

TOWN OF RUTHERFORDTON

Town Plan 2040

Comprehensive Land Use and Master Plan



November 16, 2020 DRAFT

Adopted: _____

Recommended by the Rutherfordton Planning Board: November 12, 2020



Planning Board Approved

***Town of Rutherfordton
Town Plan 2040
Comprehensive Land Use and Master Plan***

TOWN OF RUTHERFORDTON

Rutherfordton Town Hall
129 North Main Street
Rutherfordton, NC 28139

Adopted by the Town Council: _____

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1. WHY PLAN OUR TOWN?

The purpose of the ***Town of Rutherfordton Town Plan 2040 - Comprehensive Land Use and Master Plan*** (“Town Plan”) is to provide information and perspective used to pinpoint and prioritize actions to support a resilient, self-sustaining community. The Town Plan must encourage economic opportunities, while at the same time maintaining the character and resources essential to Rutherfordton place in a vibrant, growing urban region. An up-to-date plan balancing the changing trends, environmental mandates, and the Town’s vision is essential to the success of Rutherfordton and its inhabitants. Information contained in the Town Plan should serve as the basis for both investment and future development decisions.

Rutherfordton Town Plan has been designed for regular use by citizens, businesses, investors, leadership, and agencies in making decisions affecting the future of Rutherfordton. This Town Plan is vital to making informed decisions that will both account for current conditions while maintaining perspective about the future when doing so. A Town Plan is the foundation of almost all capital improvement and growth decisions. ***Adoption of Town Plan 2040 is not the end; it is a consensus on where to begin!***

1.1 About Town Planning

Long-term planning for the future of a community is vitally important. One tool to guide the future of a community is the planning process and adoption of a comprehensive land use plan. Part of a comprehensive land use plan is designed to provide an overview of a community’s existing conditions and physical development. The main function of the plan is to serve as a guide to a community’s future development policy. The goals of a comprehensive land use plan aim to:

- involve the community in developing a long-term vision,
- address what should be maintained or changed in the future in order to achieve that vision,
- identify future land uses in an overall community-wide context,
- identify and prioritize needed future infrastructure improvement aimed at supporting the vision, and
- provide implementation guidance as to the private and public investment strategies to realize the vision.

Part of the on-going planning process is monitoring the plan’s progress as a fluid document that should be bi-annually (every other year) refined and updated to reflect progress achieved and changing conditions. ***Planning is an ongoing process!***

1.2 Official State Policy

The State of North Carolina requires local governments in NC General Statute 160D to adopt a plan to be eligible for certain funding, powers and authority by July 1, 2022. The plan is to be used as an assurance to the public that local decisions are made with a perspective on the future implications of pending decisions, and to affirm that public accountability and fiscal responsibility are considered as part of the decision-making process.

Decisions made about public spending and growth can often appear centered around individuals involved and how they may benefit. When governing board decisions adhere to an adopted plan, those individual interests are balanced with others affected by the outcome of decisions, which include citizens, property owners, and businesses.

1.3 Statutory Reference

Town of Rutherfordton Town Plan 2040 - Comprehensive Land Use and Master Plan shall serve as the adopted plan pursuant to §N.C.G.S. 160D in the planning and regulation of development.

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2. ABOUT RUTHERFORDTON

2.1 Town of Rutherfordton's Vision Statement

We are a safe, caring, beautiful and vibrant town, businesses thrive and involved citizens take pride in our community. Source: Mission Statement from the 2019 Rutherfordton Action Plan, approved by the Town of Rutherford Town Council on February 6, 2019.

2.2 Town of Rutherfordton Background

2.2.1 Location

The Town of Rutherfordton, North Carolina is centrally located in and is the county seat of Rutherford County. Rutherford County is in the south-western part of North Carolina. Situated on ridges, its elevation offers great views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and its location in the Isothermal Belt means mild weather and outstanding beauty in four distinct seasons. Rutherfordton is adjacent to the Towns of Ruth and the Town of Spindale to the east. The Town of Rutherfordton corporate limits encompasses approximately 4.2 square miles of land. The Town of Rutherfordton is bisected from east to west by US Hwy 64 and from north to south by US Hwy 221. The Rutherford Regional Medical Center, part of Duke LifePoint Healthcare, is located in Rutherfordton.

The Town of Rutherfordton and Rutherford County are members of the Isothermal Rural Planning Organization (RPO) along with McDowell and Polk Counties and their municipalities which have a combined population of 132,845 residents. The RPO administrative offices are in Rutherfordton.

2.2.2 History

The following brief history of Rutherfordton was summarized from the full history written by Robin Spencer Lattimore, Official Historian of the Town of Rutherfordton.

The Town of Rutherfordton was founded in 1787 in honor of General Griffith Rutherford, of Revolutionary War fame, before there was a Constitution of the United States and before George Washington was elected as America's first president. Rutherfordton was located on a stage route which ran from Lincolnton, North Carolina down into upstate South Carolina. From the late 18th century until the early antebellum period, Rutherfordton was the most important commercial and political center in western North Carolina.

Rutherfordton's grid of streets, including Main Street, Court Street, Washington Street, Taylor Street, and several smaller lanes, was in place by 1791. For a few brief years in the 1830s and 1840s, the hill country to the west and north of Rutherfordton led the entire United States in the mining of gold. At the height of the gold rush in the backcountry of North Carolina, a coin-producing operation was established in Rutherfordton that is recognized as the most successful private mint in United States history.

In the decades before the Civil War, Rutherfordton was considered the most important town west of Charlotte in North Carolina. The town's growing prosperity was reflected in

the construction of several important homes, public buildings, and churches during the early decades of the 19th century.

More than 1,940 Rutherford County men fought for the South during the war. Of that number, more than 450 lost their lives in battle, or from disease. The coming of railroad service to the town in 1887 can be credited with transforming the local economy and setting the municipality on a path toward greater prosperity.

A great wave of prosperity and optimism hit the town in the 1920s. During that decade dozens of new houses were built along several of the city's streets (some of which had just been paved for the first time), and several grand public buildings and churches were erected. During the 1930s, Rutherfordton experienced some very difficult financial struggles, but progress did continue. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Rutherford County Board of Education launched a wave of school consolidations. During the 1970s, the business community of the town was delivered a serious blow when new shopping centers pulled customers away from Main Street. By the 1980s, several of the department stores and specialty shops in town had closed. Beginning in the late 1980s, Rutherfordton began to capitalize on its history and find innovative ways to draw businesses and customers back downtown. Since 1989, the town has been a member of the North Carolina Main Street Program.

More than 100 structures in Rutherfordton have National Register status as either independent properties worthy of listing on their own merit, or as contributing structures to the overall historical significance of the town.

In the spring of 2012, Rutherfordton celebrated its 225th anniversary. Rutherfordton is currently home to more than 4,000 residents. It frequently receives recognition in national publications for its high quality of life stemming from excellent educational facilities, a quality public library, low crime and unemployment, and exceptionally fine medical facilities and personnel.

