



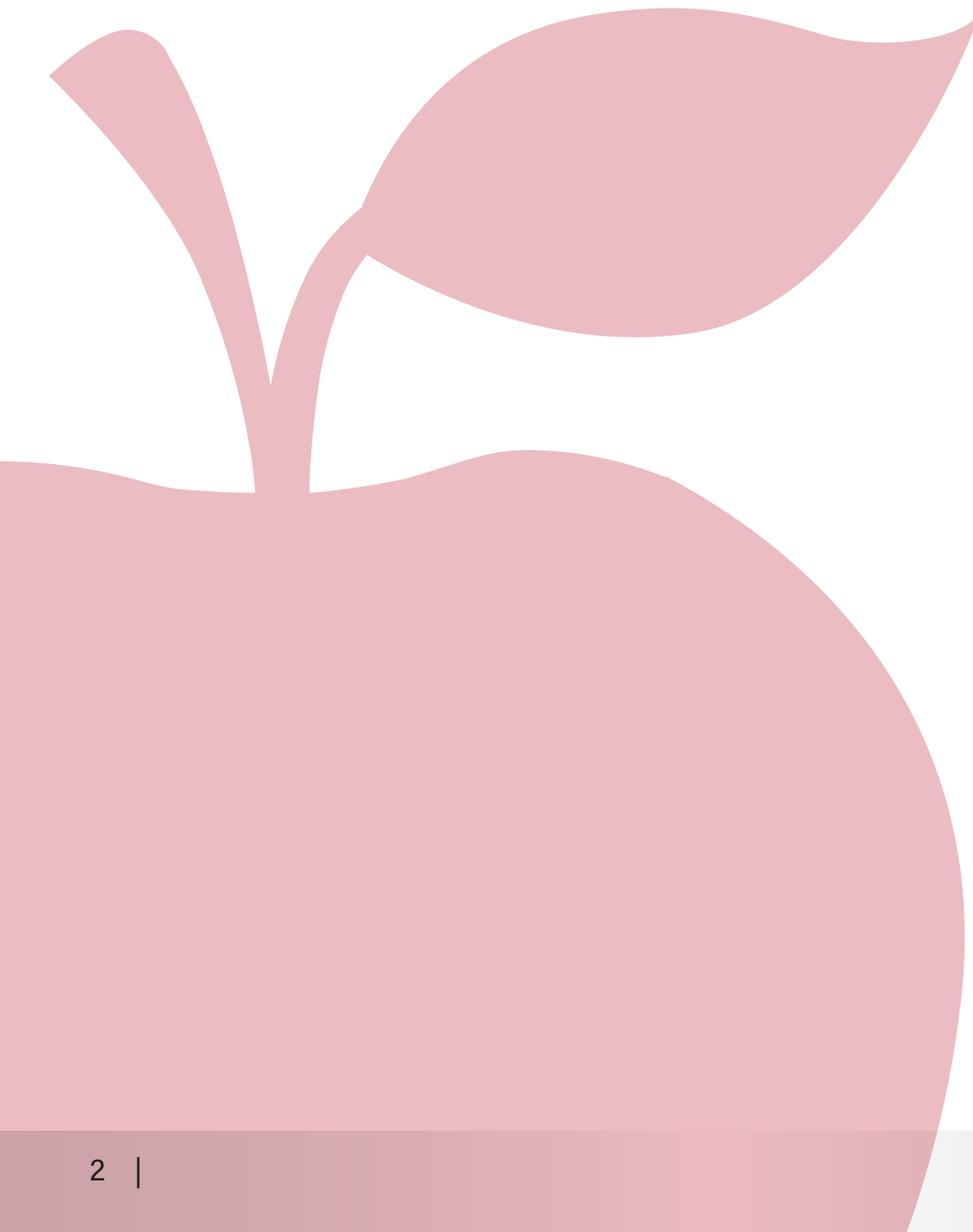
Henderson County

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



# HENDERSON COUNTY 2045 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## ADOPTED MARCH 20, 2024



Cover page photos:  
 Left: Skytop Orchard, [TDA Photos](#)  
 Top Right: Big Hungry River, [Jake Petrosky](#)  
 Bottom Right: Henderson County Courthouse, [Sam Dean](#)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- PART 1 . . . . .5**
  - How We Got Here. . . . . 6
  - Project Background . . . . . 6
  - Previous Land Use Milestones . . . . .12
  - Where We Are. . . . .14
  - Community Profile . . . . .14
  - Public Engagement. . . . . 24
  - Emerging Issues . . . . . 30
- PART 2 . . . . .33**
  - Where We Want To Go. . . . . 34
  - Using This Plan . . . . . 34
  - 2045 Goals. . . . . 36
  - 2045 Growth Framework . . . . . 38
  - Future Land Use. . . . . 40
  - Future Land Use Map . . . . . 40
  - Future Land Use Character Areas . . . . . 42
  - Sub-Area Maps and Descriptions . . . . . 50
- PART 3 . . . . .55**
  - 2045 Plan Outcomes. . . . . 56
  - Outcome 1: Intentional Land Use. . . . . 58
  - Outcome 2: Connectivity . . . . . 72
  - Outcome 3: Opportunity. . . . . 82
- APPENDIX\* . . . . .98**
  - Part 1: Glossary . . . . .100
  - Part 2: Plan Maps . . . . .106
  - Part 3: Public Outreach . . . . .124

*\*Due to file size, Parts 2 and 3 of the Appendix are only available digitally at [HendersonCounty2045.com](#)*





# PART 1

How We Got Here

Project Background

Previous Land Use Milestones

Where We Are

Community Profile

Public Engagement

Emerging Issues



# 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. This plan will be reviewed every 5 years and an update will be conducted after 10 years, in 2034. Starting the update after the next Census will optimize the planning process since the data will be new and more reliable than using solely American Community Survey data.

### PROCESS

The development of the plan was a 2 years and 9 months long process, which was 15 months longer than anticipated. The planning 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.

On December 5th, 2022, the Board of Commissioners held a formal public hearing to review the *Planning Board* recommended draft of the 2045 *Comprehensive Plan*. Feedback received during the public comment period that followed provided the basis for which many of the changes to the draft plan and *Future Land Use Map* were made during the 2023 review period.

\*Glossary terms are italicized and highlighted in blue font throughout the plan. The Glossary can be found on p. 98 in the Appendix.

### ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement formed the foundation of this plan. Outreach (p.24) 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* (See Appendix for a full list of outreach efforts). These included:

- Project Website
- Stakeholder Focus Groups
- Community Survey
- Public Meetings
- Presentations to Local Groups
- Steering Committee Meetings
- BOC Dedicated Comment Period

### ADOPTION

This plan was unanimously adopted by the Board of Commissioners on March 20, 2024.

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

### STUDY AREA

The *Comprehensive Plan* offers land use guidance for the *unincorporated area* of Henderson County. Municipalities have jurisdiction over land use decisions within their limits. 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**.*

**Municipalities of Henderson County**

.....

City of Hendersonville	Town of Mills River
City of Saluda*	Town of Laurel Park
Town of Fletcher	Village of Flat Rock

\*Saluda is in both Henderson County and Polk County



Official seals of the municipalities in Henderson County



# HOW WE GOT HERE

## WHY PLAN?

An updated *Comprehensive Plan* is a State-required document for enacting or enforcing zoning in North Carolina (per NCGS §160D-501). 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.

