

Cover page photos:

*Left: Grandad's Apples, Sam
Dean Photography*

*Top Right: Big Hungry River, Jake Petrosky
Bottom Right: Henderson County
Courthouse, Henderson County Staff*

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 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, and local businesses.

Diversify housing choices and availability.

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

PART 1

How We Got Here

Project Background

History of the County

Planning 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 25 years. This plan will be reviewed every 5 years and an update will be conducted after 10 years, in 2032. Starting the update two years 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 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.

General Project Schedule



*Glossary terms are italicized and highlighted in blue font throughout the plan.

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	



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:

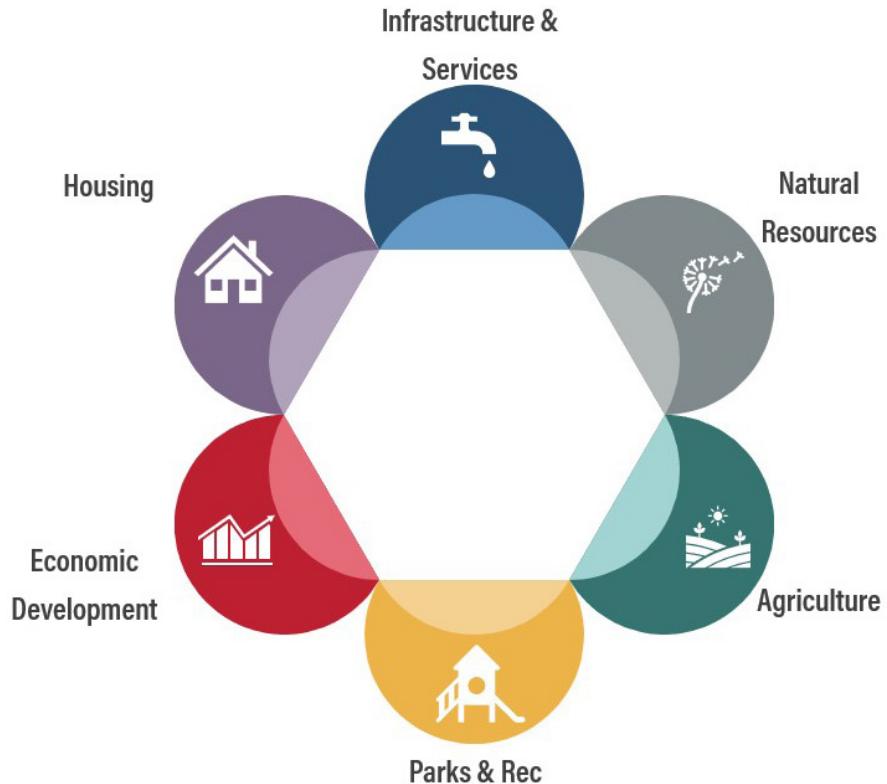
Zoning Updates
Land Development Code Updates
Corridor Studies
Parks and Recreation Planning
Transportation Planning
Economic Development
Rezoning Decisions
Funding Allocation

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...

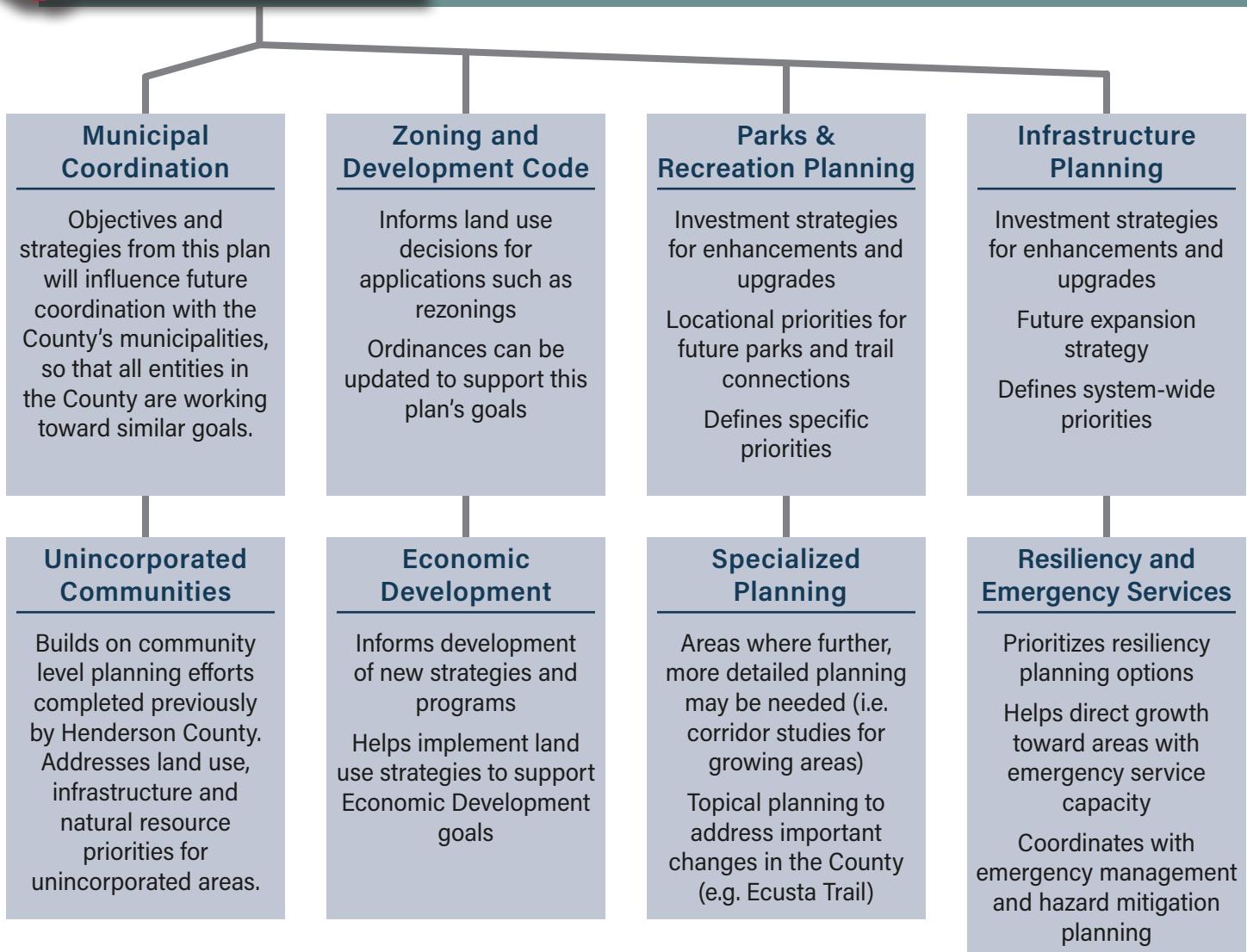


HOW DOES THIS PLAN FIT IN WITH OTHER PROCESSES?

Regional planning is informed by and informs the Comprehensive Plan.



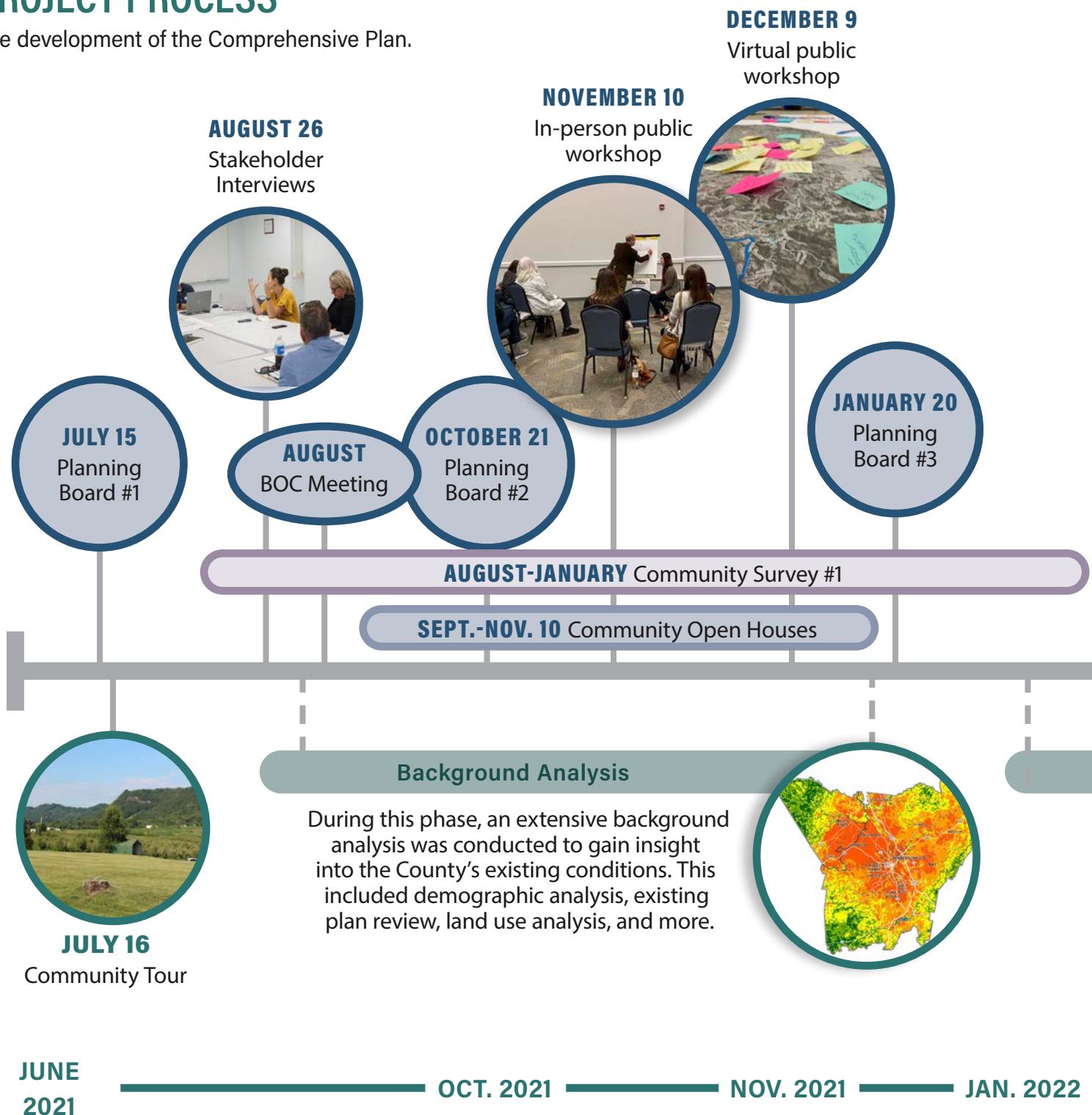
The 2045 Comprehensive Plan will inform all other planning and policy-making that affects the development of the County.

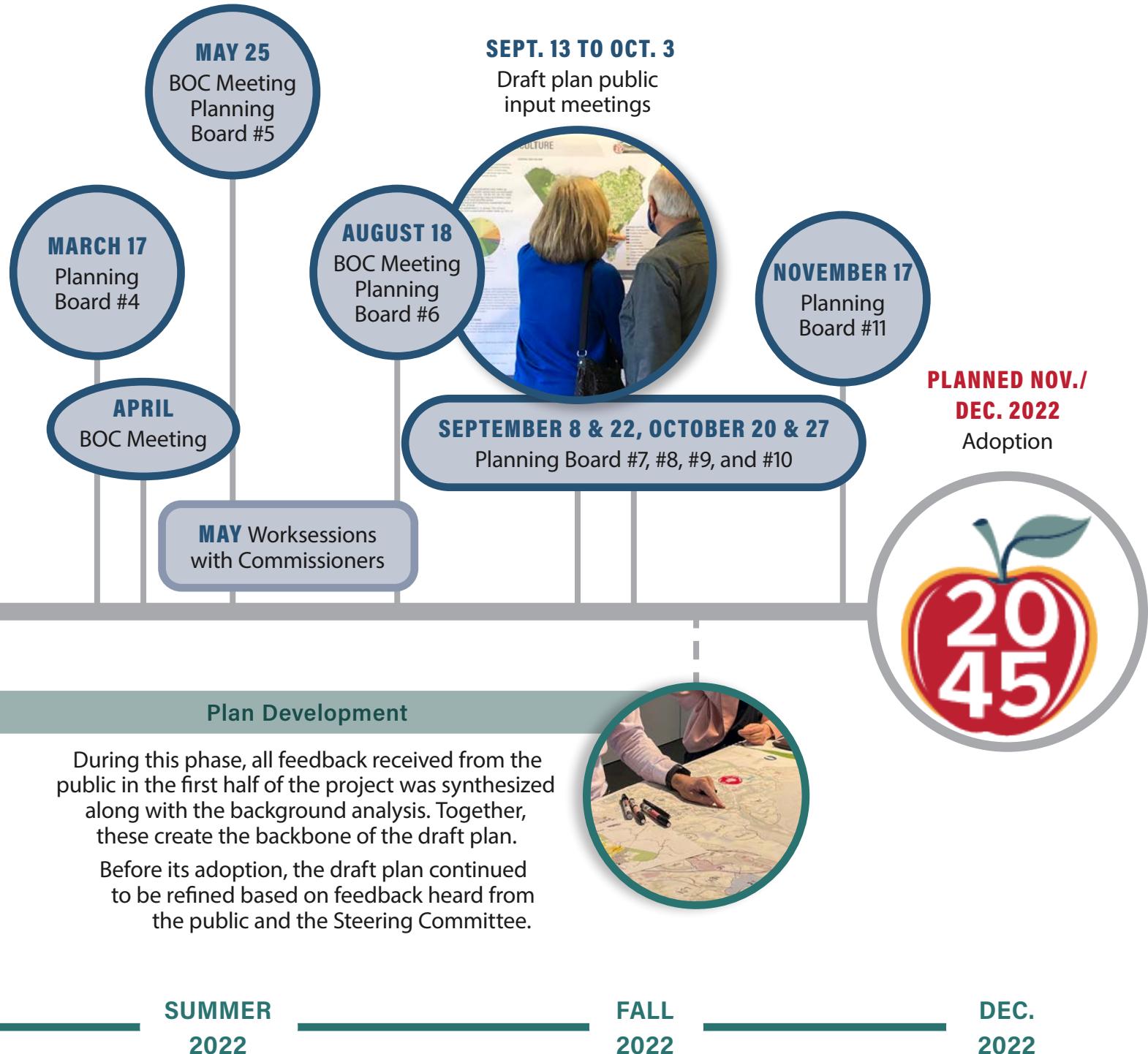


HOW WE GOT HERE

PROJECT PROCESS

The development of the Comprehensive Plan.





HOW WE GOT HERE

HISTORY OF THE COUNTY

The land that would become Henderson County was first inhabited by the Native Americans and their ancestors for thousands of years prior to European settlement. European settlers continued to migrate into the Western North Carolina mountain region during the 17th and 18th centuries. The North Carolina General Assembly created Henderson County in 1838 and named it after NC Supreme Court Justice Leonard Henderson. In 1841, the central location of Hendersonville was voted to be the County seat, and the town received its charter



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.)

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 many South Carolinians. The Flat Rock area of the County was the primary area for these visitors and settlers. 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.

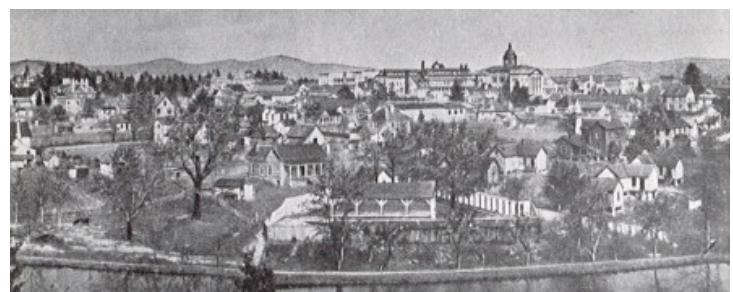
In the mid-20th century, tourism changed to include a new demographic: children and young adults. Summer camps became increasingly popular and the climate of Henderson County offered an

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 because of its agriculture, industry, natural resources, tourism, and most of all, its people. To plan for the future, the County must acknowledge its past and current strengths, in order to plan for the best possible future development of the County for its citizens.