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3. COMMUNITY PROFILE

The development of a Town Plan first requires that identification and analysis of certain key growth factors be performed. The intent of the analysis is to ensure that policies contained in the Town Plan address current problems, trends, and issues facing the community, including the immediate area. The key growth factors included for analysis are discussed in several subject areas within the Town Plan. Collectively, these key growth factors summarize past and present conditions, while providing the essential yardsticks for estimating future conditions.

The U.S. Census Bureau prepares a detailed statistical portrait for local governments, counties and states of their respective social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics through the 5-year American Community Survey (ACS) products. The ACS 5-year estimates are constructed as period estimates and reflect the average characteristics over the five year period. In general, unless a user knows how the estimate for each characteristic is trending over time, it is not accurate to consider the 5-year estimate as an estimate at any given point within the 5 year period. However, under certain conditions, the ACS estimates can serve as a proxy. Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau *2014-2018 American Community Survey*, released on January 30, 2020, were used in several instances in developing the Community Profile for the Town of Rutherfordton, as detailed in this section. Rather than refer to the 5 year period (2014-2018) throughout the narrative in this section, the last year of 2018, will be used for brevity, but the full five year period will be noted as the source for tables and charts.

In their methodology of defining what is a current residence in the American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau considers everyone who is currently living or staying at an address for more than two months is considered a current resident of that address. This means that their expected length of stay is more than two months, not that they have been staying in the housing unit for more than two months at the time when the survey is conducted. Persons away from their residence for two months or less, whether in the United States or overseas, on a vacation or on a business trip, are considered to still be a resident at the address, and the unit is classified as occupied and eligible for inclusion in the survey. Persons away from their residence for more than two months are considered not to be a resident. For the ACS, if no one is determined to be a current resident in the sampled housing unit, it is classified as vacant.

3.1 Population

3.1.1 Population Growth

The U.S. Census Bureau *American Community Survey 2014-2018* estimated the Town of Rutherfordton's population in 2018 at 4,058 persons. The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management estimated a slightly higher population estimate of 4,133 persons in 2018. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated there were 1,996 households in the Town of Rutherfordton in 2018 with an average household size of 1.86 people. Households include related family members, non-related individuals and people living alone. The count of households excludes group quarters. Section 3.1 provides figures within the Town of Rutherfordton town limits using U.S. Census Bureau figures.

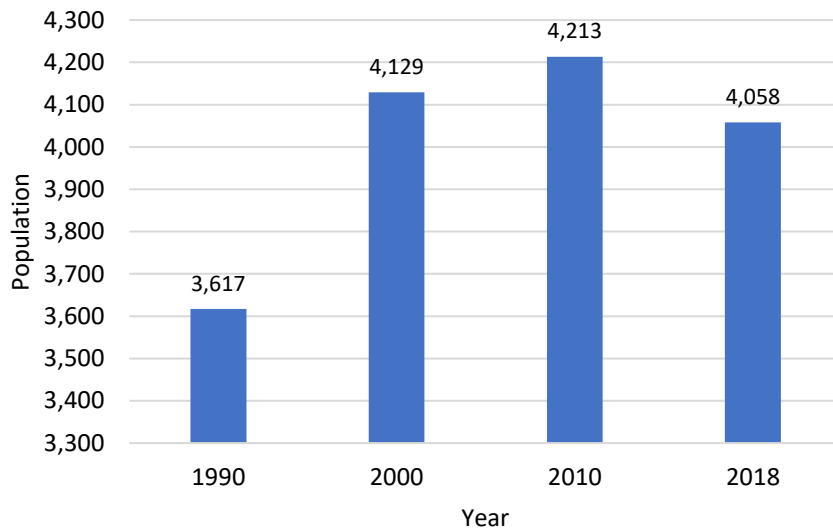
The population of the Town of Rutherfordton grew between 1990 and 2010, but then started to decline between 2010 to 2018 as illustrated in Table 3.1.1A and Figure 3.1.1.A.

Table 3.1.1.A: Town of Rutherfordton Population Estimates and Growth Rates

Year	Town of Rutherfordton Population	Rutherfordton Population Annual Increases/Decreases	Between Years
1990	3,617		
2000	4,129	1.4%	1990-2000
2010	4,213	0.2%	2000-2010
2018	4,058	-0.5%	2010-2018

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 3.1.1.A: Town of Rutherfordton Population (1990-2018)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 3.1.1.B illustrates the percentage of Rutherfordton population to the total population of Rutherford County has remained stable between 6% to 7%.

Table 3.1.1.B: Town of Rutherfordton to Rutherford County Population Comparison

Year	Rutherfordton	Rutherford County	Rutherfordton's Population to Rutherford County's Population
1990	3,617	56,918	6.4%
2000	4,129	62,899	6.6%
2010	4,213	67,810	6.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The population estimates for each year between 2010 to 2018 have been estimated annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. As illustrated in Table 3.1.1.C and Figure 3.1.1.B, the population has decreased every year from 2010 to 2016 and has only increased this

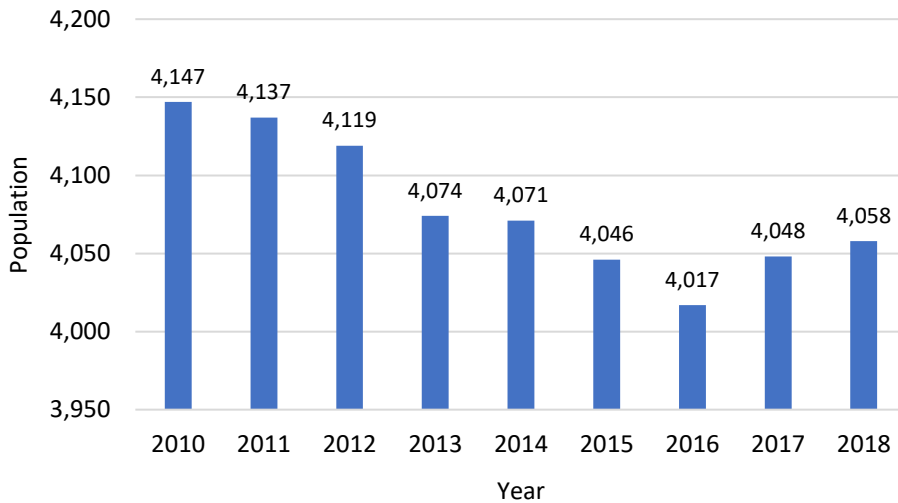
decade in years 2017 and 2018. The average rate of population reduction between 2010 and 2018, as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau, was (-0.27%). Population estimates for 2019 and 2020 were not available during the preparation of this section.