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

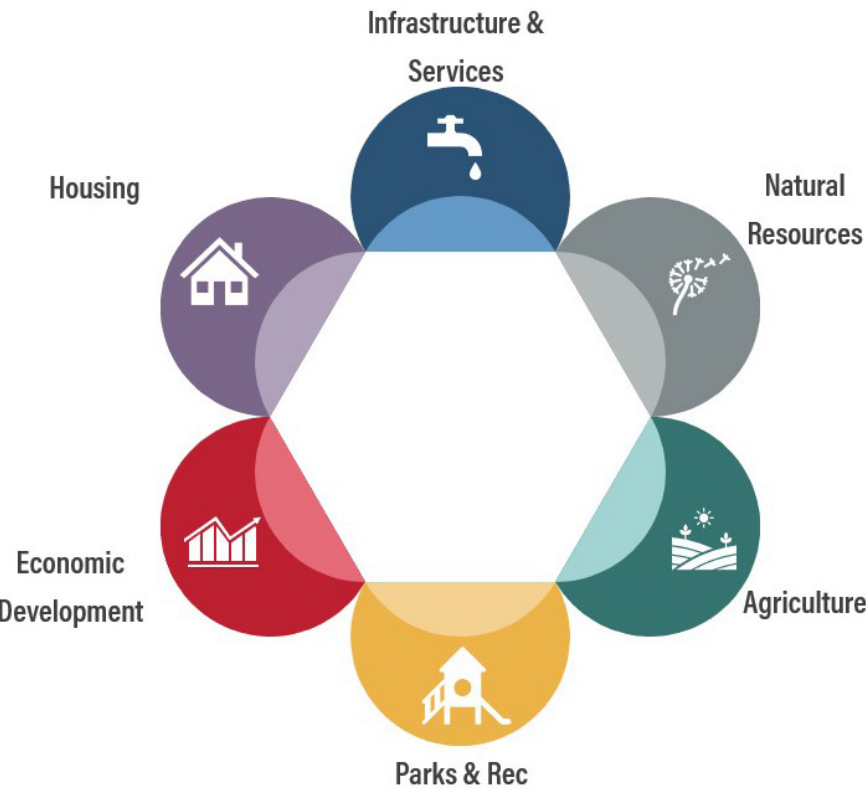
- Zoning Updates
- Land Development Code* Updates
- Corridor Studies
- Parks and Recreation Planning
- Transportation Planning
- Economic Development
- Rezoning* Decisions
- Funding Allocation
- Agricultural Preservation

## WHY NOW?

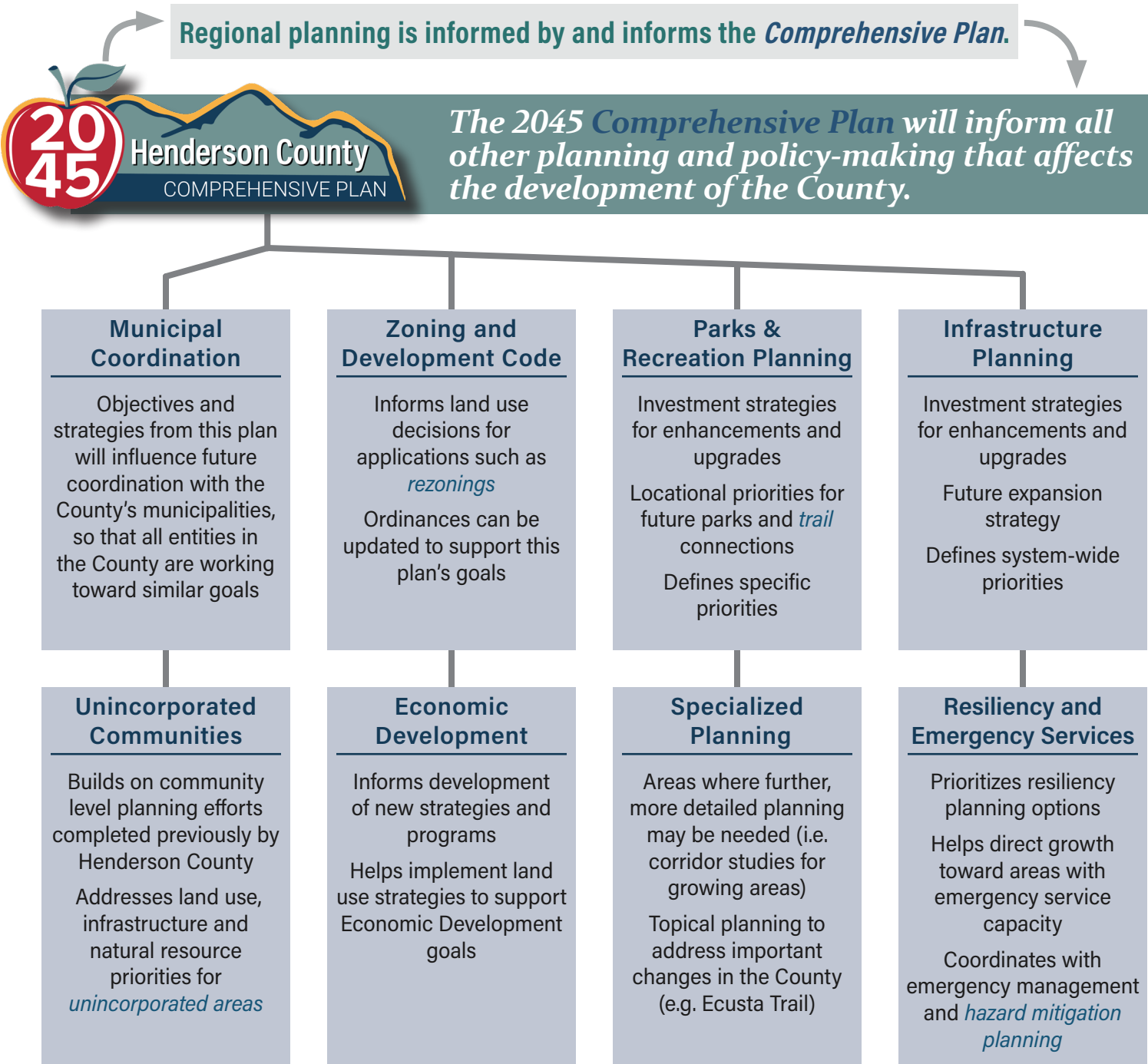
The current plan was adopted in 2004 and needs to be reviewed and updated. Since that time, development increased rapidly and typically catered to households with higher incomes. Additionally, the current *Comprehensive Plan* was adopted prior to implementation of the *Land Development Code*. In result, 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.

This document is policy, not regulatory. The *Land Development Code* and other County ordinances are the regulatory documents.

