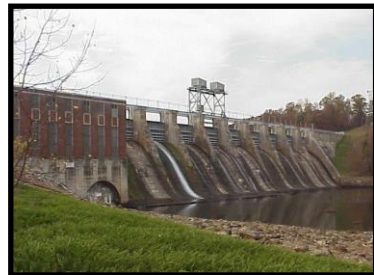
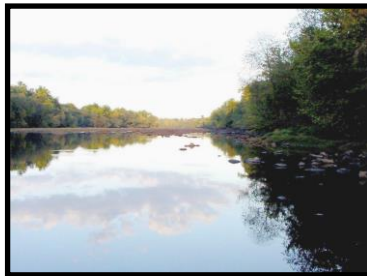


# St. Stephens/Oxford Small Area Plan

Recommended by the St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Committee October 30, 2002  
Recommended by the Catawba County Planning Board March 31, 2003  
Adopted by the Catawba County Board of Commissioners April 21, 2003



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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Purpose**

The concept of conducting small area plans for Catawba County was one of sixteen growth strategies resulting from the County's long-range Strategic Growth Plan (1999). The Growth Plan stated that Small Area Plans "would explore general development patterns and trends and evaluate public service/facility deficiencies needing attention." The document further stated that the plans should also "include conceptual sketch plans based upon appropriate land use and zoning concepts and be used for consideration for future zoning changes and subdivision standards."

Through the development of the small area plan, a committee would assess their area's current quality of life and sustainability on issues such as traffic congestion, residential development patterns, water quality, library service levels, utility capacities and school facilities. Upon reviewing these issues, the committee then would recommend measures for improvement. Specifically, the Small Area Planning Committee was asked to discuss and develop goals and action statements for the following issues: 1) economic development; 2) natural resources; 3) cultural resources; 4) community facilities and public services; 5) housing; 6) land use and community design; and 7) transportation. The plan would then include implementation strategies for the goals and action statements, whether it is through ordinance or policy amendments, modified capital improvement plans, or coordination with other agencies to complete specific tasks.

#### **Process**

The process for developing the small area plan was a grassroots effort that began with the appointment of the St. Stephens/Oxford Small Area Planning Committee in October 2000 by the Board of Commissioners. Ten committee members were interested citizens who live or own land in the St. Stephens/Oxford Small Area Plan boundary and volunteered their time to develop a small area plan for their community. One committee member was also a Planning Board member who served as liaison to the Board. The County Planning staff and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments educated and assisted the Committee in the development of their individual plan. During the process of developing the plan, the Committee solicited input from citizens in the planning area through a community input meeting held in May 2001. At this meeting, citizens were asked how they saw their community developing in the future using a 10 to 20 year planning period. Approximately twenty residents participated in this meeting held at Riverbend Middle School. Results from this community input meeting are provided in Appendix A. The Committee used this

input in the development of the plan's guiding principles and recommendations. Upon completion of the draft plan, the Committee sponsored another public meeting in September 2002, which was held at Lyle Creek Elementary School. At this meeting, the plan's maps and recommendations were presented to the community. The Committee, in amending the draft plan, considered input from the 40 residents who participated at this meeting. When the Committee's recommendations were complete, their final document was presented to the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners for review and consideration for adoption. Presentations to these Boards were through a public hearing process where the public was invited to express its comments on the proposed plan. The committee presented the final document to the Planning Board at a work session held on March 17, 2003. The Planning Board conducted a public hearing on the plan at its March 31, 2003 meeting and subsequently recommended the plan to the Board of Commissioners with an amendment to add a Scenic Byway designation along Oxford School Road. The Board of Commissioners reviewed the plan during one-on-one sessions with the committee in February 2003. The Board of Commissioners then conducted its public hearing and adopted the plan at its April 21, 2003 meeting. In adopting the plan, the Board amended a recommendation in order to allow an existing singlewide manufactured home to be switched out with another singlewide manufactured home in the R-1 rezoning areas. The Board also amended Map 8, *Proposed Zoning Map Amendments* to include the Rest Home Road/Riverbend Road area in the proposed R-1 zoning.

Over the next five years issues may arise that have not been addressed in this document. Since the plan is intended to be an active document, it must be capable of adapting to changes and new challenges. The St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Committee recommends reviewing the plan every five years, or as conditions change. Amendments to the Plan have a potential impact on all residents and businesses in the St. Stephens/Oxford area and therefore should be treated in a manner that would allow for public input, through notice and hearings, during the amendment procedure.

## **STUDY AREA**

The St. Stephens/Oxford Small Area Plan (SAP) study area boundary follows the Catawba River to the north and east; the municipal limits of Catawba, Claremont and Conover to the south; and the municipal limits of Hickory to the west. The study area encompasses approximately 30,846 acres.

See Map 1, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Study Area*

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The St. Stephens/Oxford Area has historically been a rural farming community since its settlement in the 18th century. The farming culture of this community is still apparent today. Although the area is much more suburban today, many residents identify with the farming culture. The “Rock Barn” located off Rock Barn Road near Lyle Creek is identified on the National Register of Historic Places. The barn (circa 1822) was part of the farm of Frederick Hoke, who was instrumental in the formation of Catawba County in 1842. This barn is a symbol of the agricultural history of the community. Churches have also played an important role in the history of the St. Stephens/Oxford Area. The St. Stephens community derived its name from the two Lutheran churches located on Springs Road. These and many other churches have bonded the community and formed a significant part of its identity.

The Catawba River has also played a significant role in the history of the area. The construction of the Oxford and Lookout Dams in the early 20th century provided needed electricity for the area and controlled flooding that destroyed homes and farms. The river is also used for recreation and fishing.

Today, the St. Stephens/Oxford Area is much more suburban than rural. Although there are several farms remaining, the number of farms has diminished greatly through the years. Like many other communities in close proximity to growing urban areas, the St. Stephens/Oxford area faces many growth pressures. The impacts of sprawling growth are clearly evident as pastures, forested areas and farmland are developed.



## **COMMUNITY PROFILE**

### **ASSETS AND KEY ISSUES**

During the May 2001 community meeting, St. Stephens/Oxford residents participated in small group discussions to identify their likes, dislikes and future visions of the community. As a result of the discussions, the committee identified broad categories of assets and key issues to direct their work. In the following sections of the plan, more specific comments from the community meeting comprise the guiding principles of each topic.

#### **Community Assets**

- Rural setting
  - Un-congested
  - Open space
  - Scenic topography
- Public services
  - Schools
  - Fire Departments

#### **Key Issues**

- Rapid residential development on small lots.
- Loss of farmland and open space.
- Need for public water.

## **MAJOR POINTS OF REFERENCE**

The St. Stephens/Oxford SAP encompasses approximately 30,846 acres of land in northern Catawba County. A significant natural feature bordering the study area is the Catawba River. Other significant natural features include Riverbend Park, a 450-acre park adjoining the Catawba River, and a number of streams and scenic vistas.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

The St. Stephens/Oxford area experienced a substantial population growth from 1990 to 2000. The number of people residing in the area grew at a rate of 33.8%. The population in 1990 for the area was 14,669 while the 2000 Census indicated a population of 19,625, an increase of 4,956 persons (see chart below). The growth rate for the entire county was 19.7%, considerably less than the growth rate of the study area. The study area's net gain of 4,956 persons represented 21% of the total County population increase of 23,273. The population growth rate for the study area is among the highest in the Unifour.

<b>St. Stephens/Oxford Small Area Plan, Study Area Growth: 1990 to 2000</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Net Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Persons</b>	14,669	19,625	4,956	33.8
<b>Households</b>	5,465	7,481	2,016	36.9
<b>Persons/Household</b>	2.68	2.62	-0.06	-2.2

Source: US Census, 1990, and 2000; compiled by WPCOG Data Center, May 2002.

The number of households grew slightly faster than the number of persons in the study area, resulting in a lower average of persons per household. This trend is consistent with county, state and national trends, all indicating a lower number of persons per household.