Table 3.1.1.C: Town of Rutherfordton Population - Annual U.S. Census Bureau Estimates and Growth Rates

Year	Population	Growth Rates
2010	4,147	
2011	4,137	-0.24%
2012	4,119	-0.44%
2013	4,074	-1.09%
2014	4,071	-0.07%
2015	4,046	-0.61%
2016	4,017	-0.72%
2017	4,048	0.77%
2018	4,058	0.25%
	Average Growth Rate	-0.27%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 3.1.1.B: Town of Rutherfordton Population - Annual U.S. Census Bureau Estimates



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Estimates

3.1.2 Population Projections

Rather than apply an average 2010 through 2018 reduction rate of (-0.27%) to the 2018 U.S. Census Bureau’s estimate of 4,058 and subsequent years, which will lead to an unrealistic projection, another method was used. The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) State Demographer publishes population projections

annually for each county using complex methodology tailored to each county’s birth, death, and migration rates. Since the Town of Rutherfordton’s population has remained approximately 6% of Rutherford County’s total population for two decades, 6% was applied to the State Demographer population projections for 2030 and 2039 to arrive at initial projections.

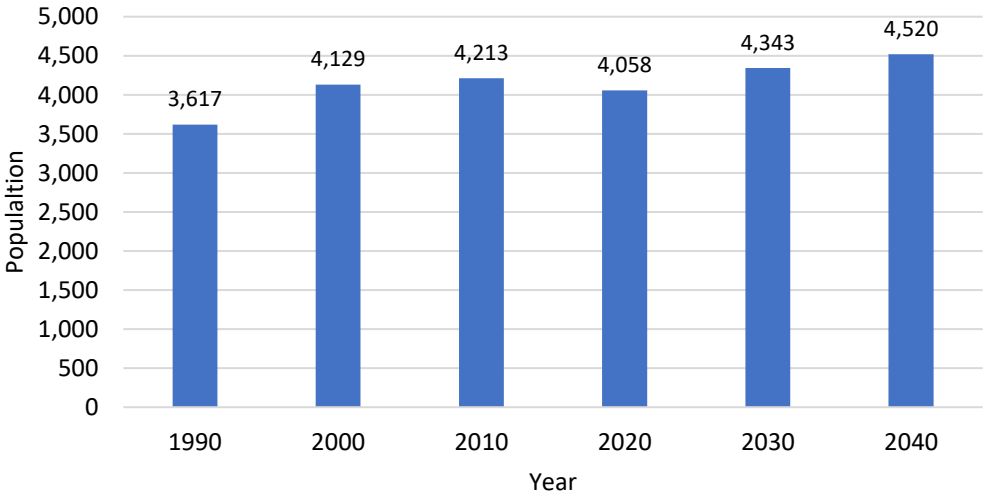
This results in a population projection for the Town of Rutherfordton for 2030 of 4,343 residents and a projection for 2040 of 4,520 residents as illustrated in Table 3.1.2 and Figure 3.1.2.

Table 3.1.2: Town of Rutherfordton Population - 2018 Estimate and 2040 Projection

Year	Population Estimates & Projections
2020	4,058
2030	4,343
2040	4,520

Sources: The year 2018 estimate of 4,058 by the U.S. Census Bureau was used for Year 2020 since the growth rate has been declining.
 For years 2030 and 2040, the average population percentage of Rutherfordton to Rutherford County’s population (6.0%) was calculated using the NC OSBM population projections of Rutherford County for years 2030 and 2040.

Figure 3.1.2: Town of Rutherfordton Population Estimates (1990-2010) and Projections (2020-2040)



Sources: The year 2018 estimate of 4,058 by the U.S. Census Bureau was used for Year 2020 since the growth rate has been declining.
 For years 2030 and 2040, the average population percentage of Rutherfordton to Rutherford County’s population (6.0%) was calculated using the NC OSBM population projections of Rutherford County for years 2030 and 2040.

3.1.3 Diversity

Within the Town of Rutherfordton, for residents reporting one race alone, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014-2018 American Community Survey estimates 89.5% were White; 4.8% were Black or African American; 1.6% were American Indian and Alaska Native; 0.0% were Asian; 0% were Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 0.8% were some other race.

Table 3.1.3.A: Town of Rutherfordton Population by Race Alone

Race or Ethnicity	Percent Total Population
White	89.5%
African American	4.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native	1.6%
Asian	0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0%
Some Other Race	0.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey, Margin of error does not always equal 100%

The 2014-2018 American Community Survey estimated 88.9% of people in Rutherfordton were White non-Hispanic. People of Hispanic origin may be of any race. An estimated 1.4% of residents reported two or more races.

3.1.4 Population by Age and Sex

The 2014-2018 American Community Survey estimated genders in Rutherfordton in 2018 were 59.4% females and 40.6% males. Median age is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as the measure that divides the age distribution into two equal parts: one-half of the cases falling below the median value and one-half of the cases falling above the median value. The median age in 2018 was 53.1 years. An estimated 16.5% of the population was under 18 years, 28.8% was 18 to 44 years, 25.7.0% was 45 to 64 years, and 29.1% was 65 years and older.

Table 3.1.4: Town of Rutherfordton Population by Age and Sex

Age	Percent Male	Percent Female
Under 5	5.7	4.5
5 to 9	4.6	7.7
10 to 14	3.1	2.0
15 to 19	5.1	2.4
20 to 24	1.5	2.2
25 to 29	8.7	2.8
30 to 34	10.8	5.5
35 to 39	3.4	4.5
40 to 44	10.7	7.7
45 to 49	4.7	2.0
50 to 54	5.2	6.0
55 to 59	10.7	12.4
60 to 64	6.3	4.6
65 to 69	10.8	10.1
70 to 74	5.0	9.1
75 to 79	0.0	6.7
80 to 84	1.8	1.2
85 and over	1.8	8.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.2 Housing

3.2.1 Occupied Housing Characteristics

In 2018, Rutherfordton had 2,255 housing units of which 1,996 housing units were occupied or had people living in them, while the remaining 259 were vacant. Of the occupied housing units, the percentage of these houses were occupied by owners (also known as the homeownership rate) was 55.5 percent while renters occupied 44.5 percent. The average household size of owner-occupied houses was 1.95 and in renter-occupied houses it was 1.74.

Table 3.2.1.A: Homeownership Rates

Jurisdiction	% of Owner Occupied Units	% of Renter Occupied Units
Town of Rutherfordton	55.5%	44.5%
Rutherford County	71.3%	28.7%
State of North Carolina	65.0%	35.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

In 2018, the median property value for owner-occupied houses in Rutherfordton was \$114,800. Of the owner-occupied households, 55.9 percent had a mortgage. 44.1 percent owned their houses free and clear. The median monthly housing costs for owners with a mortgage was \$1,135 and for owners without a mortgage it was \$447. For renter-occupied houses, the median gross rent for Rutherfordton was \$761. Gross rent includes

the monthly contract rent and any monthly payments made for electricity, gas, water and sewer, and any other fuels to heat the house.

Households that pay thirty percent or more of their income on housing costs are considered cost-burdened. As illustrated in Table 3.2.1.B, in 2018, cost-burdened households in Rutherfordton accounted for 45.7% of owners with a mortgage, 8.8% of owners without a mortgage, and 40.5% of renters.