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



## HOW DOES THIS PLAN FIT IN WITH OTHER PROCESSES?

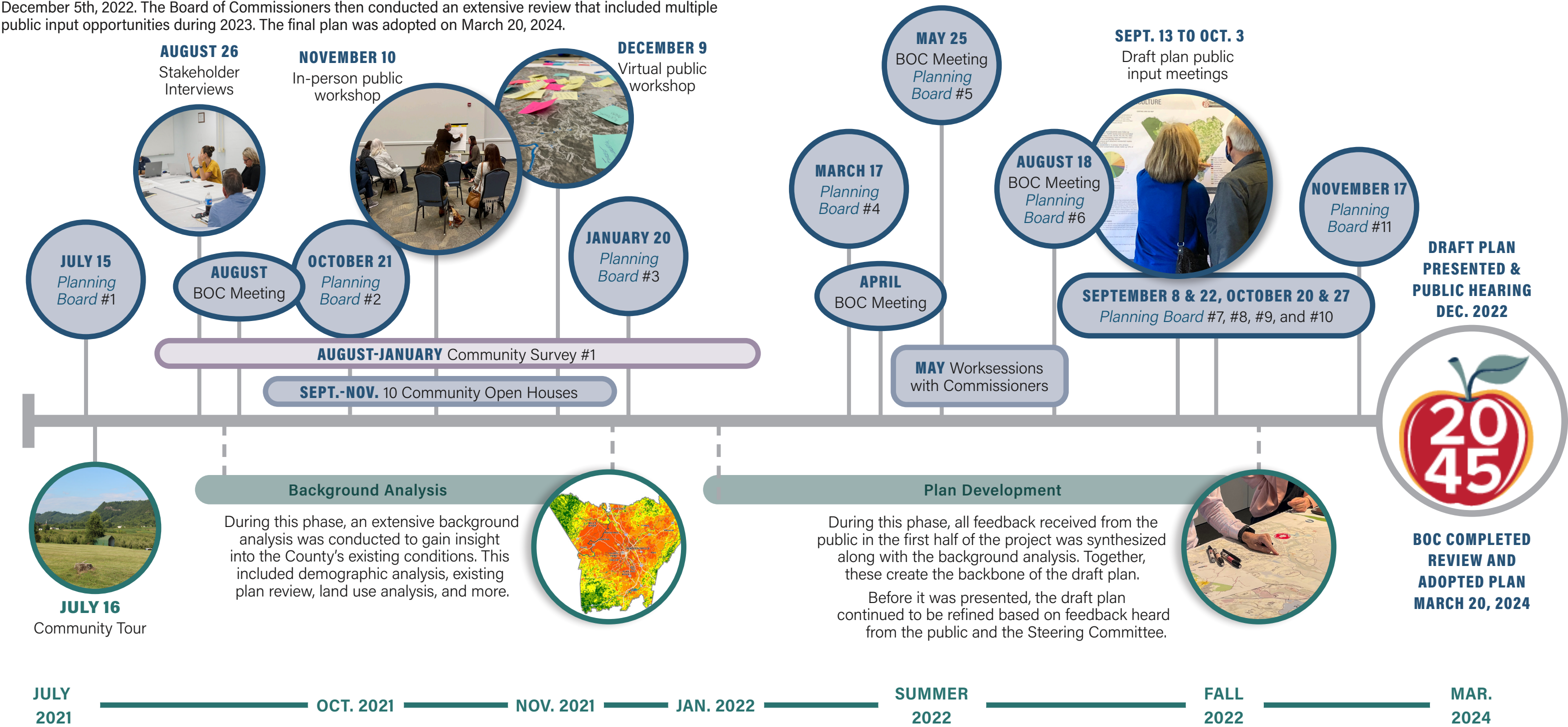




# HOW WE GOT HERE

## PLANNING PROCESS

The development of the Comprehensive Draft Plan was presented to the BOC at the Public Hearing held on December 5th, 2022. The Board of Commissioners then conducted an extensive review that included multiple public input opportunities during 2023. The final plan was adopted on March 20, 2024.





# HOW WE GOT HERE

## PREVIOUS LAND USE 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 prepared.

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 adopts the *Land Development 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.



Downtown Hendersonville from Third Avenue  
Photo Credit; Sam Dean



# 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 experienced significant growth during the 2000-2020 period. Population in the County as a whole increased by 27,106 or 30%. Population in the *unincorporated area* experienced a similar increase. Saluda and Laurel Park grew 11% and 12% respectively and some other jurisdictions, like Fletcher, grew as much as 90%! Projections from the NC Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) indicate that this growth pressure is likely to continue, projecting a population increase of 29%, totaling to 149,839 residents by 2045. (Source: NC OSBM County/State Population Projections).

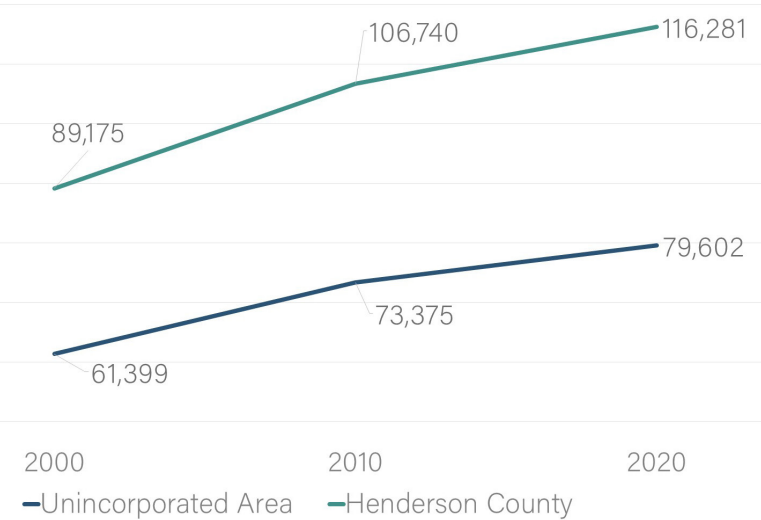
The County population estimate doesn't account for the large portion of "second home" residents who are counted in their home state instead. A significant amount of the population is located in the *unincorporated areas* of the County. Population density is highest in Hendersonville and along I-26.

### POPULATION GROWTH TABLE

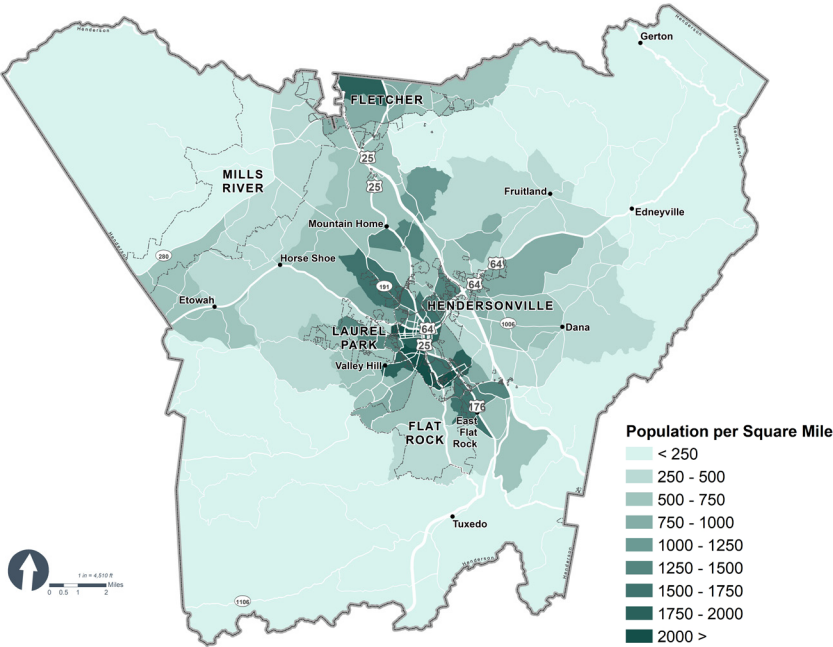
AREA	POPULATION		% GROWTH
	2000	2020	
SALUDA	667	741	11.5%
LAUREL PARK	2,017	2,250	12.2%
FLAT ROCK	2,565	3,486	35.1%
MILLS RIVER	5,566	7,134	27.2%
FLETCHER	4,185	7,987	90.9%
HENDERSONVILLE	10,420	15,137	45.27%
UNINCORPORATED	63,765	79,546	24.7%
HENDERSON COUNTY	89,175	116,281	30.4%

