson County Board of Commissioners, past and present. These leaders, working hand-in-hand with the community, have recognized the need to understand the change which is taking place in the community, and to attempt to guide and influence future change by setting growth and development objectives and by formulating realistic policies and decisions designed to achieve those objectives.

This commitment to setting a course for the county's future was summed up well by former Henderson County Commissioner Marilyn Gordon when she commented in an editorial in the *Hendersonville Times-News* in July of 2001 that, "The focus of any planning effort shouldn't be just where things go and how they look. The vision needs to be much more comprehensive than that. Just as we arrange our homes to fit our lifestyles and adjust to the personalities of all who live there, so must a county plan do the same."

General Purpose of the Henderson County 2020 Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan is intended to serve as a guide for the County's government and its appointed bodies in the development and management of growth and related public services and infrastructure. It is an expression of the County's goals and objectives for growth management. It is intended to be representative of a dynamic process which reflects a balance between facilitating change in the community, preserving community traditions and the natural environment, and improving the quality of life.

Mission Statement of the Henderson County Board of Commissioners

The Mission Statement of the Henderson County Board of Commissioners serves as the basic foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. The Mission Statement, adopted December 17, 2003 by the Board of Commissioners, is shown below:

"Our mission is:

- *to lead our community;*
- *to promote individual responsibility and equal opportunity;*
- *to protect life and property;*
- *to provide efficient, innovative, and quality public services;*
- *to provide services required by Federal and State mandates;*
- *to stimulate economic growth and regional cooperation, and*
- *to balance the preservation and utilization of all of our resources."*

Key Principles of Growth

The Recommendations and Action Strategies presented within this Comprehensive Plan are founded upon the following *Key Principles of Growth*:

- High Quality of Life
- Balanced, Sustainable Growth
- Sustaining our Heritage, Culture, and Traditions
- Economic Sustainability
- Fiscal Sustainability
- Environmental Sustainability

- Accessibility, Efficiency, and Equity in the Provision of Services, Facilities, and Resources
- Regional Coordination and Collaboration
- Community-Based Planning

Each *Principle of Growth* is described in detail below.

High Quality of Life

The overarching objective of this Comprehensive Plan is to preserve the county's high quality of life. The concept of *quality of life* is expansive and not easily defined, but it can be considered to be comprised of several key attributes:

- "Small town" feel and pace of life
- Diverse, stable economy with meaningful opportunities for employment
- Pristine, biologically diverse natural environment
- Rural landscape and scenic vistas
- Appalachian culture and traditions intermixed with growing cultural and ethnic diversity
- High quality education system
- Vibrant, healthy downtowns

Balanced, Sustainable Growth

It is the County's objective to establish a desirable balance between development and preservation. This will allow the community to continue to grow in a manner that reflects an acceptable standard of quality and complements our excellent quality of life, rural traditions, and natural environment, which we greatly value. It is also the County's objective to:

- Understand the physical and economic limitations that may influence growth and change in our community, and factor these limitations into our planning so as to avoid mistakes which would cause damage to our established communities, local traditions, valued cultural resources, prime agricultural land, and natural environment.
- Facilitate an overall approach to managing growth which will enhance our existing communities, foster rational decision-making, and enhance and protect property values and the rights of our citizens.

- adopt a comprehensive approach to planning that links physical, environmental, economic, social and cultural issues

Sustaining our Heritage, Culture, and Traditions

Balanced, sustainable growth reflects Henderson County’s heritage and traditions. Fundamental to this objective is a healthy respect for property rights, lifestyle choices, and the protection of those cultural resources and practices that symbolize the history and traditions of the region. Also fundamental to this objective is an understanding that growth and change is inevitable and necessary, and that County polices cannot – and should not – prevent it. Likewise, those who currently enjoy the fruits of previous change and growth should not seek to curb future change and growth, but should work to ensure that it is locally appropriate and sustainable.

Economic Sustainability

Balanced, sustainable growth means promoting economic expansion and job growth by sustaining existing businesses and recruiting new ones. A sustainable economy is diverse, has a strong local focus, and operates within the limits of the natural environment and the vision of the public. It requires energy, creativity, innovation, and responsibility in order to fulfill its potential.