Table 3.2.1.B: Rutherfordton Occupants with a Housing Burden in 2018

House Value	Percent
Owners with mortgage	45.7%
Owners without mortgage	8.8%
Renters	40.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.2.2 Housing Stock

In 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated 289 (12.8%) occupied residential structures in the Town of Rutherfordton have been built since 2000. These figures do not account for houses built since 2018.

Table 3.2.2: Town of Rutherfordton Occupied Housing Units by Age in 2018

Year Built	Number Structures	Percent Structures
Built 2014 or later	0	0.0%
Built 2010 to 2013	0	0.0%
Built 2000 to 2009	289	12.8%
Built 1990 to 1999	447	19.8%
Built 1980 to 1989	274	12.2%
Built 1970 to 1979	296	13.1%
Built 1960 to 1969	194	8.6%
Built 1950 to 1959	283	12.5%
Built 1940 to 1949	184	8.2%
Built 1939 or earlier	288	12.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.2.3 Housing Types

As of 2018, the U.S. Census Bureau reported Rutherfordton had a total of 2,255 housing units. Of these housing units, 69.8% were single-family houses; 28.6% were multi-family structures (buildings that contained two or more units); and 1.6% were mobile homes.

Table 3.2.2: Town of Rutherfordton Housing Types

Housing Types	%
Single Family (Site Built)	69.8%
Mobile Homes	1.6%
Multi-family	28.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.3 Economy

3.3.1 Household Income

Household income calculations consist of the income of all individuals aged 16 years and older in the household. When analyzing the distribution of household income in the Town of Rutherfordton, most households fall into the \$35,000-\$49,999 income range (18.8%), followed by the \$15,000-\$24,999 (17.7%) and \$50,000 -\$74,999 (12.9%) range. Refer to Table 3.3.1.

Table 3.3.1: Town of Rutherfordton Household Income by Range

Income Range	% of Total Population
Less than \$10,000	7.8%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	6.2%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	17.7%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	12.1%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	18.8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	12.9%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	11.2%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	7.9%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	3.4%
\$200,000 or more	2.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.3.2 Median Household Income

Median income is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as the amount obtained by dividing the total income of a particular statistical universe by the number of units in that universe. The median income is the amount that divides the income distribution into two equal groups, half having income above that amount, and half having income below that amount. Mean income is the amount obtained by dividing the total aggregate income of a group by the number of units in that group. The mean or average income is higher than median income. The median household income in the Town of Rutherfordton was \$42,346 per year. The Town of Rutherfordton's median household income is below that of the State of North Carolina, but is above the median household income of Rutherford County as illustrated in Table 3.3.2.

Table 3.3.2: Median Income Comparison

Jurisdiction	Median Household Income
Town of Rutherfordton	\$42,346
Rutherford County	\$40,347
State of North Carolina	\$52,413

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.3.3 Poverty Rates

The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If the total income for a family, or unrelated individual, falls below the relevant poverty threshold, then the family (and every individual in it) or unrelated individual is considered in poverty. Since poverty is

determined by the circumstances of individual families (e.g., family size, income thresholds and income), there is no single poverty rate for an entire jurisdiction or geographic area.

As Table 3.3.3 illustrates, the percentage of people in poverty, as well as the percent of children in poverty, in the Town of Rutherfordton is lower than for Rutherford County and for the State of North Carolina.

Table 3.3.3: Poverty Level Comparison

Jurisdiction	% of People in Poverty	% of Children (under 18 years Old) in Poverty
Town of Rutherfordton	15.1%	19.1%
Rutherford County	18.0%	23.5%
State of North Carolina	15.4%	22.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.4 Education

3.4.1 Educational Attainment

Of Rutherfordton residents 25 years and older, 88.7% of residents aged 25 years and over had at least a high school education or equivalent in 2018 and 31.2% had a bachelor's degree or higher. An estimated 11.3% did not complete high school.

Rutherfordton has a higher percentage of people with a bachelor's degree than Rutherford County and the State of North Carolina as illustrated in Table 3.4.1.

The total school enrollment, age 3 years and over, in Rutherfordton was 583 in 2018. Nursery school enrollment was 20 and kindergarten through 12th grade enrollment was 492. College or graduate school enrollment was 71.

Table 3.4.1: Educational Attainment Comparison for Population Aged 25 and Over

Educational Attainment	Town of Rutherfordton	Rutherford County	State of North Carolina
Less than high school diploma	11.3%	17.4%	12.6%
High school diploma or equivalency	23.2%	31.9%	25.9%
Some college, no degree	24.0%	22.0%	2.5%
Associate's degree	10.4%	11.4%	9.5%
Bachelor's degree	20.3%	11.6%	19.6%
Graduate or professional degree	10.8%	5.7%	10.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.4.2 Public Schools

Rutherfordton is served by the Rutherford County School District with students attending the following schools:

- Rutherfordton Elementary School is located at 201 Bob Hardin Rd. in Rutherfordton. It offers grades pre-kindergarten through grade 5;
- Pinnacle Elementary School is located at 1204 Painters Cap Rd. in Rutherfordton. It offers kindergarten through grade 5;
- Rutherfordton-Spindale (R-S) Middle School is located at 545 Charlotte Rd. in Rutherfordton. It offers grades 6 through 8.; and
- Rutherfordton-Spindale (R-S) Central High School is located at 641 US-221 in Rutherfordton. It offers grades 9 through 12.

3.4.3 Colleges and Universities

Rutherfordton is conveniently located in proximity to the following colleges and universities.

Isothermal Community College is a public community college and member of the North Carolina Community College System. The college is located 5.5 miles from Rutherfordton in Spindale. The college offers degrees in the following licensed programs of study: Nursing; Basic Law Enforcement Training; and Cosmetology.

McDowell Technical Community College is located 22.5 miles north of Rutherfordton in Marion, NC. McDowell Tech is a public community college and offers degrees and certificates in 28 fields of study.

Gardner-Webb University is located 24 miles southeast of Rutherfordton in Boiling Springs. Gardner-Webb is a private university that offers 4-year undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

University of North Carolina-Asheville is located 60 miles northwest of Rutherfordton in Asheville. UNC-Asheville is part of the University of North Carolina System and offers 56 fields of study.

3.5 Workforce

3.5.1 Employment

In Rutherfordton, the U.S. Census reported that in 2018, 43.1% percent of the population age 16 and over were employed while 50.0% were not employed. An estimated 78.5% of the people employed were private wage and salary workers; 17.5% were federal, state, or local government workers; and 4.0% were self-employed in their own (not incorporated) business.

As presented in Table 3.5.1, the largest number of the Town's citizens in the workforce (aged 16+) are employed in the management, business, sciences, and arts occupation (618 people, or 41.6% of the 1,487-member workforce). The second most numerous categories are sales and office occupations (320 people, or 21.5%).

Table 3.5.1.A: Occupations for Civilian Employed Population 16 Years and Over

Occupation	Number	%
Management, business, sciences, and arts occupations	618	41.6%
Service occupations	263	17.7%
Sales and office occupations	320	21.5%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	133	8.9%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	153	10.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

In 2018, the civilian employed population 16 years and older in Rutherfordton worked in the following industries.