Source: 2020 Census except Saluda (Esri))

### POPULATION GROWTH 2000-2020



### POPULATION DENSITY MAP



A larger version of this map can be found in the Appendix

### HOUSING

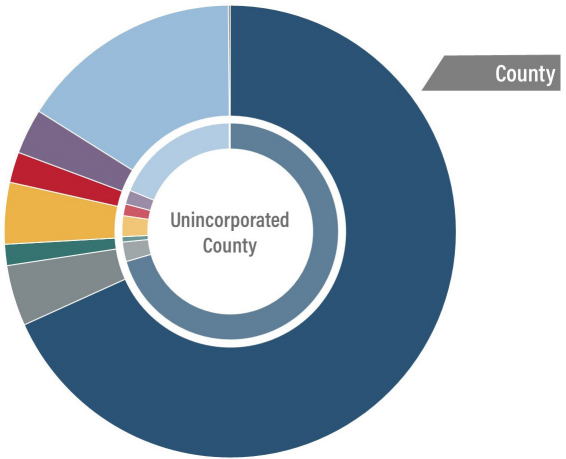
There are 58,811 housing units in Henderson County (Census, 2019). Over 15,000 housing units have been constructed between 2000 and 2019, but the majority of these (11,257) were built between 2000 and 2009. Recently approved developments in the County are set to add more than 2,600 homes over the next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

### HOUSING TYPE

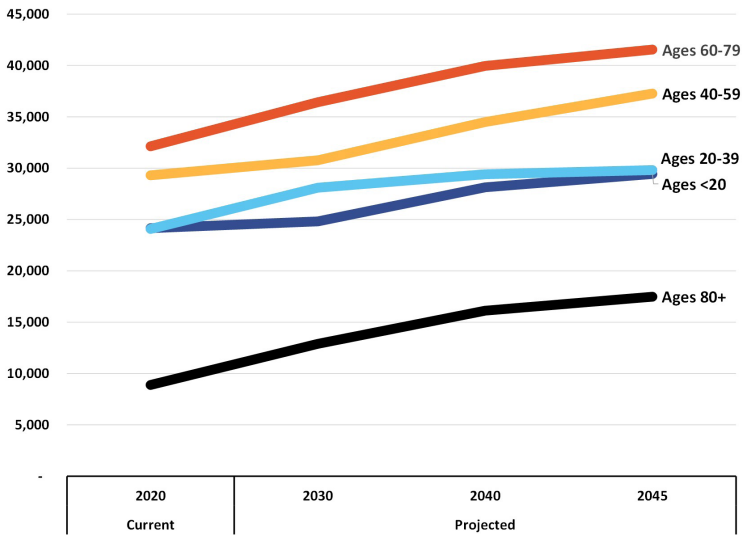


- Single Family
- Townhome
- 2 units
- 3 or 4 units
- 5 to 9 units
- 10 or more units
- Mobile Home
- Other

Source: 2019 Census ACS Data

### AGE COHORTS

### AGE



Sources: NC Office State Budget & Management, SYNEVA Economics

### 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

Henderson County has an older population than the average of North Carolina as whole. The median age in the County is 48.1 years old. This 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. The cohort between the ages of 60 and 79 is projected to remain the largest age group in Henderson County.

### INCOME

Median household income in Henderson County is \$59,669 which exceeds that of all other counties in Western North Carolina, except for Buncombe County at \$64,532. The median is in-line with North Carolina as a whole (\$61,972)(Source: ACS 2021 Estimate). When broken down by age of householder, the median household incomes are shown in the table to the left.



# WHERE WE ARE

## LAND USE

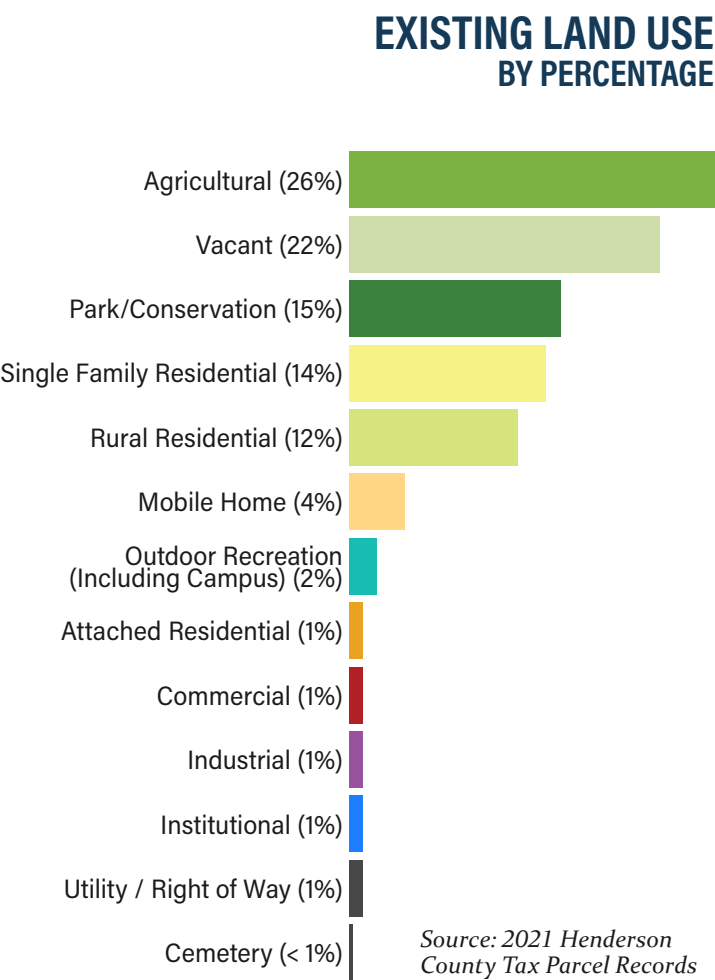
### EXISTING LAND USE

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 of the 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. The total county acreage is 238,688 acres (US Census 2020). The total *unincorporated area* is 208,038 acres. Highlights from the *existing land use* inventory include:

