



Henderson County

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

DRAFT: September 9, 2022

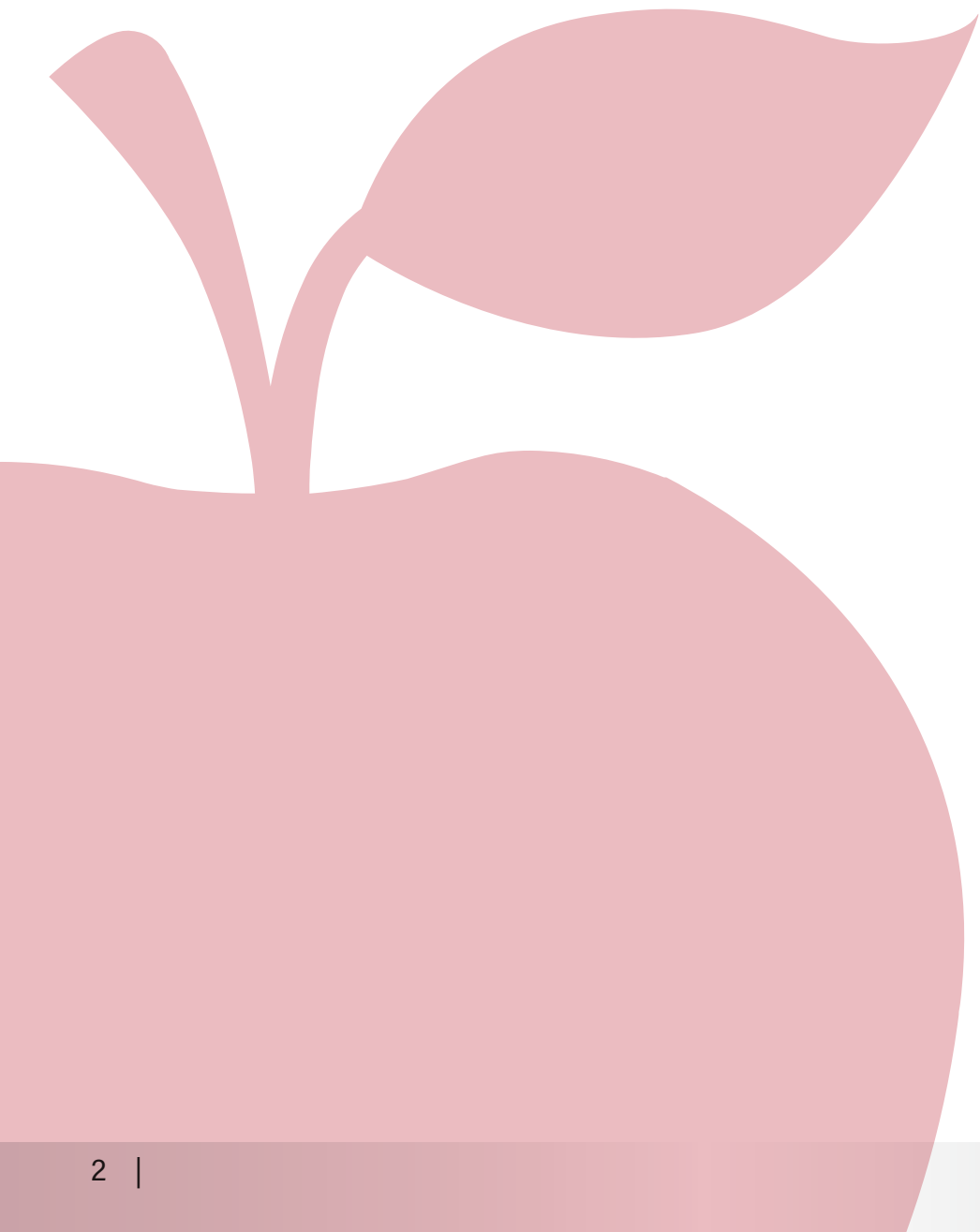
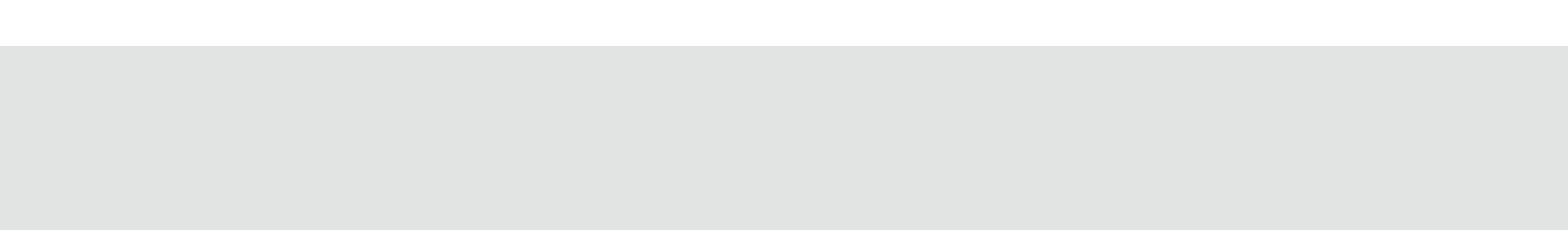


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PLAN PROCESS

How We Got Here

Project Background

History

Past Planning Efforts

Where We Are

Community Profile

Public Engagement

Emerging Issues

Where We Want To Go

How To Use This Plan

Outcomes

Plan Goals

HOW WE GOT HERE

PROJECT BACKGROUND

PLANNING FOR HENDERSON COUNTY

An updated Comprehensive Plan is a State of North Carolina requirement, but even more, it is an essential tool for guiding a County's growth and development.

In the summer of 2021, Henderson County undertook the process of creating a new Comprehensive Plan. The result is a document that establishes a vision for the community and guides the County's growth and development for the next 20 years.

PROCESS

The 18 month-long process consisted of substantial community engagement paired with in-depth analysis of the existing conditions in the County. To better understand past and present conditions of Henderson County, the County conducted demographic research, spatial analysis, and reviewed existing planning documents. To create a vision for the future, the County sought input from stakeholders, members of the public, County departments, and leadership.

ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement formed the foundation of this plan. Outreach included public meetings, a community survey, and conversations with many County stakeholders, residents, and community members. A summary of public engagement activities is available in Chapter Two of the Comprehensive Plan. These included:

- Project Website
- Stakeholder Focus Groups
- Community Survey
- Public Meetings
- Presentations to Local Groups
- Steering Committee Meetings

See Appendix for a full list of outreach efforts.

*The Comprehensive Plan will make land use recommendations for the **unincorporated area** of the County.*

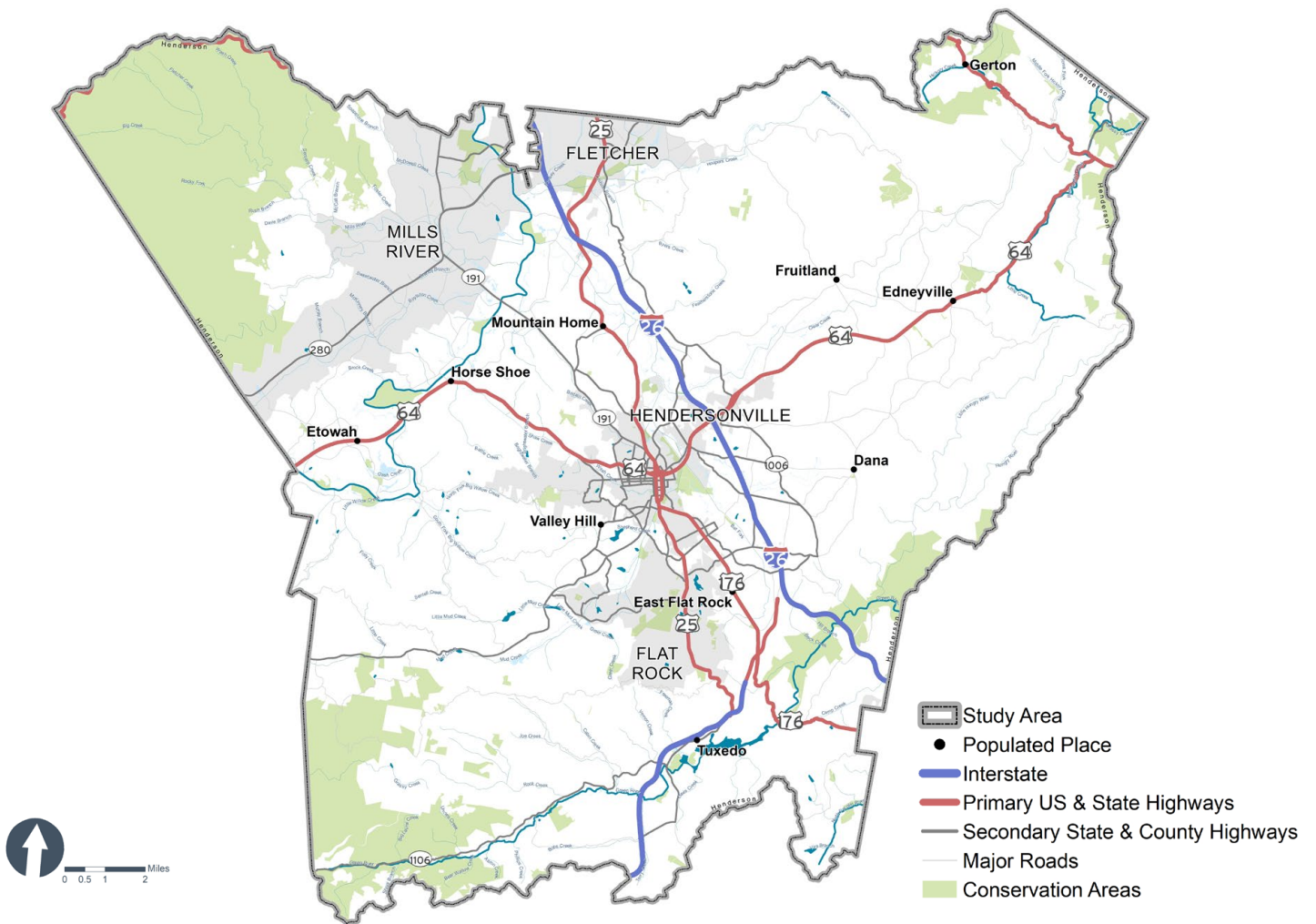
General Project Schedule



STUDY AREA

The Comprehensive Plan offers land use regulations for the unincorporated area of Henderson County. Within the municipalities, the towns have jurisdiction over land use decisions. Each municipality participated in the planning process to ensure cohesiveness as community members traverse jurisdictional boundaries. Understanding that all County residents pay taxes to and benefit from County services and programs, the entire Henderson County community was invited to participate in the planning process. This input will influence concerns, such as recreation planning and infrastructure, that affect all County residents no matter which jurisdiction they live in.

The study area covers the entire County. Roughly 60% of the County's population lives within unincorporated areas.



HOW WE GOT HERE

WHY PLAN?

An updated Comprehensive Plan is a State-required document for enacting zoning in North Carolina. It is also a strategic tool for local governments to shape the future of their communities.

It presents an opportunity every 5-10 years for a community to have a conversation about:

- where they are,
- where they're going,
- where they want to be,
- and how they will get there.

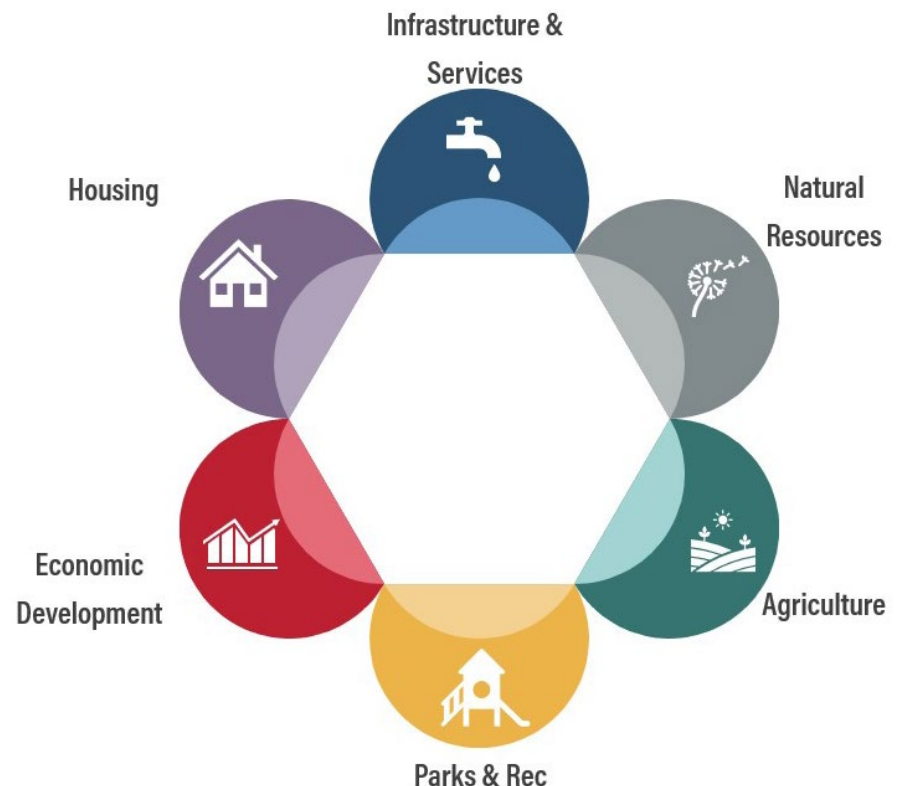
WHY NOW?

The current plan was adopted in 2004 and has outgrown its usefulness. Since that time, development increased rapidly as many retirees chose to settle here. Additionally, the current Comprehensive Plan was adopted prior to implementation of county-wide zoning. In result, the future land use map does not adequately reflect the desires of the community to preserve their agricultural and environmental assets, while balancing economic growth. This plan addresses those factors and many others, ensuring it serves present and future residents alike.

The Comprehensive Plan will serve as guidance for planning and decision-making in Henderson County such as:

- Zoning Updates
- Land Development Code Updates
- Corridor Studies
- Parks and Recreation Planning
- Transportation Planning
- Economic Development
- Rezoning Decisions
- Funding Allocation

A Comprehensive Plan addresses, but is not limited to...

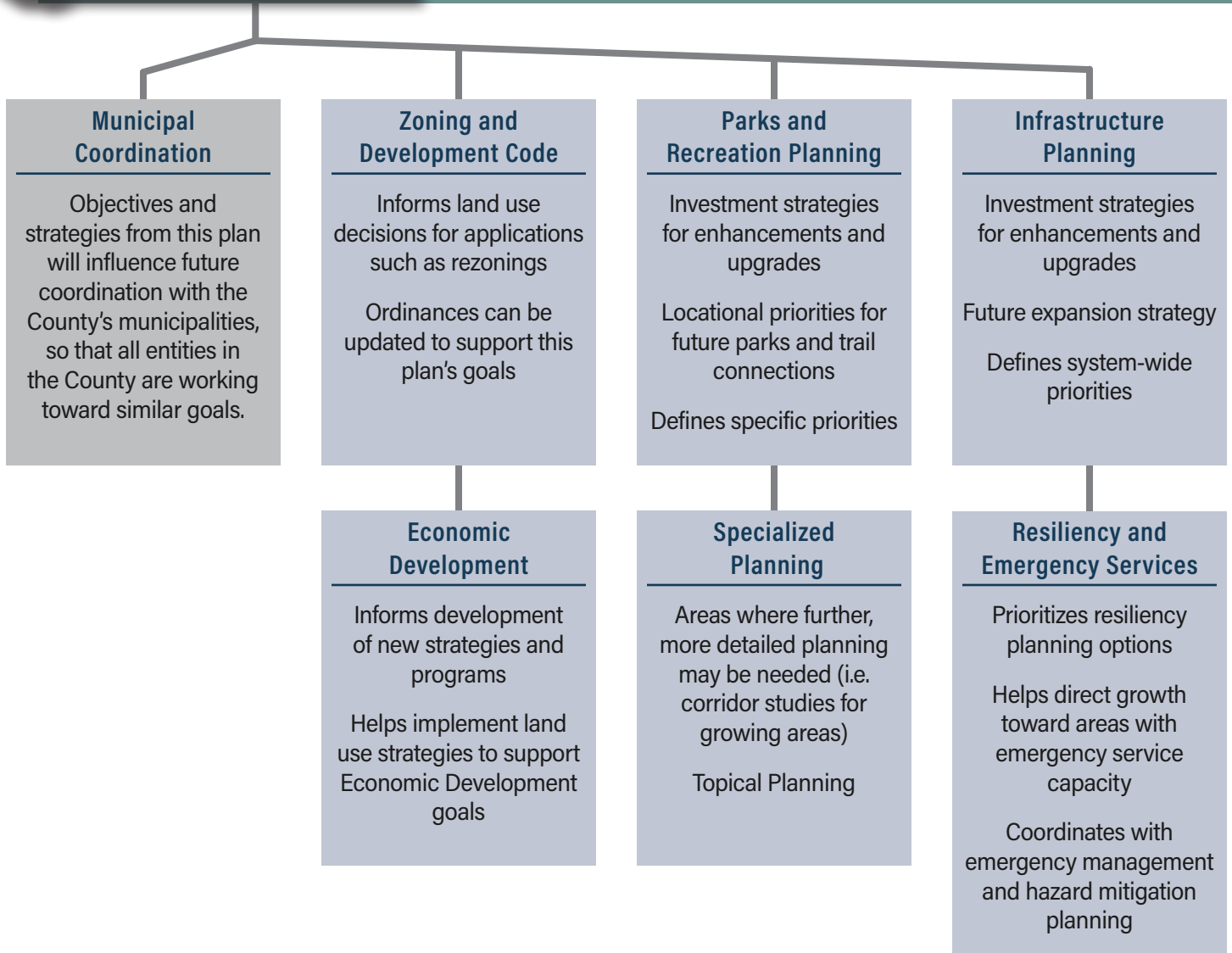


HOW DOES THIS PLAN FIT IN WITH OTHER PROCESSES?

Regional planning is informed by and informs the Comprehensive Plan.