Table 3.5.1.B: Employment by Industry

Industry	%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	1.1
Construction	8.1
Manufacturing	9.3
Wholesale trade	3.0
Retail trade	13.8
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	1.5
Information	1.3
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	0.0
Professional, scientific, & management, & admin. & waste management svcs.	7.3
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	34.9
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation, and food services	6.3
Other Services, except public administration	8.1
Public administration	5.4

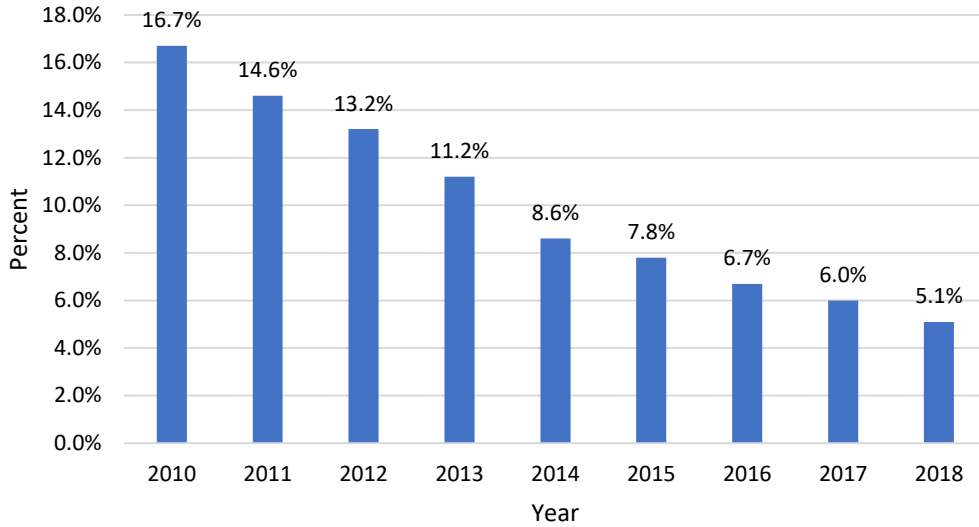
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.5.2 Unemployment

Unemployment rates in Rutherford County have shown a steady downward trend from 16.7% in 2010 to 5.1% in 2018. These improvements demonstrate the County has managed to rebound from the great recession. Labor statistics specifically for the Town of Rutherfordton are not available.

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Table 3.5.2: Unemployment in Rutherford County, 2010-2018



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

3.5.3 Commuting Patterns

As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, an estimated 84.5 percent of Rutherfordton workers drove to work alone in 2014-2018, and 12.1 percent carpooled. Among those who commuted to work, it took them on average 27.9 minutes to get to work. Table 3.5.3 presents Rutherfordton workers’ modes of travel to work as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Table 3.5.3: Town of Rutherfordton Commuters’ Methods of Transportation

Transportation Method	% of All Workers
Drive Alone	84.5%
Carpool	12.1%
Public Transportation	0%
Walk	0%
Worked at Home	2.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

3.6 Future Trends Projection - How does Rutherfordton prepare?

Recognizing trends and how market dynamics can and do change will enable Rutherfordton to position itself as a welcoming community for multiple generations looking at buying or renting a home, starting or growing a business, and finding Rutherfordton a good place to visit. This approach to planning reinforces the community’s desire to create a place where younger people will desire to locate, while aging community members will choose to remain. A vibrant and sustainable community is one where both the new and existing home markets are attractive to future generations and allow for aging members of the community to remain in the community by offering a variety of housing products near jobs, services and events.

According to contemporary real estate experts, the “50+” real estate market is changing. In these next few years, Generation X (those born between the years 1964 and 1977) will be joining the Boomers (born between 1946 and 1963) and Matures (between 1927 and 1945), making serving the age 50+ market both a challenging puzzle as well as an opportunity for both communities and the real estate industry itself.

A recent insightful online posting on RISmedia.com (a real estate trade site) states: “For the **Mature** buyers, those born between the years 1927 and 1945, the decision to move can be an emotional and complicated process. The sense of obligation to the family home may be a burden and a comfort at the same time.” The posting goes on to state: “**Baby Boomers** are savvy home buyers. They approach the transaction with high expectations and confidence. They consider the home a reflection of their lifestyle, so image and status are important. Whether they are downsizing, upsizing, or purchasing a second home, vacation home, or investment property, they know what they want and how to tell you about it.” And finally, the post states: “Newbies to the 50+ group, **Generation X** stands out because of their strong need for independence and practical yet cautious approach. They take on the responsibility of gathering information and rely strongly on facts and documentation. They ask a lot of questions and don’t want to get burned. They expect their home to complement their lifestyle and not the other way around.”

Preparations to embrace current and projected trends are a partnership of land development and real estate industries with local government leadership. New housing construction should address gaps in the market product offering; therefore, land development specifications appearing in the Town’s ordinances must be adequate to accommodate these trends. Replacing the town’s antiquated zoning ordinance, adding specifications for land development which creates new streets and supporting infrastructure, and maintaining quality control over the implementation of these standards must be prioritized to protect property rights of all parties while creating common-sense opportunities that don’t setup for failures in the future.

As with the housing markets, ever changing trends in consumption, product development, technology and generational shifts in personal choices/values must be considered when making decisions about commercial and other non-residential growth. This approach to planning reinforces the community’s desire to create a place where younger people will desire to locate, while aging members will choose to remain. A community, where traditional values accompany craftsmanship must embrace the presence of technology in everyday life, commerce, and business. Innovation is an ever-increasing component of the economy at all levels; therefore, it must be considered in the formation of growth policy serving these innovators if we are to adapt and survive global influence on everyday life. *(Also see Sections 6 and 8 of this document).*

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4. NATURAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

4.1 Natural Resources

4.1.1 Water Resources

Water resources provide both recreational and life sustaining resources for the Town of Rutherfordton and the region. The Town of Rutherfordton lies within the Broad River Basin. This basin contains more than 100,000 acres with rare animals, plants and natural communities. The Broad River originates in western North Carolina and flows southeast through the foothills of the Piedmont before entering South Carolina. The scenery and natural heritage of the Broad River Basin have captivated tourists and ecologists alike. The 404-foot waterfall named Hickory Nut Falls was featured in the movie “Last of the Mohicans.”

The Town of Rutherfordton is bordered to the west by the Broad River Water Supply Watershed, which is classified by the NC DEQ as WS-IV-Protected. The NC DEQ defines the primary classification of WS-IV as sources for drinking, culinary, or food processing purposes where a WS-1, II or III classification is not feasible. WS-IV waters are generally moderately to highly developed watersheds or protected areas.

The Town of Rutherfordton is bisected by Cleghorn Creek, Stonecutter Creek, and Hollands Creek. Mount Creek and the Broad River are located outside of Rutherfordton to the west. Cleghorn Creek and Stonecutter Creek are classified by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ) as Class C waters protected for uses such as secondary recreation, fishing, wildlife, fish consumption, aquatic life including propagation, survival and maintenance of biological integrity, and agriculture. Secondary recreation includes wading, boating, and other uses involving human body contact with water where such activities take place in an infrequent, unorganized, or incidental manner.