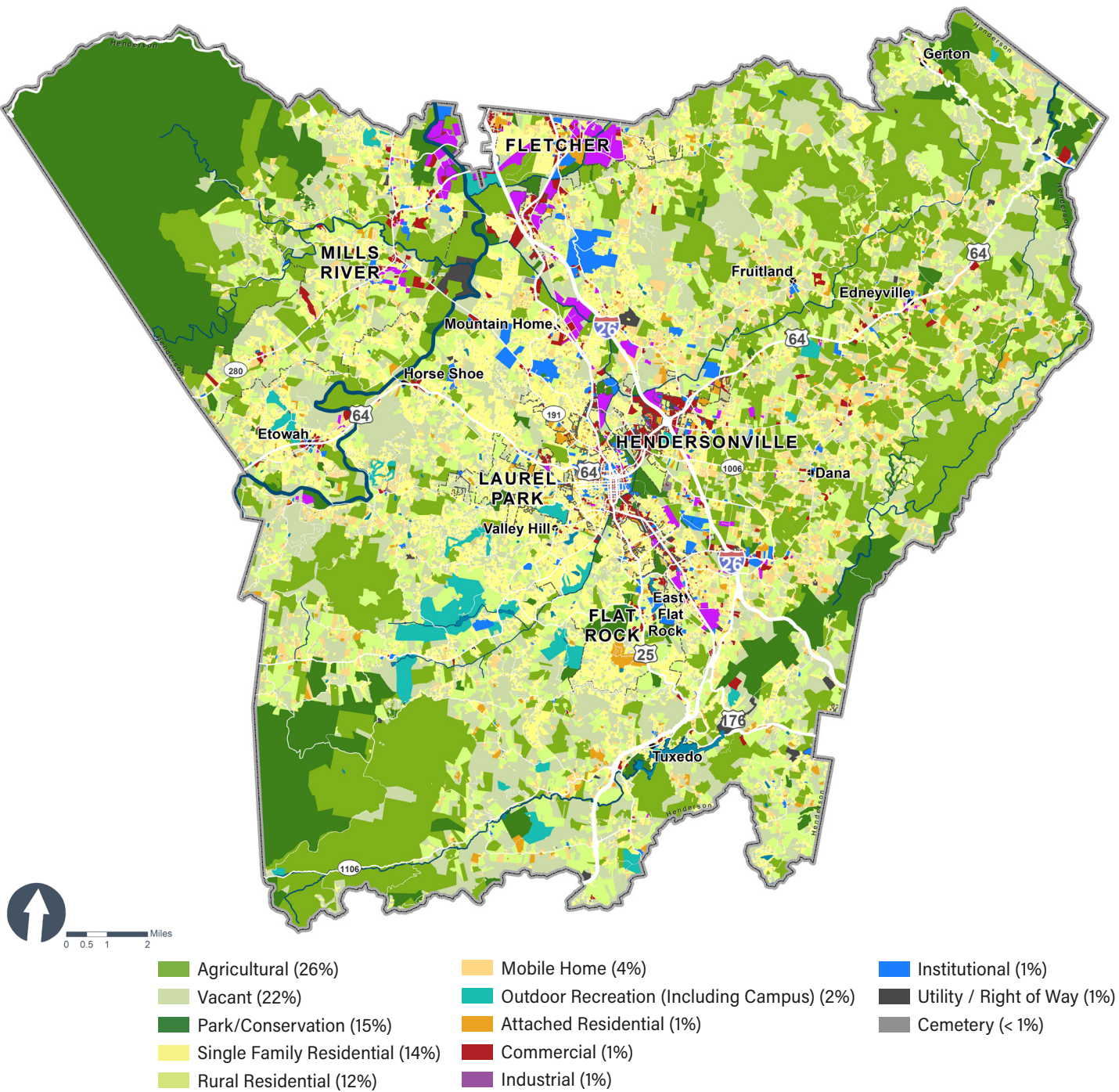
- Commercial and *industrial* uses make up 2.7% of land (approximately 6,200 acres) and concentrated along highways (I-26, US-64, NC 191, NC 280)
- Agriculture* (including timber) covers 26% of land (60,000 acres)
- Subdivisions and attached residential cover 18% of land
- Rural residential (residential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

### PROPERTY VALUE

Commercial and *industrial* uses make up 2.7% of land but 13% of property value for the County (based on 2021 tax records). 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 MAP





# WHERE WE ARE

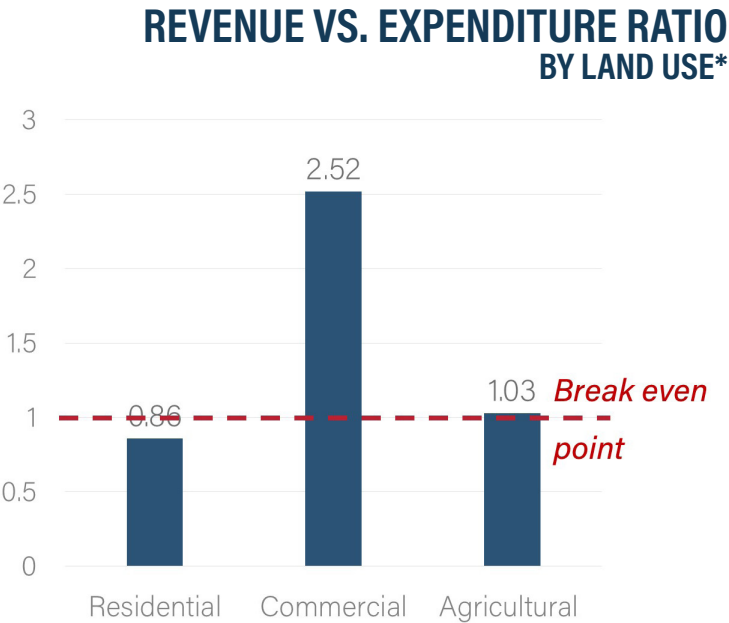
## COST OF SERVICES

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 residential properties consume they provide \$0.86 in revenue\*.
- 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.



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

*Agriculture* is not only a source of food, but it is also a major economic driver across North Carolina. To help preserve farmland and ensure the ability to farm, the NC General Assembly codified the prohibition of county zoning regulations for Bona Fide Farms (NCGS § 160D-903). Although there is a specific Character Area for Agriculture/Rural, agricultural operations can occur anywhere in the County, regardless of zoning.

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, environmental benefits, and adds to the scenic beauty of the County. 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.

Preservation of the agricultural industry and farmlands in Henderson County will hinge on resolving labor shortages, labor costs, production costs, loss of farmland to other land use, attracting future farmers to carry on the business, and identify future threats.

There are  
**59,000 acres**  
(25% of total County acreage)  
of *Present Use Value (PUV)*  
properties in the County.  
Source: Henderson County Tax Records