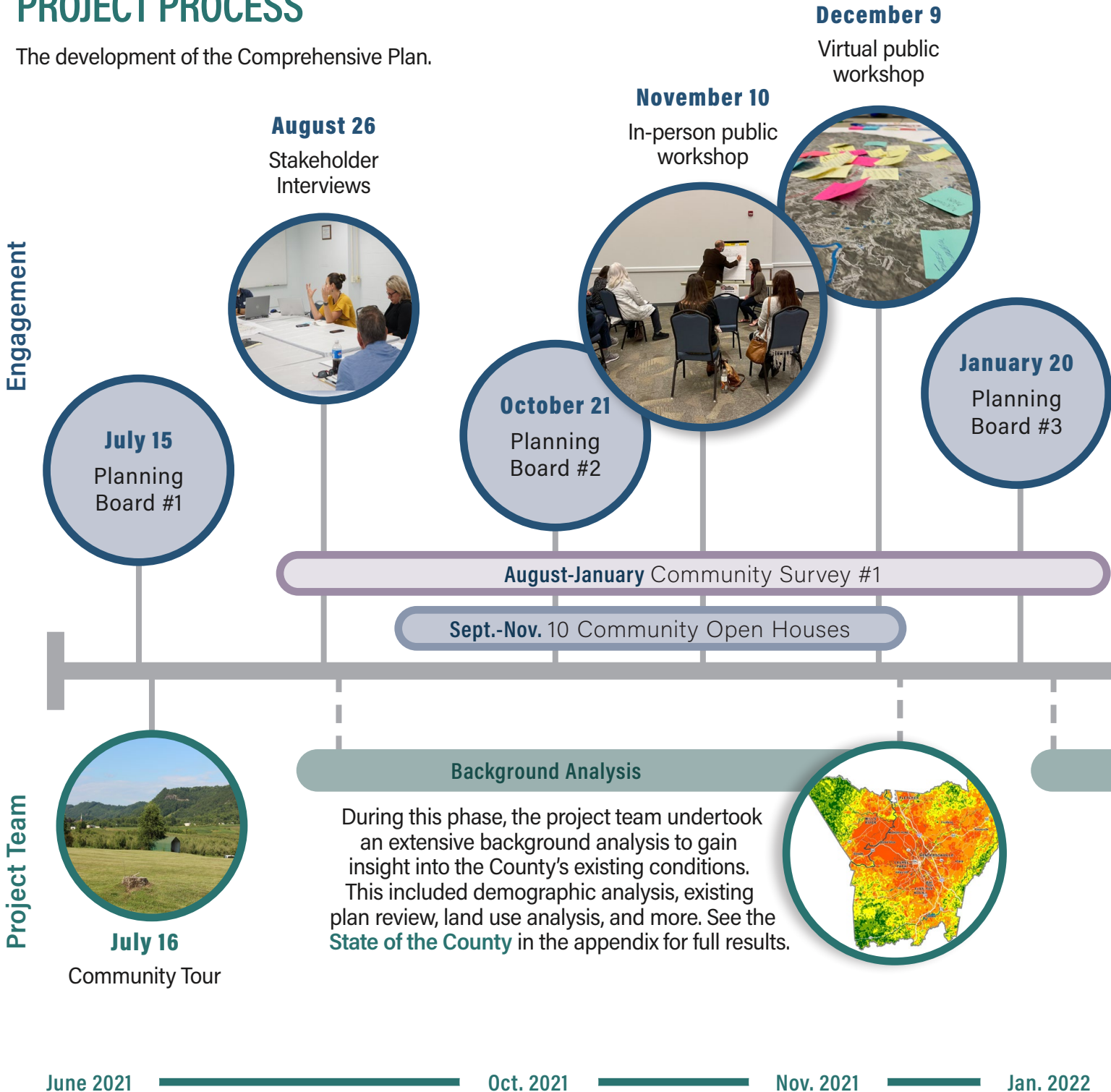
The 2045 Comprehensive Plan will inform all other planning and policy-making that affects the development of the County.



HOW WE GOT HERE

PROJECT PROCESS

The development of the Comprehensive Plan.



To be updated as additional engagement occurs in fall of 2022

Planned - Sept. 13-27

Draft Plan public meetings



**Planned Nov./
Dec. 2022**
Adoption



Plan Development

During this phase, all feedback received from the public in the first half of the project was synthesized along with the background analysis, together, these create the backbone of the draft plan.

Before its adoption, the draft plan continued to be refined based on feedback heard from the public and the Steering Committee.



May 2022

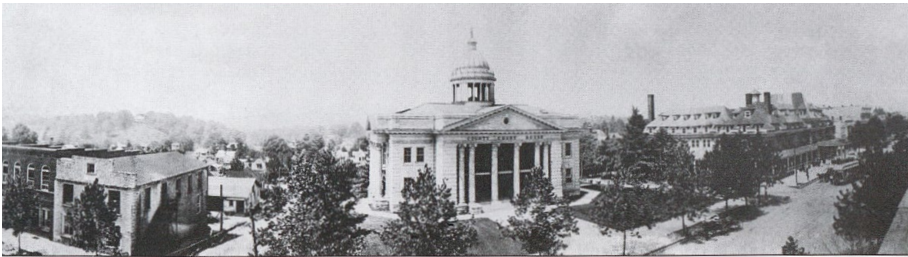
Sept. 2022

Nov. 2022

HOW WE GOT HERE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HENDERSON COUNTY

The land that would become Henderson County was first inhabited by the Cherokee, Catawba, and their ancestors for thousands of years prior to European settlement. While Native Americans and Europeans continued to live in proximity to each other, European settler expansion eventually culminated in the Trail of Tears, forcibly relocating the majority of Native Americans westward. In the same year of 1838, Henderson County was created out of Buncombe County, named after Judge Leonard Henderson.



Hendersonville's Main Street in the early 20th century. The 1904-1905 Henderson County Courthouse is shown in the center. (Photo by A. F. Baker, from the collection of the Henderson County Genealogical and Historical Society.)

In 1841, the central location of Hendersonville was voted to be the County seat, and the town received its charter from the North Carolina General Assembly in 1847. Henderson County initially began as a small rural county, though it quickly became a summer escape for the wealthy elite of South Carolina's Lowcountry. The Village of Flat Rock was the primary location for these early visitors. The County's first railroad, opened in 1879, traversed from Charleston to Hendersonville, winding up the Saluda Grade.

The introduction of rail into the County spurred further population and development. Soon after, railroads connecting the County to the North, West, and South were built. These new connections meant a diversification of the County's economy. Connecting the County to the region initiated the rise of industry. The mining of granite and limestone became a source of wealth. New factories began to open, with the first in 1907, Green River Manufacturing. Canneries began to sprout up, as

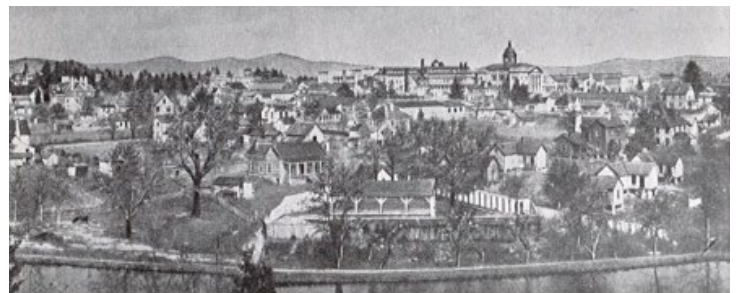
the County's locally grown produce could now be shipped even further through this food preservation process.

New access to the County created a rise in tourism. In the early 20th century, establishments including boarding houses, inns, and hotels began to open, especially around Hendersonville and what would soon be Laurel Park Estates. The famous hotels included the Skyland, The Wheeler (Terrace), and the never completed Fleetwood Hotel.

In the mid-20th century, tourism changed to include a new demographic: children and young adults. Summer camps became increasingly popular and the climate of Henderson County offered an ideal location for many. The first North Carolina Apple Festival in 1947 offered another reason to visit and has continued to draw thousands of tourists every year since.

Today, Henderson County continues to thrive on its agriculture, natural resources, tourism, industry, and most of all, its people. To plan for the future, the County must acknowledge its past and current strengths, in order to provide the best recommendations for the County possible.

*Sources: Fain, Jr, James T. "A Partial History of Henderson County." Arno Press, New York, 1980.
Ruscin, Terry. "Images of America: Henderson County." Arcadia Publishing, Charleston, 2018.*



Hendersonville as seen in 1910. (Photo by A. F. Baker, from the collection of the Henderson County Genealogical and Historical Society.)

PLANNING MILESTONES

1838

Henderson County is created from Buncombe County.

1841

The County votes to locate the County seat centrally along the north-south road (the Buncombe Turnpike), rather than on the French Broad River near present-day Horse Shoe.

1847

Hendersonville is issued a town charter from the NC General Assembly, becoming the County's first municipality.

1876

The first railroad through Henderson County is completed.

1925

Town of Laurel Park is incorporated.

1966

The first section of I-26 opened from NC 280 to the US 25 connector.

1969

The Henderson County Water and Sewer Plan is adopted.

1976

I-26 from Asheville to the SC border was completed.

1977

The County's first land use plan is adopted.

1989

Town of Fletcher is incorporated.

1993

The County's second land use plan is adopted.

1995

Village of Flat Rock is incorporated.

2003

Town of Mills River is incorporated.

2004

The 2020 Comprehensive Plan is adopted.

2007

The County eliminates open-use zoning and implements its present-day zoning code.

2009

The 2020 Comprehensive Plan is amended.

2009

The Etowah/Horse Shoe Community Plan is completed.

2010

The Edneyville Community Plan is completed.

2011

The Dana Community Plan is completed.

2014

The Green River/Tuxedo/Zirconia Community Plan is completed.

2018

The East Flat Rock Community Plan is completed.

2019

The Greenway Master Plan is adopted.

2021

The 2045 Comprehensive Plan process begins.



WHERE WE ARE

COMMUNITY PROFILE

The statistics and graphics in this section of the 2045 plan report provide highlights from the analysis conducted as part of the plan. More detail is included in the Appendix.

POPULATION

Henderson County has been experiencing significant growth since 2000. Population in the County as a whole increased by 27,106 or 30%. Population in the unincorporated area experienced a similar increase. All jurisdictions grew over 25% since the year 2000 except Saluda (11%) and Laurel Park (12%). Projections from the NC Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) indicate that this growth pressure is likely to continue.

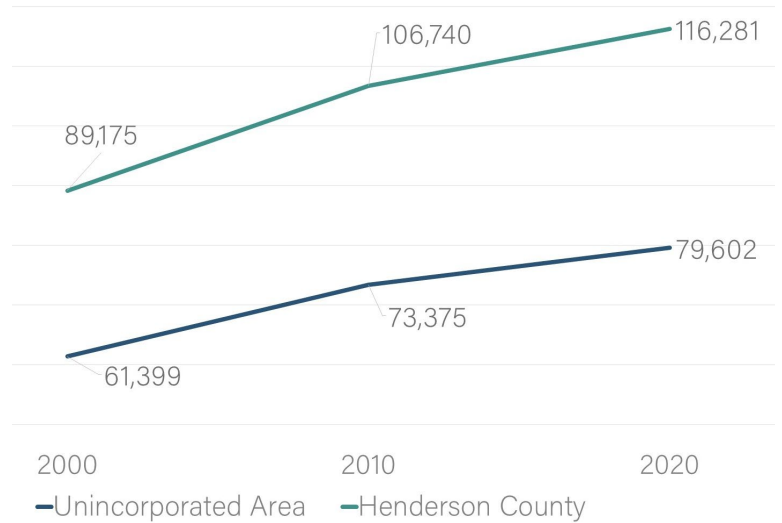
A significant amount of the population is located in the unincorporated areas of the County. Population density is highest in Hendersonville and along I-26. The Etowah, Dana and Fruitland areas also have slightly higher densities than the remainder of the more rural areas in the County.

POPULATION GROWTH TABLE

AREA	POPULATION		% GROWTH
	2000	2020	
SALUDA	667	741	11.1%
LAUREL PARK	2,006	2,250	12.2%
FLAT ROCK	2,587	3,486	34.8%
MILLS RIVER	5,566	7,078	27.2%
FLETCHER	4,586	7,987	74.2%
HENDERSONVILLE	12,364	15,137	22.4%
UNINCORPORATED	61,399	79,602	29.6%
HENDERSON COUNTY	89,175	116,281	30.4%

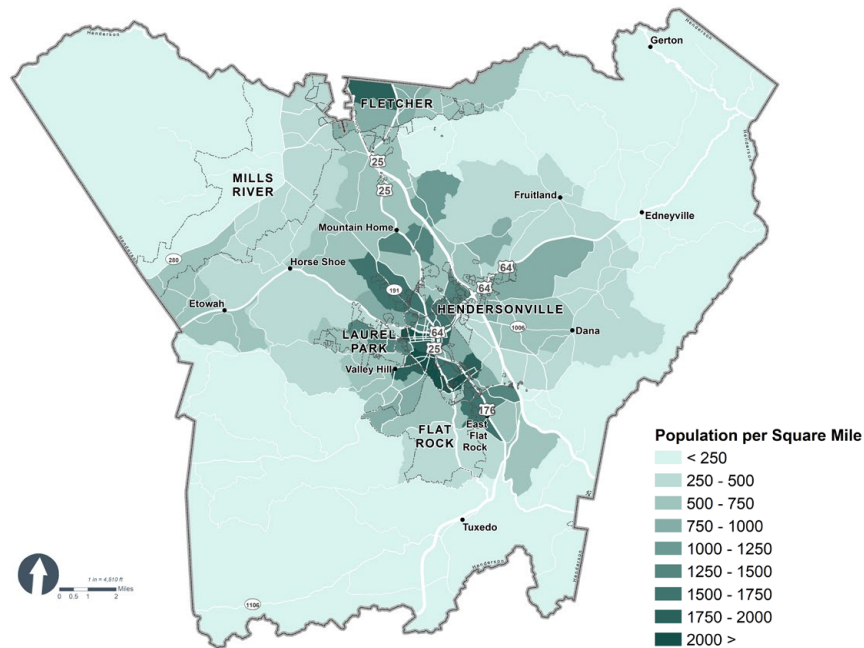
Source: 2020 Census
(except Saluda (Esri))

POPULATION GROWTH 2000-2020



Source

POPULATION DENSITY MAP



HOUSING

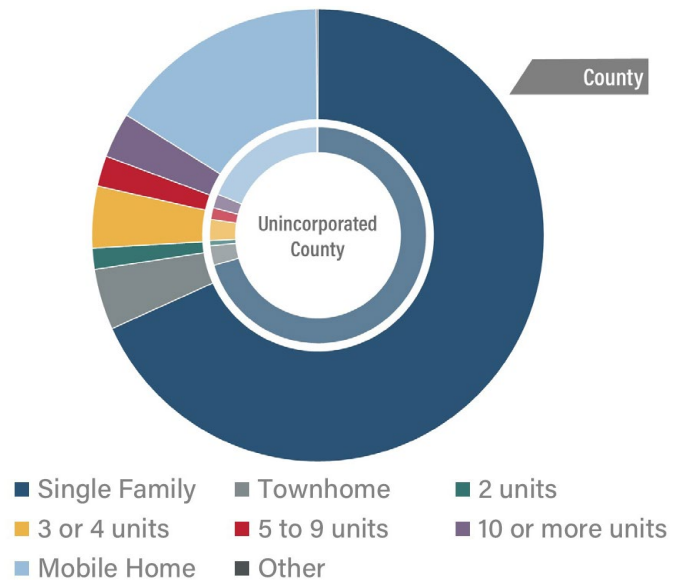
There are 58,811 housing units in Henderson County (Census, 2019). Over 15,000 housing units have been constructed between 2000 and 2019, but the majority of these (11,257) were built between 2000 and 2009. Recently approved developments in the County are set to add more than 2,600 homes over the next several years (Source: BlueRidgeNow.com).

Sixty-eight percent of total existing housing units in the County are single-family homes. Sixteen percent are mobile homes. Townhomes and duplexes make up 5.8% of units. Structures with more than 2 units make up almost 10% of units.

Housing Costs

Housing costs have increased significantly over the last few years. The average sale price for housing in 2021 was \$416,000. Prices varied significantly between areas of the County (\$278,000 in Laurel Park to \$510,000 in Flat Rock and \$629,000 in Mills River) (Source: Stakeholder Interviews).

HOUSING TYPE

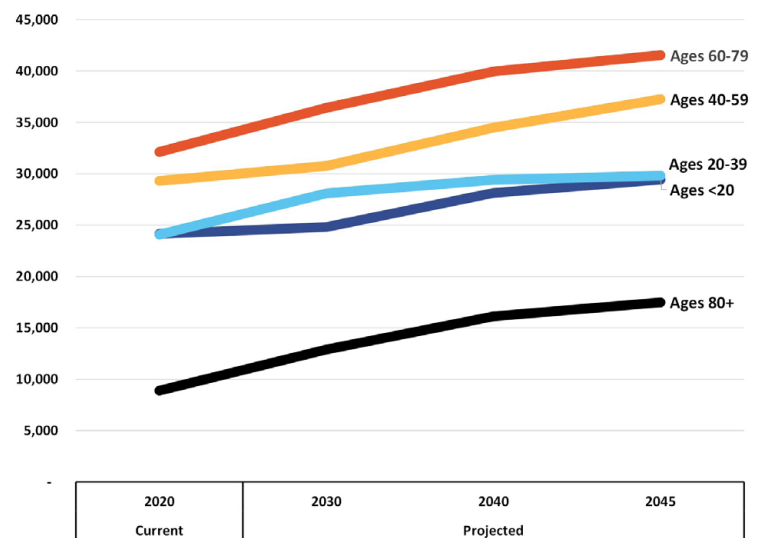


Source: 2019 Census ACS Data

AGE

Henderson County has an older population than the remainder of North Carolina. Median age in the County is 48.1 years old. The median age is projected to remain above the nation and the state and reach 49.9 by 2045. All age groups are projected to increase in size with the cohort between the age of 60 and 79 projected to remain the largest age group in Henderson County.

AGE COHORTS



Sources: NC Office State Budget & Management, SYNEVA Economics

INCOME

Median household income in Henderson County is \$58,928 which exceeds that of all other counties in Western North Carolina and North Carolina as a whole (\$56,642)(Source: Census 2020). When broken down by age of householder, the median household incomes are shown in the following table.