4.1.1.1 Water Sports

Outdoor water sport opportunities are available within a short drive from Rutherfordton. The Broad River Basin offers many opportunities for paddling creeks, ponds, streams, rivers and lakes.

The Broad River Canoe Trail starts at [Broad River Greenway](#) and travels into South Carolina just a few miles downstream. Paddlers often put in upstream of the greenway at the NCDOT bridge.

[Lake Adger](#) is a privately owned, tranquil lake impoundment on the Green River near the Green River Game Land. One public boat access area is available. Kayaking and canoeing are popular on the scenic lake, as there is a restricted horsepower limit on motorized craft, and no jet skiing or waterskiing is allowed.

Lake Lure, owned by the Town of Lake Lure, was created by the damming of the Rocky Broad River at Tumbling Shoals in 1926 with the intent of establishing a resort community in western North Carolina. The Town of Lake Lure contracts with a private concessions

company to operate a recreational beach and [Washburn Marina](#). Canoe and kayak rentals are available.

[Moss Lake](#), located in nearby Cleveland County, has two public boat landings. The lake provides drinking water for the City of Kings Mountain, and is also called Kings Mountain Reservoir.

Also see section 6.5.2 of this document for additional information.

4.1.1.2 Water Supply

The Town of Rutherfordton obtains its water from the Broad River Water Authority ([BRWA](#)). The source of the public water supply is the Broad River which originates in the Blue Ridge Mountains of eastern Buncombe County, above Lake Lure, N.C., and flows southeast through Rutherford County. BRWA treatment capacity is 12 mgd and their average daily usage is approximately 6 mgd. The BRWA water treatment facility is located at 1661 Baber Road in Rutherfordton. After the water has been treated, filtered, disinfected and conditioned for the distribution system, it is pumped to an onsite clearwell then a 5 MG ground storage tank, located on Poors Ford Road in Rutherfordton. The distribution system consists of three primary elevated storage tanks, pump stations and approximately 250 miles of pipeline to serve over 16,000 customers with 6,800 meters to Rutherfordton and other communities. The BRWA's administrative office is in downtown Rutherfordton.

4.1.2 Land Resources and Geography

The Town's topography ranges from gentle slopes to steep slopes of approximately 33% percent, with elevations ranging from 795 feet to 1115 feet above sea level. According to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Rutherfordton's predominant soils consist of Urban Land (downtown Rutherfordton), Madison clay loam, Cecil-Urban Land, and Pacolet sandy clay loam. Madison clay loam's and Pacolet sandy clay loam's suitability for urban development includes dwellings and local roads, however management measures and considerations for development with 8% to 15% slopes include designing structures so that they conform to the natural slope to help overcome the slope limitations which may be a severe hazard of erosion of the underlying material. Urban development is poorly suited for slopes exceeding 15%.

4.1.2.1 Agricultural

According to [Soil Survey of Rutherford County, NC](#), a 1790 census of Rutherford County reported that corn and other grains, cattle, and hogs were the county's chief agricultural products. During that time, most agricultural exports were transported by boat along the Broad River. Around the early 1800's, cotton production began to become increasingly important to the local economy. According to the Soil Survey, Rutherford County continues to have a diversity of agriculture with major row crops including corn, small grain, soybeans and cotton. Vegetables include tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, and cucumbers. Hardwood timber continues to provide employment to local residents as it did in the county's early history.

4.1.2.2 Recreation

The Town of Rutherfordton's Parks and Recreation Department maintains four [municipal parks](#), detailed in Section 4.2.1: Crestview Park; Kiwanis Park; 2nd Street Park; and Main St. Park.



The Rutherfordton Clubhouse is the community center for the Town. The Town hosts several events throughout the year including: Annual Winter Rutherford Town Revitalization Fund Raiser; FAB Fest (Food, Art, Brews); July 4th Freedom Fest; Hilltop Fall Festival; Trick-or-Treat on Main Street; Salute to Rutherford County Veterans; and the Christmas Parade.

Organized sports leagues in the area include the following which are operated by organizations independent of the Town: Rutherfordton Little League; Rutherford County Soccer Association; and Rutherfordton Raiders Youth Football.

4.1.2.3 Transportation Facilities

The Town of Rutherfordton is centrally located in and is the county seat of Rutherford County. Rutherford County is in the south-western part of North Carolina, approximately 60 miles west of the City of Charlotte. The Town of Rutherfordton is bisected from east to west by US Hwy 64 and from north to south by US Hwy 221. I-40 is approximately 20 miles north of Rutherfordton via US 221.

The Town of Rutherfordton and Rutherford County are members of the [Isothermal Rural Planning Organization \(RPO\)](#) along with McDowell and Polk Counties and their municipalities which have a combined population of 132,845 residents. The RPO's administrative office is in downtown Rutherfordton. The Town is represented on the RPO through membership of its City Manager on the Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC). The TCC consists of staff members from local government members, agencies, and NCDOT to provide guidance and recommendations to the RPO's Transportation Advisory

Committee (TAC). The [Rutherford County Comprehensive Transportation Plan](#) (CTP), November 21, 2018, was prepared by the RPO as a joint effort between Rutherford County, the Towns Rutherfordton, Ellenboro, Forest City, Ruth, Bostic, Spindale, and the NCDOT. On December 6, 2017, the Town of Rutherfordton adopted its portion of the CTP.

Existing major thoroughfares, as inventoried in the CTP's [Highway Map](#) within the Town of Rutherfordton include:

- US 221
- NC 74 Business
- NC 64 / NC 74 Alternate

Existing minor thoroughfares within the Town of Rutherfordton, include:

- SR 1166 (Ridgecrest St.)
- SR 1218 (Washington St)
- SR 2271 (Industrial Park Rd.)
- SR 2201 (Thunder Rd.)
- SR 2193 (Stonecutter Rd.)
- SR 2203 (Laurel Hill Dr)

SR 108 (Tryon Rd) enters Rutherfordton on the southwest side and terminates at S. Ridgecrest St. It is not identified on the CTP's Highway Map.

Recommendations in the 2018 CTP's Highway Map include the US 221 Bypass, NC 64/NC 74 Alternate improvements, SR 2203 (Laurel Hill Dr.), and improvements identified as "Landfill Access." The US 221 Bypass has continued to advance forward and NCDOT has acquired most of the right-of-way along the route within the Town of Rutherfordton.

Rutherford County Airport - Marchman Field (FQD) is located on 250 acres and has an average of 92 aircraft operations a day. The airport has a 5000 foot long runway at the low elevation of 1057 feet which offers the ability to serve all general aviation airplanes, except the largest corporate jets. Consequently, it is a valuable asset for business and tourist traffic. The Asheville Regional Airport is approximately 52 miles west of Rutherfordton and the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport is approximately 52 miles southwest of Rutherfordton. Foothills Regional Airport and Hickory Regional Airport are approximately 53 miles northeast of Rutherfordton. The Charlotte Douglas International Airport is approximately 66 miles east of Rutherfordton.