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 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 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 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 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).

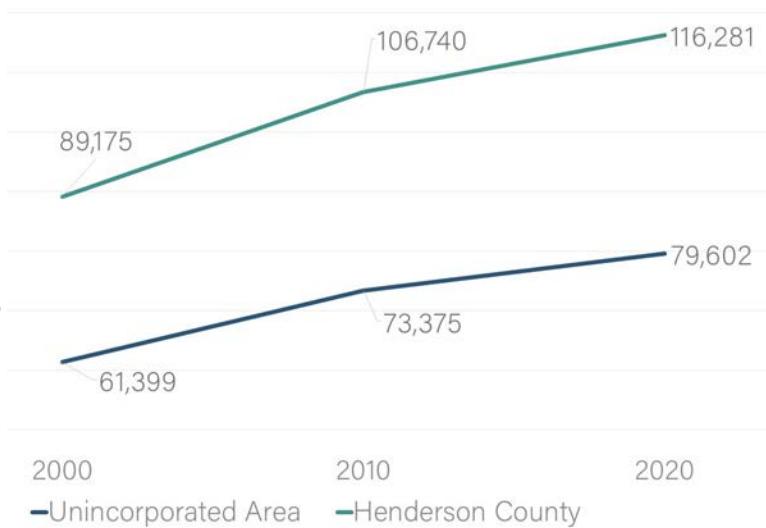
The County population estimate doesn't account for the large portion of "second home" residents who are counted in their home state instead. A significant amount of the population is located in the [unincorporated areas](#) of the County. Population density is highest in Hendersonville and along I-26.

POPULATION GROWTH TABLE

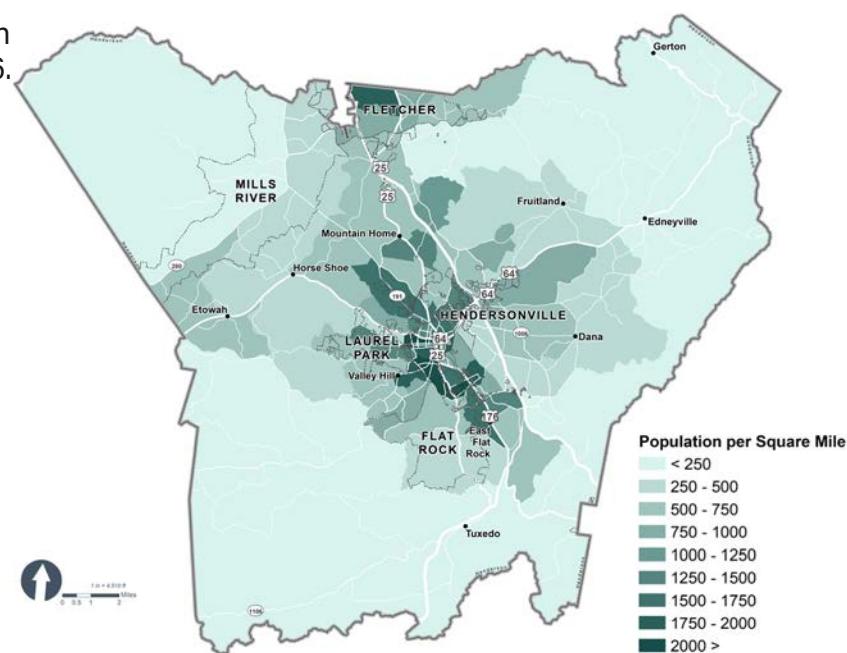
AREA	POPULATION 2000	POPULATION 2020	% GROWTH
SALUDA	667	741	11.5%
LAUREL PARK	2,017	2,250	12.2%
FLAT ROCK	2,565	3,486	35.1%
MILLS RIVER	5,566	7,134	27.2%
FLETCHER	4,185	7,987	90.9%
HENDERSONVILLE	10,420	15,137	45.27%
UNINCORPORATED	63,765	79,546	24.7%
HENDERSON COUNTY	89,175	116,281	30.4%

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

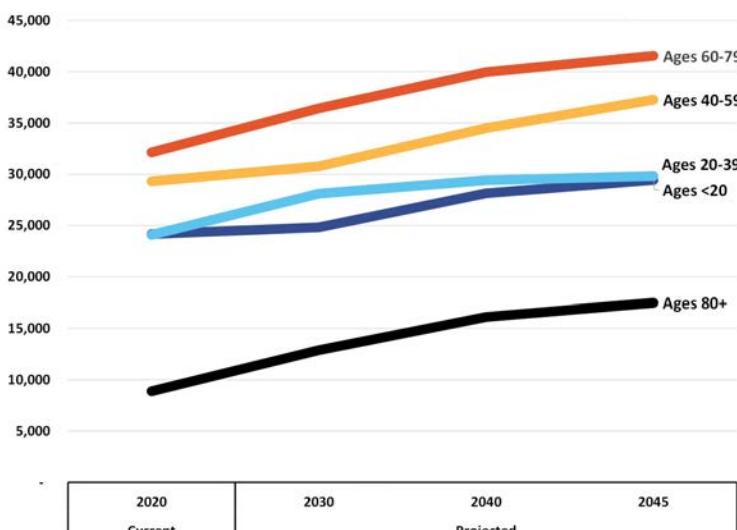
HOUSING

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.

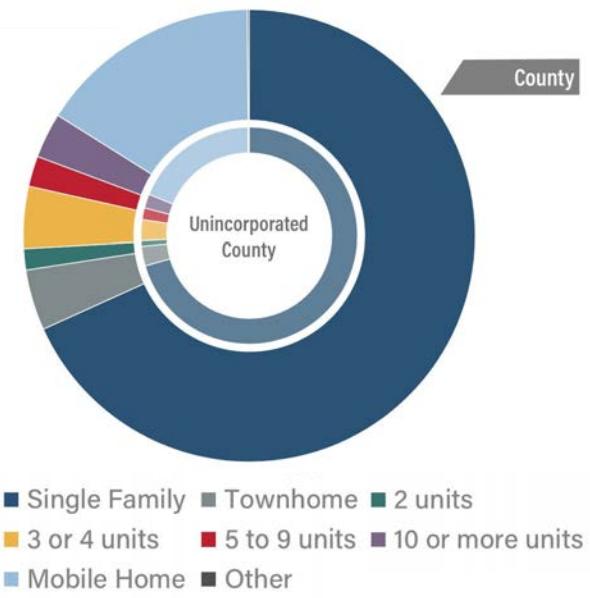
HOUSING COSTS

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).



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

HOUSING TYPE



AGE COHORTS

AGE

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

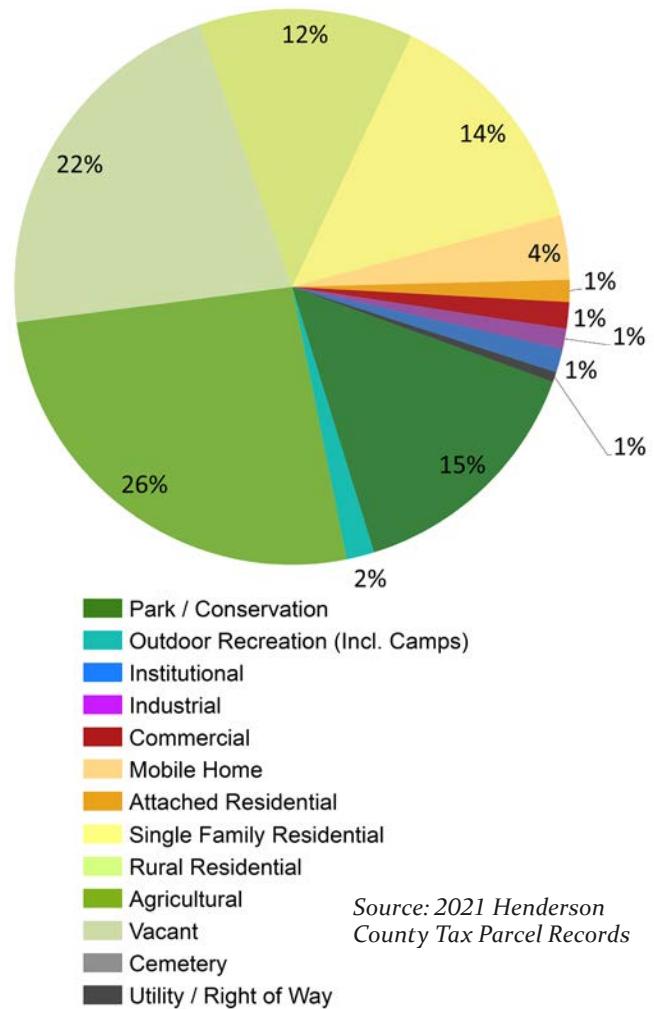
Henderson County experienced significant growth since 2000. Some areas of the County have seen residential growth, while others have seen more commercial or [industrial](#) development. In some of the more isolated parts of the County, land use trends have changed little during the last 20 years. The 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

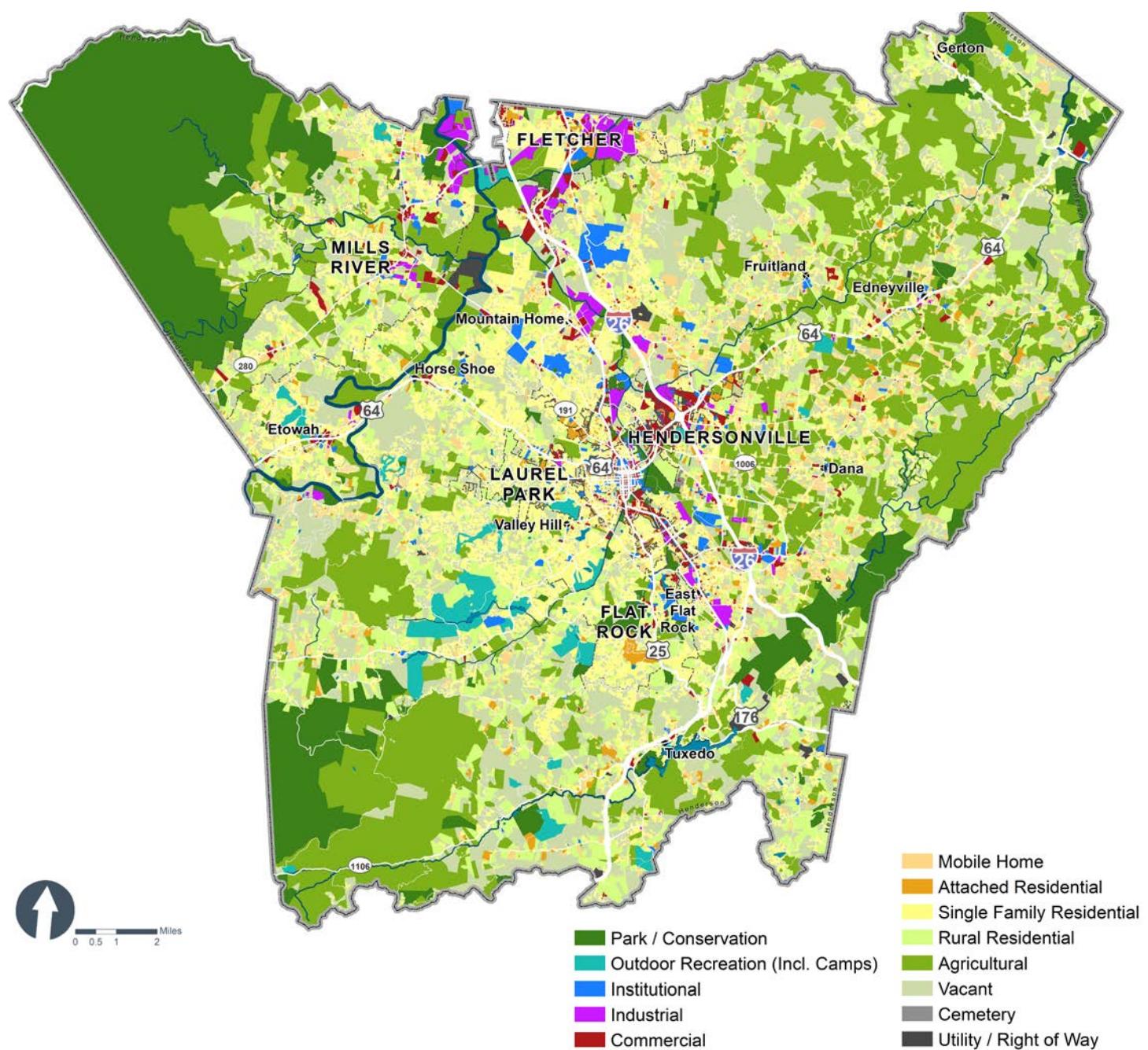
PROPERTY VALUE

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 BY PERCENTAGE



EXISTING LAND USE MAP



WHERE WE ARE

COST OF SERVICES

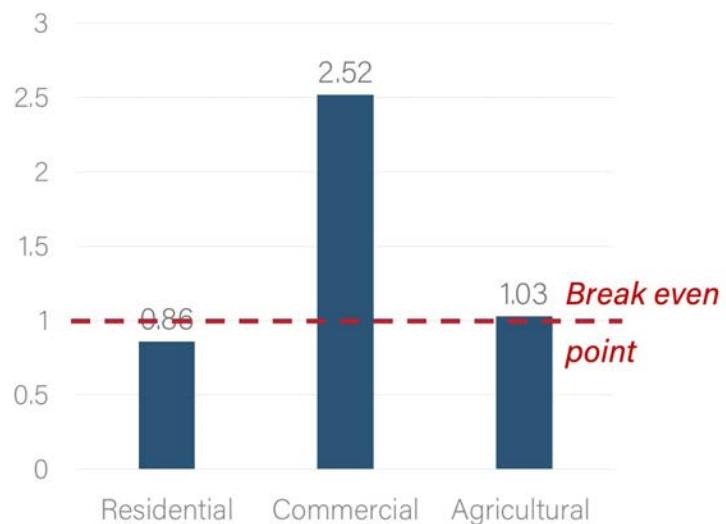
In 2008, the [Cost of Services](#) Study was conducted for Henderson County. Key findings from this study include:

- 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.

REVENUE VS. 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

[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.

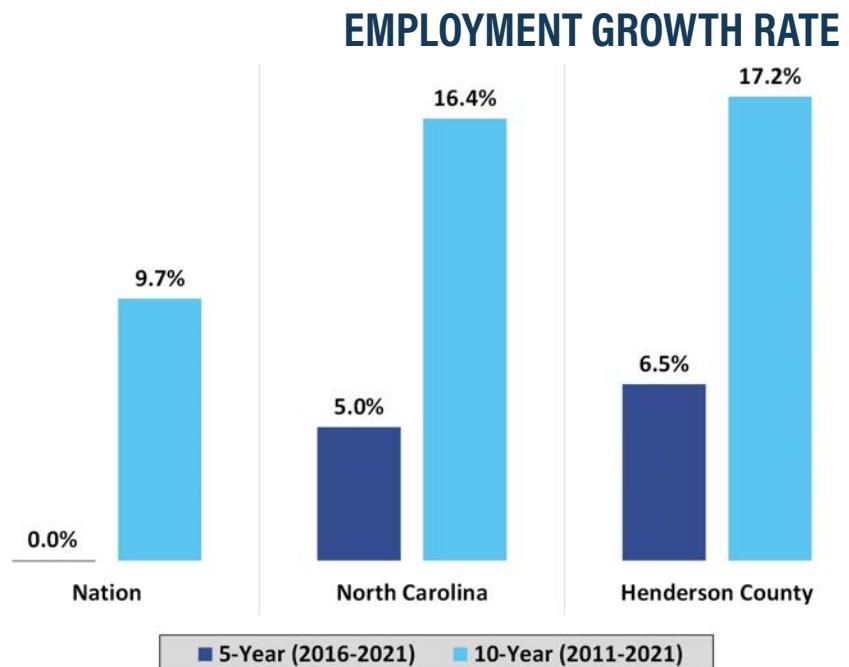
This high median can be credited to many well paid manufacturing jobs, which is the County's third largest employment sector.