HOUSEHOLDER AGE	2020 INCOME ESTIMATE
UNDER 25 YEARS	\$37,304
25 TO 44 YEARS	\$60,125
45 TO 64 YEARS	\$68,423
65 YEARS AND OVER	\$50,316

WHERE WE ARE

LAND USE

EXISTING LAND USE

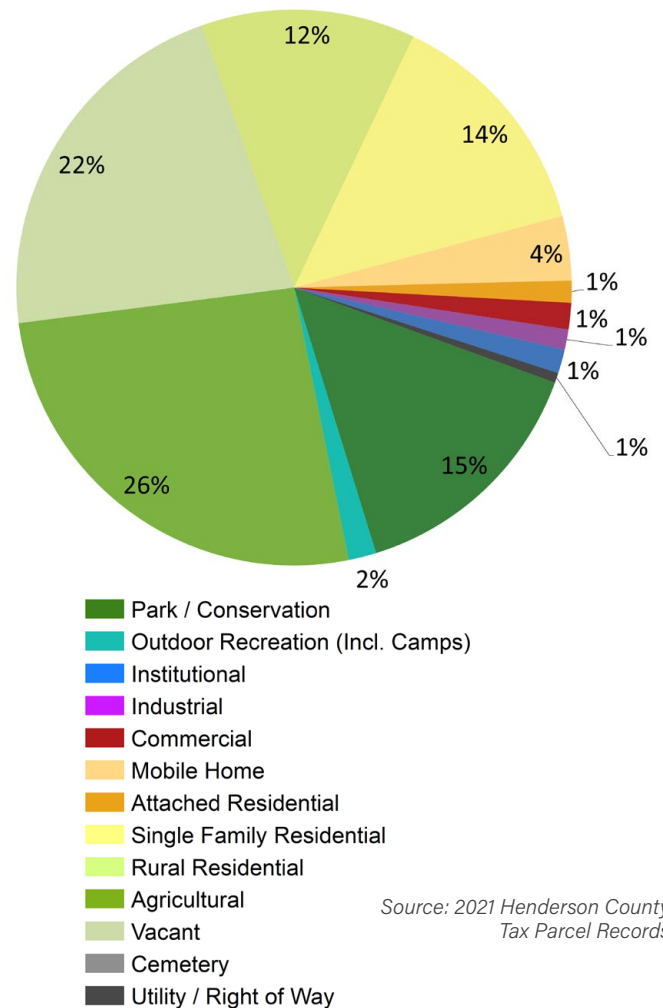
Henderson County experienced significant growth since 2000. Some areas of the County have seen residential growth, while others have seen more commercial or industrial development. In some, more isolated, parts of the County, land use trends have changed little during the last 20 years. The following chart and map show existing land use in the County. Existing land use is determined using a combination of parcel data and aerial imagery. It represents a current inventory of how land is used. Highlights from the existing land use inventory include:

- Commercial and industrial uses make up 2.7% of land (~6,200 acres) and concentrated along highways (I-26, US-64, NC 191, NC 280)
- Agriculture (including timber) covers 26% of land (60,000 acres)
- Subdivisions and attached residential cover 18% of land
- Rural residential (residential uses on lots >5 acres), 13% of land
- Parks and conservation areas total 15% of land

PROPERTY VALUE

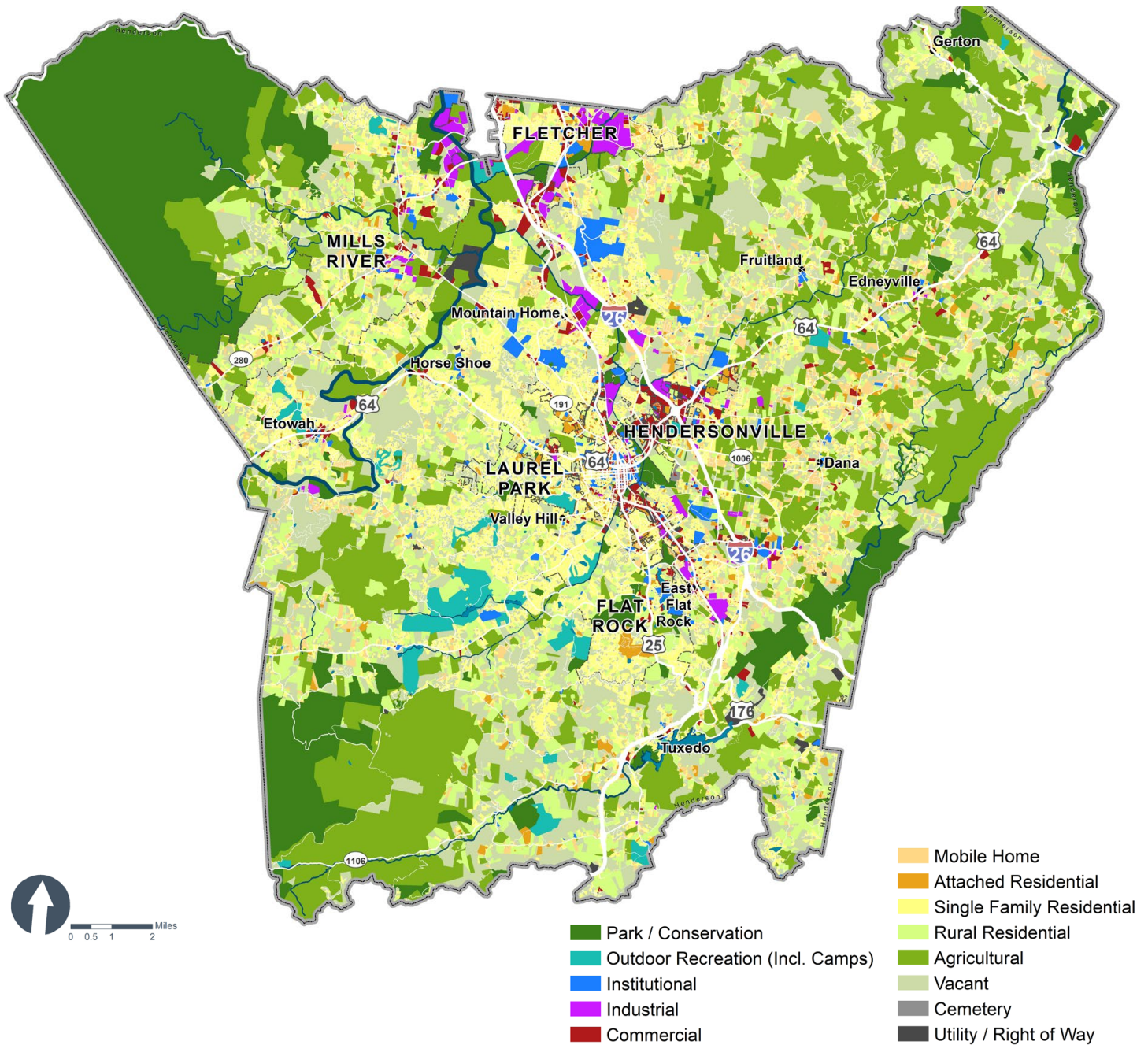
Commercial and industrial uses make up 2.6% of land but 13% of property value for the County. Subdivisions and attached residential make up 18% of land and 63% of property value. Values per acre vary significantly based on geographic area and type of development. The style of development with the highest value is in downtown Hendersonville where multi-story mixed use buildings reach values of \$8,000,000 per acre.

EXISTING LAND USE
BY PERCENTAGE



Source: 2021 Henderson County
Tax Parcel Records

EXISTING LAND USE MAP



WHERE WE ARE

COST OF SERVICES

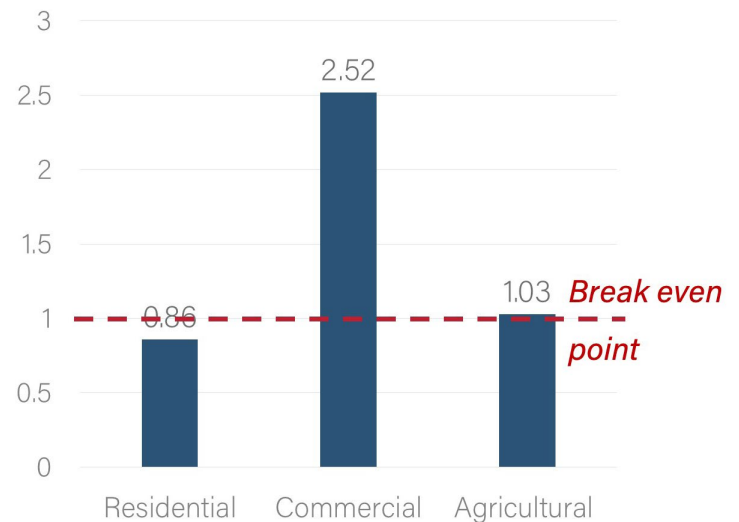
In 2008, the Cost of Services Study was conducted for Henderson County. Key findings from this study include:

- Residential development typically costs more in services compared to tax revenue produced.
- For every \$1 in services commercial properties consume they provide \$2.52 in revenue*.
- For every \$1 in services agricultural properties consume they provide \$1.03 in revenue*.

Takeaways from the analysis of existing land use and property value trends and review of the previous cost of services research include:

- Residential land uses typically consume more in services than they produce in property taxes. Even though this study was completed prior to the establishment of seven wineries and multiple new greenhouses, keeping land in agriculture can be financially beneficial to Henderson County from a tax base and cost of services perspective. This is especially true if the alternative is to replace agriculture with lower value residential development.
- Commercial and industrial development can help keep residential property taxes low by producing more taxes than these properties consume in public services.
- Some commercial development types are more financially beneficial than others. Storage facilities have a relatively low tax value and do not create many local jobs, whereas industrial uses add more value to the tax base (land value and property value (i.e. machinery)) and contribute jobs to the local economy. Multi-story mixed-use development produces more tax revenue than it consumes in services. Finding opportunities for more valuable development in key areas would benefit the County's financial future.

REVENUE / EXPENDITURE RATIO BY LAND USE*



Source: Henderson County Cost of Services Study, 2008

*Notes: Commercial land use types include industrial and manufacturing uses. Agricultural statistic is for agricultural production only, many agribusinesses have a rate of return more similar to commercial.

AGRICULTURE

AGRICULTURAL OVERVIEW

Henderson County's agricultural heritage is key to its identity. The industry is experiencing change, such as the conversion of farmland to development, an increase in greenhouses and silviculture, and the increasing popularity of agritourism and vineyards. Programs such as the State Present Use Value (PUV) program and the County's Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program help farmers keep their land devoted to agriculture. Encouraging participation in these programs and employing careful land use decisions can help to preserve the County's agricultural industry.

Present Use Value Program (PUV)

The Present Use Value program offers up to 90% tax savings for private eligible landowners in North Carolina. The PUV program has four classifications to qualify for enrollment including agricultural, horticultural, forestry, and wildlife use. Property that is accepted into this program is taxed at its "present use value" as a farm. This value is usually less than the market value of the property. The difference between the market value and the present use value is "deferred."

When property is removed from the program, the deferred taxes from the current year, and the previous three years plus interest, become due.

Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD)

Voluntary Agricultural Districts are areas in Henderson County set aside by property owners for agricultural use only. Members of voluntary agricultural districts receive increased protection from nuisance lawsuits, rights to public hearings before any condemnation proceedings, and public recognition of their commitment to maintaining the rural part of their heritage.

Benefits and Threats

Agriculture is a high-value resource to Henderson County and has many economic, environmental and cultural benefits. Farming is part of Henderson County's heritage dating back to the early settlers. The apple is included in the County seal and a major part of the County's identity. Agriculture is nearly a \$1 billion industry and includes 4,000 jobs with approximately 40% high-tech and managerial positions (Source: AgHC).

Farmland also provides greenspace and adds to the scenic beauty of the County. This open space captures greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to effects of climate change, such as floods, fires, and landslides. In addition to traditional farming, future growth opportunities include agritourism, modernized greenhouses and controlled environments, processing, distribution, wineries, cideries, and high-tech (ag-tech) operations.

Threats to farmland and agricultural industry include aging farmers, labor (shortages and costs), increasing production costs, and loss of farmland to development.

There are
59,000 acres
of Present Use Value (PUV)
properties in the County.

Source: Henderson County Tax Records

WHERE WE ARE

ECONOMY

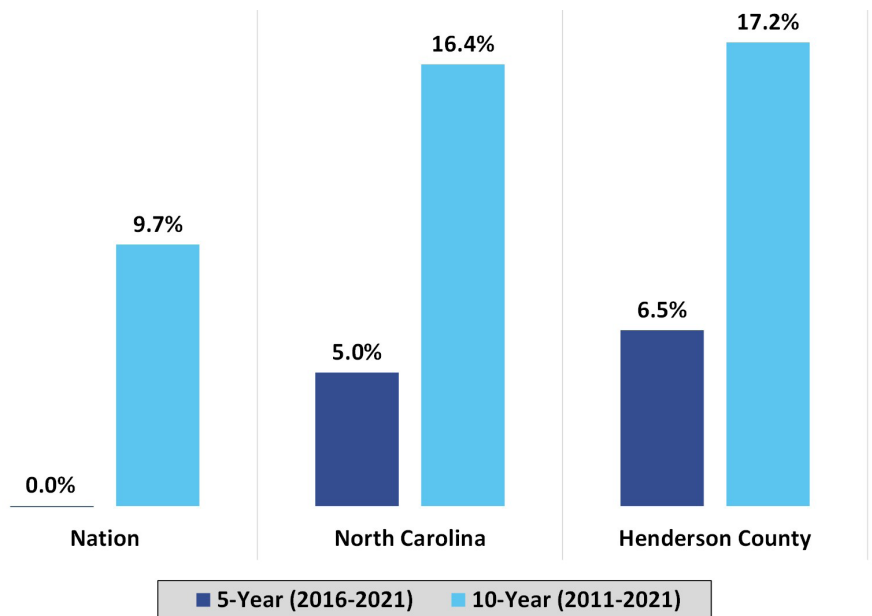
Job growth rates in Henderson County have exceeded that of North Carolina and the nation as a whole. Median household income is higher than any county in Western North Carolina. The most recent data from the American Community Survey (2020 ACS data) shows a median household income of \$58,928 for the County. Buncombe County has the second highest median household income in western North Carolina at \$55,032.

Henderson County's economy is anchored by manufacturing, tourism, and agriculture. It is also heavily influenced by retirees and the second home industry.

The Henderson County Partnership for Economic Development works to attract and retain high quality jobs in the County. Industrial growth has generated \$947 million of investment in the County and makes up 30% of the property tax base (HCPED presentation at the Board of Commissioners meeting, April, 2022).

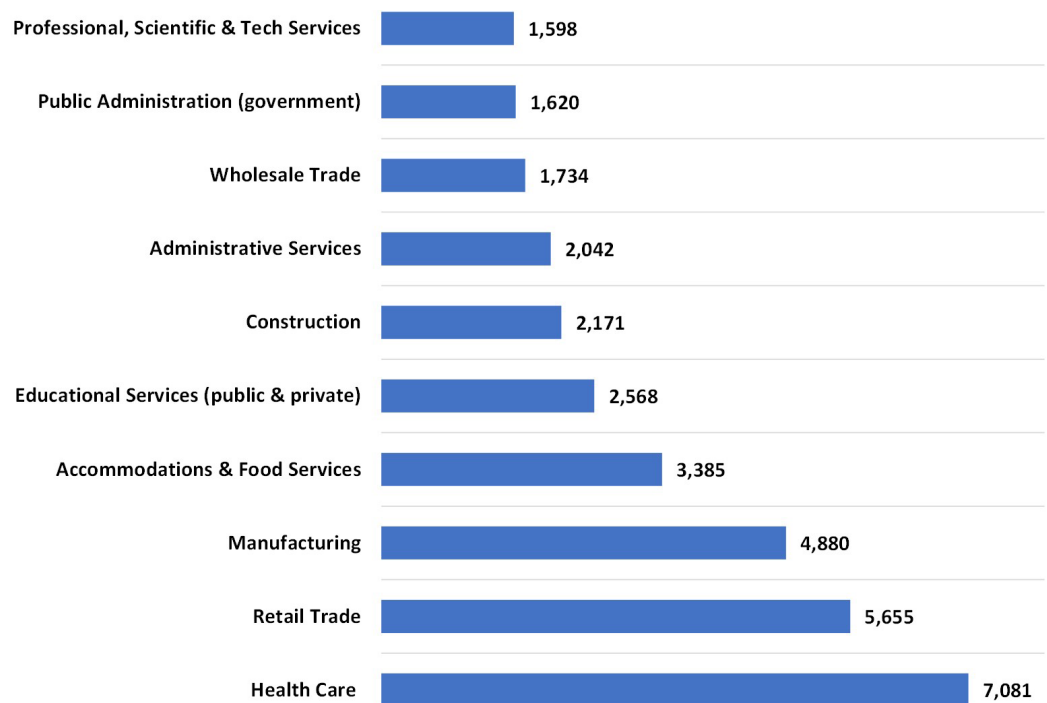
Agriculture also contributes significantly to the County's economy via market value of products sold, processing and distribution activities and by supporting agritourism, which is a growing industry.

EMPLOYMENT GROWTH



Source: NC Department of Commerce, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, SYNEVA Economics, 2021 1Q

EMPLOYMENT SECTORS



Source: NC Department of Commerce, 2021 1Q

PARKS & TRAILS

The Henderson County Parks and Recreation Department (HCPRD) oversees the programming, maintenance, rental of facilities, safety, and usage of twelve parks in Henderson County. 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. These public lands provide habitat for rare species and a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. Conserving Carolina is a local land trust active in permanently protecting sensitive lands in the County. The organization manages a number of properties for conservation, although many do not have public access. Henderson County completed a Greenway Master Plan in 2019. This plan identifies priority greenways including the Oklawaha Greenway, Ecusta Rail Trail, and the French Broad Greenway.

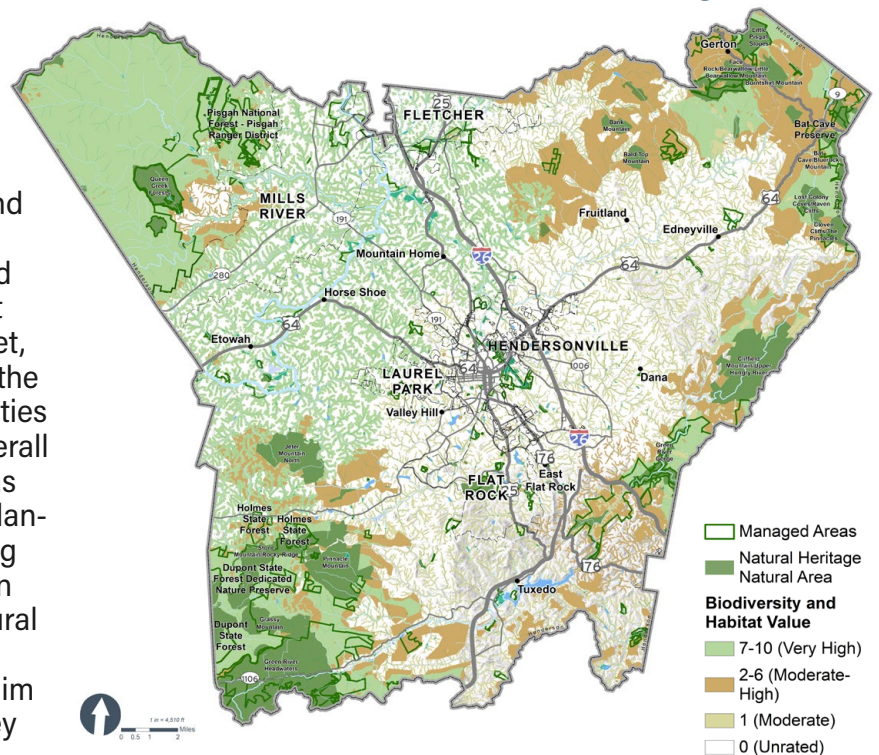
NATURAL RESOURCES

Henderson County has a variety of habitats and micro-climates including mountainous areas and broad valleys created by the French Broad River, Mills River, and Green River. The highest elevation is Little Pisgah Mountain at 5,200 feet, and the lowest is where the Green River exits the County at 1,400 feet. Diverse natural communities and species occur throughout the County. Overall there are 64 designated Natural Heritage Areas and three watersheds with federally listed endangered species in Henderson County. Protecting key natural resources adjacent to conservation lands, riparian areas, and areas of unique natural communities will be a challenge over the next 25 years. Recommendations within this plan aim to provide a balance between protection of key resources and accommodating growth.

There are **39,000 acres** of areas managed for conservation (public lands and privately held conservation easements)

Source: Managed Areas, 2021

BIODIVERSITY AND WILDLIFE HABITAT VALUE MAP



WHERE WE ARE

TRANSPORTATION

ROADWAYS

Traffic volumes (including freight) are projected to continue to increase along I-26, which is currently under construction and expected to be completed in 2024. Overall roadway volumes are also increasing and have recovered from the COVID-19 dip. If construction or a crash causes severe congestion on I-26, there are few alternatives with underutilized capacity. The County does not control or maintain roads but coordinates with NCDOT and local municipalities to address shared priorities.

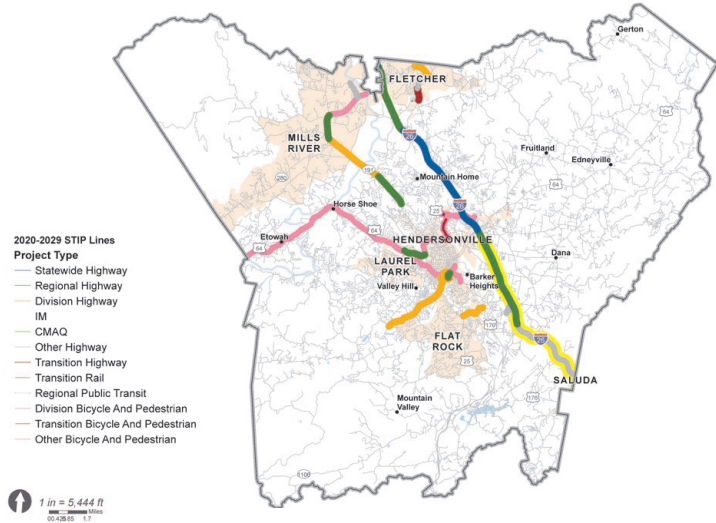
TRANSIT

Henderson County contracts with WNCSource for transit and paratransit services. Apply Country Public Transit's bus service includes three fixed-route bus routes running from 6:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday on a 1-hour cycle.