CSX rail lines pass through Rutherford County, but does not enter Rutherfordton, which provide a links to the Port of Wilmington, as well as to East Coast and Midwest US markets. This infrastructure is particularly important since there is no interstate highway in the County. The closest Amtrak passenger railroad station to Rutherfordton is approximately 98 miles south of Rutherfordton in Spartanburg, S.C. There is existing bus transportation, [Rutherford County Transit](#), that runs from Rutherfordton, through Spindale, and into Forest City.

On September 6, 2017, the Town of Rutherfordton, adopted [Connect Rutherfordton, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#). Recommendations included adopting or modifying local ordinances to facilitate multi-modal transportation options making existing roadways safe and accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles. The formation of a Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee was encouraged in the Plan among other recommendations.

The [Purple Martin Greenway](#) is a 2.1-mile, 10-foot wide paved greenway trail. It connects to Crestview Park via a half-mile sidewalk and follows Cleghorn Creek north to Kiwanis Park. The greenway is a family friendly shady trail with access points to Cleghorn Creek and multiple picnic shelters. The trail is well used and is open to cyclists as well as pedestrians. Phase 5 is planned which will extend the trail north to connect to the Thermal Belt Trail in partnership with NCDOT as a part of the Hwy 221 Bypass project.

Three miles of the multi-state [Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail](#) (OVHT), part of the U.S. National Trails System, and the N.C. State Trail System, passes through the Town of Rutherfordton. The 330 mile OVHT recognizes the Revolutionary War's Patriot Militia known as Overmountain Men and historical events utilizing a Commemorative Motor Route and 87 miles of walkable pathways. The grounds of the Town of Rutherfordton's Clubhouse will host a spur of the OVHT as part of the Clubhouse's renovation plans.



The Town of Rutherfordton has designated on-road bicycle routes throughout Town limits along Hwy 221, Hwy 221 Alternate/74 Business, and SR 1153 (Edwards St.). The Rutherford County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP)'s [Bicycle Map](#), dated September 29, 2017, recommends improvements to Rutherfordton's bicycle route and recommends multi-use paths. Recommended projects in the CTP's Bicycle Map and the Bicycle Map in the Connect Rutherfordton Plan appear to have been coordinated with one another, as they were being finalized within the same month.

The Rutherford County CTP's [Pedestrian Map](#), dated September 29, 2017, identifies existing sidewalks in Rutherfordton and recommends pedestrian route improvements. Although there are existing sidewalks within the Town of Rutherfordton, particularly in

the downtown area, not all residential subdivisions have sidewalks. Recommended projects in the CTP's Pedestrian Map and the Pedestrian Map in the Connect Rutherfordton Plan appear to have been coordinated with one another, as they were also being finalized within the same month. Another document, the [2019 Rutherfordton Action Plan](#), identifies key initiatives including Housing and Residential Development. Within that initiative, one of the Action Plan's goals related to that topic to reinforce quality housing is to reinforce sidewalk development. The Action Plan states, "Ensure that existing sidewalk inventory is usable and well maintained; Look for ways to improve connectivity to provide access to residential areas; and Seek ways to increase the inventory of sidewalks, while focusing on the walkability and connectivity to Town." The new unified development ordinance (UDO) will address sidewalk installation as new developments are constructed.

4.1.2.4 Growth

The population of the Town of Rutherfordton grew between 1990 and 2010, but then declined between 2010 to 2018. The population estimates for each year between 2010 to 2018 have been estimated annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. As illustrated in Table 3.1.1.C and Figure 3.1.1.B, the population decreased every year between 2010 to 2016 and increased in years 2017 and 2018. The average rate of population reduction between 2010 and 2018, as estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau, was (-0.27%).

The U.S. Census Bureau *American Community Survey 2014-2018* estimated the Town of Rutherfordton's population in 2018 at 4,058 persons. The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management estimated a slightly higher population estimate of 4,133 persons in 2018. Table 3.1.2 summarizes modest projected populations of approximately 4,343 in 2030 and 4,520 people in 2040 based on historical averages of population percentage of Rutherfordton to Rutherford County's population (6%) using the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management State Demographer population projects of Rutherford County for years 2030 and 2040.

The [Rutherford County Economic Development Strategic Plan](#), (EDC Strategic Plan) was prepared in 2013 to review the County's economy and assets, and to create a Plan that leverages its assets toward the goal of higher wage jobs and an expanded future tax base. The Plan recommended projects that would strengthen the County's position as a choice location for focused growth. The study noted that the population of Rutherford County grew steadily between 1990 to 2013 at approximately the same rate, but slower than the State of North Carolina. Compared to neighboring counties, Rutherford County's past growth and growth projection in 2020 were average. Counties to the north and east were generally growing slower than Rutherford County. Among other key findings of the EDC Strategic Plan, employment was significantly higher in Rutherford County than throughout the State in manufacturing, information, and health care industries. The Plan noted Rutherford County's important tourism assets of the mountains and foothills that are both a generator of jobs and a major component on the local quality of life.

The [Isothermal Planning and Development Commission](#) (IPDC) is the Council of Governments for the Isothermal Region which includes Rutherford, Cleveland, McDowell, and Polk Counties. The Commission's membership consists of local governments within the Isothermal Region, including the Town of Rutherfordton. The Commission's

administrative office is located in downtown Rutherfordton at 111 W. Court Street. The IPDC houses the region's Area on Aging, Housing Programs, Rural Planning Organization, Workforce Development Board and provides services through its Economic, Community and Workforce Development Programs and Technical Assistance Programs.

In 2017, the Isothermal Planning and Development Commission completed the [Isothermal Regional Economic Development Strategy](#). The Strategy examined each industry cluster's potential for growth in the Isothermal region, its location quotient, the degree to which the cluster exports goods or services outside the region, the growth trend over the five-year period from 2009 to 2014, and the number of people employed in each cluster. After the analysis, the Strategy identified three targeted industry growth clusters: Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Tourism.

4.2 Cultural Resources

4.2.1 Parks and Recreation, Outdoor Adventure and Community Outreach

The Town of Rutherfordton's Parks and Recreation Department maintains four [municipal parks](#). Crestview Park's entrance is off Parkway Drive off Highway 221 South, about 1 mile south of downtown Rutherfordton. Amenities include a 26 acre, multi-purpose park that contains three Little League baseball fields, one tee ball field, one senior league baseball field, batting cages, one multi-purpose field, four lighted tennis courts, two lighted basketball courts, four pickleball courts, 1/3 mile lighted walking trail, horseshoe pits, 2 playgrounds; a picnic shelter, bathrooms and water fountains.

Kiwanis Park is located on the north end of Main St between East 7th Street and Green Street. At the time of this Town Plan 2040's preparation, Kiwanis Park was under a complete reconstruction. [Construction bid drawings](#) for the reconstructed park feature a paved walkway trails, a dog park, a playground, a main pavilion with restrooms, a performance plaza, parking, a parking area for food trucks, a gazebo, and a special events lawn.