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.

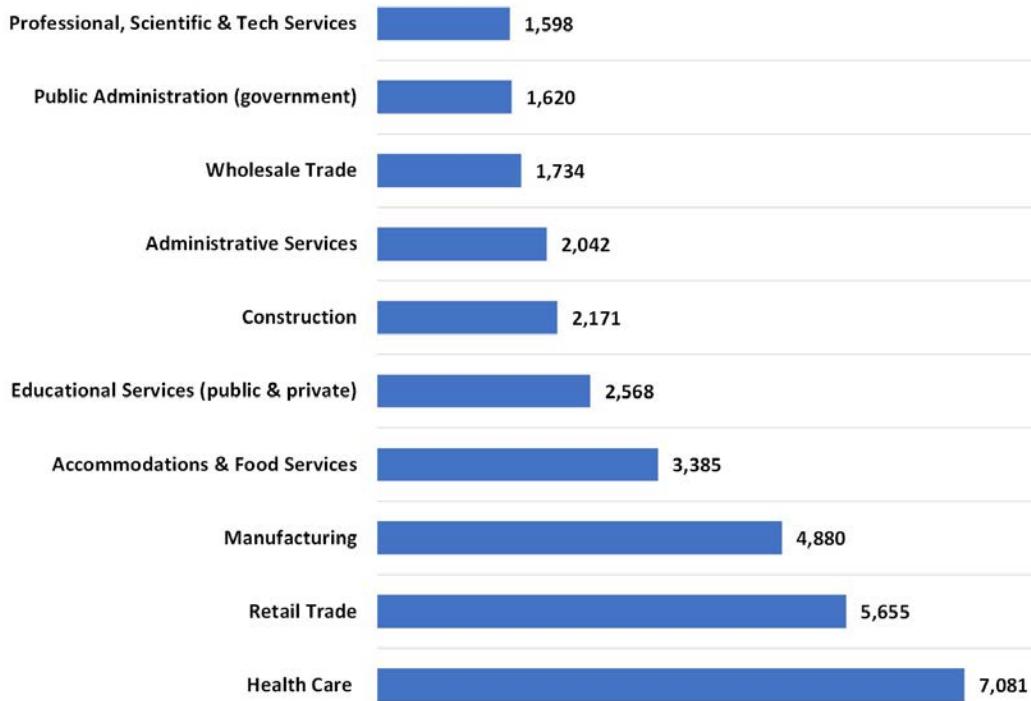
Industrial growth has generated \$947 million of investment in the County and makes up 30% of the property [tax base](#) (HCPED presentation at the Board of Commissioners meeting, April, 2022).

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.



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

INDUSTRY SECTORS BY TOTAL NUMBER EMPLOYED



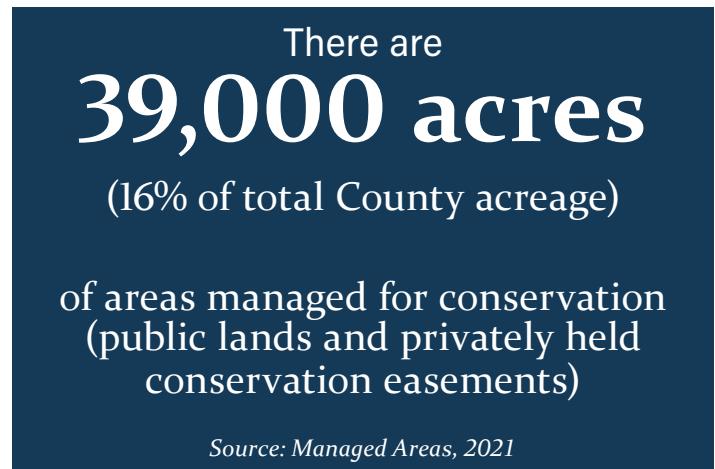
Source: NC Department of Commerce, 2021 1Q

PARKS & TRAILS

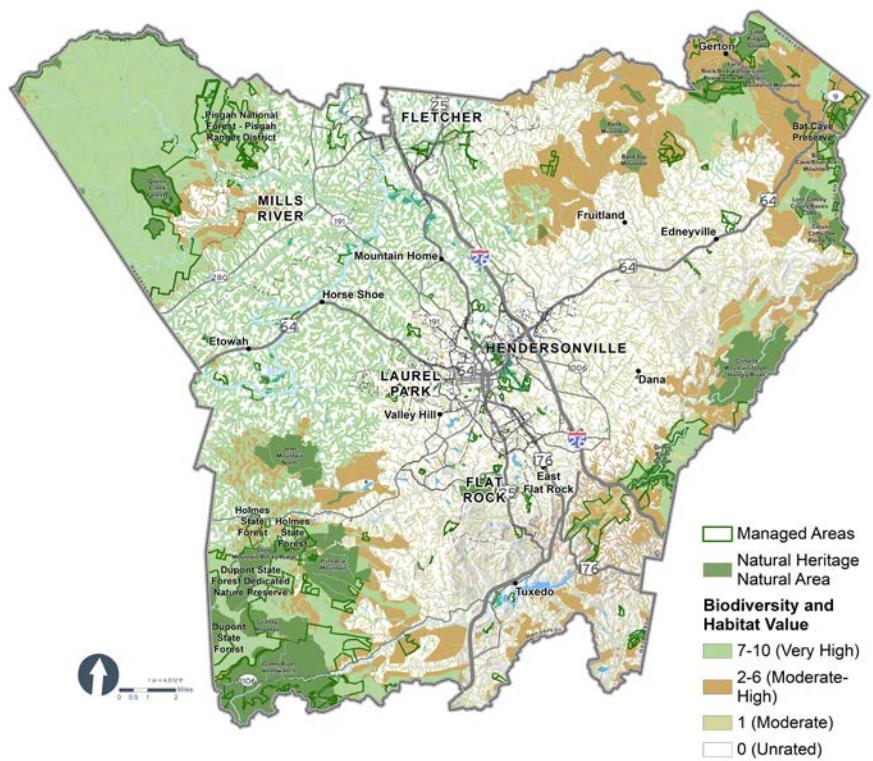
The Henderson County Parks and Recreation Department (HCPRD) oversees the programming, maintenance, rental of facilities, safety, and usage of twelve parks in the [unincorporated areas](#) of Henderson County. The County is also home to many large tracts of public lands including Pisgah National Forest, 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 25 years. Recommendations within this plan aim to provide a balance between protection of key resources and accommodating growth.



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.

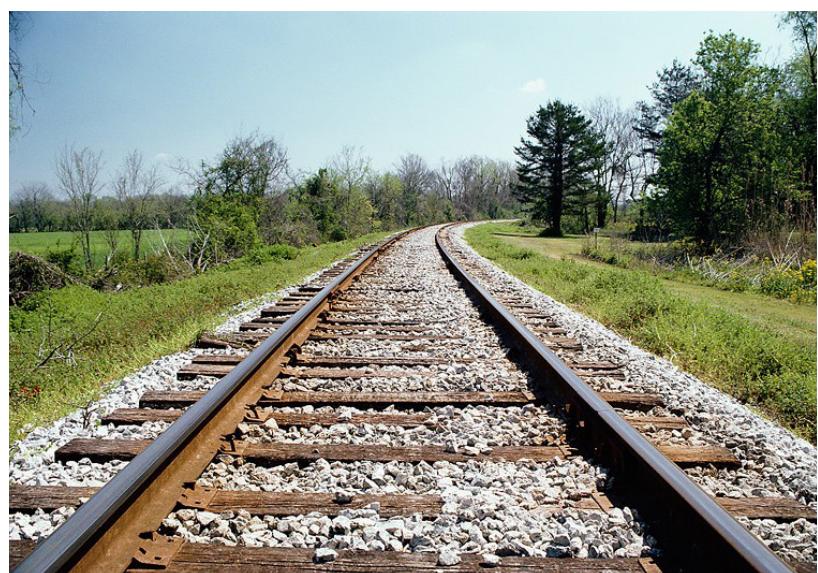
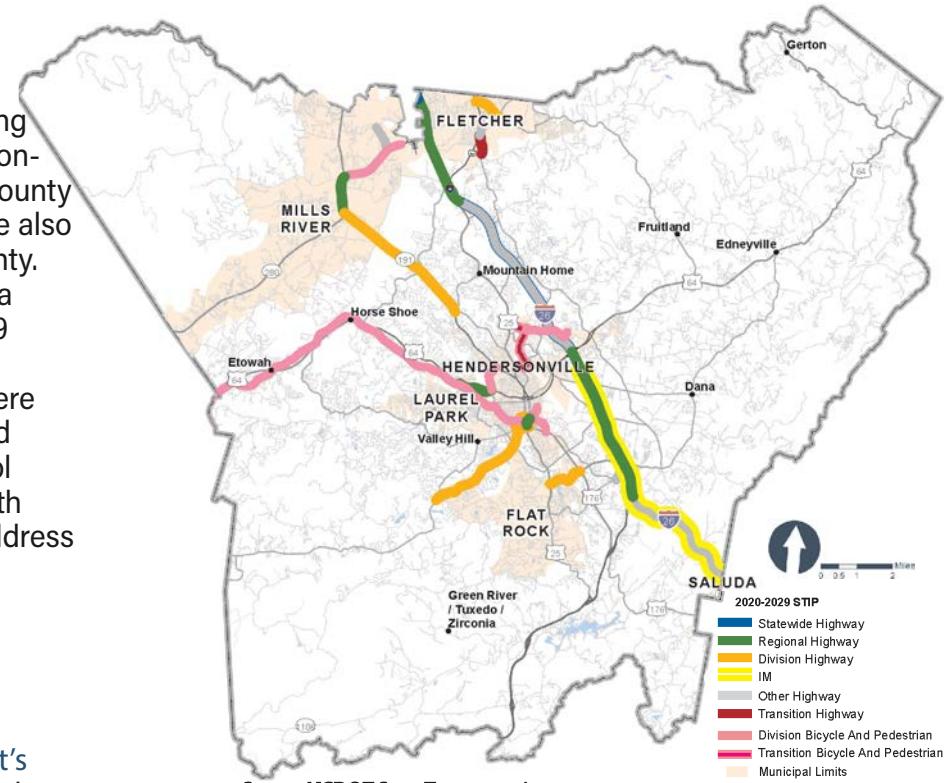
TRANSIT

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.

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

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

WHERE WE ARE

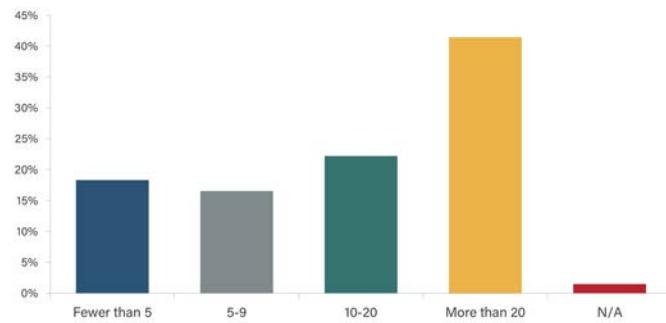
COMMUNITY SURVEY

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 2024. 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

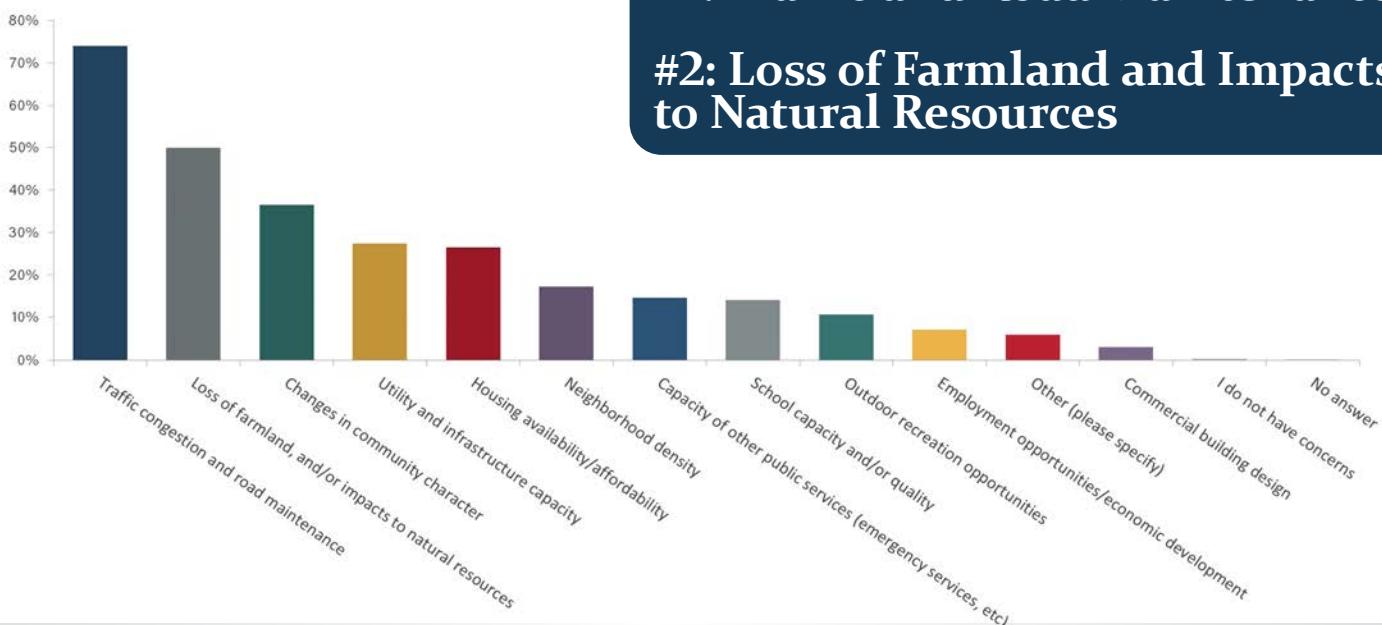
60% of the nearly 7,000 survey responses were from residents of the unincorporated areas of the County.

RESPONDENT TENURE



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, 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 Preserve Farmland**
- #3 Improve Access to Internet**

1. Protect open space / forests (55%)



2. Farmland Preservation (45%)



3. Improve access to internet / broadband (36%)



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 - 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

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.