<b>Catawba County Population Growth: 1990 to 2000</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Net Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Persons</b>	118,412	141,685	23,273	19.7
<b>Households</b>	45,700	55,533	9,833	21.5
<b>Persons/Household</b>	2.59	2.55	-0.04	-1.5

Source: US Census, 1990, and 2000; Catawba County GIS, 2000; as compiled by WPCOG Data Center, May 2002.

The St. Stephens/Oxford study area is comprised of portions of Census Tracts 101.01, 102.01, 102.02 and 103.01. See Map 2, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Census Tracts*. The remaining demographic information is broken down by the St. Stephens/Oxford SAP, Census Tracts 101.01, 102.01, 102.02, 103.01 and Catawba County.

The population in the study area as well as Catawba County is predominately white.

<b>Race and Ethnicity, 2000</b>				
<b>Place</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Hispanic (any race)</b>
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford SAP</b>	90.5%	2.9%	6.6%	5.0%
<b>Census Tract 101.01</b>	93.7%	2.5%	3.8%	1.2%
<b>Census Tract 102.01</b>	86.5%	3.4%	10.1%	4.6%
<b>Census Tract 102.02</b>	84.4%	8.3%	7.3%	7.5%
<b>Census Tract 103.01</b>	91.5%	2.7%	5.8%	8.7%
<b>Catawba County</b>	85.0%	8.4%	6.6%	5.6%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000; WPCOG Data Center 2002.

Residents ranging in age from 19 to 64 comprise the largest population group of residents in the study area, Census Tracts 101.01, 102.01, 102.02, 103.01 and Catawba County.

<b>Age of Population, 2000</b>			
<b>Place</b>	<b>Persons Age 18 and under (% of all persons)</b>	<b>Persons Age 19 to 64 (% of all persons)</b>	<b>Persons Age 65 and older (% of all persons)</b>
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford SAP</b>	5,219 (26.6%)	12,718 (64.8%)	1,688 (8.6%)
<b>Census Tract 101.01</b>	1,345 (24.8%)	3,624 (66.6%)	465 (8.6%)
<b>Census Tract 102.01</b>	1,241 (28.0%)	2,875 (64.8%)	320 (7.2%)
<b>Census Tract 102.02</b>	1,701 (25.3%)	4,246 (63.2%)	770 (11.5%)
<b>Census Tract 103.01</b>	1,202 (27.4%)	2,839 (64.8%)	344 (7.8%)
<b>Catawba County</b>	34,392 (24.3%)	89,868 (63.4%)	17,425 (12.3%)

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000; WPCOG Data Center 2002.

Between 1985 and 1990 61.4% of St. Stephens/Oxford residents remained in the same home compared to 55.1% in Catawba County. However, during that same time period, St. Stephens/Oxford experienced 13.6% in-migration, which is comparable to the 16.1% experienced by Catawba County.

<b>Change in Housing and Migration</b>		
<b>Place</b>	<b>% of Persons living in the same house between 1985 and 1990</b>	<b>In-migration 1985 and 1990 (% of population)</b>
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford SAP</b>	61.4%	1,995 (13.6%)
<b>Census Tract 101</b>	59.8%	860 (13.2%)
<b>Census Tract 102</b>	66.8%	786 (9.8%)
<b>Census Tract 103</b>	57.8%	2,232 (17.3%)
<b>Catawba County</b>	55.1%	19,027 (16.1%)

Note: In migration refers to those persons that moved into the listed place from another MSA between 1985 and 1990. All of the places listed in the table are part of the Hickory MSA.

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

In 1990 the average commute time to work for St. Stephens/Oxford residents was 17.5 minutes, which is below the County average of 21.6 minutes.

<b>Commuting Time to Work, 1990</b>		
<b>Place</b>	<b>Average Work Commute Time</b>	<b>% of Workers commuting over 40 minutes to work</b>
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford SAP</b>	17.5 minutes	4.3%
<b>Census Tract 101</b>	18.2 minutes	4.7%
<b>Census Tract 102</b>	17.2 minutes	4.6%
<b>Census Tract 103</b>	17.2 minutes	3.8%
<b>Catawba County</b>	21.6 minutes	12.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

St. Stephens/Oxford had a lower percentage of workers employed outside of Catawba County than the County as a whole.

<b>Place of Work, 1990</b>	
<b>Place</b>	<b>% of Workers Employed Outside County of Residence</b>
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford SAP</b>	7.8%
<b>Census Tract 101</b>	8.7%
<b>Census Tract 102</b>	6.0%
<b>Census Tract 103</b>	8.7%
<b>Catawba County</b>	11.9%
<b>Hickory-Morganton MSA</b>	21.4%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

In 1990 17.3% of St. Stephens/Oxford residents were employed in professional occupations compared to 17.6% in Catawba County. Employment in service and professional support occupations showed a greater difference between St. Stephens/Oxford (31.3%) and Catawba County (35.6%). Catawba County as a whole had more workers employed in manufacturing occupations. Farming occupations, near 1%, were low for both St. Stephens/Oxford and Catawba County.

<b>Employment, 1990</b>				
<b>Place</b>	<b>% Employed in Professions</b>	<b>% Employed in Service &amp; Prof. Support</b>	<b>% Employed in Manufacturing</b>	<b>% Employed in Farming</b>
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford SAP</b>	17.3%	31.3%	50.5%	0.9%
<b>Census Tract 101</b>	18.4%	32.6%	48.2%	0.8%
<b>Census Tract 102</b>	15.6%	34.1%	48.8%	1.5%
<b>Census Tract 103</b>	18.5%	27.9%	53.1%	0.5%
<b>Catawba County</b>	17.6%	35.6%	45.8%	1.0%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

Household income data from 1989 indicates a slightly higher median household income in St. Stephens/Oxford compared to Catawba County though Catawba County showed a higher percentage of household incomes over \$60,000.

<b>Household Income, 1989</b>			
<b>Place</b>	<b>1989 Estimated Median Household Income</b>	<b>% of 1989 Households with Incomes Below \$10,000</b>	<b>% of 1989 Household Incomes over \$60,000</b>
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford SAP</b>	\$32,189	7.6%	11.8%
<b>Census Tract 101</b>	\$34,655	8.5%	9.4%
<b>Census Tract 102</b>	\$30,565	6.1%	9.8%
<b>Census Tract 103</b>	\$31,994	8.4%	15.2%
<b>Catawba County</b>	\$31,212	13.0%	15.7%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS**

If the long-term trend of increasing job demand continues in Catawba County, the population in the St. Stephens/Oxford area is projected to continue increasing at a substantial rate. By 2015 the population of the St. Stephens/Oxford area could approach 27,000 persons. The trend of fewer people per household is expected to continue.

<b>St. Stephens/Oxford Small Area Plan, Projected Study Area Growth: 2000 to 2015</b>						
<b>Year</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Growth 2000 to 2015</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Persons</b>	19,625	22,431	24,685	26,677	7,052	35.9
<b>Households</b>	7,481	8,627	9,568	10,421	2,940	39.3
<b>Persons/Household</b>	2.62	2.60	2.58	2.56	-0.06	-2.3

Source: WPCOG Data Center, May 2002.

This substantial population growth for the St. Stephens/Oxford area is predicated on growth rates that are more than 35% for the area. Future population growth within the St. Stephens/Oxford Area Plan boundary will be largely affected by the availability of public water and sewer and the County subdivision policy restricting development in school districts at or near 110% of their school capacity. If current subdivision policies remain in place, population growth will be limited in part by pre-existing or potential small lot development. However, if County policies on school capacities change, or if multi-family or new residential subdivision growth is stimulated by the extension of water or sewer services, the potential growth will increase significantly. These population projections would then need to be revised or updated extensively.

## **LAND USE AND COMMUNITY DESIGN**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

#### **Current Land Use**

Residential uses and open space occupy a majority of the land in the St. Stephens/Oxford study area. Most parcels are zoned R-1, R-2 and R-3 with a majority of the area assigned the R-2 zoning classification as indicated on Map 3, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Current Zoning*. The R-2 zoning district is intended to accommodate low-density residential development, agriculture, and the necessary governmental and support services in the more rural portions of the County. It permits modular, site-built homes, singlewide and doublewide manufactured homes, as well as bona fide farms. Large tracts of undeveloped land, zoned R-2, remain along Lookout Shoals Lake. This portion of the study area is much less densely developed and still retains a rural atmosphere. The western and southern sections of the study area contain a greater density of housing as indicated on Map 4, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Current Land Uses*.

Most of the commercial activity is concentrated along Springs Road from the western study area boundary to County Home Road. Additional commercial activity is sparsely located along the remainder of Springs Road, on NC Highway 16 and on the northern side of the I-40 interchange at Oxford School Road. The commercial areas are primarily zoned C-2, which allows regional type businesses. Fewer commercial parcels are zoned C-1, which permits community service type businesses. The few parcels zoned C-3, previously non-conforming businesses, are not allowed to expand their land use (see Map 3).

Industrial and office-institutional uses within the study area are limited (see Map 4). Claremont, Conover, and Hickory contain large industrial parks with the needed infrastructure. While most of the industry is located within municipalities, some industrial uses are sparsely located within the St. Stephens/Oxford Study Area. A welding operation and two furniture manufacturers, zoned E-1, are located on Houston Mill Road. Volex, a textiles manufacturer, is also zoned E-1 and is located on Bolick Road. The location of a salvage yard on NC Highway 16 is zoned E-2. A beauty shop occupies the property zoned O-I on Springs Road.

State mandated watershed regulations also impact land uses in the St. Stephens/Oxford Study Area. The study area lies within the Lookout Shoals WS-IV watershed. The watershed extends five miles from the Lake, with the first half-mile designated as the critical area. This watershed was designated in 1999 as a water intake for the City of Statesville.

## Land Use Distribution

The St. Stephens/Oxford SAP encompasses 30,846 acres of land (excluding rights-of-way). Of the 30,846 acres, roughly 28% are entirely vacant and another 49% are in large tracts, which could be subdivided.

	Total Zoned Acreage		
	Total Acreage	Total Entirely Vacant Land	% Entirely Vacant
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford</b>	30,846	8,519	28%

Land use in the study area consists of industrial, commercial, office-institutional and residential uses. Commercial zoning occupies the largest number of acres of non-residential zoned land, though industrial zoned land has the greatest vacancy rate.

	Acreage Zoned Non-Residential		
	Total Acreage	Total Entirely Vacant Land	% Vacant Zoned Non-Residential
<b>Industrial</b>	40	12	30%
<b>Commercial</b>	183	26	14%
<b>Office-Institutional</b>	1	0	0%

Residential uses occupy the greatest percentage of land in the study area (see Map 4). Yet over 65% of the residentially zoned land is vacant as shown on Map 3. Over 14,445 acres are entirely vacant while approximately 10,967 acres with a structure are in lots of four acres or more that could be subdivided into two lots. Assuming that 85% of the total vacant land zoned for residential use is developed, the St. Stephens/Oxford area could see an additional 16,940 acres developed for residential purposes.

	Acreage Zoned Residential		
	Total Acreage	Total Entirely Vacant Land + Lots w/Structure & ≥ 4 Acres	% Vacant Zoned Residential
<b>St. Stephens/Oxford</b>	30,622	19,929	65%

The land use statistics indicate that a substantial amount of additional development could occur in the St. Stephens/Oxford area.



## Site Development Patterns and Land Design Trends

Historically, St. Stephens/Oxford was largely a rural agricultural community. Gradually, the larger homesteads were sold and subdivided for single-family homes. Housing developments began to take over open space that residents value. While the greatest amount of residential growth has occurred in the western and southern portion of the study area, growth pressures are developing for the northeastern portion of the study area. Manufactured home developments have been more common in the northeast section of the study area. Site built homes represent a majority of residential growth in the southern and western sections of the study area. A significant amount of low-density development could occur within the study area.

Commercial uses have developed primarily along Springs Road, NC Highway 16 and at several major intersections in the study area. Most St. Stephens/Oxford residents work and shop in the Claremont, Conover and Hickory urban areas. This trend is not expected to change as retail developers target more densely populated areas, such as Hickory and Conover. The construction of the new NC 16 interchange on Interstate 40 along with significant residential development, will likely lead to significant commercial development just south of the study area. Commercial development along the Highway 16 Corridor, within Conover, will likely consider much of the study area as part of its sales market. Aside from that, significant commercial development is not expected within the study area.

Industrial growth within the study area has been limited and most current industrial uses were in existence prior to countywide zoning. Most industrial development has occurred within Claremont, Conover and Hickory. Industrial growth in the urbanized areas, where the needed infrastructure is located, is expected to continue. Significant industrial growth, within the study area, is not anticipated.

The County owns and operates Riverbend Park located on N.C. Highway 16 at the Catawba River. This 450-acre park includes a variety of passive recreational opportunities including walking, hiking, biking and equestrian trails, picnic areas and an observation deck by the river. The Catawba River (Lake Hickory and Lake Lookout Shoals) borders the study area to the north and east. The river and lakes also provide recreational opportunities. Other recreational uses in the St. Stephens/Oxford Area consist primarily of school and church facilities.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **RESIDENTIAL**

- Maintain a rural, un-congested setting.
- Provide a regional fair-share of affordable housing.
- Encourage subdivisions to build community atmosphere and a sense of place through design.
- Discourage the accumulation of unnecessary materials/vehicles in residential areas, on public rights-of-way and near the river.

### **COMMERCIAL**

- Continue to allow a diversified range of businesses.
- Require more aesthetically pleasing commercial development designs.
- Balance additional growth in commercial services with the preservation of rural atmosphere.

### **OFFICE-INSTITUTIONAL**

- Maintain a scale and design for office-institutional buildings that blend with the surrounding area.
- Encourage Office-Institutional growth.

### **INDUSTRIAL**

- Control industrial growth in restricted zones.

### **OPEN SPACE**

- Protect natural features (i.e. trees, lake, fields) that contribute to the rural atmosphere.
- Encourage farmland preservation.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RESIDENTIAL**

- Designate an area for higher density residential uses, as shown on Map 5, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Proposed Density Districts*.
- Higher-density development should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 2 units per acre if public water is not available and 3 units per acre if public water is available;
  - 5 percent of a major subdivision should be set aside for open space.
- Designate an area for medium density residential uses, as shown on Map 5.
- Medium-density development should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1.34 units per acre;
  - 7.5 percent of a major subdivision should be set aside for open space.
- Designate an area for lower-density residential uses, as shown on Map 5.
- Lower-density development should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per acre;
  - 10 percent of a major subdivision should be set aside for open space.
- Designate an area within 435 feet from the Catawba River as the Catawba River Corridor, as shown on Map 6, *St. Stephens/Oxford Future Land Use Recommendations*.
- Development in the Catawba River Corridor should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available; however, no single lot should be less than 0.75 acres;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per acre;
  - Any water front lot should have a minimum width of 100 feet.

- Multi-family development should be limited to the areas designated as mixed-use village development as shown on Map 6.
  - Multi-family development should also be limited to sites where both public water and sewer are available.
- Setbacks should be increased and driveway cuts limited for residential developments along NC Hwy. 16, Springs Road, Oxford School Road and County Home Road to protect right-of-way for future road expansion.
- Require a minimum number of trees on each housing space of manufactured home parks.
- Residential subdivisions should incorporate the following additional design criteria:
  - landscaping/buffering;
  - subdivision signs;
  - sidewalks – as defined under pedestrian systems in the Transportation section of this plan;
  - tree ordinance;
  - internal access;
  - cluster subdivisions should be available as an option to conventional subdivisions.
- To protect property values, appearance and character of the community, the area within Catawba River Corridor should be assigned a zoning classification of R-1. Construction of “stick built” homes has been the trend along the Catawba River Corridor and the zoning should reflect that trend.
- Increase enforcement of the Catawba County junk ordinance.

## **COMMERCIAL**

- Setbacks should be increased and driveway cuts limited for commercial developments along NC Hwy. 16, Springs Road, Oxford School Road and County Home Road in order to protect right-of-way for future road expansion.
- Commercial uses should adhere to additional appearance criteria, similar to the current US Hwy. 321 guidelines, including:
  - the option of either placing parking in the rear of the building with less landscaping required or placing parking in the front of the building and incorporating additional landscaping;
  - stronger signage regulations;

- required access management;
  - incorporation of Conover's landscaping requirements;
  - buffering from residential uses.
- The following nodes should be designated Rural Commercial with a maximum total area of 10 acres per node and a maximum gross leasable area of 15,000 square feet per lot:
    - Lee Cline Road and Houston Mill Road;
    - NC Hwy. 16 and St. Peters Church Road\*;
    - NC Hwy. 16 and Springs Road\*;
    - NC Hwy. 16 and Swinging Bridge Road\*;
    - Oxford School Road and Riverbend Road;
    - Spring Road and Houston Mill Road. (amended by Board of Commissioners 11/21/05) (see Map 6).

*\* Re-examination of these areas should occur within 5 years to determine if a Neighborhood Commercial designation is warranted.*

- The following nodes should be designated Neighborhood Commercial with a total area of 10 to 25 acres per node and maximum gross leasable area of 50,000 square feet per lot:
  - St. Peters Church Road and Springs Road (see Map 6).
- The following area should be designated as a Commercial Corridor with additional standards that limit driveway cuts, require additional landscaping along road frontage and in parking lots and limit the number, location and height of signs:
  - Springs Road from County Home Road west to the study area boundary (see Map 6).
- The following area should be designated as a Community Center with a total area of 20 to 40 acres per node and maximum gross leasable area of 100,000 square feet per lot. Businesses in this area should buffer structures and parking from I-40.
  - The interchange at I-40 and Oxford School Road (see Map 6).
- The following areas should be designated as mixed-use:
  - South of St. John's Church Road to the study area boundary and east to Rock Barn Road should permit a mixed-use village type development;
  - South of Rock Barn Road to the study area boundary should permit a mix of neighborhood business and office-institutional uses (see Map 6).
- The following areas should be designated as a Mixed-Use Corridor which would allow a mixture of commercial, office and multi-family uses. Higher development standards should be applied to the corridor which limit driveway

cuts, require additional landscaping along road frontage and in parking lots and limit the number, location and height of signs:

- Rock Barn Road from the planning jurisdiction of the City of Conover to approximately 3500 feet north of the intersection of St. Johns Church Road.
  - NC Hwy. 16 North from the planning jurisdiction of the City of Conover to 1000 feet north of the intersection of C & B Farm Road (amended by Board of Commissioners 12/20/04) (see Map 6)
- Billboards should be limited to the Interstate 40 corridor. The use of logo signs on Interstate 40 should be encouraged.

### **OFFICE-INSTITUTIONAL**

- The following area should be designated for office-institutional uses with a total area of 5 to 10 acres for the node:
  - NC Hwy. 16 and C&B Farm Road (see Map 6).

### **INDUSTRIAL**

- Zone for industrial areas in park-like settings with the option to mix with high-impact commercial uses.
- The following areas should be designated for industrial uses:
  - South of Oxford School Road to I-40. Buildings and parking in this area should be buffered from I-40 (see Map 6);
  - South of Interstate 40 and north of US Highway 70 between Rock Barn Road and North Oxford Street (see Map 6).

### **OPEN SPACE**

- Assist property owners of rural farms in preserving those uses by providing information on conservation easements and tax credit measures. In addition, create agricultural districts as allowed by State Statutes. Rezoning to this district should occur at the request of the property owner.
- Develop a mechanism for preserving open space resources by creating a transfer of development rights (TDR) type component for the zoning ordinance. Catawba County would need to pursue State legislative authority.
- Protect rural character and open space by requiring dedication of open space within subdivisions.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

#### **Roads & Highways**

Transportation systems within the St. Stephens/Oxford study area are primarily planned by the Hickory-Newton-Conover Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Since its inception in 1983, the MPO's planning area has faced significant growth in retail, commercial and residential developments. Consequently, traffic congestion has become a problem, which St. Stephens/Oxford is experiencing.

Interstate 40, Highway 16 and Springs Road are major thoroughfares serving the St. Stephens/Oxford communities. The following table illustrates the significant increase of vehicles per day (VPD) utilizing these roads.

	<b>NC Hwy 16 N of St. Peters Church Rd</b>	<b>NC Hwy 16 N of Conover City Limit</b>	<b>Springs Rd N of Rifle Range Rd</b>	<b>I-40 w/i Study Area</b>
<b>1988</b>	<b>6,100 VPD</b>	<b>5,000 VPD</b>	<b>6,000 VPD</b>	<b>22,500</b>
<b>1994</b>	<b>8,900 VPD</b>	<b>8,600 VPD</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>36,100</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>12,000 VPD</b>	<b>12,000 VPD</b>	<b>12,000 VPD</b>	<b>43,000</b>
<b>2025</b>	<b>27,500 VPD</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>24,800 VPD</b>	<b>70,000-75,000</b>

VPD = Vehicles Per Day Source: NCDOT Traffic Count Maps

To reduce traffic congestion and adequately provide for future travel demands, the MPO adopted the Hickory-Newton-Conover Urban Area Transportation Plan in 1986 and updated the plan in 1996. The most current update, the *2025 Hickory-Newton-Conover Urban Area Transportation Plan*, includes six projects affecting the St. Stephens/Oxford study area. Three projects address anticipated traffic volumes that will exceed highway capacity. Springs Road will be widened to accommodate multi-lanes from its current two-lane section to its terminus with NC Highway 16. Interstate 40 will be widened to six lanes and NC Highway 16 will be widened to multi-lanes from its intersection with Interstate 40 to the Alexander County border.

Three other projects involve extensions or realignments of existing roads. The North Crosstown thoroughfare will be a multi-lane road linking NC Highway 16 North with Spencer Road as part of the Newton-Conover loop system. The projected traffic volume on North Crosstown in 2025 is 20,900 vehicles per day. Fairgrove Church Road Extension will be a two-lane road extending from its current terminus with US 70-A North to County Home Road. The projected

traffic volume on Fairgrove Church Road Extension in 2025 is 12,000 vehicles per day north of US 70-A and 7,600 vehicles per day north of Section House Road. Section House Road will be a two-lane road realigned to link with Kool Park Road. The projected traffic volume on Section House Road in 2025 is 12,600 vehicles per day.

## **Pedestrian System**

Presently, Catawba County does not regulate or require sidewalk construction in new developments. In general, St. Stephens/Oxford lacks a pedestrian system offering options for connectivity between residential areas and commercial developments. However, it is now the policy of the MPO and NCDOT to evaluate any new road construction project for potential pedestrian facilities (i.e. sidewalks and crossovers) and bicycle accommodations.

## **Bicycle System**

The St. Stephens/Oxford study area does not currently have an integrated system of bicycle trails. Riverbend Park offers a system of off-road bicycle trails. Additionally, NCDOT has funded a Bicycle Route Map and signing project that began in spring 2002. A draft Bicycle Route Map has been completed and NCDOT is evaluating the proposed routes. Completion of the project is expected in the fall of 2003. In compliance with NCDOT's policy, the Springs Road and NC Highway 16 road widening projects should be evaluated for their potential to provide bicycle lanes connecting with Riverbend Park.

## **Transit System**

The Piedmont Wagon Transit System (PWTS) offers limited transit service to St. Stephens/Oxford residents. Five days a week vans are available through the Piedmont Wagon to transport senior citizens and disabled residents in the St. Stephens/Oxford area. In addition, the Riverbend Route, a Rural General Public Route, operates on a fixed route two days per week. The Riverbend Route originates in downtown Newton and follows Main Street (NC Highway 16) through downtown Conover north to Riverbend Park. The Route loops back along Springs Road to Section House Road then to Sipe Road and County Home Road and finally returns to NC Highway 16. Plans are underway to expand the frequency and service area as well as by adding bicycle racks to the minibus. The addition of bicycle racks would offer residents transit service to Riverbend Park and other destinations where bicycle trails are available.

## **Passenger Rail**

The NCDOT has determined that the next major expansion of passenger rail service in the State will be in Western North Carolina. Plans are underway to initiate service between Raleigh and Asheville with a stop in downtown Hickory.



A portion of the former Hickory depot, now entirely occupied by a restaurant, will return to a passenger waiting area. This service is expected to be operational by 2008.

The following map (Map 7) illustrates the current and planned transportation system in St. Stephens/Oxford SAP.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **ROADS & HIGHWAYS**

- Reduce traffic congestion.
- Provide better access management.
- Establish safer roads for drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Create more aesthetically pleasing road designs.
- Maintain rural character.

### **PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM**

- Provide a safe environment for pedestrians en route to schools, churches, etc.
- Encourage development that is pedestrian friendly.

### **BICYCLE SYSTEM**

- Establish safer roads for bicyclists.
- Provide a bicycle loop to tie in with Riverbend Park.

### **TRANSIT SYSTEM**

- Support efforts to promote and increase public transportation alternatives.

### **PASSENGER RAIL**

- Study connections, via the Piedmont Wagon Transit System, with the Western North Carolina Passenger Rail Service.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

Catawba County does not maintain roads; therefore, the following recommendations will be forwarded to NCDOT or used in areawide transportation planning.

### **ROADS & HIGHWAYS**

- Evaluate safety and design of the following intersections:
  - NC Highway 16 and St. Johns Church Road,
  - C & B Farm Road and NC Highway 16,
  - Sipe Road and Section House Road,
  - Springs Road and County Home Road,
  - Springs Road and Highway 16,
  - Rock Barn Road (straighten curve at Lyle Creek).
- Evaluate the width of existing multi-lane roads to assure that the lanes are wide enough for multiple vehicles to travel side by side.
- Widen the following roads:
  - Springs Road needs to be widened from the end of the five lane section to NC Highway 16;
  - Widen and/or replace the bridge on Lee Cline Road at Rifle Range Road;
  - Widen and/or replace the bridge on Lee Cline Road north of Houston Mill Road;
  - Widen and/or replace the bridge on Snow Creek Road.
- Pursue installation of traffic signals at the intersection of Bunker Hill High School Road and Oxford School Road (see Map 7).
- Encourage traffic-calming devices, such as rumble strips, within existing subdivisions and on St. Johns Church Road.
- When NC Highway 16 and Springs Road are widened, construct a four lane divided highway with a landscaped median. In order to provide adequate access provide median breaks at least every  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile and at intersections with other State roads, schools and major subdivisions/developments. Landscaping should be maintained and low growing, to preserve visibility.
- Support completion of State schedule to pave remaining gravel roads.
- Require turn lanes at existing and future schools.
- Include projected traffic counts from proposed developments in addition to existing traffic when reviewing development proposals.

- Evaluate the possibility of a local scenic highway designation for the following route: beginning at the I-40 interchange with Oxford School Road, continue northwest along Oxford School Road to Riverbend Road then north along Hwy. 16 to the river. (see Map 7).
- Limit driveway cuts on major highways and encourage shared access points for both residential and commercial subdivisions and developments.

### **PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM**

- Require sidewalks, or a comparable pedestrian/bicycle path, in new high-density housing developments (i.e. minimum 25 lots of ½ acre or less in size) on one side of the street. Prohibit a certificate of occupancy until the sidewalk or a performance guarantee is in place.
- Request sidewalks on State roads when they are widened. Sidewalks on the following roads could tie in with existing or planned sidewalks in Conover, Claremont and Hickory:
  - County Home Road,
  - Rock Barn Road,
  - C & B Farm Road,
  - Lee Cline Road,
  - St. Johns Church Road,
  - NC Highway 16,
  - Sipe Road.
- Provide a pedestrian crossing for St. Johns Church.

### **BICYCLE SYSTEM**

- Designate bicycle routes that tie in with existing or planned bicycle routes in Conover and Hickory.
- When roads and highways are resurfaced, widen the roads to accommodate a designated bicycle lane on the following:
  - NC Highway 16,
  - Springs Road.
- Increase pavement width to the maximum extent feasible along the following roads for bicycle routes:
  - Oxford School Road,
  - Riverbend Road,
  - Rest Home Road,
  - County Home Road.

### **TRANSIT SYSTEM**

- Publicize existing services offered by the Piedmont Wagon, especially handicap accessibility.
- Enhance visibility and quality of transit stops by adding shelters.
- Add stops closer to pockets of population (i.e. retirement communities, large developments) and destination points (i.e. airport, businesses, rental car facilities).

### **PASSENGER RAIL**

- Encourage the Piedmont Wagon Transit System to schedule trips to coordinate with the Western North Carolina passenger rail service.

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

#### **SCHOOLS**

The St. Stephens/Oxford study area is located within 15 different school districts. Students from this study area attend high school at Bunker Hill, St. Stephens, and Newton-Conover High Schools. Students from this area also attend Catawba Intermediate School as well as Arndt, Riverbend and Newton-Conover Middle Schools. There are seven elementary school districts within the St. Stephens/Oxford study area: Murray, St. Stephens, Campbell, Oxford, Shuford, Claremont and Lyle Creek.

In 1999, the Catawba County, Hickory, and Newton-Conover Schools systems commissioned the Western Piedmont Council of Governments to develop the *Catawba County Growth Estimation Model*. This model identified and examined various factors and trends that impact student population. This model is used to plan for the need, size and location of future school buildings.

#### **Oxford Elementary School**

The student population at Oxford Elementary School exceeded building capacity until the 2001-02 school year when Lyle Creek School opened. The opening of Lyle Creek Elementary School lowered the student occupancy to 65% of Oxford's building capacity.

<b>Oxford Elementary School 1<sup>st</sup> Month Enrollment</b>			
<b>School Year</b>	<b>Total Student Population</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1995-1996	819	-	-
1996-1997	935	116	14.2%
1997-1998	942	7	0.7%
1998-1999	1062	120	12.7%
1999-2000	948	-114	-10.7%
2000-2001	960	12	1.3%
2001-2002	502	-458	-47.7%

Source: *Catawba County Growth Estimation Model: Study of the Catawba County, Hickory and Newton-Conover School Systems, 2001*

The *Catawba County Growth Estimation Model* predicts 70 new students will attend Oxford Elementary between 2001 and 2007. With the addition of 70 students Oxford will still only be 75% of building capacity.

## Lyle Creek Elementary School

The opening of Lyle Creek Elementary in August of 2001 relieved serious overcrowding at Oxford Elementary. The Lyle Creek district was carved from the Oxford district. The Catawba County Growth Estimation Model calculates significant growth within the Lyle Creek District. While the school opened at 65% building capacity, it is expected the school enrollment will reach 91% of capacity by the 2007-08 school year.

## Riverbend Middle School

Riverbend Middle School opened in 1999 with an enrollment equaling 65% of building capacity. The school was built with a higher student capacity than its current enrollment to accommodate growth in the coming years.

<b>Riverbend Middle School 1<sup>st</sup> Month Enrollment</b>			
<b>School Year</b>	<b>Total Student Population</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1999-2000	470	-	-
2000-2001	503	33	7%
2001-2002	504	1	0.2%

Source: Catawba County Growth Estimation Model: Study of the Catawba County, Hickory and Newton-Conover School Systems, 2001

When Riverbend opened in 1999, fewer than 500 students were enrolled. By the 2007-08 school year, Riverbend is projected to enroll 700 students, slightly over 100% of building capacity.

## Bunker Hill High School

Bunker Hill High School has experienced significant growth since 1999 due to residential growth in the district. During the 2001-2002 school year Bunker Hill was slightly over building capacity at 101%.

<b>Bunker Hill High School 1<sup>st</sup> Month Enrollment</b>			
<b>School Year</b>	<b>Total Student Population</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
1995-1996	731	-	-
1996-1997	713	-18	-2.5%
1997-1998	715	2	0.3%
1998-1999	695	-20	-2.8%
1999-2000	753	58	8.3%
2000-2001	810	57	7.6%
2001-2002	835	25	3.1%

Source: Catawba County Growth Estimation Model: Study of the Catawba County, Hickory and Newton-Conover School Systems, 2001

Rapid growth of student enrollment is expected for Bunker Hill. Without an addition to the school, Bunker Hill is expected to reach 145% of building capacity by the 2007-08 school year. An addition is planned that includes 12 new classrooms and a new cafeteria, however, it is contingent upon funding for the project.