Fiscal Sustainability

Balanced, sustainable growth requires rigorous, conservative management of fiscal resources. *Fiscal Sustainability* reflects the need to make efficient use of the County’s financial resources and to minimize future obligations imposed on the citizens of Henderson County, while at the same time providing services and facilities to support future growth. It requires the efficient development of services and public facilities to enhance development while preventing unnecessary waste, undue taxation, and long-term debt. It requires innovative approaches to funding the construction of services and facilities, and the reliance upon natural systems for the provision of services for which they are best suited.

Environmental Sustainability

Balanced, sustainable growth is environmentally sustainable in that it maintains the integrity of complex ecological systems while promoting economic viability and social equity. Growth and development are essential for economic sustainability, but they

must occur in ways that minimize impacts on the natural functions of the county's landscape.

Growth should be designed to maintain sensitive lands and habitats, to minimize its footprint on the land in order to retain natural features, and to make use of natural processes rather than human engineering whenever possible.

Accessibility, Efficiency, and Equity in the Provision of Services, Facilities, and Resources

It is Henderson County's objective to ensure that all people have access to and use of community facilities and services, irrespective of such factors as age, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion, disability, income, or geography.

It is the County's objective to provide for the essential services and facilities that are vital to the continued, positive growth of our community. As good stewards of the community's resources, we must plan for the efficient development of these services and facilities and direct our growth and economic development to areas that can be served efficiently, while discouraging development in areas that cannot be efficiently served.

Regional Coordination and Collaboration

It is the County's objective to promote meaningful intergovernmental and regional solutions to the management of growth and the development of essential public infrastructure required to sustain future growth. Collaborative planning and implementation at all levels of government enhances communication, ensures an exchange of information, and enables all entities to plan services and facilities for the future in an integrated fashion. It is the County's objective to strengthen and foster innovation in its relationships with organizations and institutions that promote regional solutions to growth management, service provision, and conflict resolution.

Community-Based Planning

It is the County's objective to build a planning framework that is based upon democratic ideals, that promotes community pride and ownership in government, and that fosters civic engagement. Citizens should have the opportunity to participate in and influence the decision-making processes that affect their daily lives and their community.

Finally, it is County's objective to create a meaningful comprehensive planning process and to routinely re-examine and revise the resulting policies to meet the changing needs of our community.

How this Plan Should Be Used

This Comprehensive Plan contains specific Recommendations and Action Strategies which are intended to inform periodic revisions to the Henderson County Strategic Plan and Capital Improvement Program. More generally, this Comprehensive Plan shall serve as a guide for major decisions and actions of the County government, including those regarding zoning, transportation, sewer and water infrastructure, and others.

The Recommendations and Action Strategies of this Comprehensive Plan can also be used by the public to gain an understanding of the County's long-term intentions regarding land use management. Specifically, realtors, developers, and prospective homebuyers can look to the Future Land Use Map (Appendix I, Map # 24) for guidance regarding the geographic placement of future investments.

The Planning Process

This Comprehensive Plan was developed at the direction of the Henderson County Board of Commissioners, including members both past and present, and reflects the collective vision and leadership of that body. It was adopted on July 06, 2004.

This Comprehensive Plan was developed as a cooperative effort of the Henderson County Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee and the Henderson County Planning Board. These two committees formed the County Comprehensive Plan Joint Committee. Technical work and coordination was provided by County Staff. The Planning Board and Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee recommended this Comprehensive Plan to the Henderson County Board of Commissioners on May 20, 2004, and May 24, 2004, respectively.

Assistance was provided by a number of individuals and organizations, including the Henderson County Comprehensive Plan Community Committee (See Appendix III) who provided advice throughout the process.

The Dispute Settlement Center of Henderson County, Insight Research, Inc. and the Latino Advocacy Coalition provided assistance in gathering public input. The Agriculture Element of this Comprehensive Plan was drafted through a cooperative effort of the Henderson County Soil and Water Conservation District; the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Henderson County Center; the Henderson County Planning Department; and Land-of-Sky Regional Council. Funding for the Agriculture Element was provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program. Assistance for the Housing Element was provided by Land-of-Sky Regional Council and the Alliance for Human Services. Staff of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Community Assistance, and Dennie Martin of Martin-McGill Associates provided their invaluable knowledge and insight throughout the process.

Most importantly, the wisdom of the citizens of Henderson County informed the development of this Comprehensive Plan. Citizens contributed in a number of ways, including attending community meetings and completing surveys. This Comprehensive Plan was also informed by earlier public input efforts such as *Designing Our Future* and input efforts of the Greater Hendersonville Chamber of Commerce.

PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK