

# Recommendations



## Growth Management, Land Use, & Urban Design

- Direct growth in a manner that is consistent with the Development Strategy, which reflects the adopted Goals and Objectives. Recognize a hierarchy of “target areas” for future development, with an emphasis on infill development in the existing cities and towns and in the future transit corridors.
- Encourage development that reinforces the small towns and preserves their character. In addition, adopt policies that encourage clustering development around existing towns with adequate utility service capacity. Discourage large lot subdivisions developed without public water and sewer service.
- Encourage development that incorporates a mix of compatible uses, particularly higher density development in the future transit corridors and other appropriate locations. Ideally, the mix of uses should include schools and other institutional and civic uses, which should be centrally located for ease of access and to allow such uses to “anchor” development in the community centers.
- Coordinate the location of public facilities, particularly schools, with new development.
- Adhere to principles of urban design as exhibited by the small towns, such as:
  - An identifiable center and edge
  - A balanced mix of residential and non-residential uses that are compatible
  - A walkable environment created through an interconnected street network and pedestrian scale development
  - A variety of public spaces (i.e., small parks, squares, or plazas) around which civic and other buildings are organized
- Prepare corridor plans for existing and proposed major transportation routes through the county, such as US-74, I-85, and US-321, that address land use, urban design, transportation, and the relationship between these elements.

## Economic Development

- With the loss of textile and other manufacturing jobs over the last decade, increasing numbers of Gaston County workers have been commuting to Mecklenburg County. In order to accommodate the long-term needs of a self-sustaining economy and provide higher-wage employment options, adequate acreage should be designated along primary transportation corridors for industrial and business park development over the next 20 years. Business parks should provide a broad range of parcels for a variety of industry types and sizes. Recommended types and locations include
  - Business/industrial park development between Bessemer City and I-85 west of NC-274.
  - Business/industrial park development between NC-275 and I-85 west of US-321.
  - Redevelopment for industrial/office/retail uses between US-321 and NC-274 south of Gastonia and north of future US-321 by-pass.
  - Mixed-use center including commercial and residential uses surrounding the future US-321 bypass interchange between NC-274 and NC-279 in southern Gaston County.
  - Office park development surrounding Belmont Abbey College.
  - Mixed-use center including commercial and residential uses along the west side of South Fork River between I-85 and Spencer Mountain.

- A number of uses could be pursued for existing vacant industrial facilities, particularly those of historic significance near existing downtown areas. Many structures have architectural elements sought by today's growing service and technology companies.
- Sufficient resources should be allocated to economic development efforts, including facilities, staff, and marketing. A targeted approach should identify specific industries with the greatest opportunities for Gaston County.
- Promote links with Charlotte/Douglas International Airport and I-485 to provide an alternative business location to Mecklenburg County.
- Comprehensively retrain labor force to accelerate economic diversification, and ultimately generate commercial and residential real estate market demand.
- Create a unified marketing strategy for all natural, historic, and cultural sites to boost ecotourism.

### Housing

Housing in Gaston County remains comparatively affordable within the Charlotte MSA. However, with growth pressure emanating from Charlotte, housing costs are increasing. A balance of residential land should be planned by type and tenure with consideration of public facilities and utilities. Housing should be incorporated into mixed-use projects within the I-85/US-74 corridor, improving the ridership potential for mass transit. Recommended types and locations include

- Single-family residential development in northern Gaston County between US-321 and Stanley.
- Single-family residential development north and west of Mount Holly between South Fork River and NC-27.
- Single-family residential in northeastern Gaston County between NC-16 and the Mecklenburg County border.
- Single-family residential in southern Gaston County between US-321 and NC-279.
- Single-family residential south of Belmont between the South Fork and Catawba Rivers.
- High-density mixed-use development with focus on residential along the I-85/US-74 corridor between the Mecklenburg County border and Bessemer City.