## **PARKS AND GREENWAYS**

Riverbend Park is located within the study area along the Catawba River and offers a variety of passive recreational activities. This is the first County-owned and operated park with the second park on Baker Mountain, which opened June 2002. Riverbend Park includes over 450 acres of land with hiking, bicycle and equestrian trails, fishing and canoeing. Riverbend Park also provides picnic facilities and an observation deck on the Catawba River. The schools, churches and some private organizations operate other passive and active recreational facilities. Currently, there are no greenways within the St. Stephens/Oxford study area.

## **LIBRARIES**

Catawba County operates a well-established library system. The Catawba County Library System operates one central library, a law library and six branch libraries. The St. Stephens/Oxford area is served by three of those branches. Though no library branch is located within the study area, most of the St. Stephens/Oxford area is within the six-mile service area of a branch library. The St. Stephens, Conover and Claremont branch libraries all serve the study area. The Conover and Claremont branches are partnerships with those municipalities. This cost sharing partnership serves the residents of several communities.

The Claremont Branch Library opened in February 2002. It is located inside the Claremont City Hall and is funded through the partnership between the City of Claremont and Catawba County. This facility serves Claremont residents as well as residents of the study area.

The Conover Branch Library is located within the Conover City Hall and is another example of intergovernmental cooperation. The costs of operating this facility are shared by the City of Conover and Catawba County. A large portion of the service area for this facility falls within the study area.

The St. Stephens Branch Library is located on Springs Road just west of the study area. This branch serves most of the western section of the study area and is operated and funded by the County.



Only the extreme northeast section of the study area is beyond the six-mile service area of a branch library. Currently, no additional branches are planned for Catawba County.

## **WATER SERVICE**

The City of Hickory, City of Conover and Catawba County have partnered to extend water service to areas within the St. Stephens/Oxford study area. The County pays for construction of the water lines while the municipalities maintain the lines. Revenues are shared between the County and the respective municipality. The major water lines within the study area extend from Conover north on Rock Barn Road, along Oxford School Road, from Conover north on NC Highway 16 to Shell Hollar Road, along County Home Road, Lee Cline Road, Springs Road and St. Peters Church Road.

In coordination with the municipalities, Catawba County has recently formed the Utilities Advisory Committee to address water and sewer issues on a countywide basis. There are no immediate plans for major water line extensions in the study area; however, a loop connection is possible from the water tank on NC Highway 16 to the new line on St. Peters Church Road.

## **SEWER SERVICE**

The City of Conover has extended sewer lines within the study area along Lyle Creek south of C & B Farm Road. Conover is also constructing a new lift station along Lyle Creek near Rock Barn Road and Shook Road. This lift station can service a large basin extending north to Oxford School Road. No other major sewer line expansions are planned for immediate future within the study area. As mentioned above, the newly formed Utilities Advisory Committee will address current and future needs.

## **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

The Catawba County Emergency Communications Center is the central receiving point for all 911 calls within Catawba County. The center is regarded as one of the most advanced centers in western North Carolina utilizing the newest software and technology. The center dispatches all fire, medical, rescue and police calls for service within Catawba County, except police for Hickory and Newton. The center also gives medical instructions to callers while they await arrival of medical personnel.

## **Law Enforcement**

The Catawba County Sheriff's Department serves the study area. The patrol division is made up of twenty-six officers among four shifts. The Sheriff's Department also operates a jail and maintains security for the court system in Catawba County. Crime prevention, investigations and civil enforcement are other functions conducted by the Sheriff's Department.

## **Fire Protection**

The Oxford and St. Stephens Volunteer Fire Departments serve most of the study area. The St. Stephens Fire Department, chartered in 1957, was among the first rural fire departments established in Catawba County. The St. Stephens Fire Department serves the western portion of the study area. The department is comprised of 24 volunteer firefighters and one full-time chief. The department operates two stations along Springs Road and maintains an insurance rating of 5. The department currently maintains 2 pumpers (one with a aerial ladder), 3 pumper tankers and 1 mini-pumper (brush truck). The department plans to add one additional full-time position during the 2002-2003 fiscal year.

The Oxford Fire Department is located on Oxford School Road near Riverbend Road and serves most of the eastern portion of the study area. Oxford Fire Department currently has 45 firefighters, 3 pumper-tankers, 1 pumper and 1 brush truck. The Oxford Fire Department maintains a split fire insurance rating of 6/9. Areas with public water are assigned a rating of 6 while areas without public water are assigned a rating of 9. The department plans to begin constructing an additional station located on NC Highway 16 at Shell Hollar Road. The Oxford Fire Department also plans to purchase an additional pumper truck during the 2002-2003 fiscal year.

## **Emergency Medical Services**

Although an EMS base is not located within the study area, two bases respond to calls within the St. Stephens/Oxford area. The St. Stephens Base is located just outside the study area on Springs Road near Section House Road. This base responds to calls for the western portion of the St. Stephens/Oxford area and the northern section of Hickory. The Catawba Base is located in downtown Catawba and responds to calls east of NC Highway 16 and south of the Town of Catawba. Plans are underway to construct a new EMS base on NC Highway 16. The proposed base would be part of the new Oxford Fire Station as a result of a cooperative agreement between Catawba County and the Oxford Fire Department. The new base would house an additional crew, which would decrease response times for the area.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **SCHOOLS**

- Plan to accommodate student enrollment growth.
- Plan for community-based schools.

### **PARKS AND GREENWAYS**

- Provide adequate recreational activities for all segments of the population.
- Provide adequate open space and recreational facilities on a neighborhood basis.

### **LIBRARIES**

- Maintain adequate level of library services for the community.
- Encourage continued cooperation with municipalities.

### **WATER/SEWER SERVICES**

- Provide water and sewer services in higher density areas.
- Take a regional approach to planning of future water and sewer infrastructure.

### **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

- Maintain and expand existing levels of service.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

The grouping or sharing of facilities is an effective method to reduce capital costs. When possible the sharing of facilities is encouraged.

A community center can serve as a focal point for people to gather and learn about the history of a community. The construction of a community center is recommended to accommodate needed meeting space and to serve as a cultural learning center.

### **SCHOOLS**

- Smaller community based schools should be built to promote better learning environments. High Schools should be limited to a maximum of 850 students.
- Continue to use school facilities for public recreation activities.
- School facility planners should consider existing county and municipal plans when selecting new school locations. New schools should be located in higher density areas as indicated on Map 5.
- Continue to factor in available school capacity when reviewing development proposals until another school bond referendum is held. If the school bond passes, school capacity requirements in the high-density areas should be released immediately. If the school bond does not pass, school capacity requirements should still be released and other means of school funding sought.

### **PARKS AND GREENWAYS**

- The possibility of a multi-jurisdictional greenway along the Catawba River beginning at Riverbend Park and extending downstream should be examined. In addition, a trail connection should be made from the Oxford access on Lake Hickory to Riverbend Park.
- The possibility of a midway access point, for canoeing, between Riverbend Park and the Lookout Access should be examined.
- Active recreation parks should be constructed within the study area.

### **LIBRARIES**

- Continue cooperation with municipalities in providing library services.
- Maintain existing levels of library service and increase as needed.

### **WATER/SEWER SERVICES**

- Major utility expansions in high-density areas, as indicated on Map 5, should have a priority.

- Partner with municipalities to provide utilities that are consistent with adopted land use plans.
- Continue to pursue Community Development Block Grants for the expansion of utilities.

### **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

- Maintain existing levels of service.
- The construction of an EMS base at the water tank site on NC Highway 16 is recommended.

## HOUSING

### CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Population growth in the St. Stephens/Oxford area contributed to increases in the number of housing units within the study area. The St. Stephens/Oxford area experienced a 33.8% growth in population from 1990 to 2000 with continued growth projected. Building permits are an effective way to measure housing growth. The following table illustrates the growth by type of housing: site-built, singlewide manufactured and doublewide manufactured.