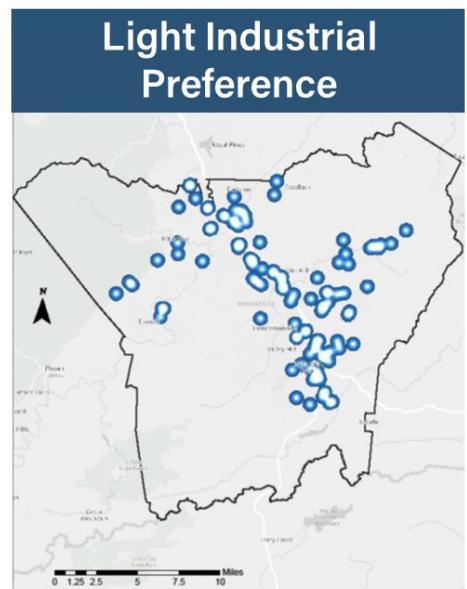
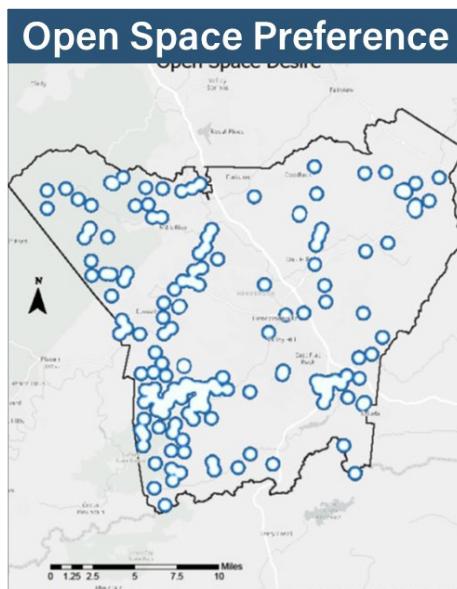
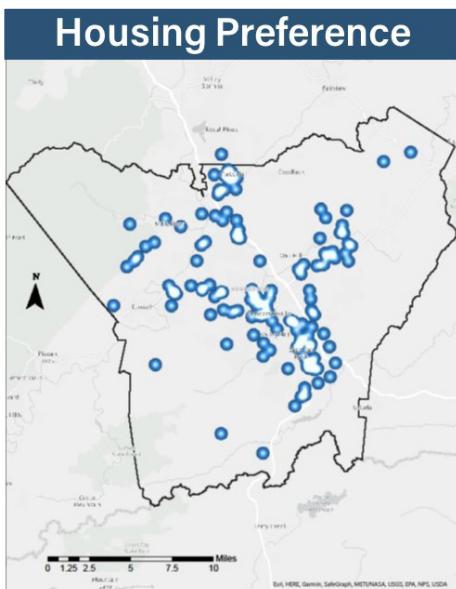
DEVELOPMENT PREFERENCE



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.



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.





PART 2

Where We Want To Go

Using This Plan

Outcomes

Plan Goals

Future Land Use

Future Land Use Map

Character Areas

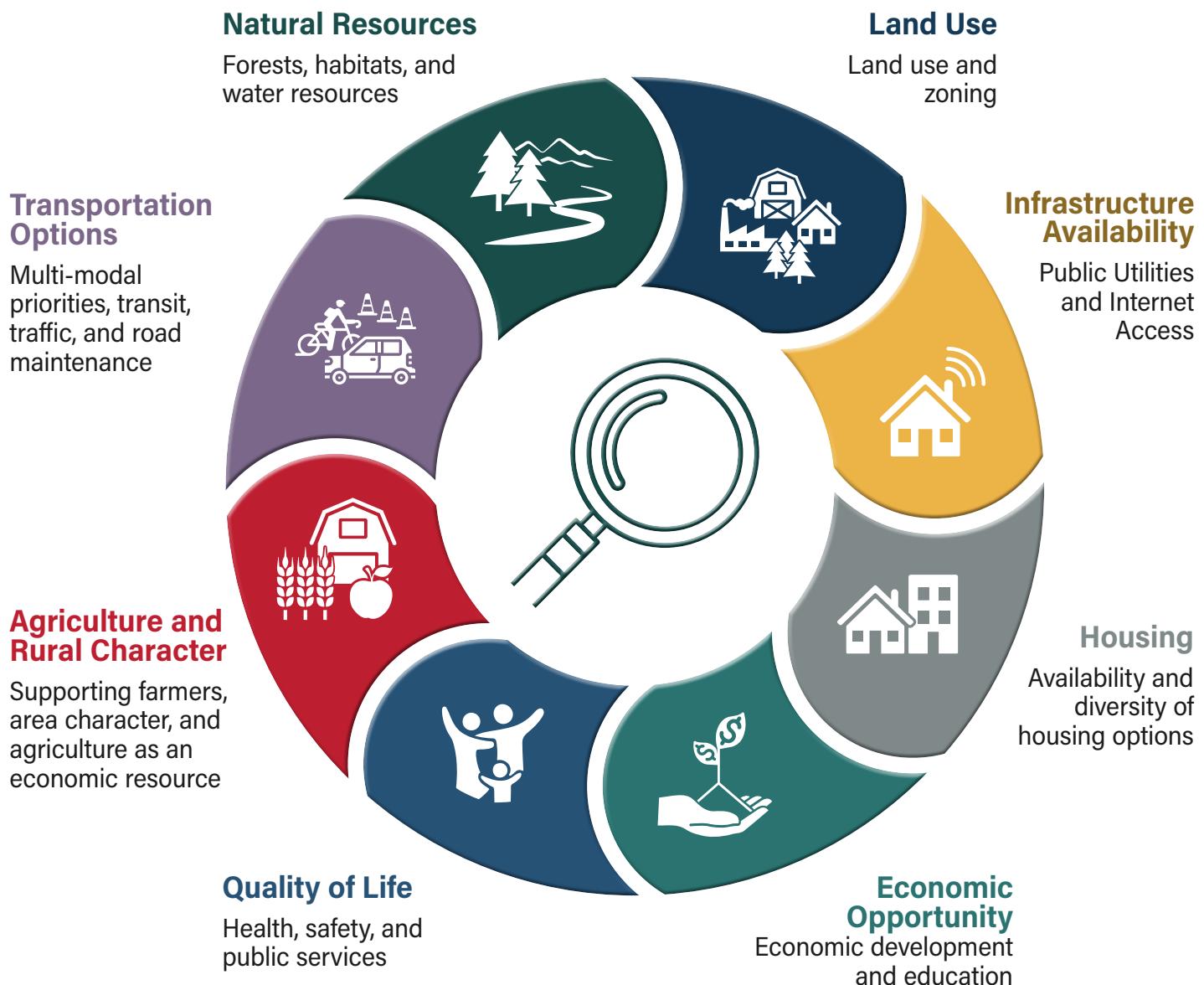
Sub-Area Maps and Narratives

WHERE WE WANT TO GO

USING THIS PLAN

PLAN TOPICS

Derived from the background analysis, public engagement, and emerging issues, these eight topics 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. These eight topic areas influenced the plan goals.



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 preserve agriculture, rural character, and natural resources with the Future Land Use Map as a guide.



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.

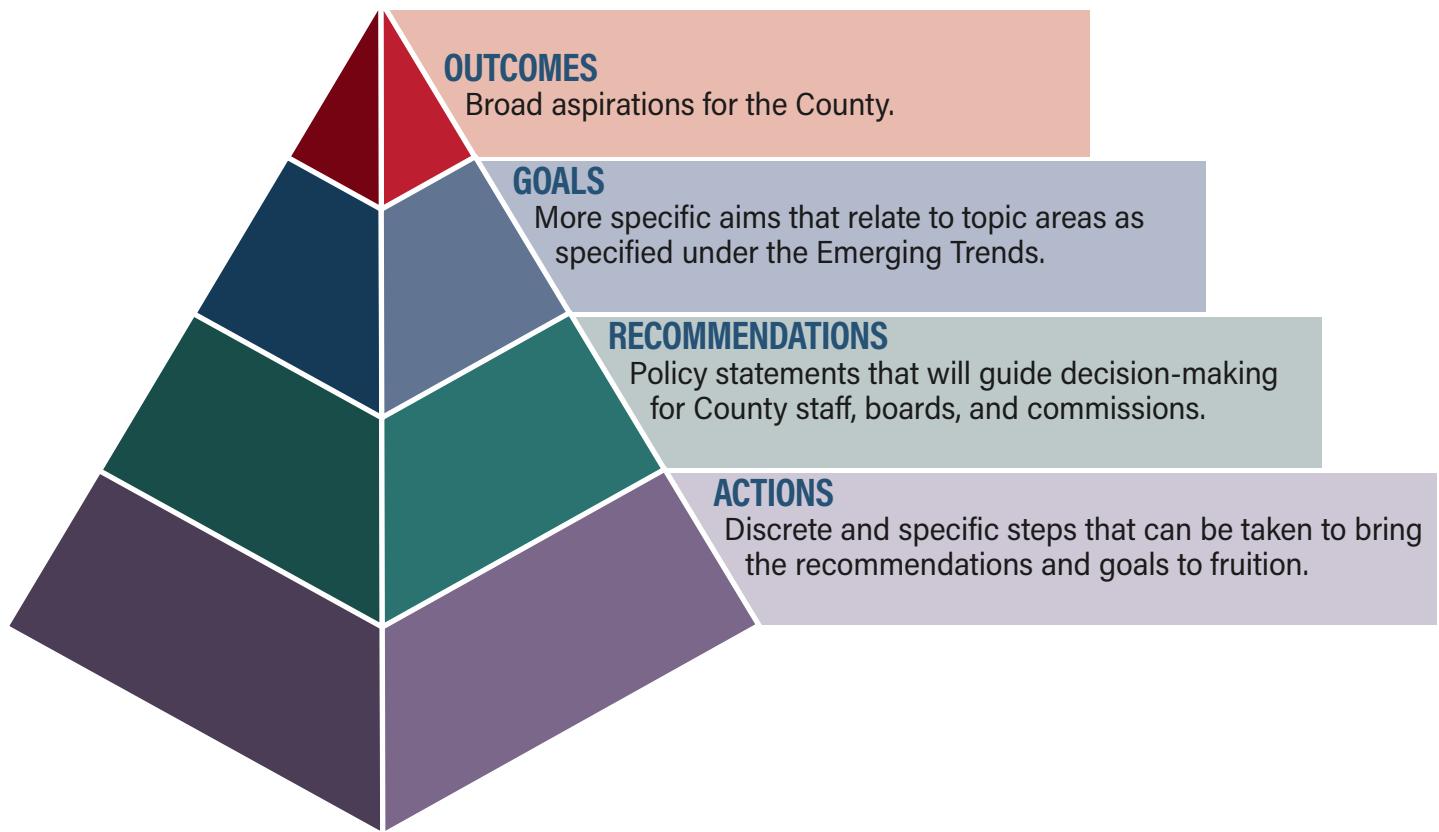


OUTCOMES

The plan consists of eight goals organized by Intentional Land Use, Connectivity, and Opportunity outcomes supporting the County vision. The outcomes provide a bigger picture of how each goal, recommendation, and action step form the County's ideal 2045.

The goals describe the future condition of the County and recommendations provide more detail with measurable desired action steps. Each action is to be considered in the short, medium, or long-term suggesting regulatory changes, investment, and partnership recommendations. Recommended actions are cross-functional and support the guiding values established at the start of the planning process. Actions are intended as guidance for the County over the next 25 years and should be evaluated appropriately prior to implementation.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO



2045 GOALS

WHAT ARE GOALS?

From the eight topic areas defined previously (page 34), 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 anchors.



Protect and conserve rural character and agriculture.



Improve resiliency of the natural and built environments.



OUTCOME 2: CONNECTIVITY



Prioritize multi-modal transportation options and connectivity.



Create a reliable, connected utility and communication network.



OUTCOME 3: OPPORTUNITY



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



Diversify housing choices and increase availability.



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



2045 GROWTH FRAMEWORK

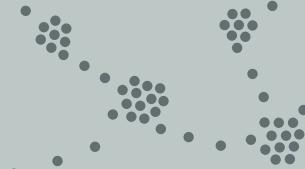
WHERE and HOW growth occurs will impact whether housing, transportation, agricultural, and open space goals can be met. The 2045 Growth Framework that was developed as a result of the community vision, situates growth in the most appropriate areas (i.e. connected to utilities & adequate road networks). This can protect rural character and reduce the cost of services. The following graphics compare the “growth as usual” historical development patterns, with the framework laid out through the outcomes, goals, recommendations, and actions in this plan.

GROWTH PATTERN AS USUAL

OVERVIEW	OPEN SPACE	HOUSING	TRANSPORTATION
<p>What do we lose when we stick with the current strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 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 and low density housing▪ Housing diversity is limited; including limited long-term rentals, price variety, and housing type options▪ Land is not preserved for future employment	<p>Most of Henderson County's vacant land is zoned for moderate densities of development and will absorb much of the future growth.</p> 	<p>Developers continue to build at low densities on remaining vacant land.</p> 	<p>Land uses continue to be largely separated outside of Hendersonville and downtown areas, reflecting suburban-style land use patterns.</p> 

To help explain how this 25 year plan incorporates multifaceted land use concerns and opportunities, visual this preferred framework when reviewing the Future Land Use Map and Character Areas on the following pages.

2045 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GROWTH FRAMEWORK

OVERVIEW	OPEN SPACE	HOUSING	TRANSPORTATION
<p>What could we gain with a new strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 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 ■ Housing options are provided that fit community character ■ Land is preserved for future employment growth which continues to create a diverse tax base and can help keep residential taxes low 	<p>Land use policies carefully steer growth to designated nodes and corridors.</p>  <p>AGRICULTURAL & OPEN SPACE GOALS BECOME POSSIBLE</p>	<p>Developers build at higher densities in nodes and along corridors that are suited for this type of growth.</p>  <p>HOUSING SUPPLY IS ABLE TO DIVERSIFY</p>	<p>A well-integrated system of nodes and corridors allows Henderson County to grow in ways that make significant progress on its priorities possible.</p>  <p>TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY GOALS BECOME POSSIBLE</p>

FUTURE LAND USE

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

Although the 2045 Comprehensive Plan is a holistic document, an important feature is the Future Land Use Map. The Future Land Use Map helps guide the County on land use decisions, transportation, transit, investments in infrastructure and civic spaces, investments and incentives in housing, neighborhoods, and job centers. The value of the Future Land Use Map is its prescriptive nature and clarity in where these resources can be invested in Henderson County. The map recommends land uses for all unincorporated areas of the County based on community input, existing conditions, growth analysis, and the Plan's vision.

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).