### Transportation

#### Roads and Traffic

While counties in North Carolina do not have the legal or statutory authority to construct roads or provide maintenance for transportation infrastructure, urban counties like Gaston can play an instrumental part in setting transportation priorities. As members of the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, County participants are positioned to communicate and foster a vision that strategically expands the region's transportation infrastructure. Equally important is the acknowledgment that traffic and congestion know no jurisdictional boundaries. For this reason, the County can work with the MPO and NCDOT to assist with efforts to coordinate a cooperative strategy to deal with growing transportation demand and increased competition for transportation resources. The following list represents recommendations intended to enhance transportation mobility within Gaston County. Many of the recommendations require the cooperation and attention of a combination of agencies at the local, regional, and state level.



- Protect / preserve future transportation corridors
  - Promote a proactive means to protect critical transportation corridors (e.g. the proposed Garden Parkway) through a combination of right-of-way dedication/reservation, construction requirements, and improved communication to the greater community about future facilities. Said policies should seek to inform while simultaneously reducing right-of-way cost and preserving preferred alignment alternatives.
  - Support the implementation of the adopted Thoroughfare Plan.
- Make a commitment to alternative modes of travel. Efforts independent of NCDOT should be designed to promote mobility choices throughout the county including bikeways, greenways, bike-lanes, sidewalks, and paths. In addition, an inventory of the necessary short- and long-term transit service needs required to successfully move individuals from residences to places of work, education, and services is recommended.
- Address road and traffic issues through the NC Transportation Improvement Program and Powell Bill Program.
  - Continue a thorough, comprehensive maintenance program as the top priority in acquiring and allocating funds, ensuring the preservation of infrastructure investments.
  - Maximize the capacity of existing roadways before increasing capacity via new construction.
  - Invest in road improvements (widening and new roads) when necessary and appropriate to address safety or capacity deficiencies (both existing and future), primarily by eliminating critical bottlenecks and gaps in the road network.
  - Develop a strategic investment plan to create better road networks in under-served areas of the County, giving priority to connections that will stimulate economic development and support land use plans and environmental goals.
- Facilitate coordination among the local municipalities, Gaston County, and the MPO in order to develop a Collector Street Plan. This plan would determine effective ways to plan for future collector street connections and enhanced connectivity of the local street system for areas within and between communities.



#### Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

- Adopt a greenway/bicycle plan as an extension of “Connect Gaston” and incorporate public-private cooperation in implementation.
- Ensure adequate funding for construction and maintenance of bicycle facilities, sidewalks, and trails as critical components of the transportation system. Leverage state and federal grant funds to supplement County resources wherever possible. Ensure close coordination with Transportation and Parks and Recreation plans.
- Enhance coordination of pedestrian and bicycle improvements with roadway and transit plans and projects. Opportunities for bicycle and pedestrian treatments should be evaluated early in the planning and design of all roadway, transit, and rail projects.

#### Local & Regional Transit

- Enhance the existing bus system through innovative alternatives to traditional fixed-route service, such as connector shuttle services. Also, focus on increasing passenger amenities, such as sidewalks, shelters, and benches.
- Prepare for future transit service:

- Preserve major corridors consistent with the regional system
- In order to meet future transit ridership goals, steps must be taken to identify and foster development and redevelopment opportunities that support local and regional transit objectives.
  - Promote transit use by encouraging transit-supportive design features in areas targeted for transit service.
  - Emphasize the need for transit-supportive development (Transit Oriented Development or TOD) at major activity centers. Permitting pedestrian-scale, compact, mixed-use developments at strategic locations will prove beneficial as supporting transit service is expanded to serve the region. Special attention should be given to the I-85 / US 29-74 corridor as a possible Transit Oriented Development (TOD) corridor.
- Along with NCDOT and the MPO, develop coordinated park-and-ride and feeder/express bus services to support the future regional system.
- In cooperation with NCDOT and MPO, coordinate roadway improvement projects to support, rather than complicate or compete with, regional transit service.
- Investigate and support transit technologies (bus rapid transit, regional rail, express bus, light rail, etc.) appropriate for specific markets and corridors along with regional partners.
- Along with NCDOT and the MPO, investigate the feasibility of extending/enhancing transit centers supported by pedestrian/bicycle connections and appropriate land uses (e.g., hospitals, colleges, shopping centers, TODs).