<b>Catawba County Residential Permits for the St. Stephens/Oxford SAP 1997-2001</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Single-Family Site-Built Permits</b>	<b>Singlewide Manufactured Home Permits</b>	<b>Doublewide Manufactured Home Permits</b>
1997	113	47	46
1998	134	82	50
1999	117	60	56
2000	117	32	59
2001	113	18	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>272</b>

Source: Catawba County Permit Center, 2002.

Manufactured homes represented 46 percent of new homes built from 1997 to 2001, while site-built homes represented a slight majority of the new homes built during that same time within the study area. The number of site-built homes has remained relatively static since 1997. Singlewide manufactured homes have decreased sharply in recent years while doublewide manufactured homes have increased steadily. The total number of manufactured homes, both singlewide and doublewide, has decreased steadily since 1998. With the steady reduction of new manufactured homes, site-built homes represented almost 59 percent of new homes built in 2001 while manufactured homes accounted for 41 percent.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **SINGLE-FAMILY**

- Encourage a diverse range of housing densities and types that will meet the needs of all segments of the population, household types and income levels.

### **MANUFACTURED HOMES**

- Manufactured housing should represent a limited portion of the housing stock within the study area.

### **MULTI-FAMILY**

- Encourage the construction of multi-family housing as an affordable housing option.
- Development of multi-family housing should occur where appropriate public infrastructure exists.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **SINGLE-FAMILY**

- Designate an area for higher-density residential uses, as shown on Map 5, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Proposed Density Districts*.
- Higher-density development should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 2 units per acre if public water is not available and 3 units per acre if public water is available;
  - 5 percent of a major subdivision should be set aside as open space.
- Designate an area for medium-density residential uses, as shown on Map 5.
- Medium-density development should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1.34 units per acre;
  - 7.5 percent of a major subdivision should be set aside as open space.
- Designate an area for lower-density residential uses, as shown on Map 5.
  - Cluster development option is available;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per acre;
  - 10 percent of a major subdivision should be set aside as open space.
- Designate an area within 435 feet from the Catawba River as the Catawba River Corridor, as shown on Map 6, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Future Land Use Recommendations*.
- Development in the Catawba River Corridor should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available; however, no single lot should be smaller than 0.75 acres;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per acre;
  - Any water front lot should have a minimum width of 100 feet.



## **MANUFACTURED HOMES**

- Rezone the areas as shown on Map 8, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Proposed Zoning Map Amendments*. Existing development patterns and scenic area preservation were determining factors for the proposed Zoning Map amendments. The protection of property values and community character were important considerations in determining the areas for specified housing types (R-1, R-2, R-3 zoning).
- Allow non-conforming manufactured homes in the R-1 district to be replaced with singlewide manufactured homes when a property owner requests to replace a home.
- To protect the property values, appearance and character of the community, the area within the Catawba River Corridor should be assigned a zoning classification of R-1. Construction of “stick built” homes has been the trend along the Catawba River Corridor and the zoning should reflect that trend.

## **MULTI-FAMILY**

- Encourage multi-family development, as shown on Map 6, as an affordable housing alternative.
- Multi-family development should only occur where public water and sewer is available.
- The density of multi-family development should not exceed 15 dwelling units per acre.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

The economy of Catawba County has shifted from the once dominant furniture and textile industries to a more diverse base. The decline of furniture and textile jobs has resulted in transition of workers to new fields such as fiber optics cable, coaxial cable and other electronic equipment. The service industry has also increased greatly with Hickory serving as a regional center for shopping and entertainment.

The St. Stephens/Oxford area has limited existing industrial development. Most of the County's industrial base is located in the Claremont, Conover and Hickory areas. Interstate 40 serves as a transportation backbone for industrial and heavy commercial development. As a result, the municipalities along I-40 have experienced tremendous growth through the last three decades.

Significant industrial development is not expected for the study area other than the areas close to Interstate 40. Most of the areas adjacent to I-40 have the needed infrastructure to attract businesses.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **COMMERCIAL**

- Create more aesthetically pleasing developments.

### **INDUSTRIAL**

- Continue to separate industrial and residential uses.
- Direct industrial growth to areas with appropriate infrastructure.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **COMMERCIAL**

- Commercial uses should adhere to additional appearance criteria, similar to the current US Hwy. 321 guidelines, including:
  - the option of either placing parking in the rear of the building with less landscaping required or placing parking in the front of the building and incorporating additional landscaping;
  - stronger signage regulations;
  - required access management;
  - incorporation of Conover's landscaping requirements;
  - buffering from residential uses.
- The following nodes should be designated Rural Commercial with a maximum total area of 10 acres per node and a maximum gross leasable area of 15,000 square feet per lot:
  - Lee Cline Road and Houston Mill Road;
  - NC Hwy. 16 and St. Peters Church Road\*;
  - NC Hwy. 16 and Springs Road\*;
  - NC Hwy. 16 and Swinging Bridge Road\*;
  - Oxford School Road and Riverbend Road;
  - Springs Road and Houston Mill Road (amended by Board of Commissioners 11/21/05). (see Map 6).

*\* Re-examination of these areas should occur within 5 years to determine if a Neighborhood Commercial designation is warranted.*

- The following node should be designated Neighborhood Commercial with a total area of 10 to 25 acres per node and maximum gross leasable area of 50,000 square feet per lot:
  - St. Peters Church Road and Springs Road (see Map 6).
- The following area should be designated as a Commercial Corridor with additional standards that limit driveway cuts, require additional landscaping along the road frontage and in parking lots and limit the number, location and height of signs:
  - Springs Road from County Home Road west to the study area boundary (See Map 6).
- The following area should be designated as a Community Center with a total area of 20 to 40 acres per node and maximum gross leasable area of 100,000 square feet per lot. Businesses in this area should buffer structures and parking from I-40.
  - The interchange at I-40 and Oxford School Road (see Map 6).

- The following areas should be designated as mixed-use:
  - South of St. John’s Church Road to the study area boundary and east to Rock Barn Road should permit mixed-use village type development;
  - South of Rock Barn Road to the study area boundary should permit a mix of neighborhood business and office-institutional uses (see Map 6).
- The following areas should be designated as a Mixed-Use Corridor which would allow a mixture of commercial, office and multi-family uses. Higher development standards should be applied to the corridor which limit driveway cuts, require additional landscaping along road frontage and in parking lots and limit the number, location and height of signs:
  - Rock Barn Road from the planning jurisdiction of the City of Conover to approximately 3500 feet north of the intersection of St. Johns Church Road.
  - NC Hwy. 16 North from the planning jurisdiction of the City of Conover to 1000 feet north of the intersection of C & B Farm Road (see Map 6) (amended by Board of Commissioners 12/20/04)

## **INDUSTRIAL**

- Industrial uses should be developed in an attractive park-like setting.
- Zone for industrial areas in park-like settings with the option to mix with heavy commercial uses.
- The following areas should be designated for industrial uses:
  - South of Oxford School Road to I-40. Buildings and parking in this area should be buffered from I-40 (see Map 6);
  - South of Interstate 40 and north of US Highway 70 between Rock Barn Road and North Oxford Street (see Map 6).

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

St. Stephens/Oxford residents identify open space, rural setting and scenic topography as significant community assets. The study area is blessed with scenic landscapes created by the rolling hills, streams, lakes and the Catawba River. However, sprawling development is changing the landscape to a more suburban view.

### **RIVERS**

The Catawba River, Lakes Hickory and Lookout Shoals form the northern and eastern border of the study area. The river and its lakes are a definable feature for the area. The Catawba River serves as a major source for drinking water and recreation. Two boat accesses are located within the study area. The Oxford access to Lake Hickory is located north of St. Peter's Church Road on Claude Road. The Lookout access to Lake Lookout Shoals is located on Lookout Dam Road (see Map 9, *St. Stephens/Oxford SAP Natural and Cultural Resources*).