# WHERE WE ARE

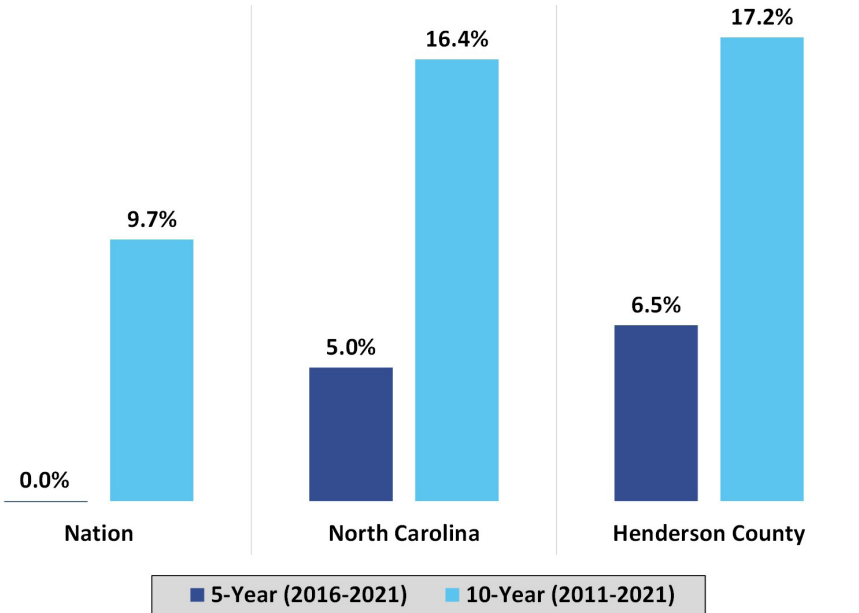
## ECONOMY

Job growth rates in Henderson County have exceeded that of North Carolina and the nation as a whole. Median household income is the second highest for counties in Western North Carolina. The most recent data from the American Community Survey (2021 ACS data) shows a median household income of \$59,669 for the County. This high median can be credited to many well paid manufacturing jobs, which is the County's third largest employment sector. Henderson County's economy is anchored by manufacturing, tourism, and *agriculture*. *Industry* growth is heavily influenced by the lower population of working age individuals and by the high housing costs, which is contributed to by the second home market.

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).

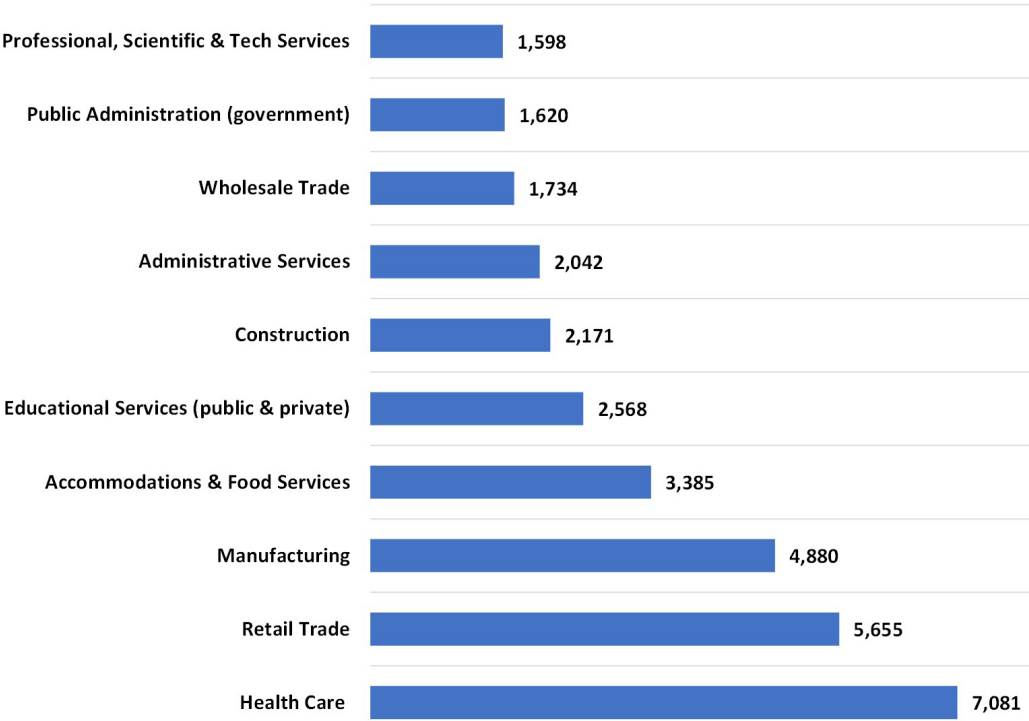
*Agriculture* also contributes significantly to the County's economy via market value of products sold, processing and distribution activities and by supporting agritourism, which is a growing industry.

### EMPLOYMENT GROWTH RATE



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

### INDUSTRY SECTORS BY TOTAL NUMBER EMPLOYED



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 the *unincorporated areas* of 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

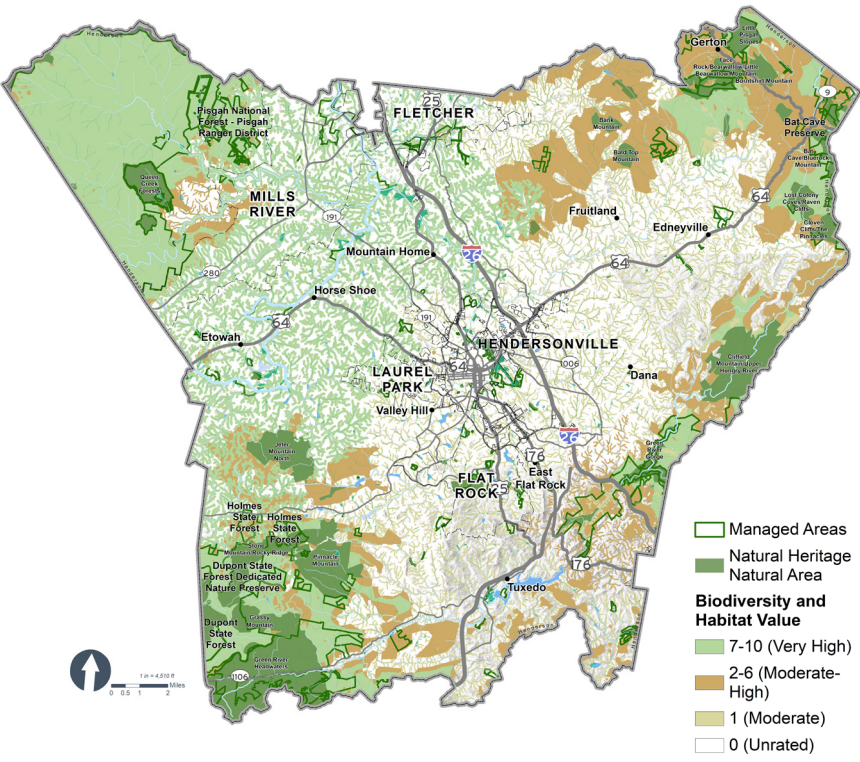
Henderson County has a variety of habitats and micro-climates including mountainous areas and broad valleys created by the French Broad River, Mills River, and Green River. The highest elevation is Little Pisgah Mountain at 5,200 feet, and the lowest is where the Green River exits the County at 1,400 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 20 years. Recommendations within this plan aim to provide a balance between protection of key resources and accommodating growth. Natural Heritage Natural Areas, mapped in dark green to the right, are unique, intact habitats of local, regional, state, national, or global significance.

There are  
**39,000 acres**  
(16% of total County acreage)

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 will be expanded and reconstructed in the northern part of the County by 2024. Overall roadway volumes are also increasing on many roads in the county. These volumes have recovered from a drop during the 2020 - 2021 COVID-19 pandemic. 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.