#### Development Standards

- Consider the modification of current development standards to support transportation objectives, including:
  - Effective spacing and connectivity of collector roads
  - Adequate connectivity of the local street system. Insure that appropriate means are taken to integrate street systems and pedestrian facilities wherever feasible. An opportunity to increase connectivity exists during the subdivision process. In addition, proactive collector street planning will complement the county's system of existing thoroughfares. The expected result of the increased connectivity is improved integration allowing increased traffic dispersion, increased mobility options, and reduced dependence on existing arterials.
  - Roadway standards flexible enough to allow context-appropriate designs
  - Pedestrian and bicycle facilities that are safe, convenient, and attractive
  - Access management standards that preserve corridor capacities
- Consider development impacts on transportation
  - A process should be identified to secure traffic data for large traffic generators during the development review process; this may include trip generation, traffic impact analysis, and signal warrant analysis. These tools should provide county and municipal decision-makers with critical information to ascertain the potential transportation impacts of proposed developments. These tools will likewise document the transportation improvements required to mitigate the development impact. Model ordinances are available from the Institute of Transportation Engineers.





### Utilities

- Redefine “target areas” for sanitary sewer service extensions / improvements by establishing a method for evaluating and prioritizing projects to be funded. Such target areas should include:
  - Areas targeted for future development—the provision of infrastructure should be consistent with the Plan, guiding development to appropriate locations. (See the Development Strategy Map as well as the associated hierarchy of target areas, which takes into consideration opportunities for utilizing existing infrastructure.) Note: Water and sewer lines serving new development between the towns/cities and areas targeted for future development should be sized to provide adequate capacity for future development within target areas.
  - Areas that have been developed with septic systems, which are now failing and causing/contributing to environmental problems.
  - Critical areas in the county that, if developed, could stimulate significant economic development and job growth.
- Inventory sewer lines and easements in potential greenway locations. In a collaborative effort between the utility and the parks and recreation departments, maximize investments by coordinating utility and greenway planning.
- Encourage consideration of regional coordination in the provision of water and sewer services to maximize investments, allow for flexibility in the provision of services, and be better prepared for growth in the long term.

### Natural Resources & Open Space

- Develop an overall open space plan for the entire county. As part of that plan, establish a greenway circuit around the county:
  - use a mix of scenic drives and pedestrian, bike, and horse trails
  - connect major “green assets” in each corner of the county
    - Mountain Island Lake Educational Forest
    - Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden
    - Crowder’s Mountain State Park
    - Pasour Mountain Gateway to Equestrian Area
  - plan the US-321/74 Bypass as a Garden Parkway
  - utilize existing utility right-of-ways, stream corridors, and abandoned railroad tracks in creating greenways
- Pursue a Natural Heritage Tourism economic development strategy:
  - protect natural & historic assets by leveraging their income-producing capacity from tourism and positioning them as part of a “Natural and Cultural Heritage Trail”
  - provide special signage, historic markers, and economic development opportunities for inns, B&Bs, restaurants, fish camps, campgrounds, agri-tourism, and Revolutionary War sites
  - develop “welcome centers” at the eastern and western ends of the Garden Parkway to promote natural heritage tourism
  - expand use of Scenic View and Scenic Corridor overlay districts to protect scenic appeal of areas around the Heritage Trail

- Protect environs of Crowder’s Mountain State Park.
  - The park’s signature plant and wildlife diversity will be lost if development is allowed too close to the park
  - Buffer the park with compatible low-intensity land uses
- Protect the heights and bottoms in order to preserve water quality and flood management benefits, the County’s unique sense of place, and the richest sites for natural habitat and biodiversity.
- Commission an agricultural sustainability study to
  - quantify future potential for
    - emerging agricultural markets (organics, export, high-margin niche markets)
    - vertical integration (value-added processing facilities)
    - agri-tourism (dude ranches, farm B&Bs)
  - further explore and define potential agricultural preservation areas.
- Explore ways to increase funding or leverage resources for Parks and Recreation.
- Provide increased opportunities for riverfront recreational development.