To protect water quality, the State of North Carolina enacted the Water Supply Watershed Protection Program in 1989. The program requires all local governments with land use planning jurisdiction in designated watersheds to administer a Water Supply Watershed Protection Ordinance to protect surface drinking water. Lookout Shoals Lake has been designated a source for water supply and as a result a majority of the St. Stephens/Oxford area falls within the WS-IV Watershed (see Map 9). The WS-IV critical area extends 1/2 mile from the lake. Within the critical area single-family home lots must be at least 20,000 square feet. Multi-family and non-residential uses are limited to 24 percent impervious coverage of the lot. The WS-IV protected area requires 15,000 square foot lots when curb and gutter is not used and public water or sewer service are provided. When no public utilities (water and sewer) are provided, lots cannot be smaller than 20,000 square feet. Multi-family and non-residential uses are limited to 24 percent impervious coverage of the lot with curb and gutter and 36 percent without curb and gutter.

### **OPEN SPACE AND SCENIC TOPOGRAPHY**

St. Stephens/Oxford residents named rural character, open space and farms as characteristics they value in the community. The amount of vacant land in the study area contributes to the rural character of the St. Stephens/Oxford Community. However, this large amount of vacant land is vulnerable to sprawling development. The Strategic Growth Plan suggested the creation of

several programs, such as voluntary transfer of development rights and farmland preservation, to assist property owners in maintaining their current rural use and preserving open space for the community.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **RIVERS**

- Protect water quality for future generations.
- Preserve the scenic quality of the river corridor.
- Utilize rivers for environmentally sound recreational activities.

### **OPEN SPACE AND SCENIC TOPOGRAPHY**

- Preserve open space.
- Assist farmers and property owners desiring to maintain the agricultural or open space use of their property.
- Protect scenic corridors.



## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RIVERS**

- Create scenic corridors by utilizing rivers, creeks and floodways for open space planning.
- Create and implement design standards for recreational facilities located on the lakes and rivers to protect water quality and scenic beauty.

### **OPEN SPACE AND SCENIC TOPOGRAPHY**

- Preserve green space in undisturbed, natural states to support wildlife corridors. Clustering subdivisions is an effective tool to preserve these corridors.
- A trail connection should be made from the Oxford access on Lake Hickory to Riverbend Park. This project would support the Mountain to the Sea Trail.
- The St. Stephens/Oxford has one identified site as listed in the *Heritage Inventory*. Bald eagles have been seen in the Oxford area and are part of this inventory. Steps to protect resources on the Heritage Inventory are recommended.
- Assist property owners of rural farms in preserving those uses by providing information on conservation easements and tax credit measures. In addition, create agricultural districts as allowed by State Statutes. Designation of this district should occur at the request of the property owner.
- Develop a mechanism for preservation of open space resources by creating a transfer of development rights (TDR) type component for the zoning ordinance. Catawba County would need to pursue State legislative authority.
- Adoption of the Watershed 10/70 provision is recommended. This option should be allowed only in the high-density, mixed use, office-institutional, and industrial areas as shown on Maps 5 and 6.
- Protect rural character and open space by requiring dedication of open space with subdivisions. As stated in the land use section and on Map 5 major subdivisions should dedicate the following amounts of open space:
  - High-Density Area: 5 percent,
  - Medium-Density Area: 7.5 percent,
  - Low-Density Area: 10 percent.

- To protect the water quality and scenic views designate an area within 435 feet from the Catawba River as the Catawba River Corridor, as shown on Map 5.
- Development in the Catawba River Corridor should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Cluster development option is available; however, no single lot should be smaller than 0.75 acres;
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per acre;
  - Any water front lot should have a minimum width of 100 feet.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

In the early nineteenth century, agriculture was the livelihood of most residents in the St. Stephens/Oxford area. Today, most residents are not involved in agriculture yet they identify with the farming culture and consider themselves part of an agricultural community. Though development has encroached on a significant amount of farmland, the remaining farms contribute to the life and atmosphere that identifies the St. Stephens/Oxford Communities.

Churches have also played significant role in the lives of St. Stephens/Oxford residents. The churches have served as a bond for people who live in the area. The St. Stephens name originates from the two Lutheran churches, reflecting the significant role churches have played in the Community.

Many older structures are found within the study area; however, only one is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places (see Map 9). The Rock Barn (circa 1822) was part of the farm of Frederick Hoke, a successful farmer who was instrumental in the formation of Catawba County. He served as the first chairman of the new Catawba County court where he served as justice of the peace.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Recognize and protect cultural resources.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Bona-fide historical sites should be identified in the St. Stephens/Oxford area.
- Provide the Catawba County Planning Department with an inventory of historically significant sites so that proposed developments on or near those sites may be flagged and encouraged to preserve the character of the area. Historically significant cemeteries and structures should be included in the inventory.
- A community center can serve as a focal point for people to gather and learn about the history of a community. The construction of a community center is recommended to accommodate needed meeting space and to serve as a cultural and historical learning center.

## Appendix A

Following are the results from the first community meeting held on May 3, 2001 at Riverbend Middle School. Specific issues that the 17 residents voted on are listed below. The number beside each issue indicates the number of votes it received. If an issue does not have a number beside it, the issue was listed for voting but no one voted for it.

### **What do you like about St. Stephens/Oxford?**

#### **Transportation - 2**

Transportation – 2  
I-40  
Convenience road  
Easy access to highways (shopping)  
Low traffic  
Close to Lake  
Close to Church

#### **Commercial/Industrial - 1**

Limited industrial - 1  
Diversified businesses

#### **Rural Setting - 10**

Rural setting (away from congestion) - 6  
Great place to raise a family - 2  
Rural setting - 1  
Small town atmosphere - 1  
Privacy  
Peaceful  
Country atmosphere  
Open Spaces  
Quiet atmosphere  
Topography (trees/lakes)  
Closeness/Comradeship  
Independent people/great people  
Local Church  
Family ties

#### **Public Services**

Water  
Good fire department (volunteer)  
Less crime  
New schools  
Schools  
Community schools (short commute)  
Neighborhood schools  
Low property tax  
Affordable

**What concerns do you have for St. Stephens/Oxford?**

**Residential - 8**

Rapid housing on small lots - 5  
Too many rental mobile home parks - 3  
More permanent homes  
Larger lot sizes for homes  
Over growth  
Overcrowding  
Property development  
Affordable Housing (sewer)

**Commercial - 6**

Recruiting businesses with tax incentives - 5  
Keep shopping in commercial district - 1  
Pollution regulation (business)

**Transportation - 4**

Traffic congestion (CB Farm Road & Highway 16) - 2  
Traffic - 1  
Speed limits - 1  
Stop light at Riverbend & Bunker Hill

**Public Services - 20**

**Water/Sewer – 4**

Lack of Water county wide – 4  
Water problem long term  
Lack of sewer  
Utility funding

**State**

State buffer/watershed  
Watershed

**Schools – 4**

School consolidation – 4

**Police**

Public Safety  
County law enforcement  
(crime on the rise)

**Recreation–2**

Lack of recreation for teens -2  
Greenways (taxes)

**County-10**

Lack of long range planning – 9  
Litter – 1  
Over regulation  
Plan before growth  
Lack of consolidation of county services  
Equal taxing for renters like owners

**City**

Annexation  
Annexation (city)

**What is your future vision of St. Stephens/Oxford?**

**Public Services - 8**

- Increased water & sewer - 5
- Adequate schools - 1
- Street lights (Highway 16 to Oxford School) - 1
- Need more police protection - 1
- Need more daytime patrols
- More County water Rock Barn Road and Riverbend area

**Transportation - 1**

- Paving of Gravel Roads - 1
- Turning lanes
- Bus turning lanes
- Public transportation
- Highway 16 to be widened (turn lanes)

**Residential - 15**

- Preservation of farmland - 10
- Subdivisions regulated to build community atmosphere - 2
- Housing maintained - 1
- Affordability - 1
- More trees (no clear cutting) - 1
- Planned development
- Cow pastures
- Clean rural area

**Commercial - 8**

- Controlled industrial growth in restricted zones - 7
- Neighborhood business & schools - 1
- Keep retail away from residential
- Trash clean up along lake
- Boat landing regulations