BIKING AND WALKING

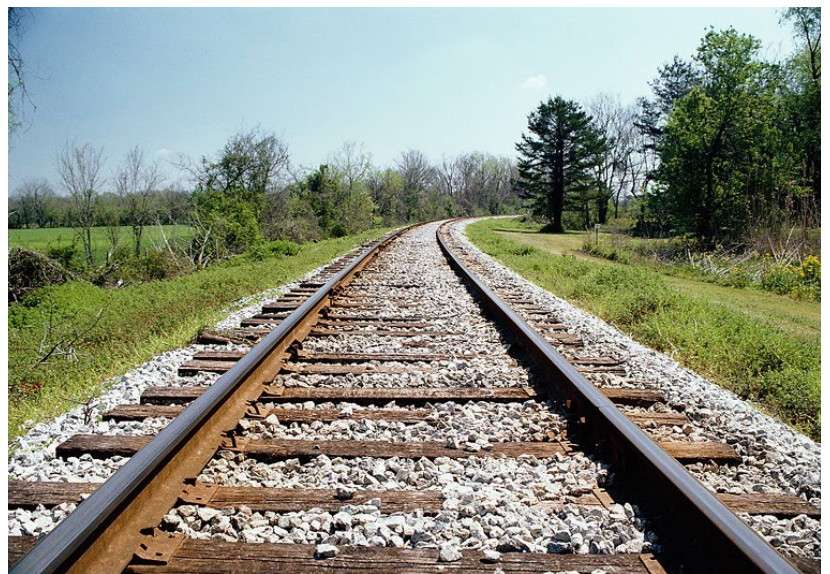
Almost eight miles of greenways have been constructed in Henderson County. Today, the County continues to implement its Greenway Master Plan with realistic and achievable goals like protecting the County's natural, cultural, historic, and scenic resources, providing safe and accessible recreation, and creating alternative transportation opportunities. One of the major regional greenway projects is the Ecusta Rail Trail, a 19-mile paved, continuous rail trail connecting Hendersonville and Brevard. The first phase of preliminary engineering is complete and construction is expected to begin in 2023.

STIP ROADWAY PROJECTS MAP



Source: NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program

FUTURE ECUSTA RAIL TRAIL



INFRASTRUCTURE

WATER AND SEWER

Henderson County is moving ahead with a planned sewer project to serve the Edneyville area. Other providers include Metropolitan Sewerage District (MSD) and Etowah Sewer Company. MSD services the northern and western parts of the County, and the privately owned Etowah Sewer Company services a limited number of homes and businesses but has the ability to be expanded to provide service to a greater area.

The City of Hendersonville Water and Sewer Department provides water service to more than 65,000 residents and businesses of Henderson County, and sewer service to more than 21,000 residents and businesses. They operate and maintain over 653 miles of water mains, 55 water pumping stations, 24 water storage tanks, over 177 miles of sewer mains, and 31 sewer pumping stations. The City of Hendersonville's wastewater treatment facility has a permitted capacity of 4.8 million gallons per day and a current discharge of 3.3 million gallons per day (for March according to the NC DWR 2021 Local Water Supply Plan for the system).

INTERNET

As a county with both urban and rural areas the struggle for affordability, adoption, and deployment of broadband internet is multifaceted. Henderson County's difficult mountain-related environmental challenges contribute to it having a lack of widespread connectivity, despite multiple carrier offerings. The 2013-2017 American Community Survey estimates over 76% of Henderson County households have an internet subscription, but many of these subscriptions include service that does not meet current broadband metrics of 25 Mbps upload and 3 Mbps download.

FRENCH BROAD INTAKE & PUMPING STATION



Source: City of Hendersonville

DANA ROAD WATER MAIN EXTENSION



Source: City of Hendersonville

About **18%** of Henderson County residents report that they do not have access to broadband internet service.

- 2015-2019 American Community Survey
(U.S. Census)

WHERE WE ARE

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

How do you create a plan that reflects the values of and serves a community as large and varied as Henderson County? With public engagement that reaches people where they are and asks the right questions.

Public engagement for the 2045 Plan strove to reach and collect feedback from as many people as possible throughout the lifespan of the project. The public engagement strategy for the project prioritized convenient, accessible, informative engagement opportunities, particularly during the visioning stage of the project. The County offered public meetings in several formats all around the County, hosted and regularly updated a project website, offered the community survey in two languages, and mailed information to over 60,000 households. The Henderson County community responded to the outreach in kind, giving thoughtful, insightful, and plentiful feedback that was crucial to creating the recommendations of this plan.

Meeting in a Box

Henderson County has many community groups that wished to host work sessions to give feedback for the Plan.

To enable these groups to host structured meetings at their convenience, the County provided a 'Meeting in a Box' It included instructions for facilitating Plan-related discussion and a means by which to submit notes back to the County for consideration and analysis.



A Few Participant Voices...

“This is a place where the tradition of farming still exists.”

- Open House Participant

“[My priority is] preserving the character and natural beauty of our communities and its wildlife”

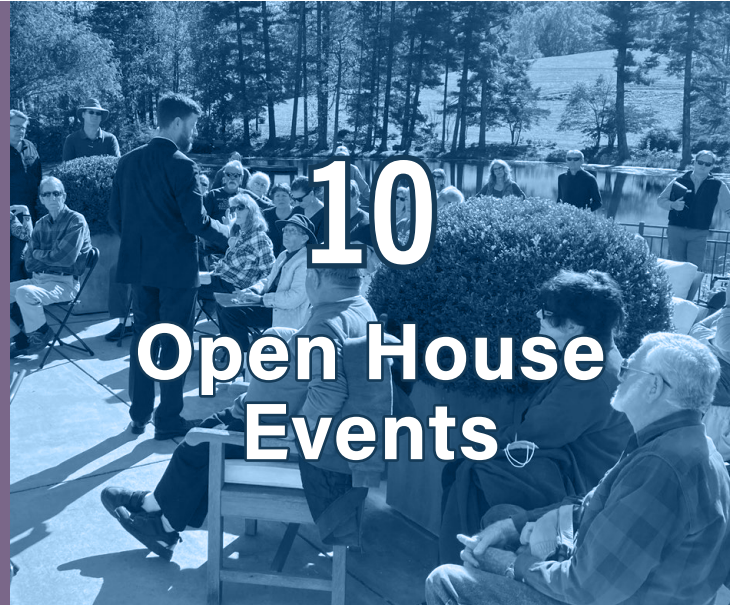
- Survey Respondent

“I believe we need to focus on the positive rural qualities that make our county desirable, we need to be strategic about growth and work towards keeping the environment clean”

- Survey Respondent

5,250+

**Website
Visits**



10

**Open House
Events**



7,000

**Survey
Responses**

60,000+

**Mailed
Surveys**



PLUS

- 1 Community Tour**
- 2 Visioning Workshops**
- 6 Focus Group Meetings**
- 5 Planning Board Meetings**
- 1 Draft Plan Public Meeting**

WHERE WE ARE

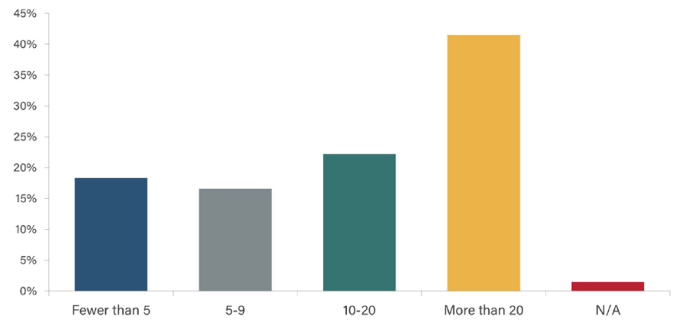
COMMUNITY SURVEY

Highlights from the community survey include:

- Over 6,900 responses were received
- An online option was provided and paper surveys were mailed to all property owners
- Responses were summarized by geographic area of the County and used to develop recommendations
- Top concerns were traffic and road maintenance (#1) and loss of farmland and impacts to natural resources (#2)
 - » It is not surprising that many residents identified traffic as their number one concern. Interstate 26 is expected to be under construction from 2020 until 2024. The expansion of this highway affects hundreds of thousands of people and has caused countless delays and overflow traffic onto alternative roads
- Community character, utility and infrastructure capacity, and housing availability/affordability were also top five concerns

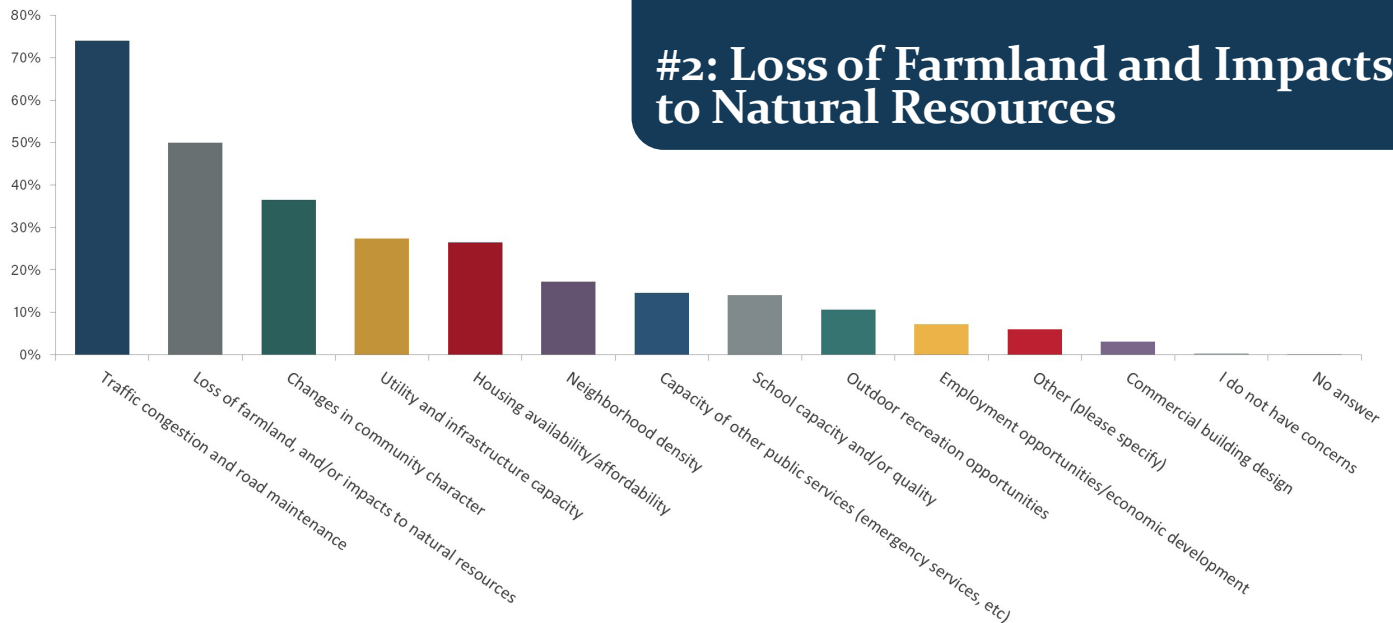
60% of the nearly 7,000 survey responses were from residents of the unincorporated areas of the County.

RESPONDENT TENURE



The majority of survey responses were from residents that have lived in Henderson County for over 10 years.

CONCERNS



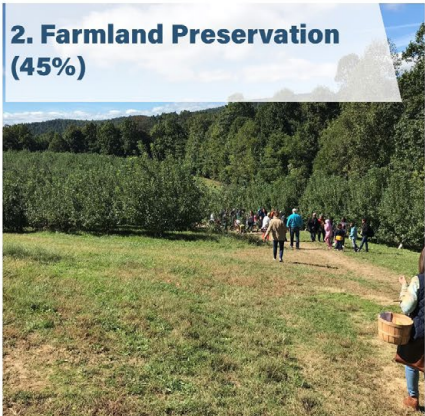
Top Concerns:
#1: Traffic and Road Maintenance
#2: Loss of Farmland and Impacts to Natural Resources

PRIORITIES

Protection of open space, forests and farmland ranked as the top #1 and #2 priorities for respondents to the survey. Farmland preservation was the #1 priority for respondents from the Edneyville area.

Top Priorities

- #1: Protect Open Space/Forests
- #2: Farmland Preservation



Priorities from survey (all responses).

TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

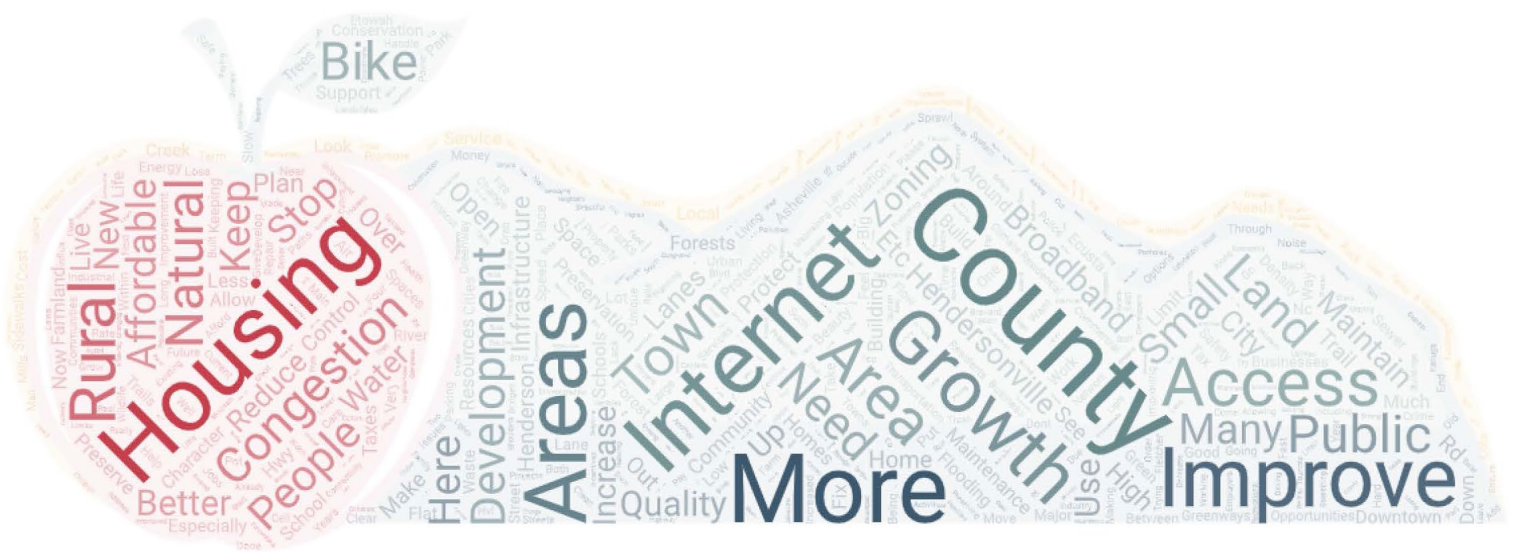
- Improve US-64 (east and west): Add turn lanes at intersections and shoulders for bicyclists
- Congestion management to meet growth pressures
- Complete the Ecusta Rail Trail
- Roadway maintenance: pavement, signs, and lane striping (center lines and edge lines)
- Invest in safe, user-friendly public transportation
- More bike lanes and sidewalks throughout the County



WHERE WE ARE

OTHER PRIORITIES

See below for a word cloud showing responses to an open ended question about priorities. The graphic shows answers other than traffic and road issues.



DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCE

Small shops and restaurants



#1

Parks and Recreation



#2

Single Family Homes



#3

Agriculture and Agri-Tourism



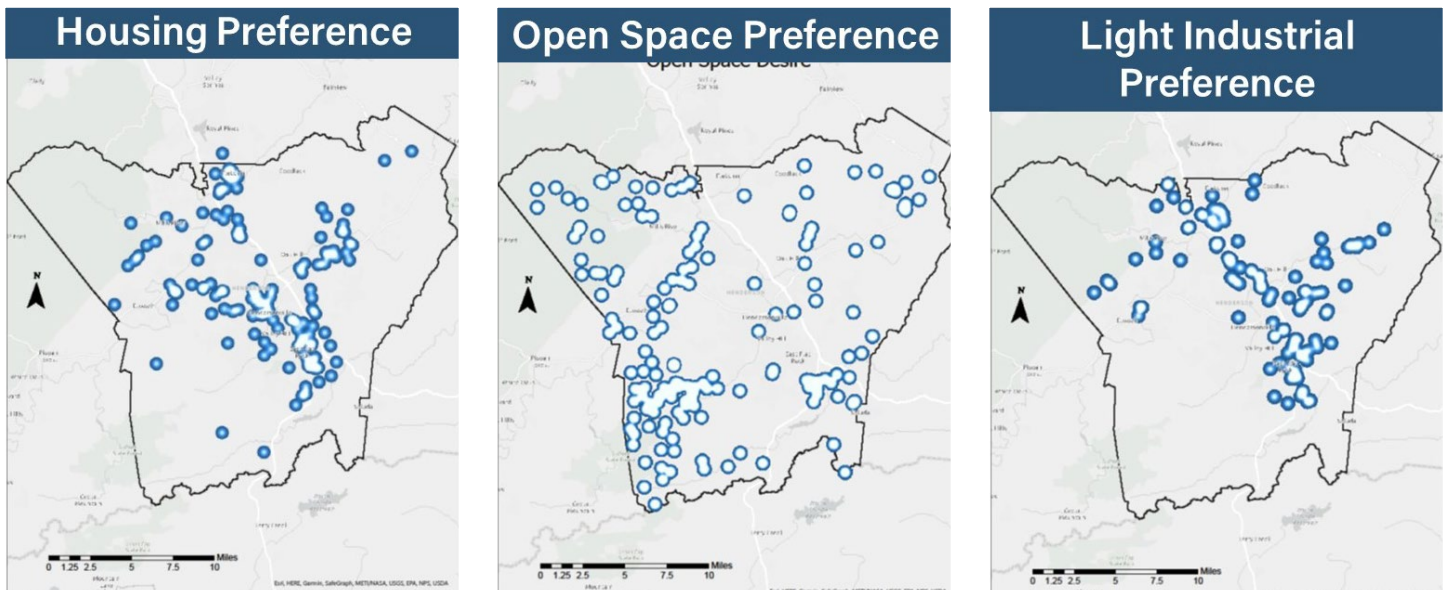
#4

Other:
"Senior homes and retirement centers"
"Affordable housing"
"Arts centers"
"Nothing"

Participants in the survey were asked to indicate what development types they felt were missing from the County. The top five answers indicated a preference for small businesses, parks and recreation facilities, single family homes and agriculture and agritourism.

DEVELOPMENT LOCATION

Henderson County staff led open houses throughout the County in the fall of 2021. Attendees provided feedback on the preferred location of new housing, commercial and light industrial development as well as where new parks or preservation of open space was needed.



PUBLIC MEETING THEMES

The following themes were documented in small group discussions and through exercises provided at the public workshop at Blue Ridge Community College in November of 2021.

- Access to housing
- Reducing impacts of growth on current residents
- Use sewer and infrastructure to guide development
- Farmland preservation
- Protecting natural areas, streams and water quality
- Coordination between governments
- Transportation options (greenways, transit)
- Access to healthcare
- Support for mixed use development, light industrial development and non-residential design standards
- Support for lower density residential and subdivision designs that preserve open space

EMERGING ISSUES

Through background research and community engagement, a set of priority issues emerged. Residents and visitors love Henderson County because of its rich natural environment, agricultural character, and quality of life. However, rising popularity threatens these beloved qualities that attract people to the community. The issues described here are often interrelated, and solutions must address the complexity through innovation and sensitivity. The topic areas, outcomes, and recommendations described in the following pages can help address these issues over the coming years.