**Implementation & Municipal Coordination**

- Designate the Elected Officials Forum as the overarching countywide policy body charged with implementing the C<sup>3</sup> process. Representing all of the County’s local governments, this well-established group is the logical choice for ‘top down’ leadership that can set the recommendations of this plan in motion.
- Initiate a Capital Needs Assessment to catalog the local government capital facilities needs, such as roads, parks, schools, and hospitals. Not just a wish list, this assessment will reveal the ‘big picture’ for public services, identify potential savings, and prioritize expenditures tied to the comprehensive plan.
- Develop a Countywide Utility Inventory and Plan to measure the capacities of various services and identify opportunities for savings and efficiencies based on the comprehensive plan.
- Foster cooperation on critical transportation issues. Since the County cannot build roads and municipalities can, the coordination of activities to protect future corridors is critical to reduce future costs and leverage limited funds from the State for the highest priority needs.
- Review overlapping jurisdictions to better coordinate development in the ETJ areas in implementing the comprehensive plan.
- Establish a clearinghouse that will make development data accessible to all government agencies and the public. This is an essential element to aid in land use and capital planning.
- Develop an Economic Development Plan/Strategy for rebuilding the County’s job base. Identify and structure programs to target employers and areas for employment growth.
- Review development standards to remove obsolete requirements and move toward more common standards countywide. This provides for better understanding and greater efficiencies in the application and enforcement of development ordinances. Evaluate optional provisions to encourage new development patterns and facilitate new employment.



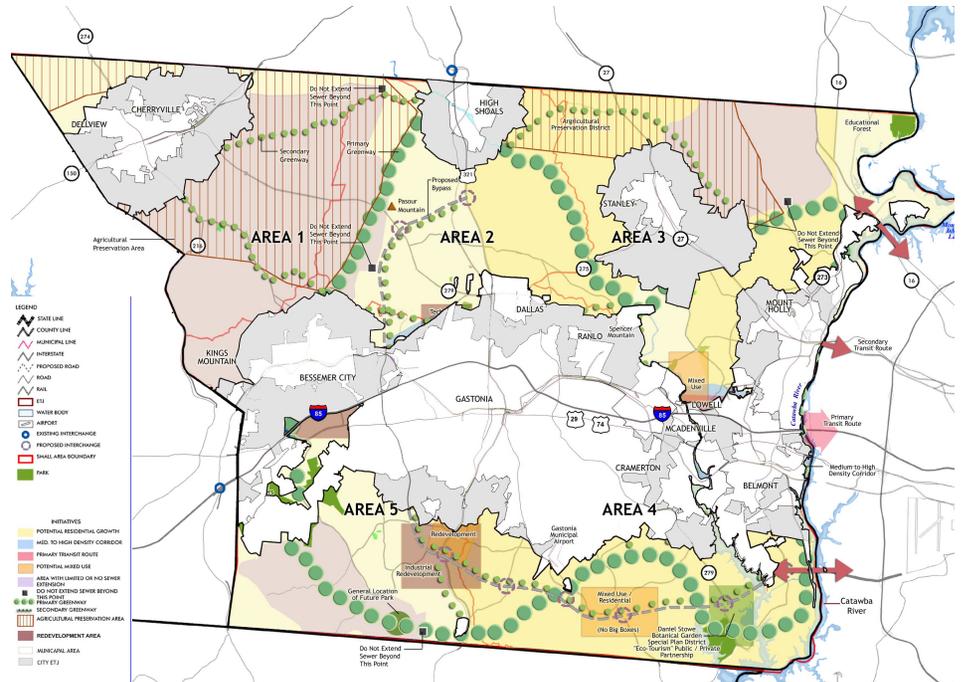
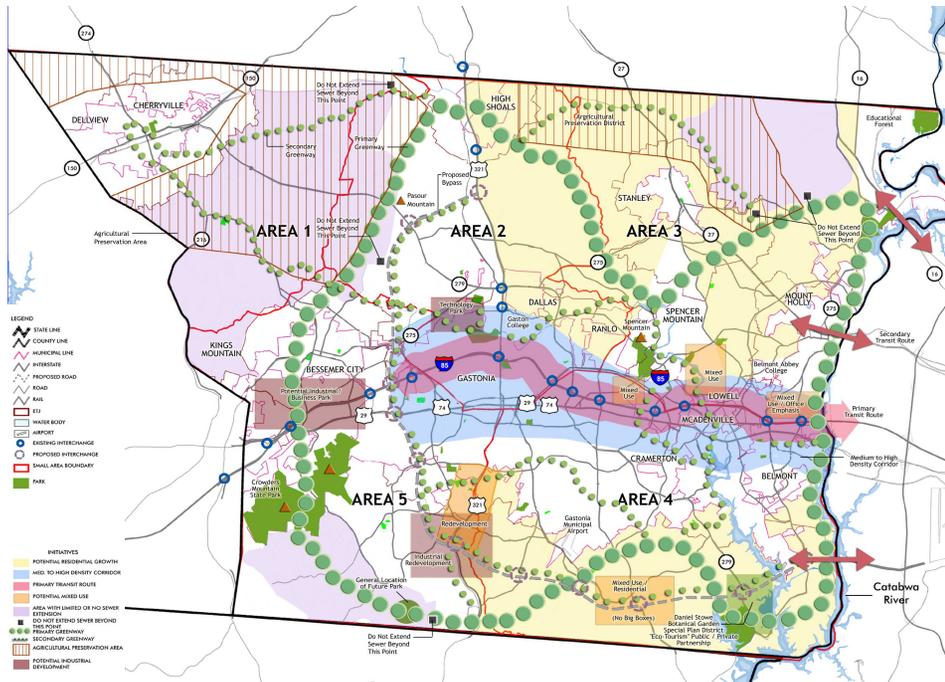
**The C<sup>3</sup> Process: Communication, Coordination, and Cooperation**  
 The key to the success of the C<sup>3</sup> process is tied to the necessity for communication, coordination, and