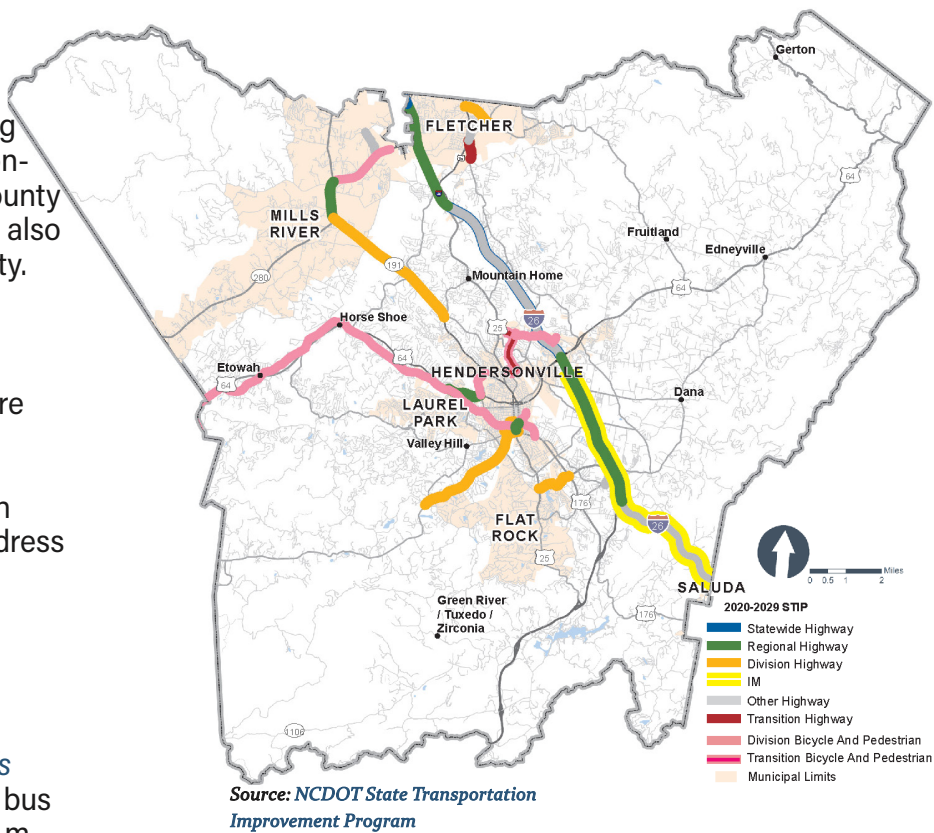
### TRANSIT

Henderson County contracts with a provider for transit and *paratransit* services. *Apple 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. Construction is expected to begin in 2023.

STIP ROADWAY PROJECTS MAP



A larger version of the map above can be found in the Appendix.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

### WATER AND SEWER

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).

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 and should be studied if this occurs.

### 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 download and 3 Mbps upload.

### OTHER PUBLIC UTILITIES & RAILWAYS

Henderson County property owners have access to natural gas lines in certain parts of the County. Although there is not a power-plant within the County, Duke Power is the main energy provider, which sources its power from various sources in North Carolina. As landline phones are becoming less popular, adequate cell service is even more important. Federal Communications Commission data shows multiple gaps in cell service across the County. Though decreasing in popularity, Henderson County still has active freight rail lines.

### FRENCH BROAD INTAKE & PUMPING STATION



Source: City of Hendersonville

18%

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

Source: 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?** *Through 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



# 6,875+

## 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 Draft Plan Public Meetings
- 11 Planning Board Meetings
- 50+ Presentations Given

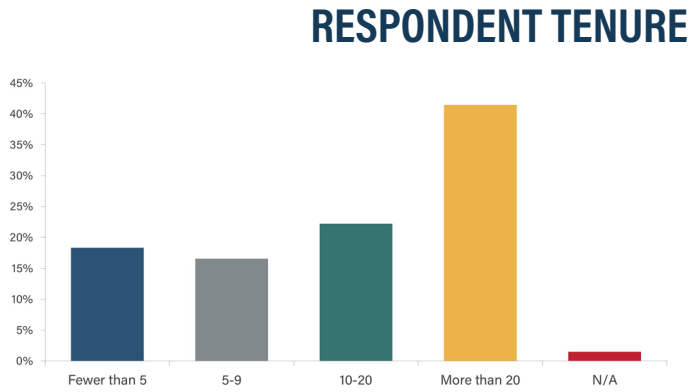


# WHERE WE ARE

## COMMUNITY SURVEY

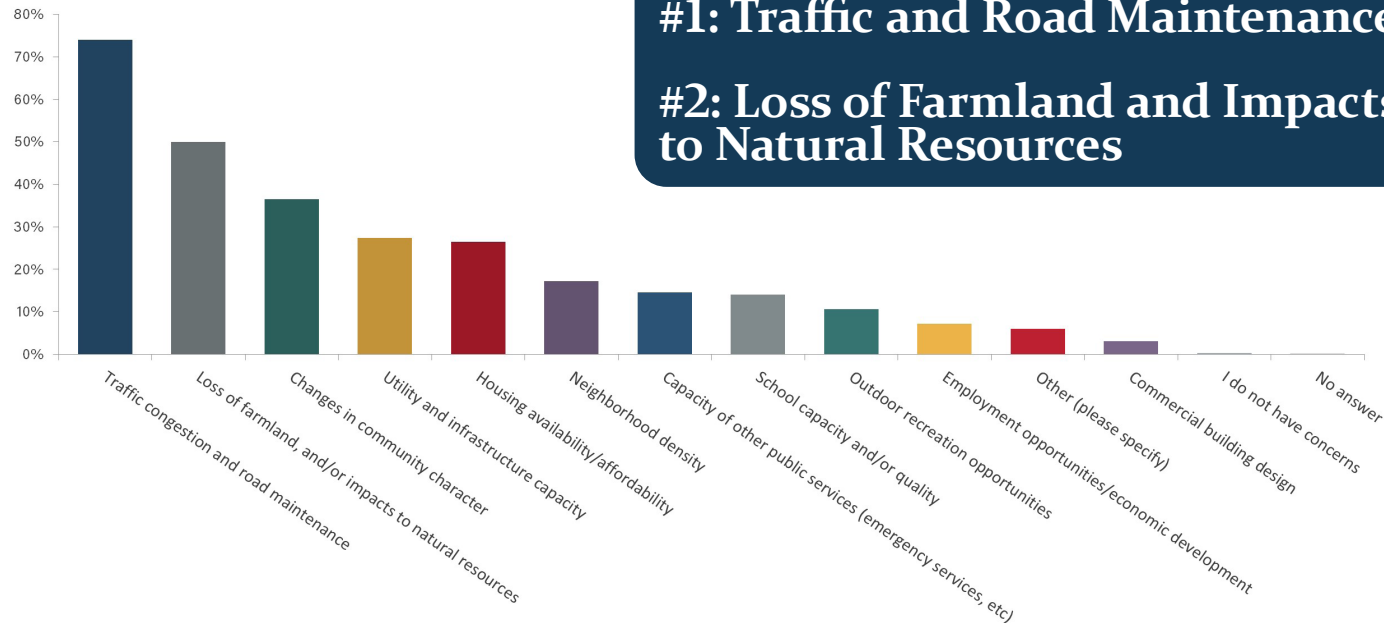
- Highlights from the community survey:
- Over 7,000 responses were received
  - An online option was provided and paper surveys were mailed to all property owners
  - Responses were summarized by geographic area of the County and used to develop recommendations
  - Top concerns were traffic and road 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 2025. The expansion of this highway affects hundreds of thousands of people and has caused countless delays and overflow traffic onto alternative roads. High volumes of seasonal traffic also contribute to this issue.
  - Community character, utility and infrastructure capacity, and housing availability/affordability were also top five concerns

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



As shown in the graph above, the majority of survey respondents have lived in Henderson County for over 10 years.