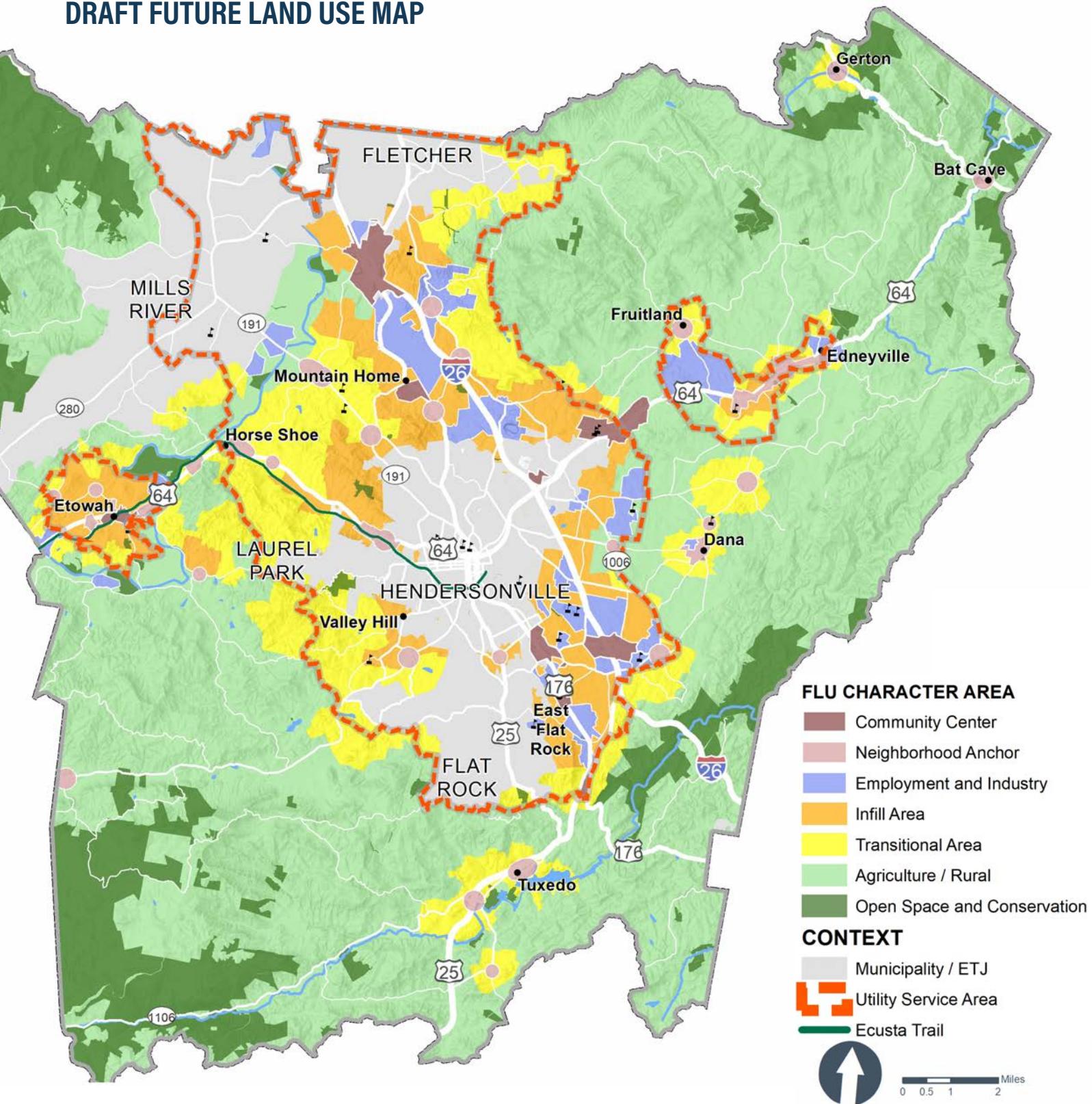
Each color-coded land use category is described on the following pages and represents Character Areas that have similar allowable uses, design characteristics, and density recommendations. Recommendations that will be included in the remainder of the [Comprehensive Plan](#) will elaborate on strategies 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*

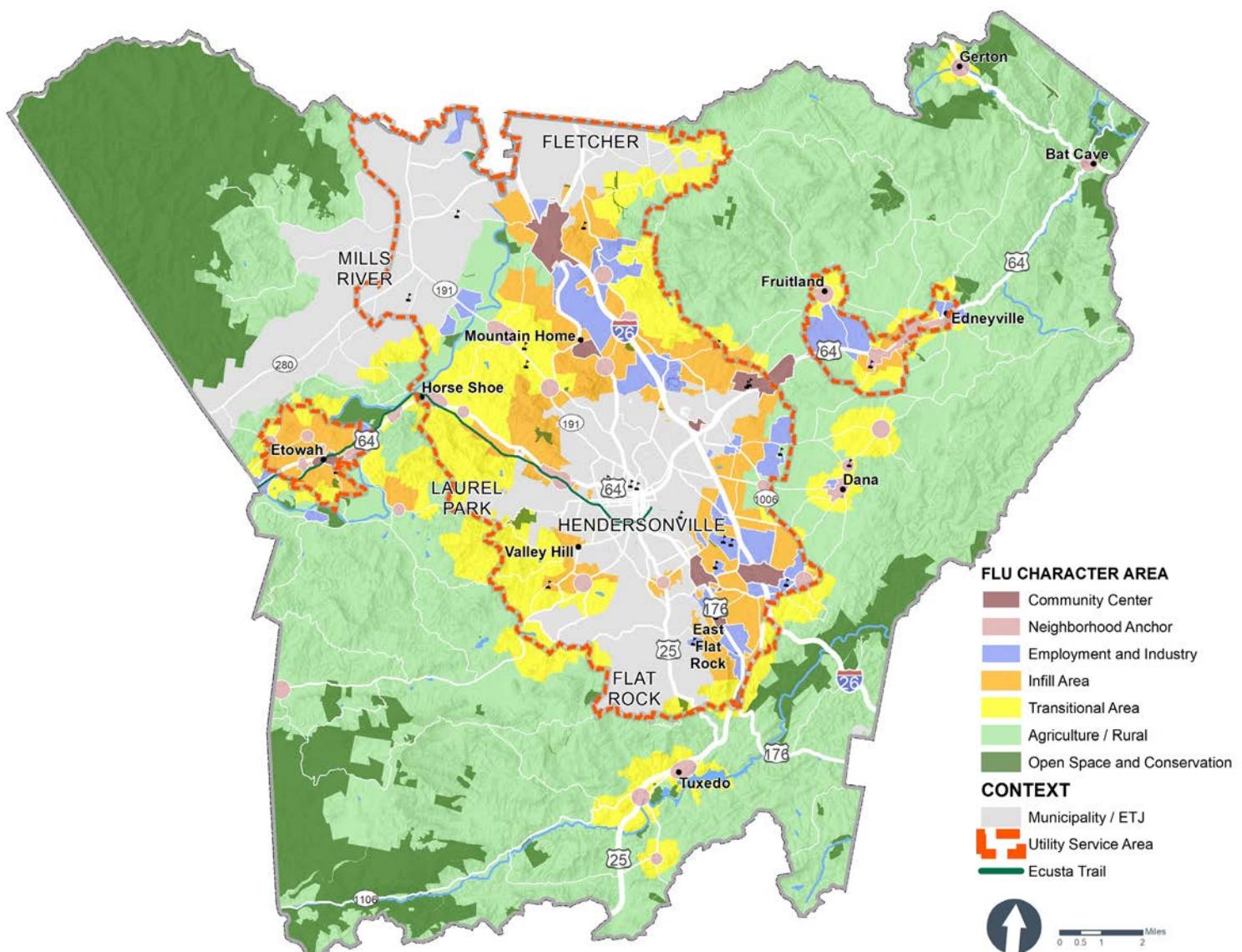
DRAFT FUTURE LAND USE MAP



FUTURE LAND USE

FUTURE LAND USE CHARACTER AREAS

The Future Land Use Map was designed using six different Character Areas to visualize development and growth. It is important to note that Character Areas, as shown on the Future Land Use Map, are not zoning districts. Character Areas share similar allowable uses, design characteristics, and density recommendations. One Character Area may represent or be located within more than one zoning district. For example, the Community Center Character Area and Neighborhood Anchor Character Area can both be found in areas zoned for commercial development. The residential Character Areas include a variety of dwelling types and density ranges. The County Land Development Code defines specific density requirements and other requirements for development. Any new zoning districts resulting from this plan will be based upon the Character Areas but will require in-depth analysis and further public feedback.



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. There are also areas that 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 concentrations of working agricultural lands. Also includes areas in and around conservation areas, steep mountain ridges and on the edges of the County

Uses: Forestry, very low density single family residential, outdoor recreation/tourism, and agriculture of all types including row crops, orchards, greenhouses, production and distribution facilities, agritourism operations, and some rural businesses

Utility Access: Varies

Density: The majority of the areas will have a maximum allowable density of 1 unit per 1 acre and the environmentally sensitive areas will have a maximum allowable density of 1 unit per 5 acres (gross density)



FUTURE LAND USE

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



TA TRANSITIONAL AREA

Transitional Area 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 Utility Service Area and working agricultural lands

Uses: Single family residential, potentially some appropriately sized multifamily as part of planned developments, agricultural uses

Utility Access: Varies

Density: The maximum allowable density range is 2 to 4 units per 1 acre (gross density)



IA INFILL AREA

Infill Area 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 Utility Service Area

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

Utility Access: Served by utilities

Density: The maximum allowable density range is 8 to 14 units per 1 acre (gross density)



NA 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



FUTURE LAND USE

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.

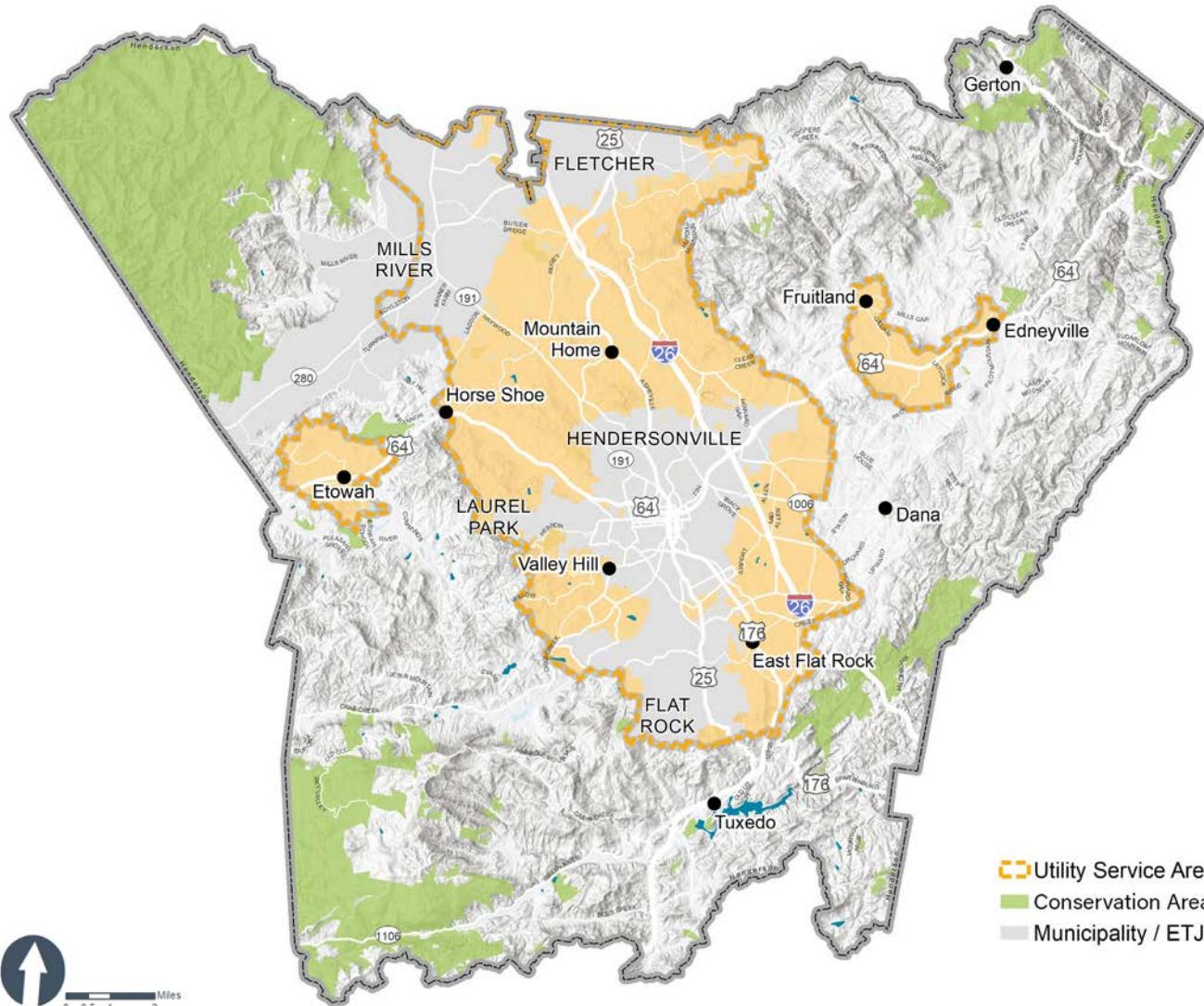
Where: Strategic areas with highway and utility access, large available parcels

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



UTILITY SERVICE AREA MAP



Utility Service Area Definition

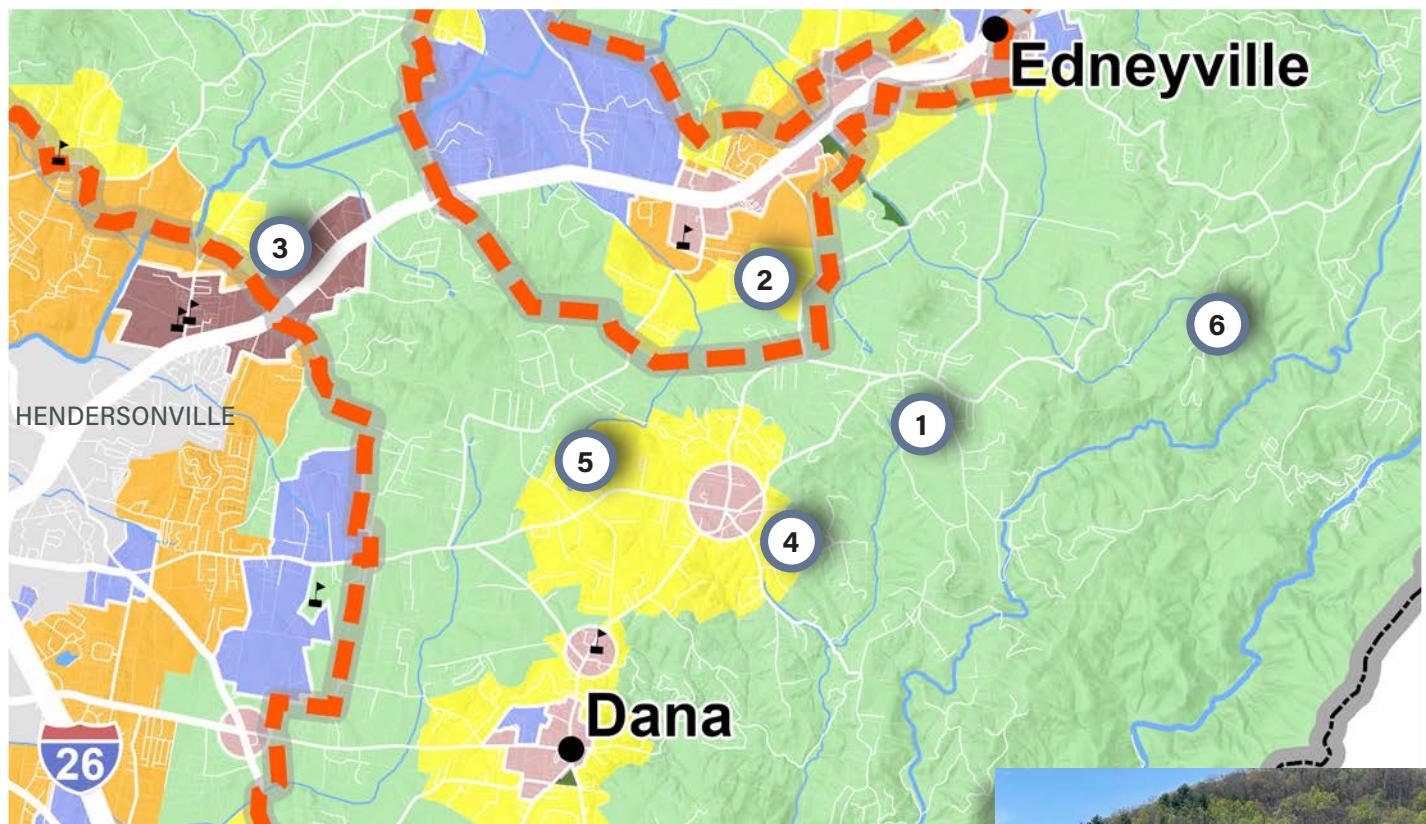
The Utility Service Area (USA) shown on the Future Land Use Map represents an area intended to be served by utilities and other urban services by 2045. This line also accounts for the existing services as well as the relative feasibility of sewer extension from sewer providers (City of Hendersonville, Metropolitan Sewerage District (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 has representation on the Board of Directors of MSD and communicates with other service providers, the County does not have any direct 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 Utility Service Area.

FUTURE LAND USE

SUB-AREA MAPS AND DESCRIPTIONS

EAST

OBJECTIVE: FOCUS DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE USA & PROTECT AGRICULTURAL LANDS.