cooperation between the counties, the towns, the schools, and NCDOT.



- Develop intergovernmental staff teams to pool talent and reduce time spent solving common problems, which allows rapid turn-around for developing specific tools for plan implementation.
- Integrate planning for schools with municipal and county planning to provide for the best use of resources for school location, construction, and expansion tied to emerging growth patterns.



Proposed initiatives reach to all parts of the County, bringing connectivity to the County's transportation, land use, and open space patterns.

If these initiatives are pursued without cooperation and coordination with the municipalities, their continuity, and thus effectiveness, will be lost.

# Resources

Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce

Gaston County Economic Development Commission

Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. *2025 Multi-Modal Long Range Transportation Plan*. September 1999.

Gastonia Planning Department. *Connect Gaston*. March 1998.

HDR Engineering, Inc. of North Carolina. *Gaston County Countywide Water and Sewer Master Plan: Preliminary Feasibility Investigation Phase II*. August 1998.

Holman, Sheila, North Carolina Division of Natural Resources, Division of Air Quality. Interview.

<http://www.gastonchamber.com/Answerbook/Education>

*Humphrey Institute Symposium on Land Use and Equity Issues in Congestion Pricing*. Proceedings prepared by Dave Van Hattum and David W. Ungemah. October 1995

NCITE. *Neighborhood Traffic Control*. December 1994.

North Carolina Department of Transportation. *Traditional Neighborhood Development Street Design Guidelines*. July 2000.

Patel, Alpesh, North Carolina Department of Transportation, Statewide Planning Branch. Interview.

Transportation Research Board. *Access Management Guidelines for Activity Centers, NCHRP Report 348*. 1992.

Woody, William. *Soil Survey of Gaston County, North Carolina*. Soil Conservation Service, US Department of Agriculture. 1984.

North Carolina Employment Security Commission

