

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary provides a concise overview of the Catawba County Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The comprehensive plan integrates the seven small area plans and three corridor plans adopted in the early 2000s to mid-2010s into one inclusive document with updated perspectives. This Plan recognizes changing demographics, existing assets, current development patterns, and community values to provide insight on where the county currently stands, and establishes a vision for the coming decades.

On the back end of the national development recession of the 2000s, Catawba County has experienced significant residential growth over the past five years. This growth has been driven largely by the County's strong quality of life and amenities, relatively affordable cost of living, proximity to the fast-growing greater Charlotte region, availability of water and sewer infrastructure, and an increase in build-out speed of previously approved housing units. This development activity indicated the effectiveness of a deliberate "quality of life"-based strategy to reverse the deeply concerning trend of population decline that was evident in Catawba County prior to the 2020 census. In fact, this growth differentiates Catawba County from the rest of the Unifour region (defined as Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties), as each of those other counties is still experiencing declining resident population.

These growth dynamics, while generally positive and critical to the County's future economic sustainability, have given rise to valid concerns about potential impacts to the very quality of life that has catalyzed the community's desirability and led to this growth. Citizens voiced their perspectives on this matter through a series of community meetings and an online survey. Negative effects of population growth on County services and infrastructure, threats to the community's agriculture heritage, and impacts to the County's natural environment were major themes running through the public input. **This Plan's overarching goal is to establish a balanced and deliberate approach to future development in Catawba County that preserves those aspects of life which make it a desirable place to live while supporting quality, focused development in appropriate areas.**

Within this context, the primary objectives of the comprehensive land use plan are to promote responsible land use, accommodate population growth, foster economic development, and preserve environmental integrity and community character. Thoughtful planning and community engagement have been integrated into a plan that reflects this desired balance and positions the County for continued economic success.

Key components of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan:

1. Demographics

The Plan identifies County population, income, employment, education and housing data to provide insight into patterns related to the remaining components of the plan. Much

like the state of North Carolina, Catawba County is attracting new residents and our population is increasing. We are becoming a more diverse, better educated population with higher household income but our age cohorts are shifting.

2. Transportation

The Plan outlines recommendations to support expansions to traffic facilities by working with the Metropolitan Planning Organization through the transportation planning process. Other recommendations include enhancing connectivity for new development, mitigating congestion, and promoting alternative modes of transportation.

3. Resources & Services

Recommendations are provided aiming at efficient use and strategic expansion of development-supporting services public utilities and public safety. Additionally, goals are listed to continue to diversify the tax base and provide an appropriate level of County services.

4. Parks and Recreation

The Plan includes provision to update the Parks Master Plan. This goal reflects the public's interest around access to outdoor spaces, natural resources and protecting open space. The plan includes provisions for maintaining and/or enhancing current park facilities and promoting greenways.

5. Natural & Cultural Resources

Safeguarding natural and cultural resources is an important issue. The Plan incorporates recommendations for preserving tree canopies, open spaces and rural vistas. Other goals include maintaining protections for water resources and bringing further attention to historic and cultural facilities.

6. Agriculture

Recognizing the County's strong agricultural history and a public desire to continue the opportunities for farming and ranching in the County, the Plan offers recommendations to support the agricultural community. Objectives include educational support through the public school system, continued support of agricultural programs, considering farmland preservation opportunities, and providing for land uses which support agricultural activities.

7. Housing

The growing demand for housing has spurred concerns about the type, location, pace and impact of residential development in certain areas of the County. Demand has also influenced housing prices in the County. The Plan establishes density maximums and safe

and healthy residential development design, and provides for a range of housing types where supported by appropriate services.

8. Economic Development & Tourism

The local economy and socio-economic well-being are important to our County. The Plan supports appropriate locations for commercial and industrial uses, collaboration with the Economic Development Corporation and programs, policies and education relative to existing and future industries.

9. Land Use & Growth Management

The core of the Plan identifies land use recommendations and designates areas for residential, commercial, industrial, mixed-use and open space/recreational uses through the future land use maps. This promotes an efficient use of space while promoting sustainable development practices. Generally, the Plan supports mixed use development where water, sewer and higher classified transportation facilities exist. Similarly, the plan supports commercial and industrial growth along major transportation corridors and where utilities are present. The Plan recommends reducing residential density in areas recognized as rural and without public sewer.

10. Small Area Plans

Beginning in 2002, small area land use plans were adopted focusing on smaller known communities within the County. These geographic areas/plans are identified as Balls Creek, Catawba, Mountain View, Plateau, Sherrills Ford, St. Stephens/Oxford, and Startown. Their geographic representations are incorporated in the Plan, and relevant recommendations that applied to all small area plans (such as improving subdivision design, for example) are also a part of the overarching comprehensive plan.