A Growing County

Henderson County experienced significant growth since 2000. Population in the County as a whole increased by 27,106 or 30%. Population in the unincorporated areas also experienced a similar increase. Projections from the NC Office of State Budget and Management (OBSM) indicate that this growth pressure is likely to continue.

Growth is traditionally concentrated around Hendersonville, Fletcher, Mills River, and Etowah, but increasingly, growth pressures are expanding to outlying communities. Survey respondents echoed a desire to “grow in a smart way” that would mitigate potential unintended negative impacts of growth.



Rising Housing Demand

Demand for housing was widely discussed throughout the engagement process. New residents include retirees, second homeowners, and those employed in surrounding counties. As more people move in, housing demand rises, as do its costs. Concerns over housing availability and housing costs were in the top 5 growth-related concerns in the community survey. Housing prices have risen 13.5% over a one-year period 2021 to 2022, making it more difficult for young people and the working class to afford the cost of living in the County. (Source: Redfin)

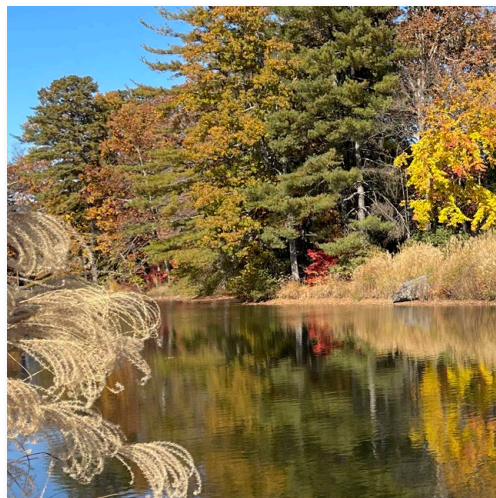
Housing for the Workforce

Housing availability impacts the local **economy**. Seasonal and tourism employees are particularly impacted by this phenomenon, as are workers such as teachers and police officers. Young people starting out in their careers often choose to leave the County due to affordability issues, which further narrows the labor pool. The rise in retirees and second-home-owners also means that many newcomers are not participating in the local labor force, yet are able to spend more on housing. This confluence of factors led to increased housing demand to accommodate a diverse group of citizens.

To review the complete State of the County (SOTC) report and public feedback, see the Plan Appendix.

Stable Economic Growth

Henderson County's employment growth rates outpaced that of the state between 2011 and 2021 (Source: NC Department of Commerce, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1st Quarter reporting). The county's largest employment sectors include manufacturing, retail, and health care. The County would like to continue these **positive economic trends** and attract innovative employers that pay high wages in order to balance the tax base and keep residential taxes low. Public feedback indicated strong support for small local businesses and a need to preserve flexibility for rural businesses.



Natural Resource Protection

Part of the County's popularity is its **rich natural environment**. Over 39,000 acres of the County are managed for conservation including large tracts of Pisgah National Forest, Dupont State Forest, and the Green River Gamelands. Additionally, there are 64 designated natural heritage and natural areas as well as three watersheds with federally listed threatened species. As development occurs, these ecosystems are threatened. Over 50% of community survey respondents indicated that they consider impacts to the natural environment as a top concern.

Supporting Agriculture

In addition to contributing to Henderson County's character, agriculture is a pillar of the County's economy, both from crops and from agriculture-related tourism. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, Henderson County's farms annually have a market value of \$67,241,000 for their products. However, the amount of land used for agriculture has declined for decades as older farmers retire and sell their land to non-farmers.

Protection of agriculture and rural character was one of the biggest concerns throughout public feedback.



Transportation and Mobility

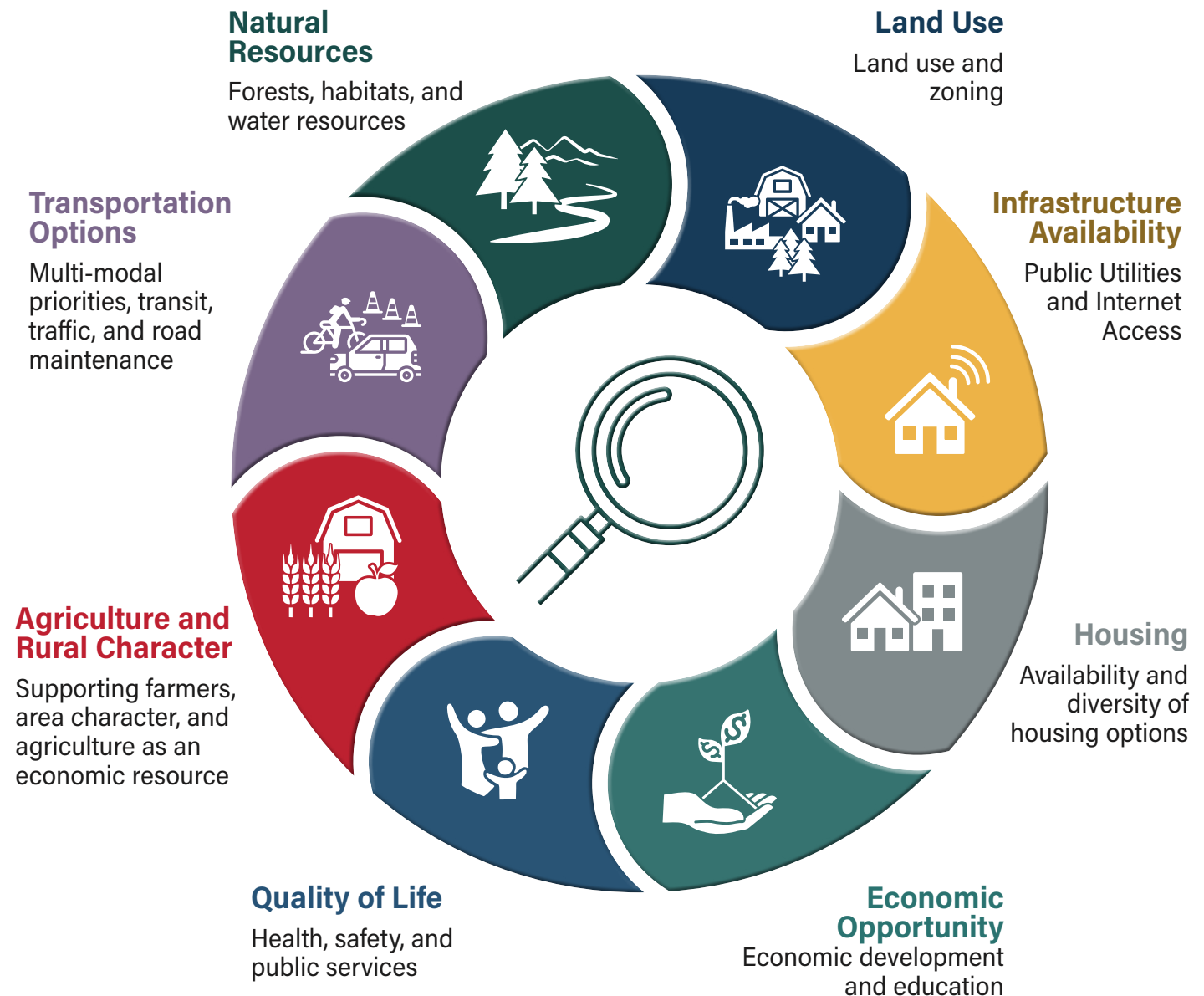
As is typical of a rural county, Henderson County is **heavily** dependent on automobile transportation. 90% of the County's population commutes to work by car (Source: ACS 2019 estimates), and 75% of community survey respondents indicated traffic congestion and road maintenance were among their top growth-related concerns for the County. Effective land use planning can help reduce the need for driving long distances between destinations, as can the development of pedestrian, cyclist, and transit systems.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO

USING THIS PLAN

PLAN TOPICS

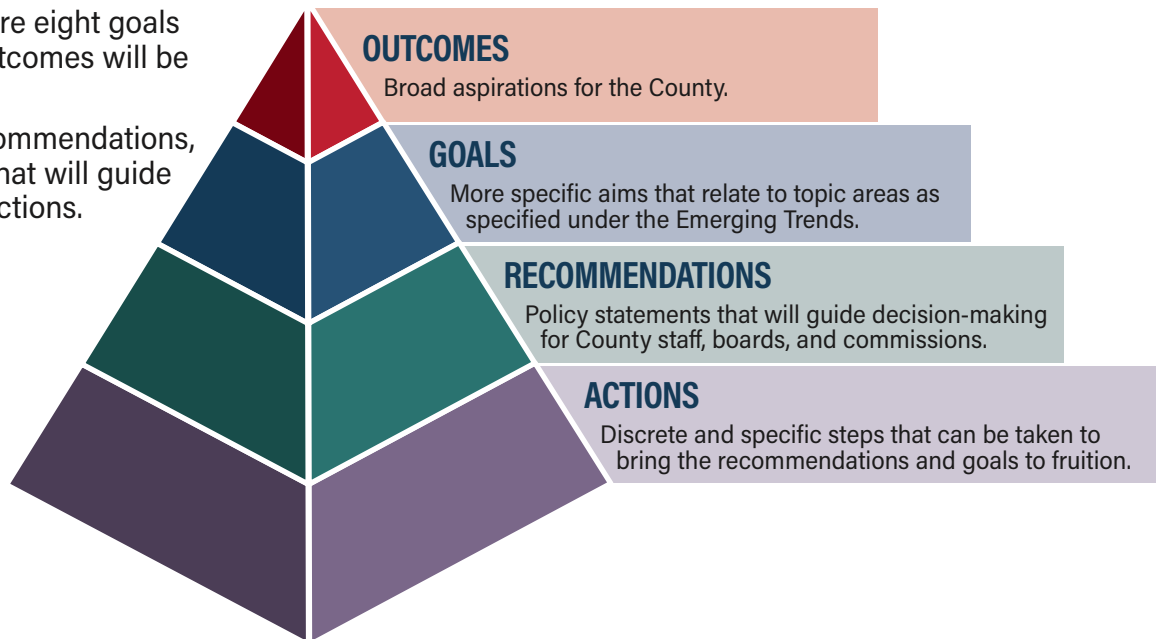
Emerging issues led the project team to define eight plan topic areas. Derived from the background analysis and public engagement, these **eight topic areas** will be addressed directly with plan recommendations. To illustrate the interrelated nature of the recommendations, a system of icons representing these themes will be used throughout the recommendations section.



PLAN STRUCTURE

Recommendations are organized under three primary outcomes. Within those three outcomes are eight goals that specify how the outcomes will be achieved.

Each goal contains recommendations, which are the policies that will guide decision-making, and actions.



OUTCOMES

1

Intentional Land Use

Make intentional land use decisions that protect agriculture, rural character, and natural resources while strategically guiding development.

2

Connectivity

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

3

Opportunity

Improve livability for all residents through economic development, housing availability, and healthy, safe living.

Primary Topics



WHERE WE WANT TO GO

2045 GOALS

WHAT ARE GOALS?

From the eight topic areas defined previously, direct and actionable goals were developed. These eight goals each correspond to a specific topic area, demonstrating the logical flow between area of concern and desired resolution. The goals are the overarching desires of the County as derived from the public engagement and analysis process. In the recommendations section, these goals are shown with detailed recommendations -- the policies that will guide decision-making and actions, which are discrete steps to accomplish the plan and achieve the goals. Here in this graphic, the goals are presented with the icon of the topic area they represent.

RELATIONSHIP TO OUTCOMES

Each goal may correspond to and accomplish multiple outcomes. Land use issues are interconnected and often are reliant upon other decisions to satisfy the goal. In order to fully understand how this plan will affect each issue, all outcome sections should be read to account for the overlap.

OUTCOME 1: INTENTIONAL LAND USE



Coordinate development near existing community centers.




Protect and conserve rural character and agriculture.




Improve resiliency of the natural and built environments.



OUTCOME 2: CONNECTIVITY



Prioritize multi-modal transportation options & connectivity.




Create a reliable, connected utility & communication network.



OUTCOME 3: OPPORTUNITY



Stimulate innovative economic development initiatives, entrepreneurship, & local businesses.




Diversify housing choices and availability.




Promote healthy living, public safety, and access to education.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Future Land Use

Future Land Use Map

Character Areas

Sub-Area Maps and Narratives

Recommendations

Outcomes

Objective 1: Intentional Land Use

Objective 2: Connectivity

Objective 3: Opportunity

FUTURE LAND USE

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The Future Land Use Map shows the land use pattern in Henderson County for the next twenty years. The map advances the Plan's goals and is based on community feedback, land use analysis, and best practices.

The map and associated policies are meant to guide growth and development as well as land use regulations in the County planning jurisdiction (outside of municipal limits and Extra-territorial Jurisdictions).

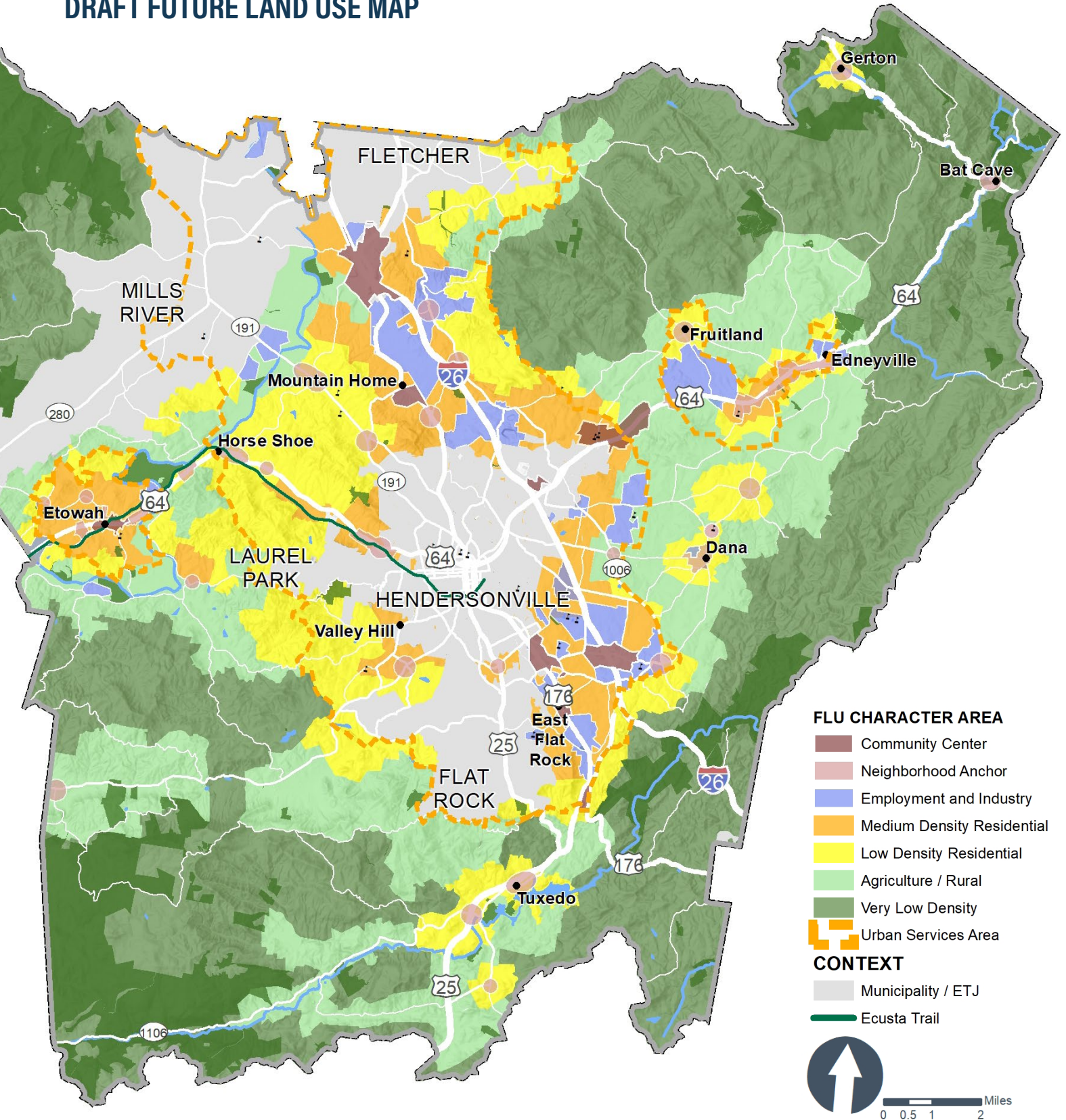
Each color-coded land use category is described on the following pages and represents character areas that have similar allowable uses, design characteristics, and density recommendations. Recommendations that will be included in the remainder of the Comprehensive Plan will elaborate on strategies to help implement the Future Land Use Map.



Highlights

- *Directs future residential development toward areas with existing infrastructure and utilities*
- *Encourages commercial, mixed-use, and economic development in key locations and corridors*
- *Recommends reduced density in strategic agricultural production areas*
- *Guides development away from natural resources, sensitive habitats, and conservation areas*

DRAFT FUTURE LAND USE MAP



FUTURE LAND USE

FUTURE LAND USE CHARACTER AREAS

OSC

Open Space and Conservation

Open Space and Conservation areas include protected areas like state and federal lands, parks, and properties with conservation easements. This designation aims to protect sensitive ecological areas as well as facilitate compatible uses like outdoor recreation (including camps) and forestry.

Where: *Remote area of the County, parks and large conservation easements*

Uses: *Conservation, outdoor recreation, forestry, agriculture*

Utility Access: *None*



VLD

Very Low Density

Very Low Density areas are significantly constrained due to steep slopes, few road networks, and limited access to infrastructure including broadband and cellular service. Forestry management, agriculture, very low density residential, outdoor recreation, and tourism are expected uses in these areas.

Where: *In and around conservation areas, steep mountain ridges and on the edges of the County*

Uses: *Forestry, agriculture, very low density single family residential, outdoor recreation/tourism*

Utility Access: *Rare*

Density: *Typically 2+ acres per dwelling unit*



AR

Agriculture / Rural

Agriculture/Rural areas are important for their ability to support diverse agricultural activities. Development in these areas should be uses that do not interfere with agricultural production or drastically change the rural landscape.

Where: *In and around concentrations of working agricultural lands*

Uses: *Agriculture of all types including row crops, orchards, greenhouses, production and distribution facilities, agritourism operations, rural businesses, and some sensitively designed, low-density residential.*

Utility Access: *Varies*

Density: *Typically less than 1 home per 2 acres (gross density), some smaller lots may be appropriate if included in a conservation subdivision*



LDR

Low Density Residential

Low Density Residential encompasses residential areas of limited density. Conservation subdivisions should be encouraged in these areas to provide and protect open space.

Where: *Outside the core of the Urban Service Area and working agricultural lands*

Uses: *Single family residential, potentially some house-scale attached residential as part of planned developments, agricultural uses.*

Utility Access: *Variable*

Density: *1-2 dwelling unit per acre (gross density), new subdivisions could include smaller lots if more common open space is preserved in a conservation subdivision*



FUTURE LAND USE

MDR

Medium Density Residential

Medium Density Residential consists of residentially focused areas that include a mix of housing types inside subdivisions and planned developments. These areas should have an improved transportation network and accommodate a variety of home options. Universal design that allows aging-in-place should be encouraged where appropriate.