## CONCERNS BY TOPIC



**Top Concerns:**

**#1: Traffic and Road Maintenance**

**#2: Loss of Farmland and Impacts to Natural Resources**

## PRIORITIES

Protection of *open space* and forests, and conservation/preservation of unique natural areas and farmland ranked as the top priorities for respondents who took the survey. When the results were aggregated by community, access to *Broadband* became a significant priority. This change in priorities can be attributed to the stark difference in internet access across the County.

**Top Priorities**

**Protect *Open Space*/Forests**

**Conserve Natural Areas**

**Preserve Farmland**

**Improve Access to Internet**



Photos: Seven Falls by Michele Schwartz; Lazy Otter by Jared Kay; Getty Images

## 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 - help create safe connections for businesses and residents
- 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





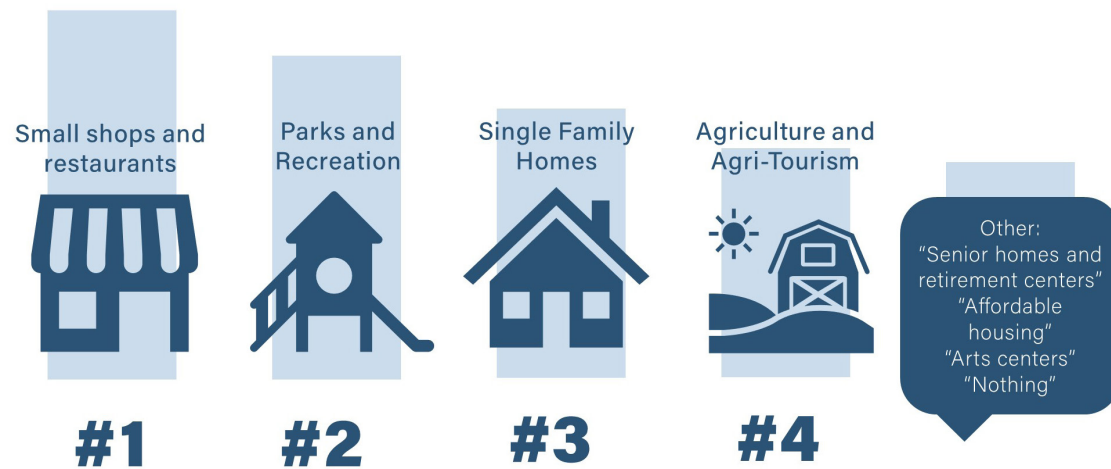
# WHERE WE ARE

## OTHER PRIORITIES

The word cloud below shows responses to an open-ended question about priorities, with the size of the word indicating the importance and frequency of use in responses. The graphic shows answers other than traffic and road issues.



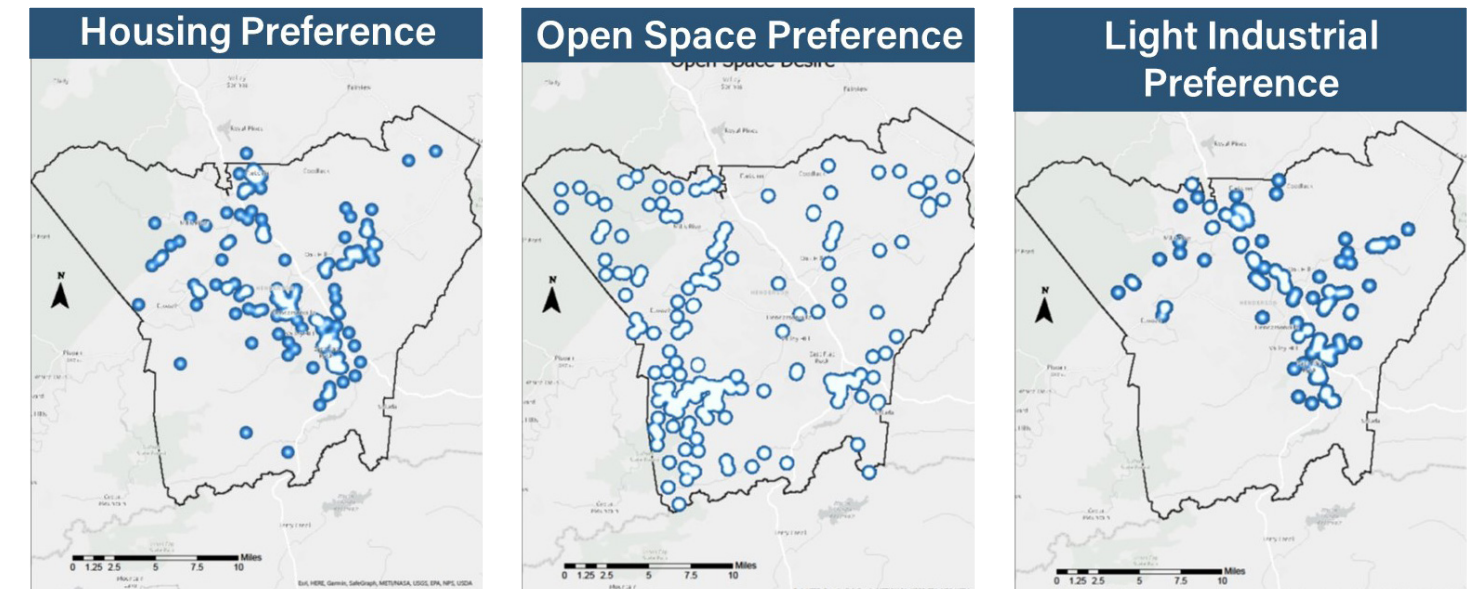
## DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCE



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

Growth in the County has traditionally concentrated around Hendersonville, Fletcher, Mills River, and Etowah, but the increasing development pressures have begun expanding to outlying communities. Projections from the NC Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) indicate that this trend is likely to continue, indicating that there will be demand for an additional 19,000 housing units in the next 30 years.

Many things will influence the County's growth trajectory, including available land, utility policies and capacity, as well as land use policy. Survey respondents echoed a desire to "grow in a smart way" that would mitigate potential unintended negative impacts of growth.



## RIISING 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)

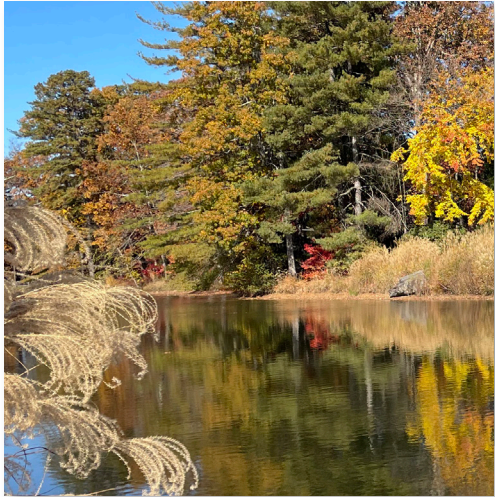
## HOUSING FOR THE WORKFORCE

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, government, 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.