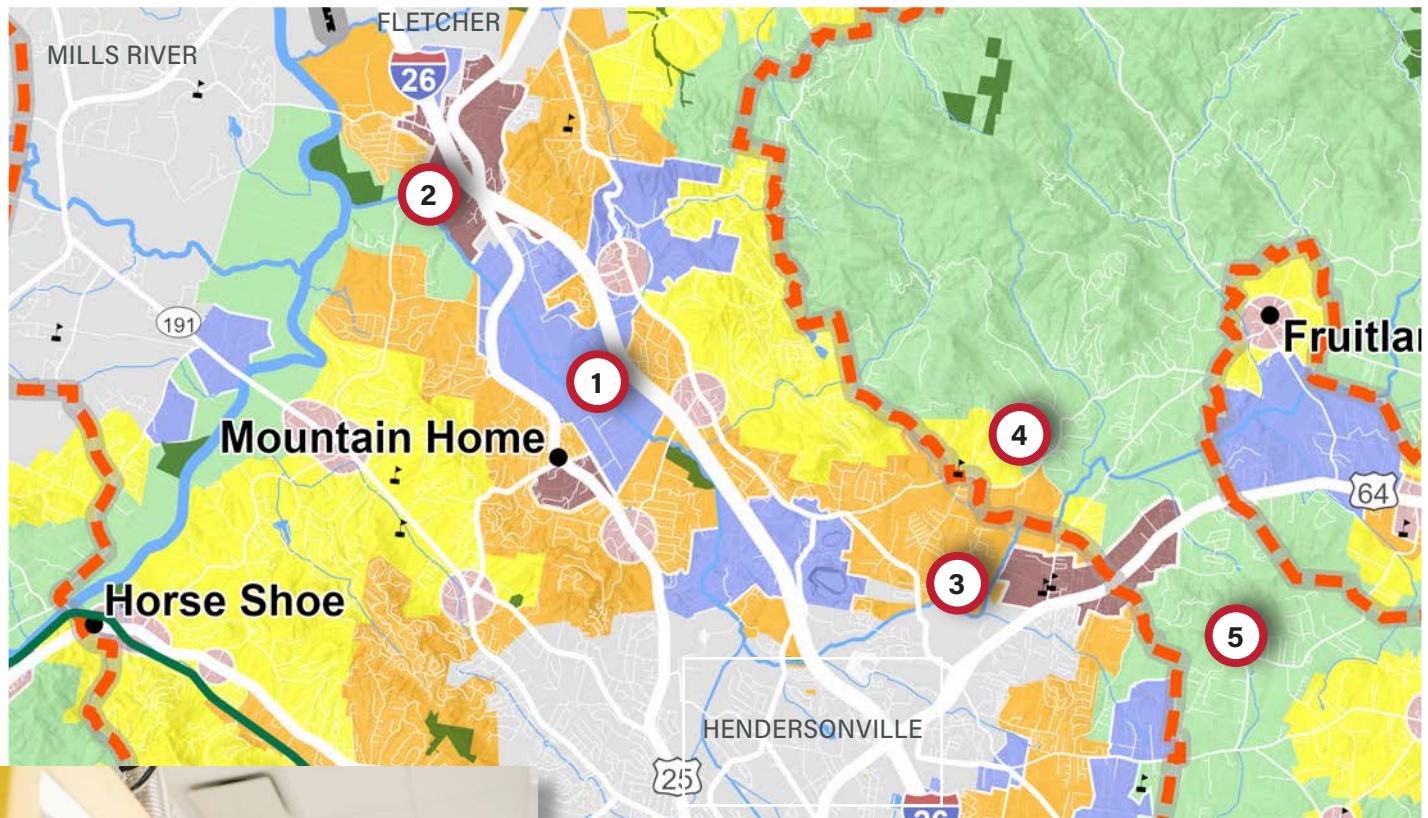


- 1 Policies discourage major subdivisions in agricultural areas.
- 2 The future sewer expansion in the Edneyville/US-64 area is a good place to focus employment centers, residential growth, and commercial activity. This directs housing away from existing agricultural land to protect rural character 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 Transitional Areas around Dana are limited to areas near existing subdivisions.
- 6 Some areas within the Agriculture/Rural Character Area are identified by topographical constraints that would limit development. Lower density would be required.



CENTRAL

OBJECTIVE: SUPPORT COMMERCIAL AND EMPLOYMENT CENTERS AROUND I-26.

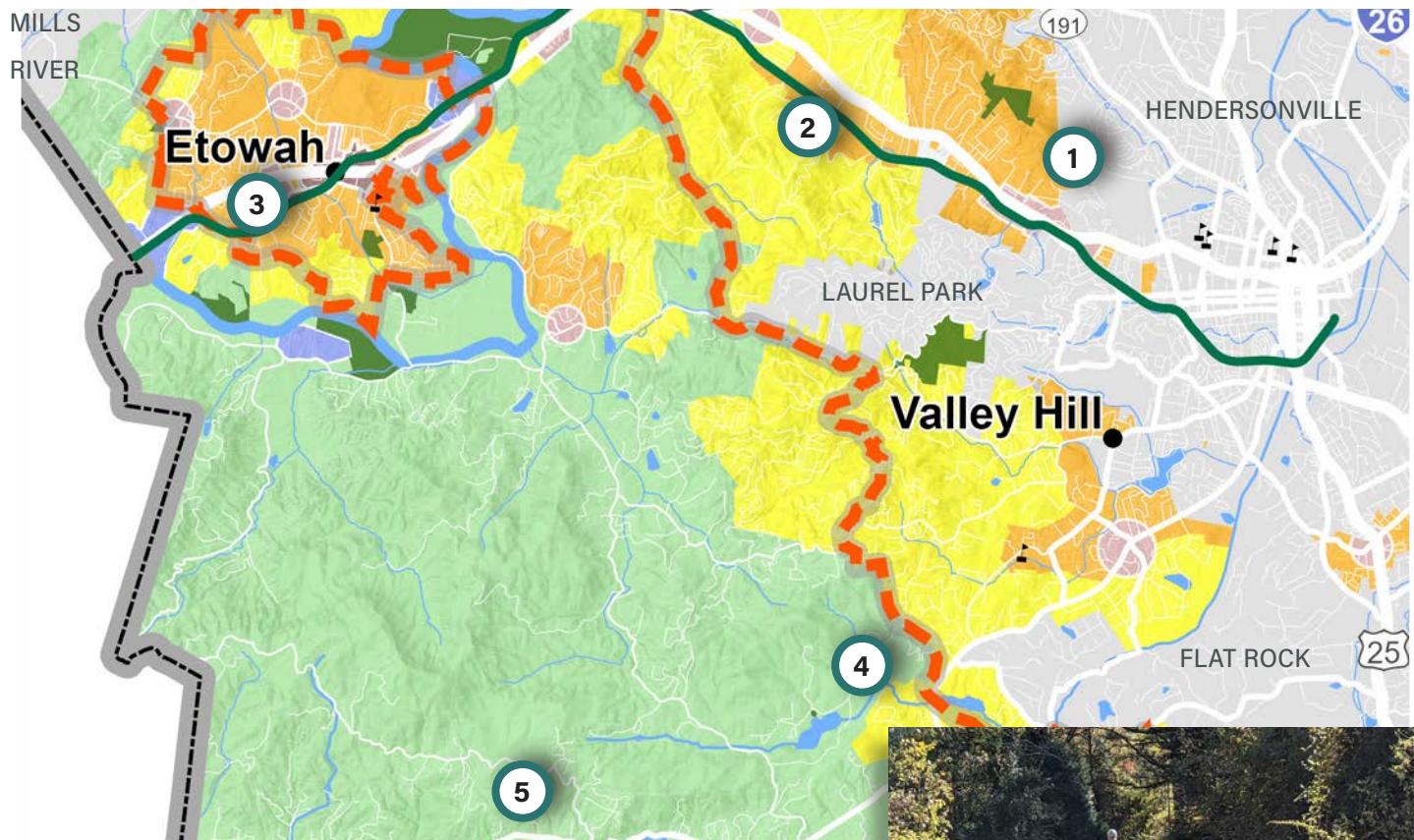


- 1 Strategic areas are reserved for commercial and employment areas near US-25 and I-26. These employment centers have the potential to provide local jobs and balance the County tax base in order to keep residential taxes low.
- 2 Commercial and mixed-use areas along Asheville Highway encourage infill and redevelopment to serve this area.
- 3 Infill 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 Utility 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.

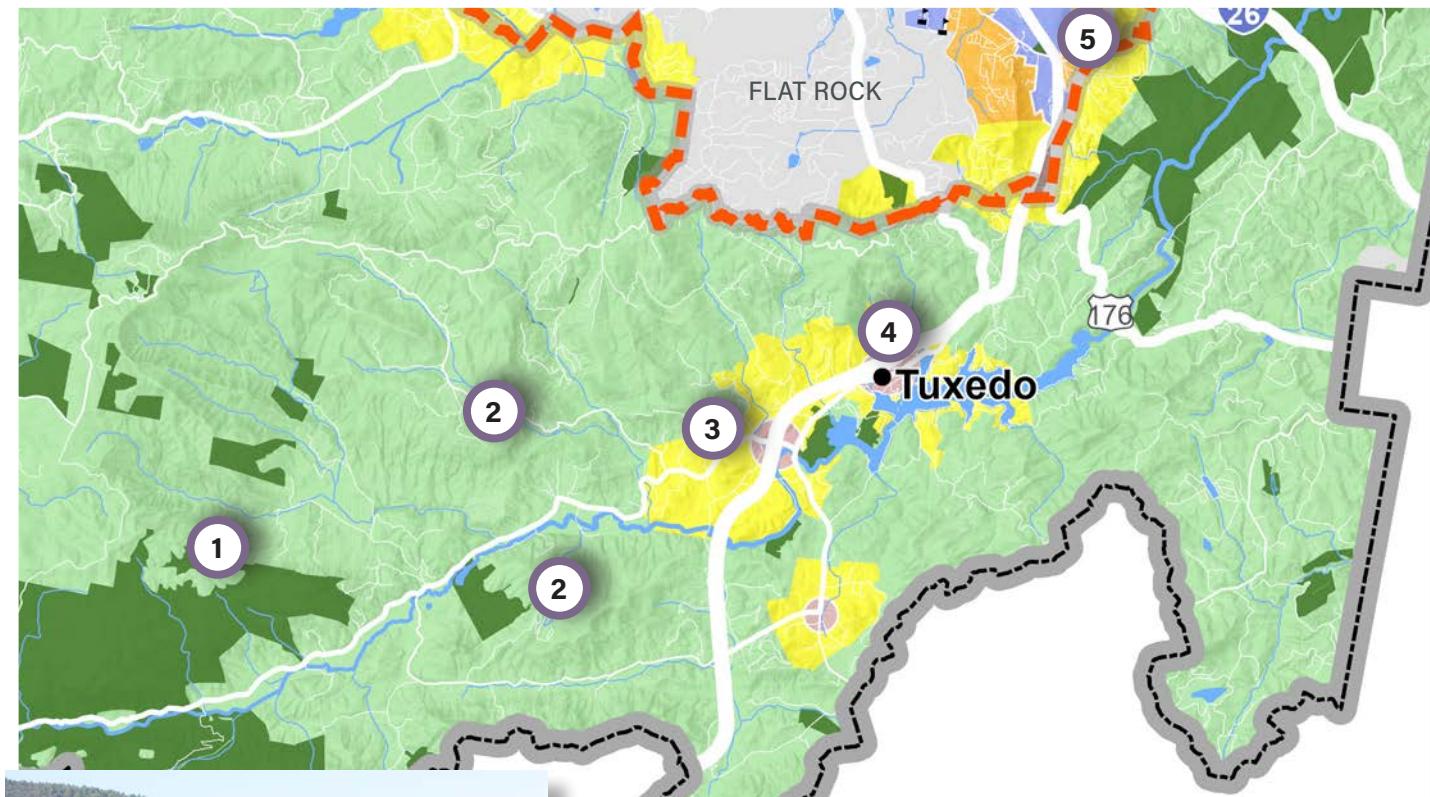


- 1 Residential infill planned near US-64 and municipalities.
- 2 Potential for "trail-oriented development" in key locations along the Ecusta Rail Trail.
- 3 The Etowah community has opportunities for commercial, employment, and residential growth. This area is served by an existing private sewer system 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 Agricultural/Rural areas.
- 2 The rural character of productive agriculture, forestry land, and outdoor camps can be insulated from surrounding growth pressures.
- 3 Low density residential should be limited to areas where appropriate, and include locations near existing residential developments since public utilities are not anticipated in this area.
- 4 Designated Neighborhood Anchors reflect the location of historical business and provide future entrepreneurship and local business opportunities.
- 5 Some areas with existing industry and employment centers can be strategically expanded to minimize adverse effects in environmentally sensitive areas.



PART 3

Outcomes

Objective 1: Intentional Land Use

Goal 1 – Coordinate Development

Goal 2 – Rural Character & Agriculture

Goal 3 – Resiliency

Objective 2: Connectivity

Goal 4 – Transportation & Connectivity

Goal 5 – Utilities & Networks

Objective 3: Opportunity

Goal 6 – Economic Development

Goal 7 – Housing Choice & Increase Availability

Goal 8 – Public Health, Safety, & Education

2045 PLAN OUTCOMES

OVERVIEW

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

Outcome 1: Intentional Land Use

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

Outcome 2: Connectivity

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

Outcome 3: Opportunity

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



OUTCOME 1:

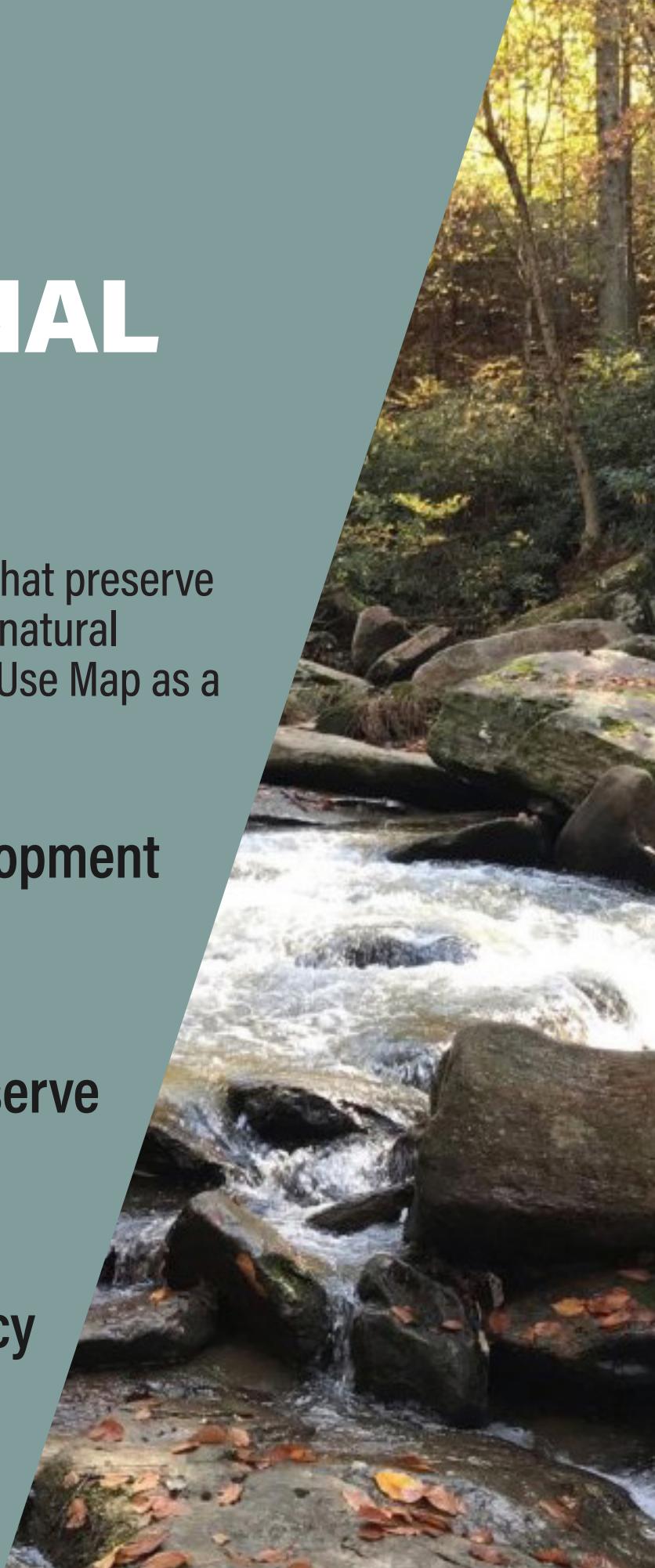
INTENTIONAL LAND USE

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

GOAL 1: Coordinate development near existing community anchors.