Where: *Found near existing municipalities and existing development. Inside the defined Urban Service Area.*

Uses: *A mix of types, including single family, townhomes, and apartments where appropriate.*

Utility Access: *Served by utilities.*

Density: *Varies based on location and context.*



NC

Neighborhood Anchor

Neighborhood Anchors are small concentrations of commercial, residential, and civic uses in more rural areas centered around structural anchors like schools, churches, and/or crossroads. These areas typically follow a development pattern where commercial uses are clustered directly adjacent to a crossroads, surrounded by residential development and agricultural uses. Developments that accommodate the ability to live, work, and play without commuting, are encouraged here.

Where: *Typically found at intersections of State Roads or thoroughfares*

Uses: *Small services and retail, churches, fuel stations, light industry, mix of residential types including small-scale multi-family.*

Utility Access: *Utilities are typically not necessary due to the small-scale of development, but may be necessary for some development types.*



CC

Community Center

Community Centers are larger commercial nodes that serve broader geographic areas than Neighborhood Anchors. These areas typically have a high concentration of nonresidential uses and commercial services that contribute to the tax base. Mixed-use development is also encouraged, especially to offer multi-story units that provide commercial use on the bottom and residential units or office space above.

Where: Typically found at intersections of State Roads or thoroughfares in areas with more residential development

Uses: Medium to large-scale retail, services, restaurants, some offices, businesses, light industry and institutional uses. Mix of housing including single-family homes, townhomes and apartments

Utility Access: Typically served by water and potentially sewer.



EI

Employment and Industry

Employment and Industry areas offer job-generation, site-ready parks, accessible road networks, and utilities. Industries come in many different forms including manufacturing, agriculture, distribution, office, research and development (R&D), etc. The design of development sites in these areas should be tailored to be compatible with other nearby uses.

Where: Strategic areas with highway and utility access, large available parcels

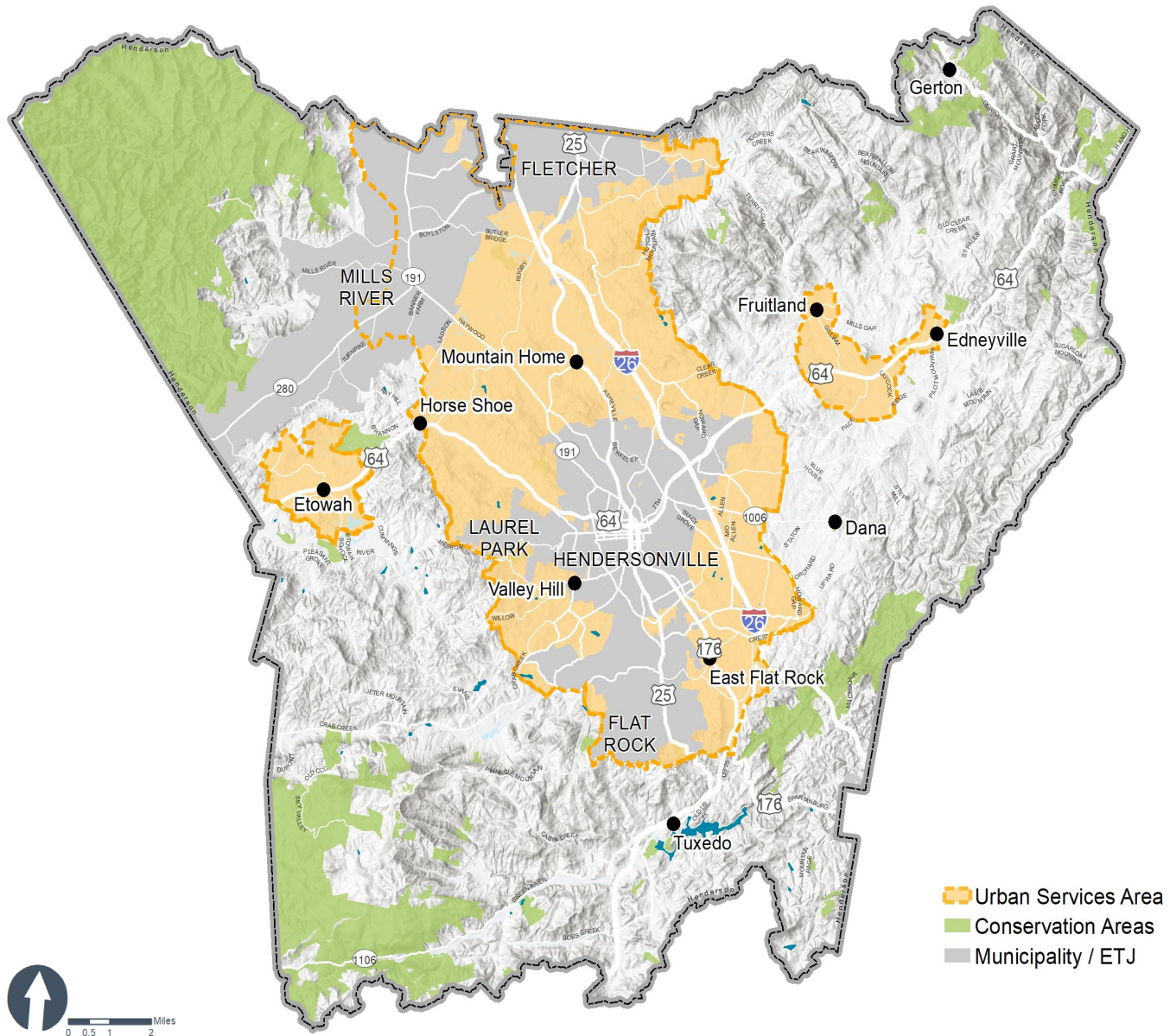
Uses: Agricultural uses including processing facilities and large-scale greenhouses, office and light-to-heavy industrial, as appropriate

Utility Access: The majority of these areas will be served by utilities.



FUTURE LAND USE

URBAN SERVICE AREA MAP



Urban Service Area Definition

The Urban Service Area (USA) shown on the Future Land Use Map represents an area intended to be served by utilities and other urban services by 2045. This line also accounts for the existing services as well as the relative feasibility of sewer extension from sewer providers (City of Hendersonville, MSD, Etowah, and proposed Edneyville). This area has the potential to accommodate the majority of growth within the horizon of this plan. Although the County participates in an advisory capacity to MSD and communicates with other service providers, the County does not have any control regarding the extension of water or sewer. When the sewer line is built at the Justice Academy and Edneyville Elementary, the County will be in control of extension and maintenance of those lines.

Utility extensions, service enhancements, and major subdivisions should generally be encouraged in areas within the Urban Service Area.

2045 GROWTH FRAMEWORK

WHERE and HOW growth occurs will impact whether housing, transportation, agricultural, and open space goals can be met. The 2045 Growth Framework encourages growth in certain areas, so that development pressure is reduced in strategic farmland areas. This can protect rural character and reduce costs of services.

GROWTH AS USUAL

2045 GROWTH FRAMEWORK

OPEN SPACE

HOUSING

TRANSPORTATION

- Open space and farmland is likely replaced with low density residential subdivisions
- Demands for services and overall cost of services increases
- Traffic is exacerbated due to widespread strip development along 2 lane road corridors
- Housing diversity is limited
- Land is not preserved for future employment

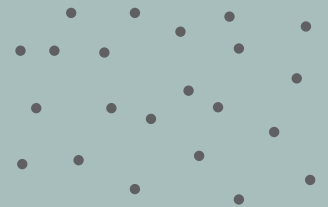
Most of Henderson County's vacant land is zoned for moderate densities of development and will absorb much of the future growth.



Developers continue to build at low densities on remaining vacant land.



Land uses continue to be largely separated outside of Hendersonville and downtown areas, reflecting suburban-style land use patterns.



AGRICULTURAL & OPEN SPACE GOALS WILL BE DIFFICULT TO MEET



HOUSING SUPPLY IS NOT DIVERSE.

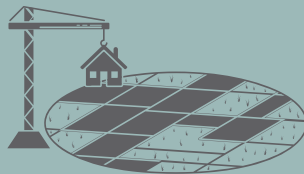


TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY GOALS CANNOT BE MET



- Infrastructure guides growth and development to areas that are appropriate
- Farmland and natural resources are conserved.
- Development is focused where utilities and services exist, which reduces demand for services in rural areas where provision is costly.
- Less traffic on inadequate roads

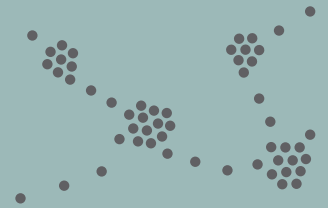
Land use policies carefully steering growth to designated nodes and corridors.



Developers build at higher densities in nodes and along corridors that are suited for this type of growth.



A well-integrated system of nodes and corridors allows Henderson County to grow in ways that make significant progress on its priorities possible.



AGRICULTURAL & OPEN SPACE GOALS BECOME POSSIBLE



HOUSING SUPPLY IS ABLE TO DIVERSIFY



TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY GOALS BECOME POSSIBLE

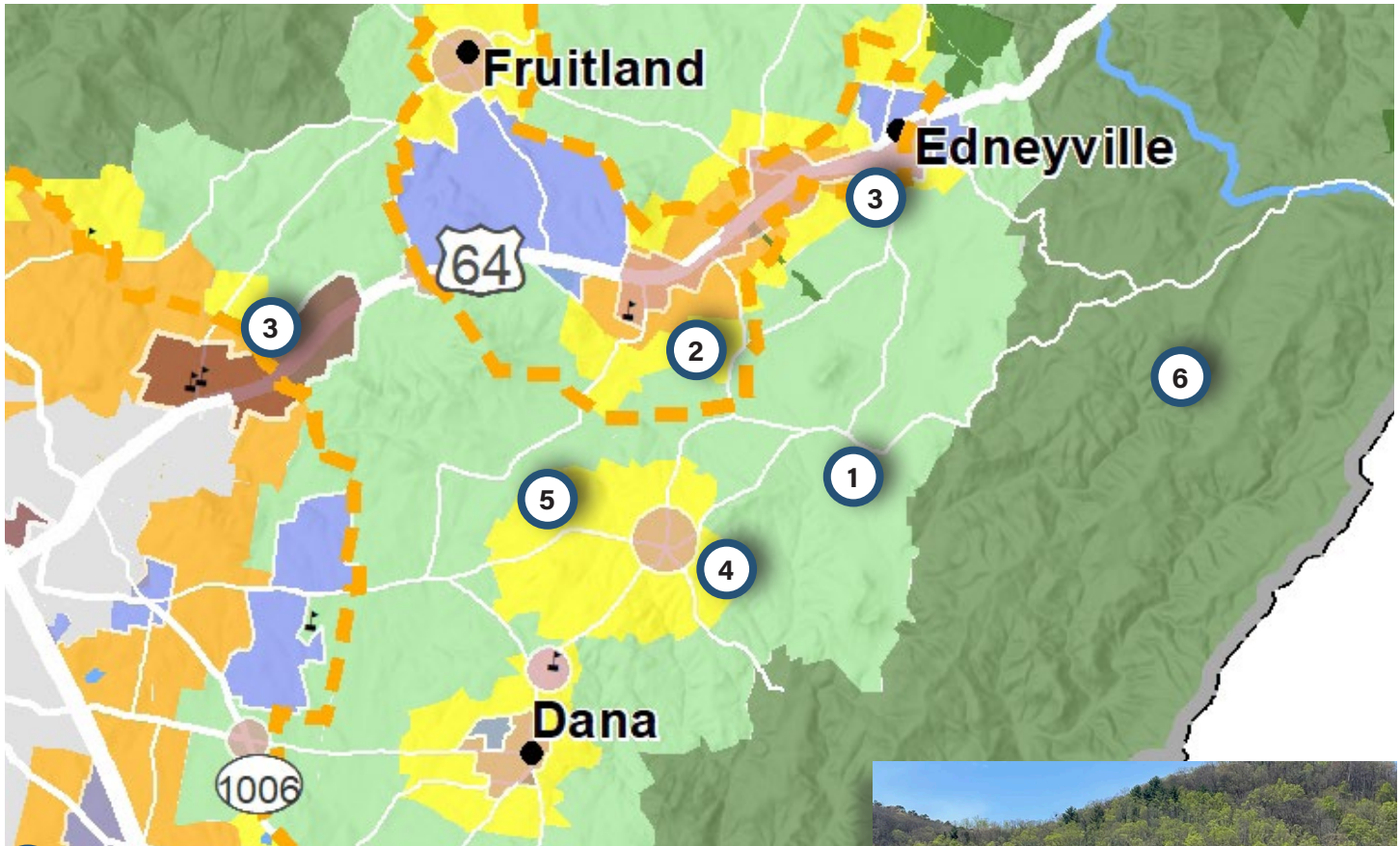


FUTURE LAND USE

SUB-AREA MAPS AND DESCRIPTIONS

EAST

OBJECTIVE: Focus development while protecting productive agricultural lands.

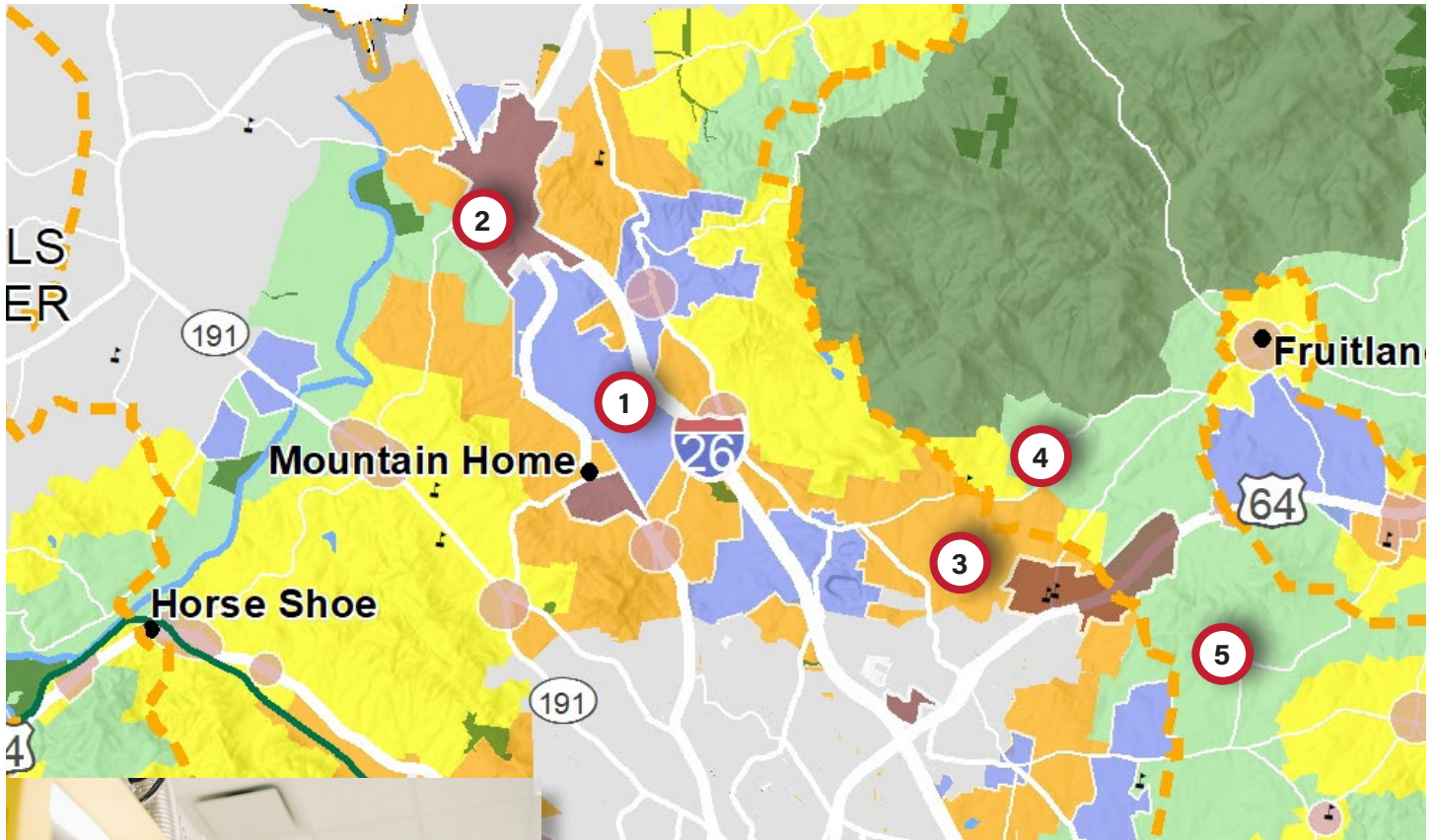


- 1 Policies discourage major subdivisions in agricultural areas.
- 2 The future sewer expansion in the Edneyville/US-64 area is a good place to focus employment centers, residential growth, and commercial activity. This directs housing away from existing agricultural land to protect rural character and reduce the cost of public services. Sewer enables conservation subdivisions that cluster development away from important natural resources and are designed to reduce impacts on existing agriculture.
- 3 Community Centers on US-64 accommodate nonresidential development close to the City of Hendersonville.
- 4 The traditional rural centers of civic and commercial activity are reinforced through the Community Centers and Neighborhood Anchors in Edneyville, Dana, and East Flat Rock.
- 5 Low Density Residential areas around Dana are limited to areas near existing subdivisions.
- 6 Very Low Density Areas are identified where development is constrained by steep slopes.



CENTRAL

OBJECTIVE: Support commercial and employment centers around I-26.

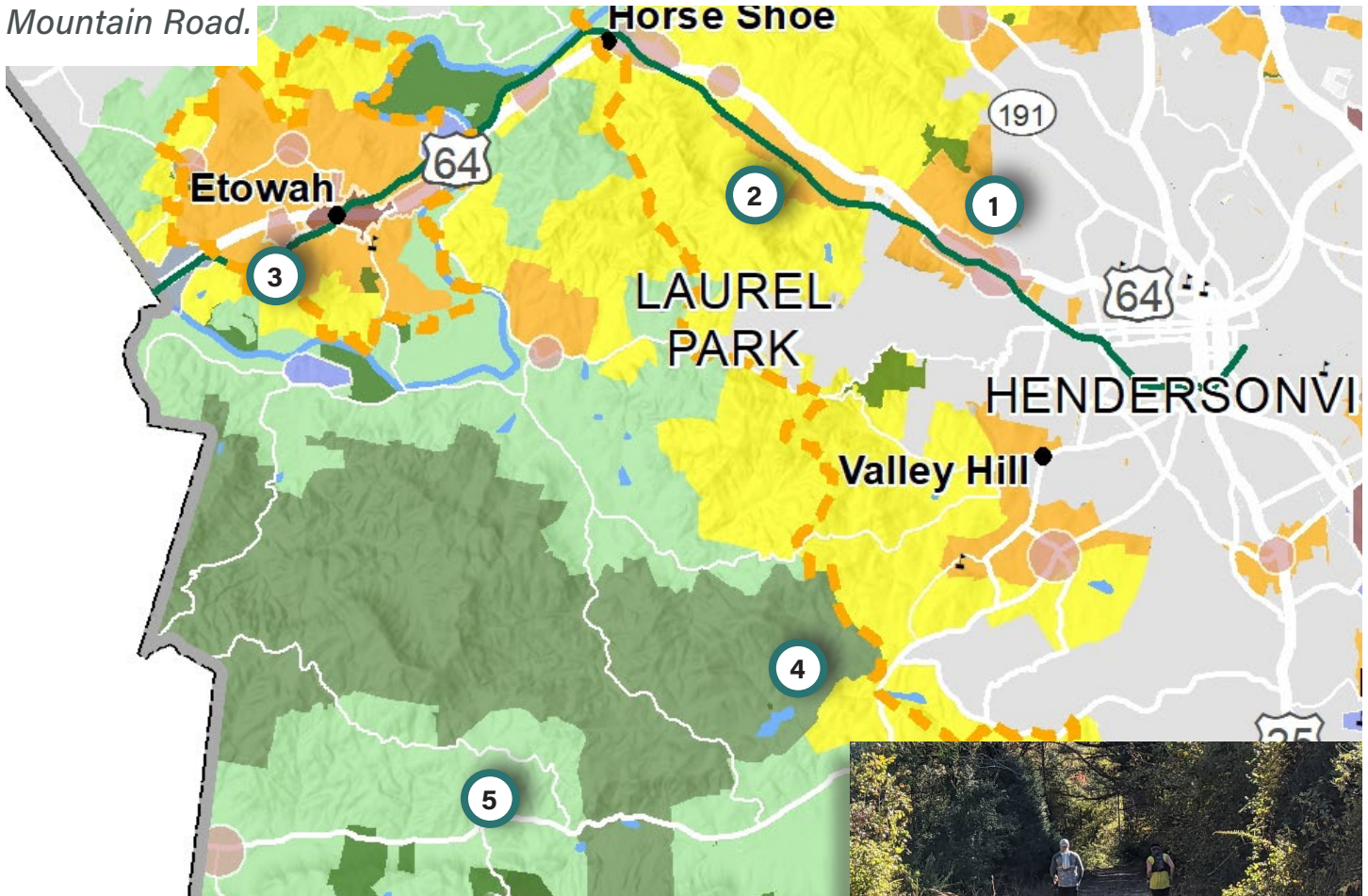


- 1** Strategic areas are reserved for commercial and employment areas near US-25 and I-26. These employment centers have the potential to provide local jobs and balance the county tax base in order to keep residential taxes low.
- 2** Commercial and mixed-use areas along Asheville Highway encourage infill and redevelopment to serve this area.
- 3** Medium Density Residential areas around Hendersonville are located to take advantage of access to utilities. Encouraging housing here will allow people to live near industry and services, reducing how long residents have to travel to reach destinations.
- 4** Residential development should transition to lower densities farther away from I-26 in more rural areas. Policies should encourage utility access to be limited to the Urban Service Area to better define the edge of suburban growth while preserving farms and rural character.
- 5** Contiguous agricultural lands between Hendersonville and Edneyville should remain intact. Within the Recommendations section, policies and programs are prescribed that may help conserve farmland and reduce development pressure here.

FUTURE LAND USE

WEST

OBJECTIVE: Focus growth in Utility Service Area and along transportation corridors while protecting rural character and steep slopes near Crab Creek Road and Jeter Mountain Road.

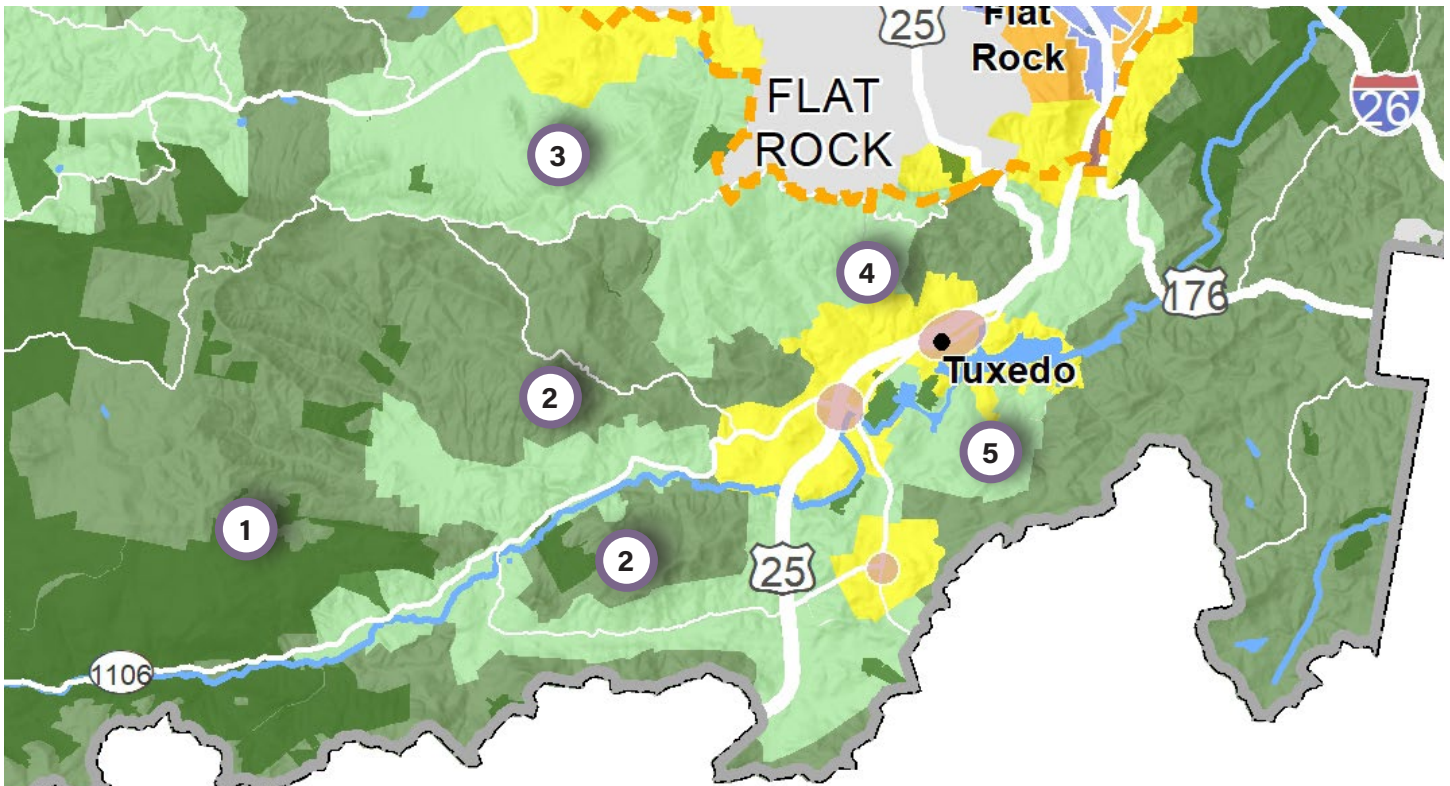


- 1** Residential infill planned near US-64 and municipalities.
- 2** Potential for "trail-oriented development" in key location along the Ecusta Rail Trail.
- 3** The Etowah community has opportunities for commercial, employment, and residential growth. This area is served by an existing private sewer system and has some potential for expansion.
- 4** The plan envisions that low-density residential should be limited to existing development near Hendersonville so that rural character remains along Crab Creek Road. Steep slopes to the north and public lands, such as Dupont State Forest, to the south, inhibit additional development.
- 5** Agricultural/Rural areas assist in the preservation of natural resources and rural character.



SOUTH

OBJECTIVE: Preserve the Upper Green River watershed, sensitive development near outdoor camps, and mix of small-scale commercial and residential near Tuxedo.



- 1** The Upper Green River Watershed contains a mix of conservation land and Very Low Density areas.
- 2** The rural character of areas near outdoor camps can be insulated from surrounding growth pressures.
- 3** Productive agricultural and forestry land are shown as Agricultural/Rural areas.
- 4** Designated Neighborhood Anchors reflect the location of historical business and provide future entrepreneurship and local business opportunities.
- 5** Low-density residential areas should be limited to areas where appropriate, and include locations near existing residential developments.

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 in the coming years will define the character in parts 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 much 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

GOAL 1: Coordinate development near existing neighborhood anchors and 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 in and near 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 Urban Service

Area (USA) and utility service agreements to best fit the Future Land Use Map and municipal land use plans.

B: Consider requiring large 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 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.

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 commercial properties.
- D: Limit the size and intensity of uses in Neighborhood Anchors to maintain the local business economy.
- E: Discuss the option to enhance design standards for non-residential development in Neighborhood Anchors and/or in rural areas to preserve community character.
 - Collaborate with municipalities to create joint planning areas.
 - Consider developing or refining build-to requirements, building massing, parking, material and/or transparency standards.
 - Create additional lighting regulations for nonresidential uses in Neighborhood Anchors and/or in rural areas to prevent excess light pollution.



Public preference from the survey and public meetings indicated support for small-scale businesses and mixed-use development. The pictures above 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 value far beyond just 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 crops and timber) covers 26 percent 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 little agricultural land left in 2045. 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 and potentially allow for the relocation of the Cooperative Extension Office or other agricultural related agencies.



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 land in farms 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 countywide. According to the Census of Agriculture, the County lost 1/3 of its orchard land between 2002 and 2017¹

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

Rec 2.2: Preserve existing farmland.

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

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

- A: Discourage rezonings for higher density residential subdivisions outside the defined Urban 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.
 - 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.

VOLUNTARY FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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.



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.



Source: Carl Sandburg

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 such as 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.

As the frequency of extreme weather events increase, flooding, landslides, and drought-induced fires are likely to become a more regular occurrence. 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: Encourage conservation design by specifying overall density instead of minimum lot size.

C: Consider allowing for administrative approval for conservation subdivisions that meet certain criteria (i.e. are under a density threshold, have a minimum amount of open space, reserve

priority open space types, and meet access standards).

- D: Implement minimum open space requirements and prioritize the reservation of sensitive natural resources as open space in new development.
- E: Limit development on steep slopes and mountain ridges.

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.
- 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.



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.

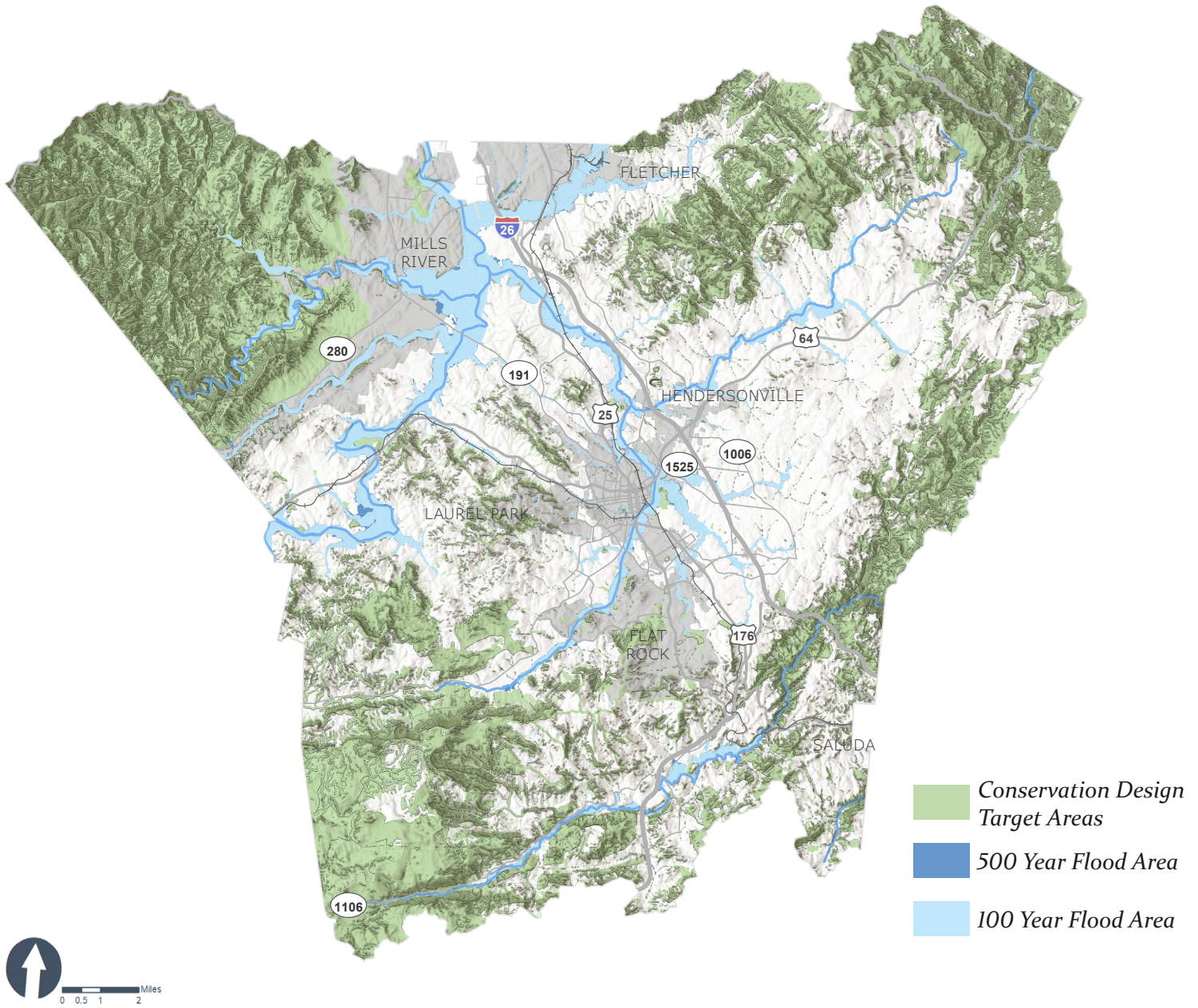
NATURAL ASSETS

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.

- 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 prioritize 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 <https://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: Incorporate FireWise design 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
- Utilize fire resistant building design and provide defensible space around clustered development
- Provide incentives for homeowners with high vulnerability and risk to wildfires to retrofit existing structures with wildfire-resistant modifications.

G: Adopt best practice design standards for new construction within the wildland/urban interface.

Rec 3.4: Improve stormwater management strategies and water quality protections

A: Limit built-upon area within the watersupply watersheds and provide standards for stormwater management.

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

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: Remove regulatory barriers and provide incentives for green infrastructure projects, which can lessen stress on natural systems.

E: Educate the community and developers regarding green infrastructure projects, as well as state and federal rebates and tax incentives, which can lessen stress on natural systems.

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-FIRM

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

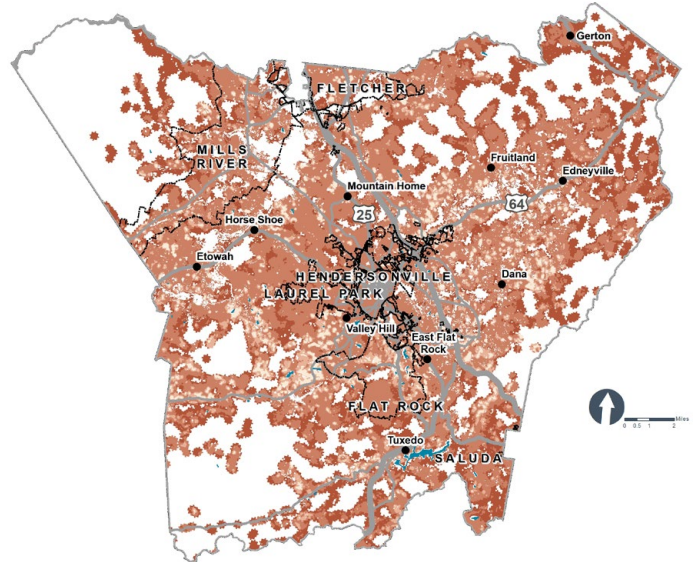
Landslide vulnerability driven by construction before step slope ordinance

- 4% of all residential
- 16 critical facilities including churches and xx.

Wildfire vulnerabilities

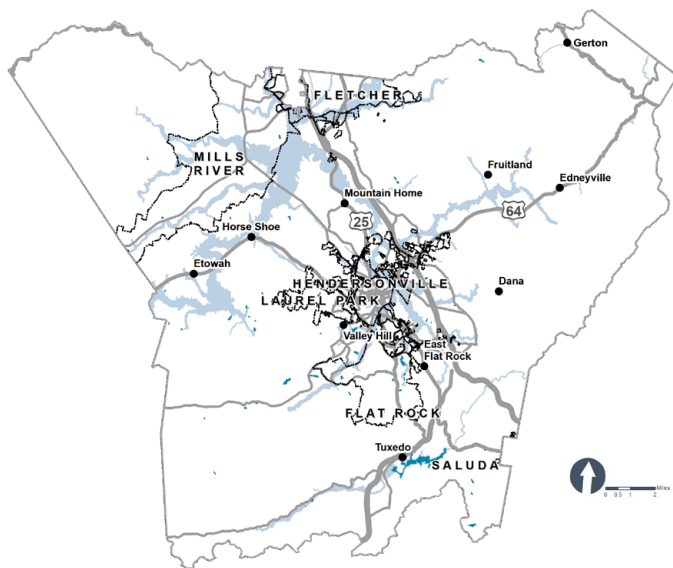
- Wildland urban interface areas outside a 5-minute emergency response drive time
- Increasing vulnerability is a concern due to increasing heavy precipitation, aging and sensitive populations, and growth in areas of risk

Source: Land of Sky Regional Council Vulnerability Assessment



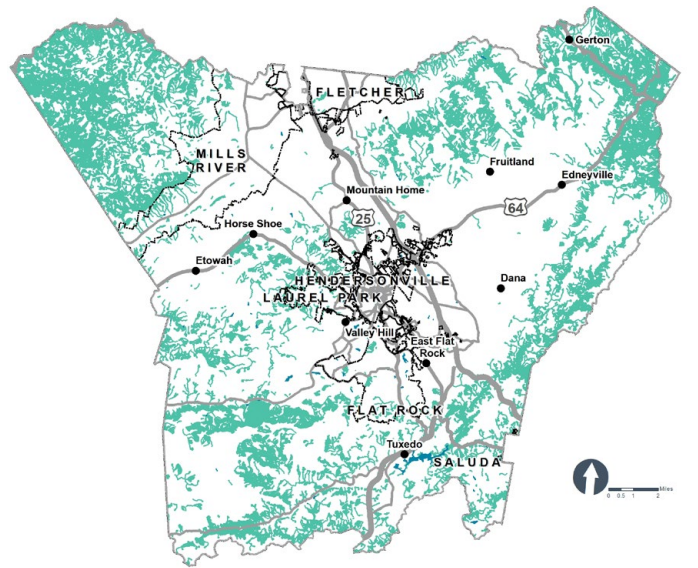
Wildfire Hazard

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

GOAL 4: Prioritize multi-modal transportation options & 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 years will not just focus on automobile transport, but rather will integrate planning for bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation where feasible.

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: Require that new subdivisions have adequate roadway connectivity with appropriate access (ingress and egress) and limited dead ends/ cul-de-sacs.
- 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.



Many county roads are “farm-to-market” roads that have narrow lanes and limited shoulders. Improvements to these roads and key intersections will be 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: County staff 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.
- 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: Partner with the State Legislature and other local governments to improve solutions for the funding and maintenance of bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

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: Initiate a study of Apple Country Public Transit to identify whether fare rates are a barrier to use of the bus system and study the feasibility of a fare-free system.
- D: 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.

- E: 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.
- F: 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.
- G: 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.
- H: Create connections between transit and greenways to help reduce traffic, vehicle miles traveled, and the county's carbon footprint.
- I: Continue to improve existing bus stops through amenities like benches and shelters.

- J: Explore solutions to solve the garbage collection issue at bus stops.
- K: Collaborate with the City of Hendersonville on a joint planning effort for a more robust transfer station in downtown Hendersonville.
- L: Encourage diversification of the Henderson County vehicle fleet, including transit buses, for optimum resiliency.