GOAL 2: Protect and conserve rural character and agriculture.

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



GOAL 1: COORDINATE DEVELOPMENT NEAR EXISTING COMMUNITY ANCHORS



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

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

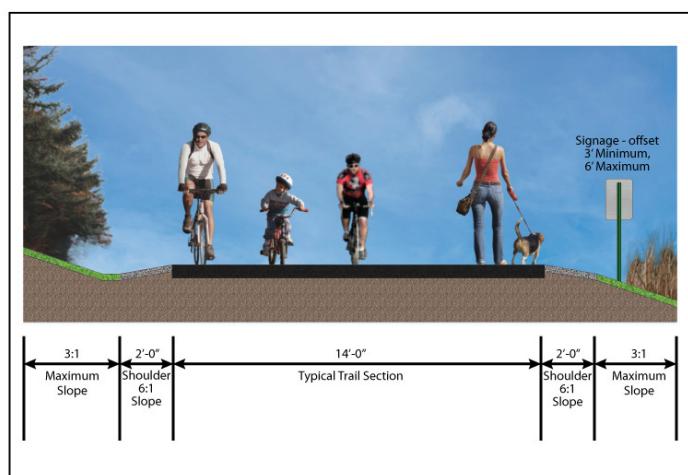
- B: Encourage high-density residential developments to be located within the USA.
- C: Locate commercial and residential growth near community anchors (i.e. Neighborhood Anchors and Community Centers on the FLU Map).
- D: Utilize tools such as utility provision, increased density or other incentives,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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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



GOAL 2: PROTECT AND CONSERVE RURAL CHARACTER AND AGRICULTURE



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

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 2.1: Support agriculture as an economic driver.

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

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

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



Source: AgHC

Agricultural Trends

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

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

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

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

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

- of potential grant and loan programs are listed within the Supplemental Information Document.
- I: Work with the NC cooperative Extension and other organizations to help farmers to negotiate lease agreements that include the right of first refusal.

Rec 2.2: Preserve existing farmland.

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

- D: Study the creation of a County-wide Farmland Mapping & Monitoring Program. (Term listed in Glossary)
- E: Consider applying the County [Voluntary Agricultural District](#) to all [Present Use Value](#) enrolled farms to further protect farmland from development pressure.

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

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

VOLUNTARY FARMLAND PRESERVATION

in Henderson County



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

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

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

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

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

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.



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

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

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

GOAL 3: IMPROVE RESILIENCY OF THE NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENTS



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

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

- B: Consider allowing for administrative approval for **conservation subdivisions** that meet certain criteria.
- C: Implement minimum **open space** requirements and prioritize the reservation of sensitive natural resources as **open space** in new development.

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

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



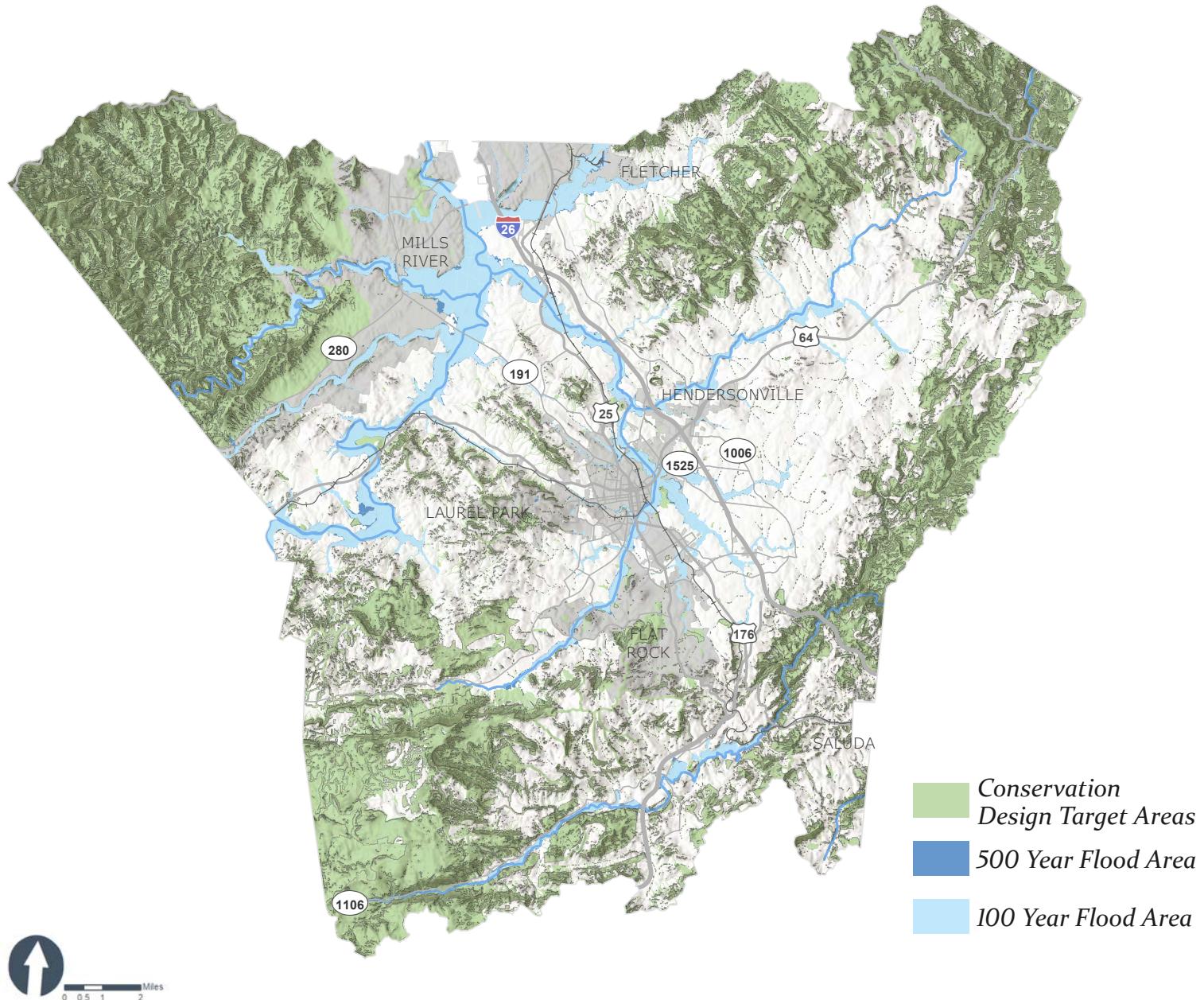
NATURAL ASSETS

in Henderson County

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

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

CONSERVATION DESIGN TARGET AREAS MAP



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

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

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

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



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

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

- F: Encourage wildfire mitigation principles in new developments located in the [Wildland Urban interface](#) including:
- Design recreation space and access roads to double as firebreaks
 - Design each home site to have defined defensible space
 - Encourage fire resistant building design and provide defensible space around clustered development
- G: Encourage best practice design standards for new construction within the [Wildland Urban Interface](#).
- H: Encourage additional street trees within new developments to enhance the environmental benefits of the requirement.
- C: Consider additional site development standards to reduce stormwater and erosion impacts of new minor and major subdivisions.
 - These could include changes to minimum disturbance thresholds that require stormwater devices or adjusting impervious surface lot coverage maximums.
- D: Identify regulatory barriers and consider incentives for green infrastructure projects, which can lessen stress on natural systems.

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

- A: Limit built-upon area within the watersupply watersheds and provide standards for stormwater management.
- B: Monitor water quality trends to determine effectiveness of existing regulations and other trends.

Threat Assessment Summary

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

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

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

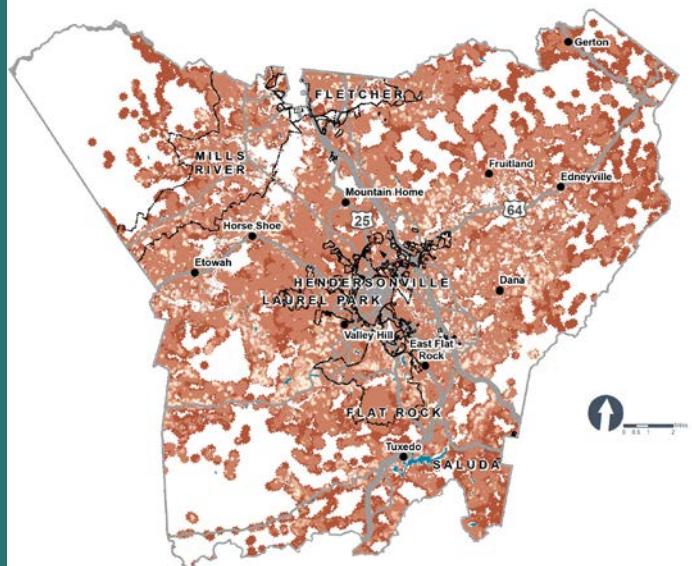
Landslide vulnerability increased by land disturbance

- 4% of all residential
- 16 critical facilities

Wildfire vulnerabilities

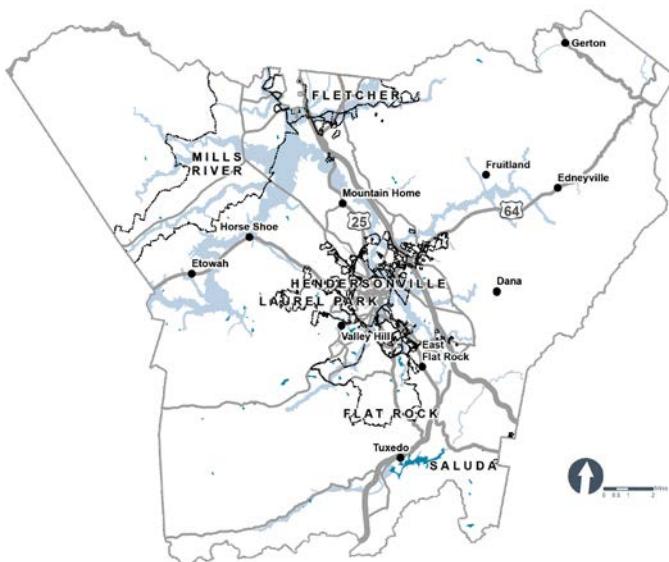
- Wildland Urban Interface areas outside a 5-minute emergency response drive time
- Increasing vulnerability is a concern due to increasing heavy precipitation, aging and sensitive populations, and growth in areas of risk

Source: Land of Sky Regional Council Vulnerability Assessment



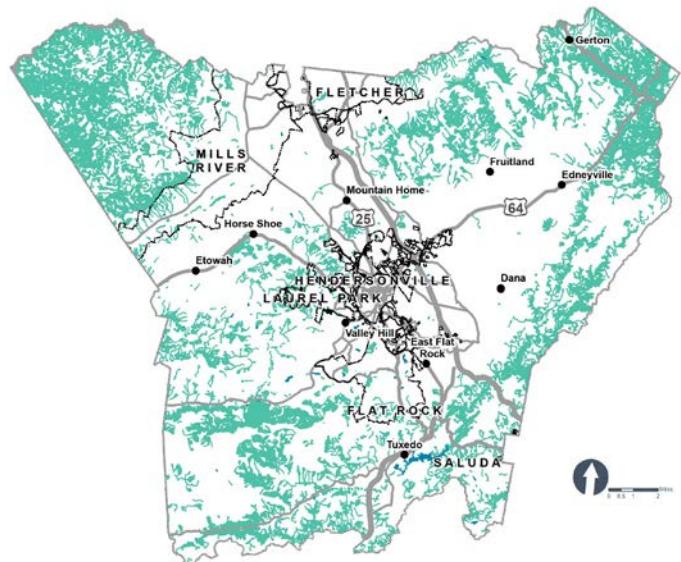
Wildfire Hazard

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



Floodplains

Source: FEMA



Landslide Hazard

Source: NCDEQ

Larger versions of these maps can be found in the Appendix

OUTCOME 2:

CONNECTIVITY

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

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

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



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



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

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 4.1: Address traffic and road maintenance priorities.

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

- B: Coordinate with NCDOT and municipalities via the Henderson County Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC).
- C: Advocate for the French Broad River MPO to update the Comprehensive Transportation Plan, which was adopted in 2008, and focus improvements around active transportation options and transit.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

Rec 4.6: Complete the trail and greenway network.

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



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

initiatives, updated funding opportunities, and tentative community partners.

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

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

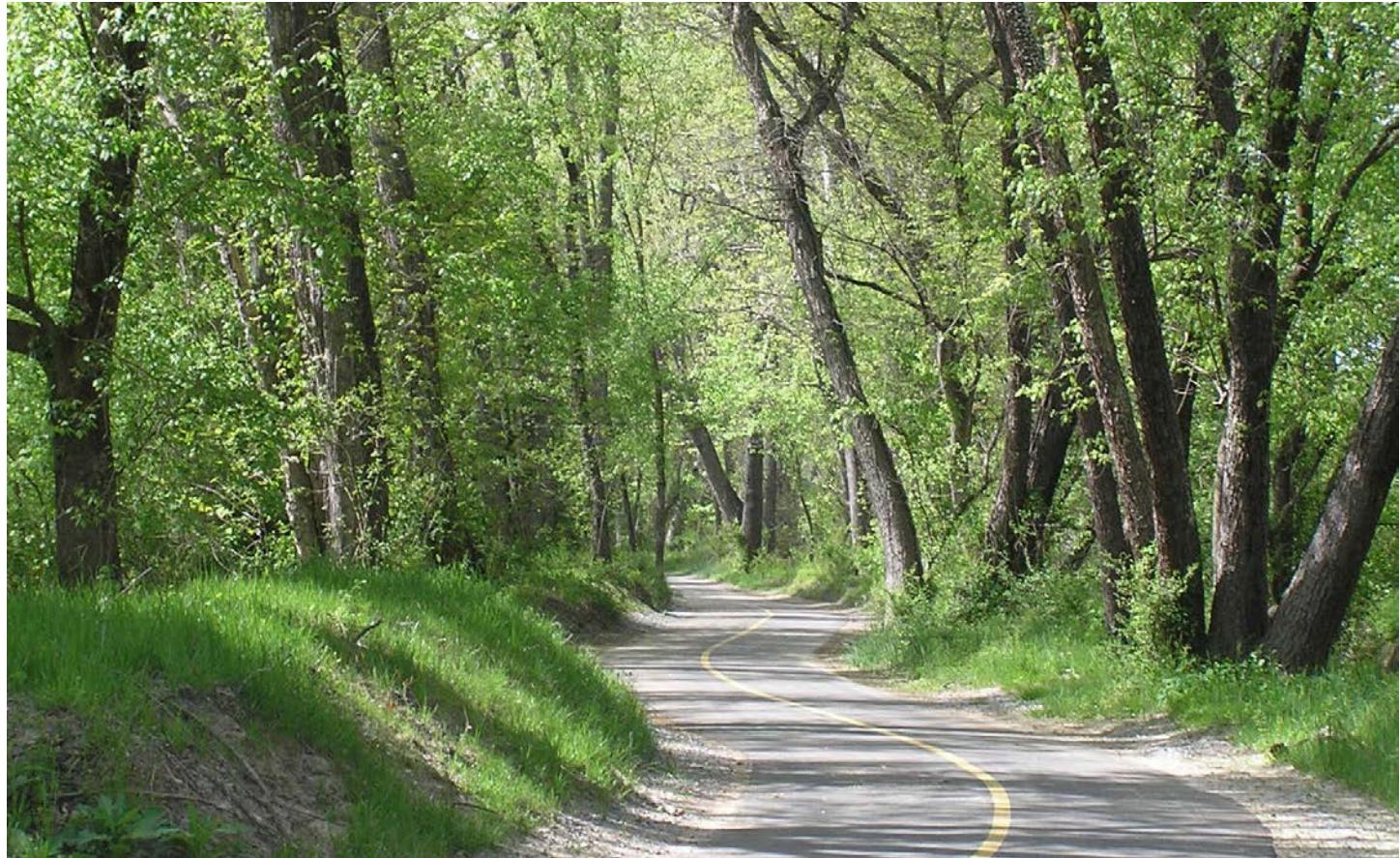
Rec 4.7: Support education and encourage activities related to bicycling.