Rec 4.6: Support the use of electric vehicles to reduce air pollution and dependency on fossil fuels.

- A: Encourage the placement of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in new developments.
- B: County staff should work with the TDA, the County Environmental Coordinator, and other partners to develop an online map of EV charging stations in Henderson County.
- C: Work with the State Legislature to overhaul the existing general statute prohibiting the placement of vehicle charging stations at rest areas.

Rec 4.7: 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.



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.

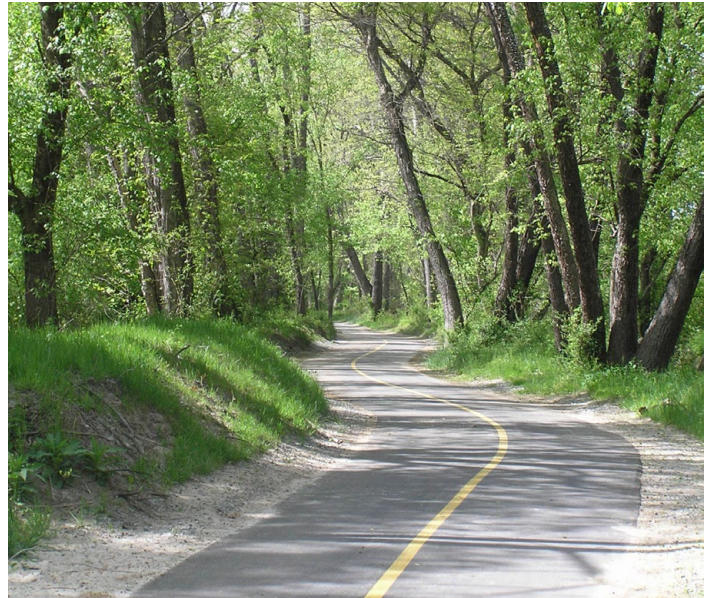
- H: Update the Henderson County Greenway Master Plan to reflect current progress, new initiatives, updated funding opportunities, and tentative community partners.
- I: Ensure that new trails are adequately designed to be resilient and withstand extreme weather events, as well as design for stormwater 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 4.8: Support education and encouragement 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 rural routes in Henderson County and utilization of the Ecusta Rail Trail and other greenways.

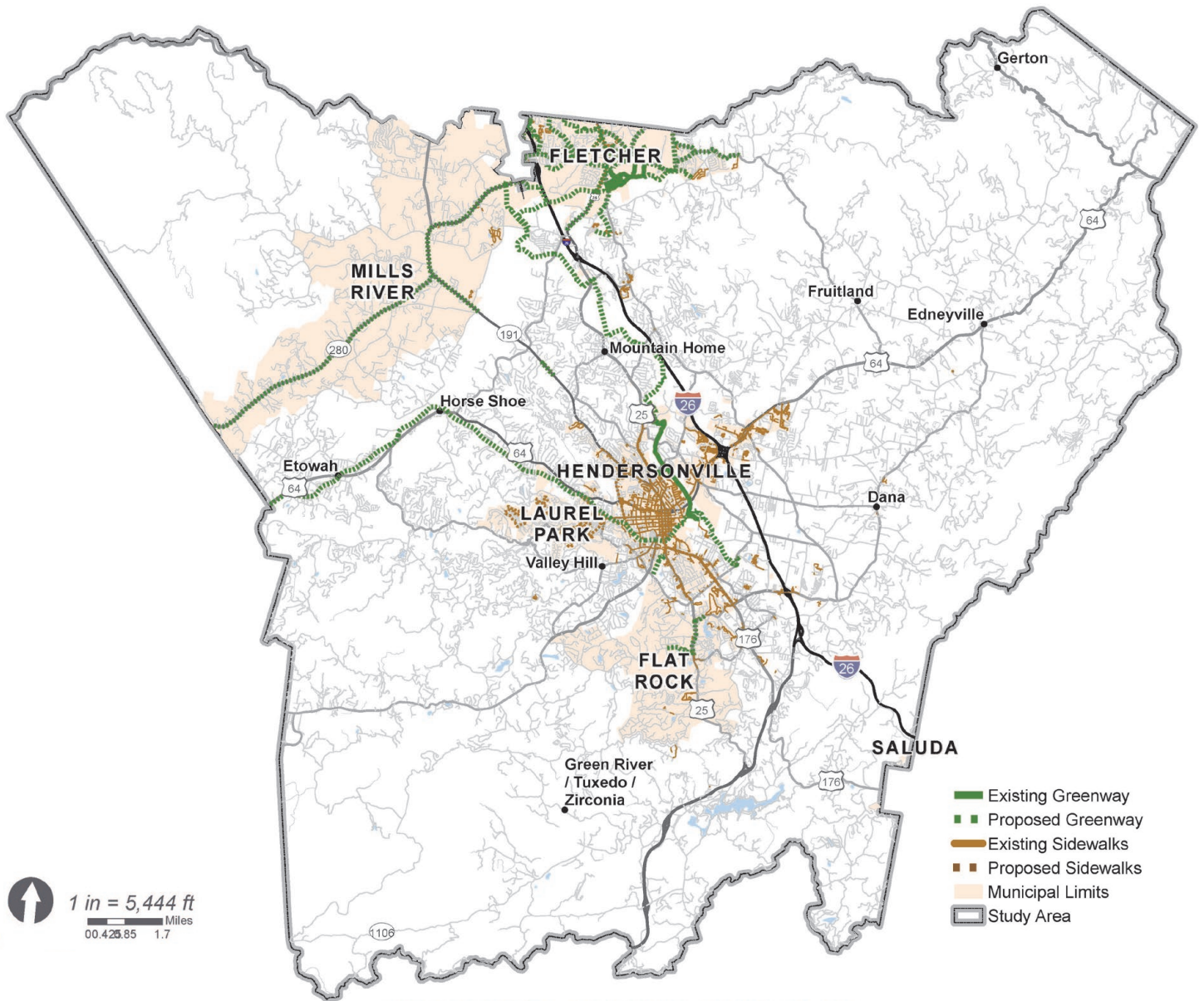


The Oklawaha Greenway is a heavily used greenway in Henderson County. There are currently seven miles of existing greenway in the County. Greenways and trails were the highest priority of parks and recreation facilities identified at the public meetings for the Comprehensive Plan and have grown in popularity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

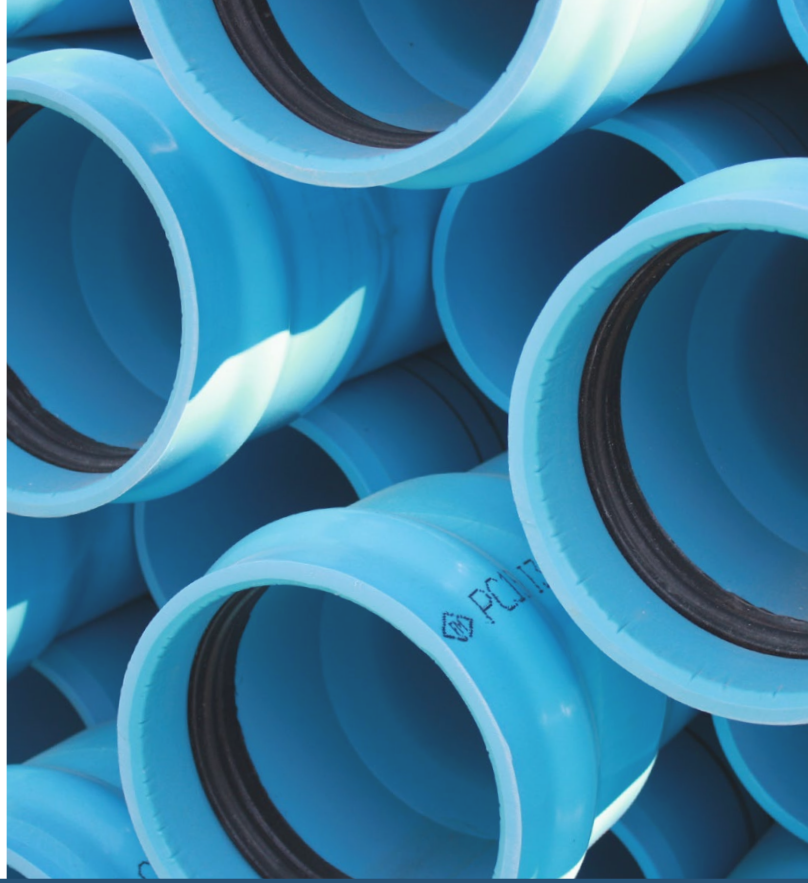
260%

Usage of the Oklawaha Greenway increased 260% between 2018 and 2022.

GREENWAYS AND SIDEWALKS MAP



The map above shows existing and planned greenways in Henderson County. Future planning and design for greenway segments should seek to extend and connect existing facilities. (e.g., Ecusta Rail Trail - Oklawaha Greenway, Clear Creek Greenway - Advent Health loop, Cane Creek Greenway - Mills River Trail - Ecusta Rail Trail, Mud Creek Greenway - Oklawaha Greenway - Ecusta Rail Trail, and all trails to the proposed French Broad River Trail "spine" corridor).



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 Urban Service Area.
- D: Discuss with Henderson County Schools regarding alignment of future school planning with water and sewer infrastructure planning.

Rec 5.3: Utilize 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: Require 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: Study the development of a management structure that allows the County to control growth in its boundaries.
- 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.
- E: Consider a joint city/county program to assist low and moderate income families with their utility bills.

OUTCOME 3:

OPPORTUNITY

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

GOAL 7: Diversify housing choices and 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. 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 educators to align today's students with tomorrow's employment needs by preparing local students for in-demand careers. 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 will be 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: Discourage large-scale residential subdivisions in prime industrial areas.
- D: 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 TDA to sponsor local artists to create public art and murals.
- C: Encourage NCDOT to improve the safety of intersections for pedestrians.
- D: Encourage TDA, HCEDP The Partnership, and the City of Hendersonville to locate an outdoor amphitheater space.
- E: Create a permanent shelter/farmers market space.

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



Henderson County residents value small businesses.

“Small-scale retail and restaurants” was survey respondents’ top answer when asked what type of development they feel the County is missing.

GOAL 7: DIVERSIFY HOUSING CHOICES AND 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 the issue through a multi-pronged approach that considers both housing supply and housing accessibility. This will involve examining unintended obstacles to housing development within the County's ordinances and proposing changes that will allow different densities and housing types in certain areas. The plan also looks at the particular needs of certain groups, such as the workforce, the elderly, and agricultural workers, and includes recommendations that address their particular needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 7.1: Increase housing in the Urban 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 Medium and Low Density Residential 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 Urban 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: Continue to allow for manufactured homes in designated zoning districts in the county.



via arlnow.com

TRAIL-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

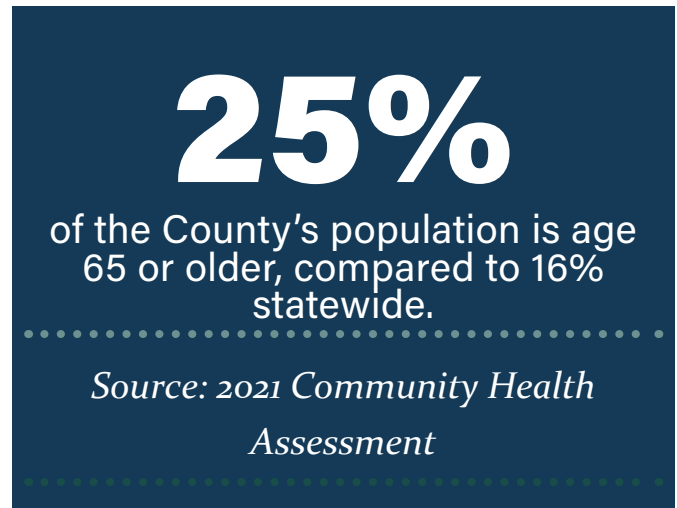
The future land use map encourages mixed-use development near and around the future Ecusta Rail Trail. When these areas are developed, they should be encouraged to orient their structures toward the trail to fully maximize their location. Adding features such as seating areas and service windows on the 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 above shows an example of an active trailside business along the Baltimore and Annapolis Trail.

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: Create 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).

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.
- 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 and workforce housing.



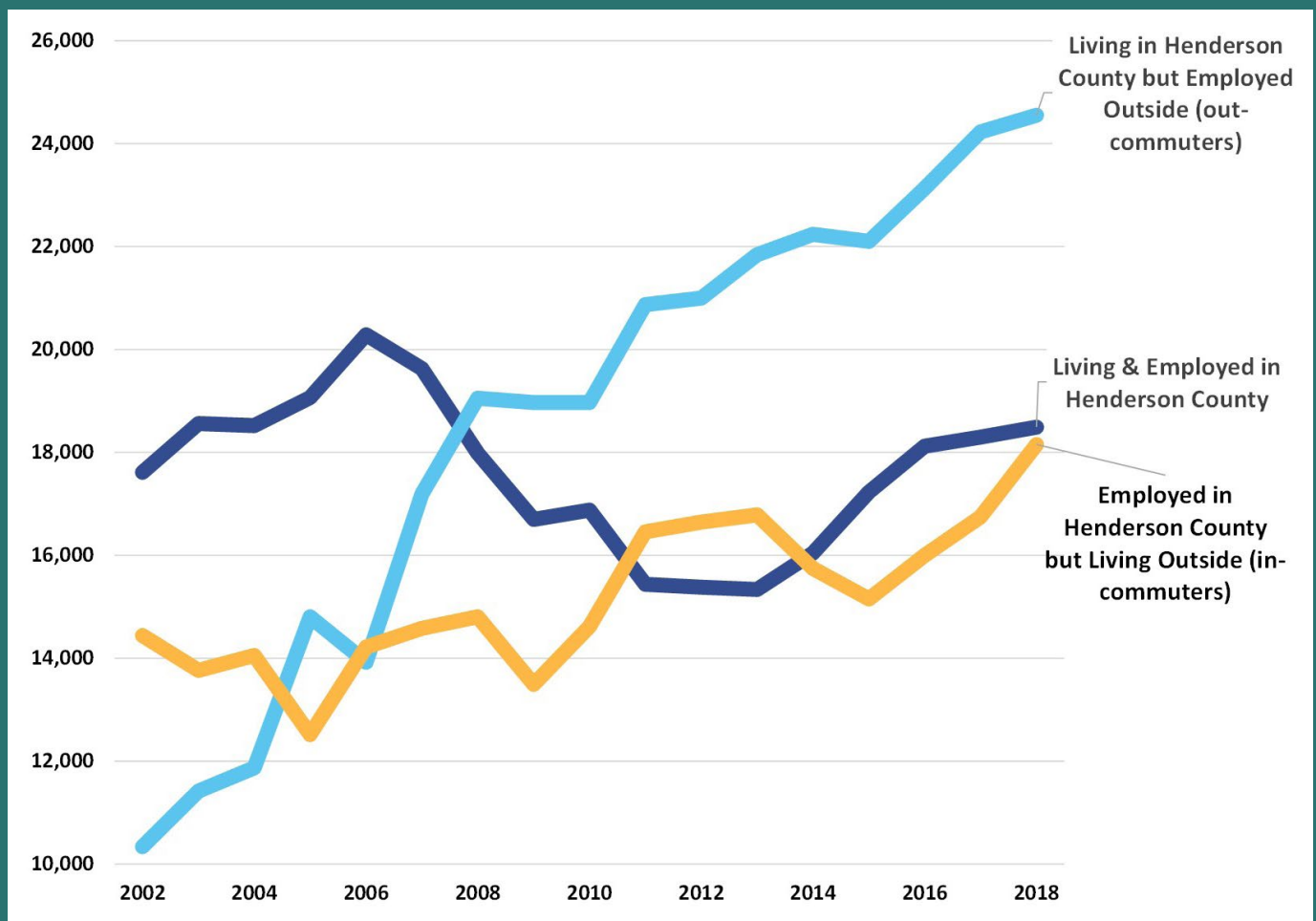
Rec 7.4: Locate workforce housing near jobs.

- A: In accordance with guidance from the Future Land Use Map, support residential development near employment areas and in and around commercial centers.
- B: Coordinate with municipalities to jointly plan for areas near new employment areas that share municipal and county jurisdiction.
- C: Educate 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

As of 2018 around 18,000 workers in Henderson County commute from other counties. 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 18,000 workers commute into Henderson County and 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: Increase the number of 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 coordination with partners to develop additional access points.
- 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: Require 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.
- N: Explore the creation of a regional sports council/commission made up of regional public and private organizations to manage and plan for sports tourism within the county.



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 is active in permanently protecting sensitive lands in the county and manages a number of properties for conservation, though many do not have public access.

Rec 8.2: Improve and coordinate access to health services.

- A: Coordinate with municipal and non-profit partners to utilize 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 so seniors can more easily access care.
- C: Address opioid addiction and mental health by utilizing the opioid litigation settlement funds to create a drug abuse treatment center or other resources for recovery.
- D: Launch an awareness campaign for local opioid addiction recovery resources.
- E: 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)

Only **22.4%**
of adults in Henderson County
reported that they get the recommended
amount of physical activity
- 2018 Community Health Assessment

Rec 8.3: Expand healthy food access.

- 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.

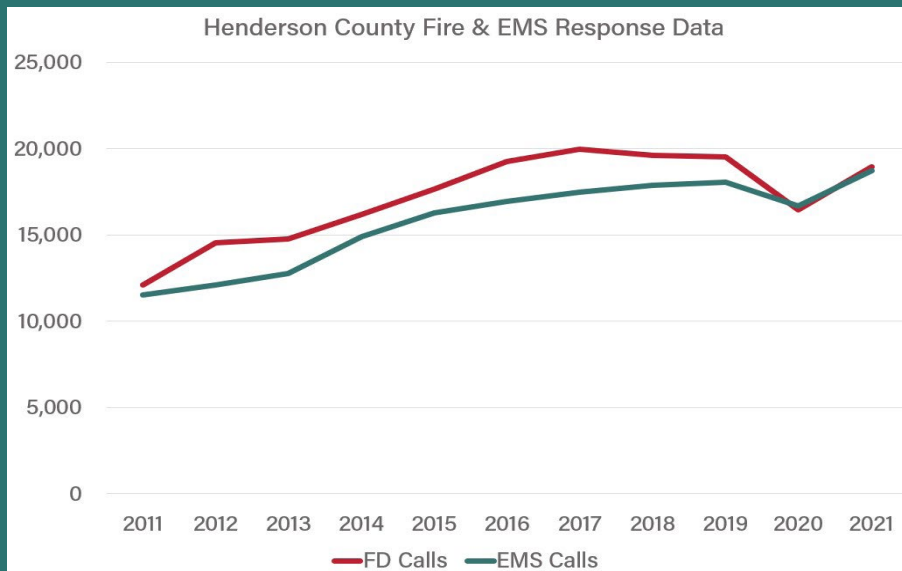
Rec 8.4: Provide high-quality public and emergency services.

- 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.

Rec 8.5: Coordinate with school systems.

- 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.

DEMAND FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES



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 8.6: Increase access to education for every community member.

- A: Support nonprofits in their endeavor to assist immigrant and 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.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

HENDERSON COUNTY

*John Mitchell | County Manager
Amy Brantley | Assistant County Manager
Chris Todd | Business and Community
Development Director*

PLANNING STAFF

*Autumn Radcliff | Planning Director
Janna Bianculli | Senior Planner
Grayson Taylor | Planner III
Austin Parks | Planner I
Liz Hanson | Planner I
Charlie Savage | Intern
Landon Coley | Intern*

PLAN MANAGER

Janna Bianculli | Senior Planner

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Rebecca McCall | Vice-Chair
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