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

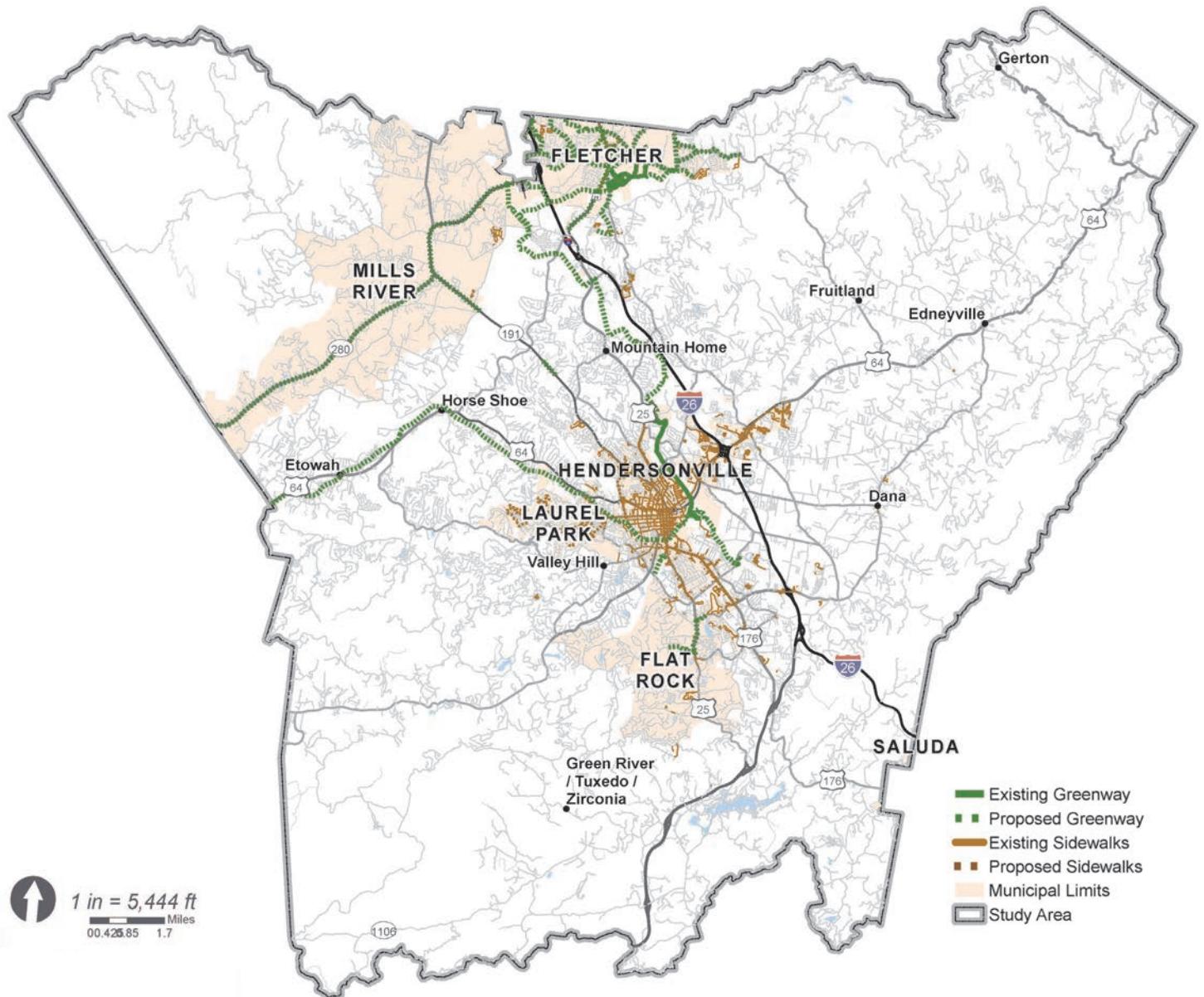
260%

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

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

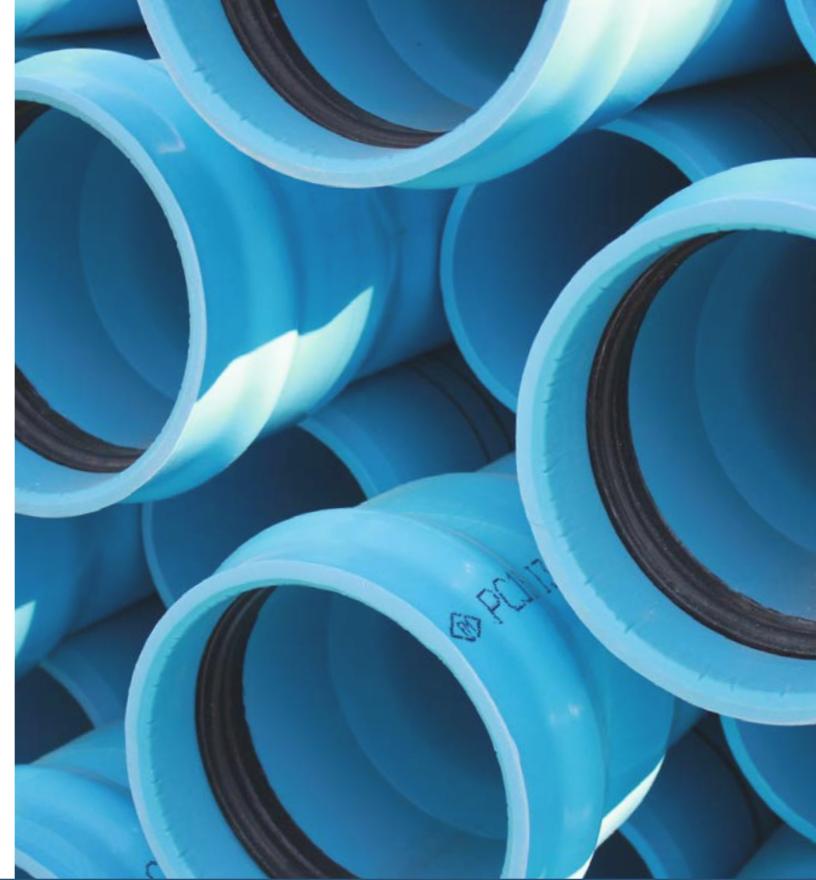


GREENWAYS AND SIDEWALKS MAP



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

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



Reliable, well-planned infrastructure systems keep a growing County functioning.

Henderson County will expand and strengthen the systems that support everyday life for residents, specifically public utilities and communication infrastructure.

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Rec 5.1: Improve communications infrastructure.

- A: Improve the County's Broadband Availability
Index ranking per the NC Broadband Infrastructure Office.
- B: Pursue the extension of broadband Internet, especially trunk-line improvements or extensions between major population centers, including improvements along I-26.
- C: Continue participation in broadband planning programs. Work with the State to receive

and distribute funding for building broadband infrastructure grants, such as the Completing Access to Broadband Grant Program.

- D: Continue County participation in the BAND-NC grant program to complete the county-wide digital inclusion plan.
- E: Implement the [Henderson County Broadband Taskforce's](#) recommendations concerning the most effective and legal role for Henderson County to take in assisting and promoting improvements and growth of broadband infrastructure.

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

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

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

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



Survey respondents from across the County identified “increased broadband access” as one of their top five priorities for the 2045 Plan.

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

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

OUTCOME 3:

OPPORTUNITY

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

GOAL 7: Diversify housing choices and increase availability.

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



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



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

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

Employment and Industry on the Future Land use Map.

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

Rec 6.2: Coordinate workforce education.

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

Rec 6.3: Advance small businesses and entrepreneurs.

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

30%

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

Source: Henderson County Economic Development Partnership

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

IMPORTANCE OF MANUFACTURING in Henderson County



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

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

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

98%

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



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 INCREASE AVAILABILITY.



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

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- A: Encourage rezonings to high density housing and mixed-use development within the USA.
 - Areas within the USA have access to transportation, utilities, and services. In addition, growth in these areas is less likely to create conflicts with agriculture and natural resources.

B: To avoid conflict with agricultural areas and natural resources, major subdivisions should be located near defined centers and within the Infill and Transitional Areas as defined on the Future Land Use Map.

C: Allow for a variety of housing types, including condos, townhomes, and multi-family complexes, in the defined Utility Service Area.

- D: Re-evaluate standards for intermediate and maximum residential density within all zoning districts.
 - E: Consider allowance for small-scale multi-family units (3-4 units) without a Special Use Permit if design criteria is met.
 - F: Eliminate the requirement of a Special Use Permit for developments with attached residential units within the USA and keep the existing Special Use Permit for areas outside the USA.
 - G: Encourage subdivision design to aesthetically mirror rural surroundings by developing a rural cluster option in the [Land Development Code](#) (LDC) that allows for smaller setbacks, building spacing, and innovative design in exchange for preservation of open space and views.
 - H: Continue to provide a density bonus for conservation subdivisions.
 - I: Consider administrative approval for conservation subdivisions.
- C: Allow for cottage clusters (pocket neighborhoods) and for multi-family developments that meet affordability standards in certain zoning districts.
 - D: Allow for a variety of housing types and mixed-use development at appropriate key locations along the Ecusta Rail Trail within the potential overlay district.
 - E: Support affordable housing developments within rural, agricultural areas and residential zoning districts.



TRAIL-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

in Henderson County

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

(Source: via arlnow.com)

Rec 7.3: Support the ability to “age in place.”

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

25%

of the County’s population is age 65 or older, compared to 16% statewide.

Source: 2021 Community Health Assessment

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

Rec 7.4: Locate workforce housing near jobs.

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

MISSING MIDDLE HOUSING

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



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

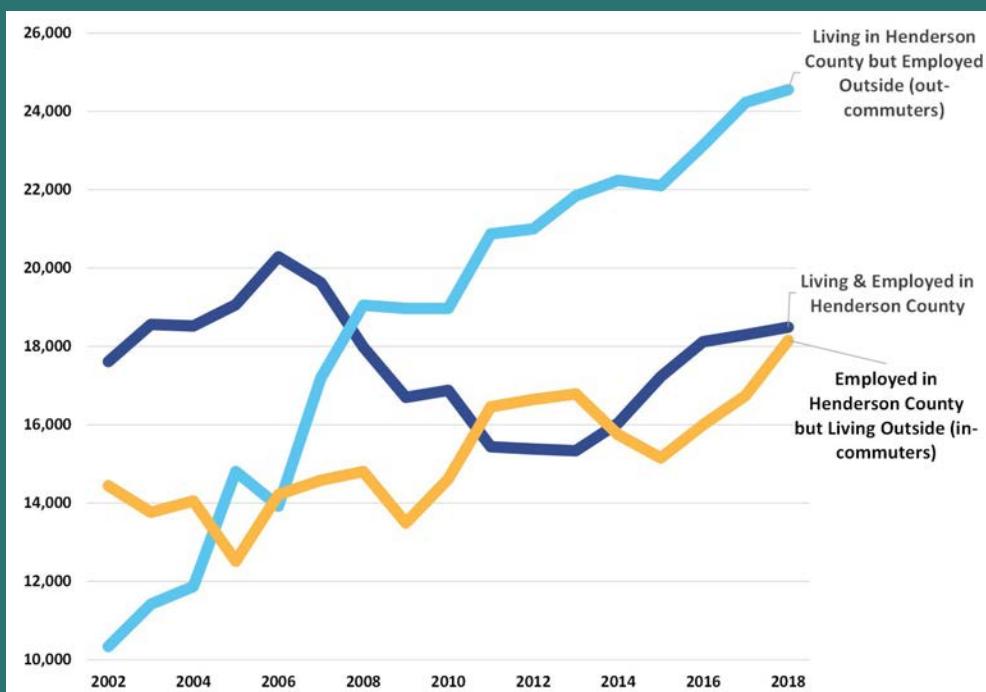
WORKFORCE COMMUTING

in Henderson County

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

Workforce Commuting Trends

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



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



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

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- A: Plan for recreational needs of the communities in Henderson County.
- B: Address facilities and programming priorities, document ongoing maintenance needs, and provide benchmarking related to facilities and staffing within a master plan.

- C: Develop a multi-year capital improvement plan for park facilities that includes planning for major maintenance expenditures.
- D: Continue to support the development of all-inclusive playgrounds in the County.
- E: Develop a master plan for Jackson Park. The master plan should address connectivity, parking issues, facility enhancements, and involve a variety of user groups.

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



PARKS AND RECREATION

in Henderson County

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

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

Rec 8.2: Improve and coordinate access to health services.

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

What are "food deserts"?

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

Source: Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

22.4%

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

Source: 2018 Community Health Assessment

Rec 8.3: Expand access to healthy food.

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

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

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

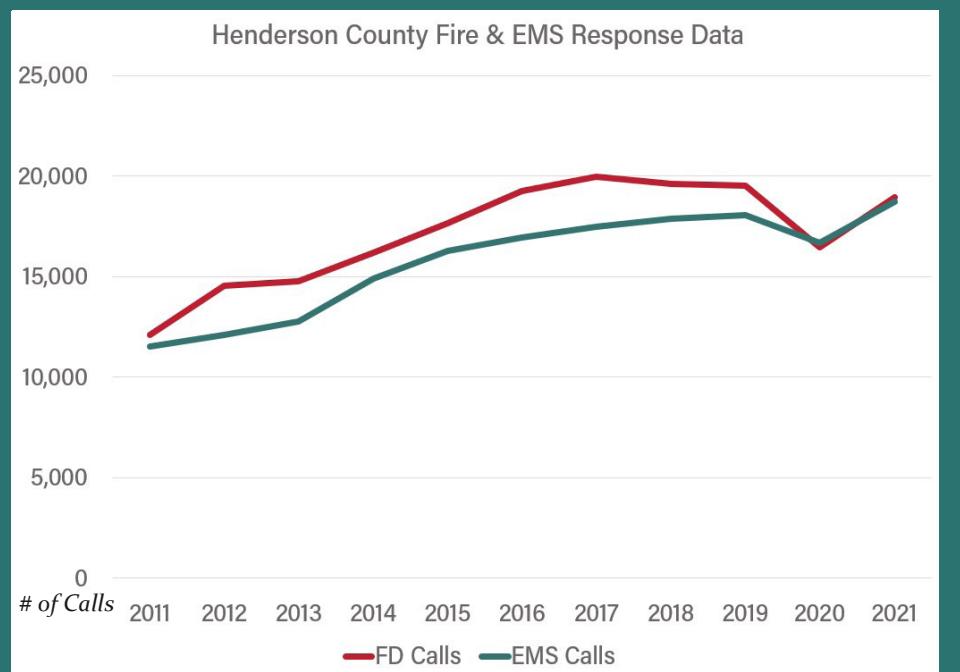
services. Substations should be considered for areas that have suburban densities.

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

DEMAND FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES

in Henderson County

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



Rec 8.5: Coordinate and support the school system.

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

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

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



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

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