2nd Street Park is located off East Second Street and is accessed by Levi Street and Recreation Street. This small neighborhood park has an outdoor basketball court and children's play area.

Main St. Park is located at the intersection of First Street and North Main Street. Amenities include a small open space in the heart of downtown which is decorated with planters, trellises, iron archways, and benches.

The Town of Rutherfordton's municipal golf course was closed in 2018 and has been master-planned into the Norris Recreation Complex. At the time this Town Plan 2040 was being prepared, the Complex's facilities were still being formulated. Facilities in the draft master plan by Wirth & Associates, dated October 23, 2020, featured a large recreation center with an indoor swimming pool, a championship level disc golf course with advanced and intermediate tee pads, as well as a par-3 beginner layout, a 1.3-mile natural surface hiking/biking loop, a pump track, an indoor training facility, a playground and splash pad area and a restroom and picnic shelter. The Norris Recreation Complex draft master plan also featured a signature golf practice area with three par-3 holes, a 40-yard

chipping area, a 4,500 SF putting green, driving cages, and a golf shelter and memorial. The Norris Recreation Complex will serve as the centerpiece of recreational offerings for the town for the next 20 years.

The Cleghorn Golf and Sports Club at Tryon Resort, (formerly Cleghorn Plantation) is a private membership golf course located in a satellite portion of the Town of Rutherfordton's town limits approximately 4 miles south of Rutherfordton's main town limits. Cleghorn has 18 holes of golf, a pool, and a sports club. Cleghorn is located at 183 Golf Circle. The Cleghorn Golf and Sports Club is owned by the [Tryon International Equestrian Center](#) (TIEC) which is located approximately 15 minutes from downtown Rutherfordton. TIEC offers first-class equestrian facilities and showcases numerous events. The equestrian center's on-site venue includes restaurants, shopping, lodging, and family entertainment; while additional off-site venues such as the Cleghorn Gold and Sports Club, include the Cleghorn Gun Club and the Lodge on Lake Lure.



The Rutherfordton Clubhouse is the community center for the Town. Built in the mid-1930's from the trees cut on the site used in the log construction, the Clubhouse was the result of a partnership between the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Town of Rutherfordton, Rutherford Hospital and other private donors. The facility has been used for generations for weddings, receptions, showers, anniversaries, birthday parties, civic organizations, family reunions, class reunions, dances, Christmas parties, business luncheons, non-profit organizations, and individual private parties.

The first phase of the Clubhouse renovation was completed in the fall of 2008. The beautiful restoration in combination with modern updates creates a truly unique space of warmth, character, and convenience. The restoration included the renovation and expansion of the existing clubhouse to improve accessibility for citizens with disabilities, adding a deck, increasing capacity, creating a caterer-friendly kitchen, improving parking, and making the meeting space adaptable for a variety of events. All of this was upgraded while restoring the historical aspects of the structure.

Organized sports leagues in the area include the following which are not sponsored by the Town of Rutherfordton. Each is operated by organizations independent of the Town:

Rutherfordton Little League; Rutherford County Soccer Association; and Rutherfordton Raiders Youth Football.

The Town hosts several events throughout the year including: Annual Winter Rutherford Town Revitalization Fund Raiser; FAB Fest (Food, Art, Brews); July 4th Freedom Fest; Hilltop Fall Fest; Trick-or-Treat on Main Street; Salute to Rutherford County Veterans; and Christmas Parade.

4.3 Historic Resources

4.3.1 Heritage Preservation and Tourism

Rutherfordton is home to the only remaining cluster of antebellum houses and public structures in the southern foothills of North Carolina. In 1995, much of downtown Rutherfordton was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including more than 45 commercial and public structures. In addition, six other properties in town are listed independently on the National Register, including: St. John's Church (1849), the Carrier Houses (1835, 1879), the Rutherford County Court House (1926), St. Luke's Chapel at Rutherford Hospital (1907), and the original Rutherfordton-Spindale Central High School building (1925), now R-S Middle School. The Town of Rutherfordton maintains an appointed Historic Preservation Commission to review proposed physical changes to exteriors of historic landmarks and historic districts within the town limits.



St. John's Church, located on North Main Street was completed in 1849 and consecrated in 1851. It is considered to be the finest example of ecclesiastical Greek-Revival architecture in western North Carolina. The Rutherford County Court House and the Norris Public Library, both located on Main Street were designed by Louis H. Asbury, noted as one of North Carolina's most important and prolific architects of the 20th century. St. Francis Episcopal Church, located on North Main Street, completed in 1899 is an exceptional example of the Gothic-Revival style of architecture. Three of the chapel's art glass windows were crafted by the Louis C. Tiffany Company of New York. The Rutherfordton City Cemetery, which encompasses more than 20 acres along North Main Street, is one of the most historic burial grounds in all of western North Carolina. Thousands of graves can be found here, many dating to the 1770s.

Three miles of the multi-state [Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail](#) (OVHT), part of the U.S. National Trails System, and the N.C. State Trail System, passes through the Town of Rutherfordton. The 330 mile OVHT recognizes the Revolutionary War Patriot

Militia, known as Overmountain Men, and historical events utilizing a Commemorative Motor Route and 87 miles of walkable pathways. The grounds of the Town of Rutherfordton’s Clubhouse will host a spur of the OVHT as part of the Clubhouse’s renovation plans.

4.3.1.1 **Downtown Rutherfordton**

Downtown Rutherfordton is a vibrant and historic neighborhood of traditional and specialty shops and services, multi-cuisine restaurants, offices, places of worship, government offices, artist studios, museums, residential, lodging, a children’s museum, outdoor art exhibits, public parks, indoor community venues, and outdoor event spaces. The [Rutherford Regional Medical Center](#) is located only 2 blocks southwest of the downtown core offering a 143-bed acute care facility with a broad array of inpatient and outpatient care.



The Town of Rutherfordton maintains numerous activities to promote Downtown Rutherfordton, including but not limited to: motorist signage along surrounding highways to exit for Rutherfordton, gateway and wayfinding signage programs, “Eat Local” signage, attractive physical and online map of downtown with business names and locations listed by type of businesses, ancillary “more This Way” signs for downtown businesses that may not have storefront frontages, installation of colorful light post banners, [online listing](#) of properties available for sale and lease, banners of upcoming downtown events, yellow “Open” for business flags, a “Welcome Friends to Historic Rutherfordton” mural, a large mural of annual events with online links for additional details, historical markers on downtown buildings including interactive quick response (QR) codes, and hosting a Rutherfordton Welcome Center located downtown.



In 2016, the Town of Rutherfordton received National Main Street Center accreditation, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The non-profit organization named, "[Rutherford Town Revitalization](#) (RTR)", created to administer the Main Street program is dedicated to promote economic vitality, a sense of community and quality and administers programs to celebrate and improve Downtown Rutherfordton through events and programs such as administering the downtown building façade grants.

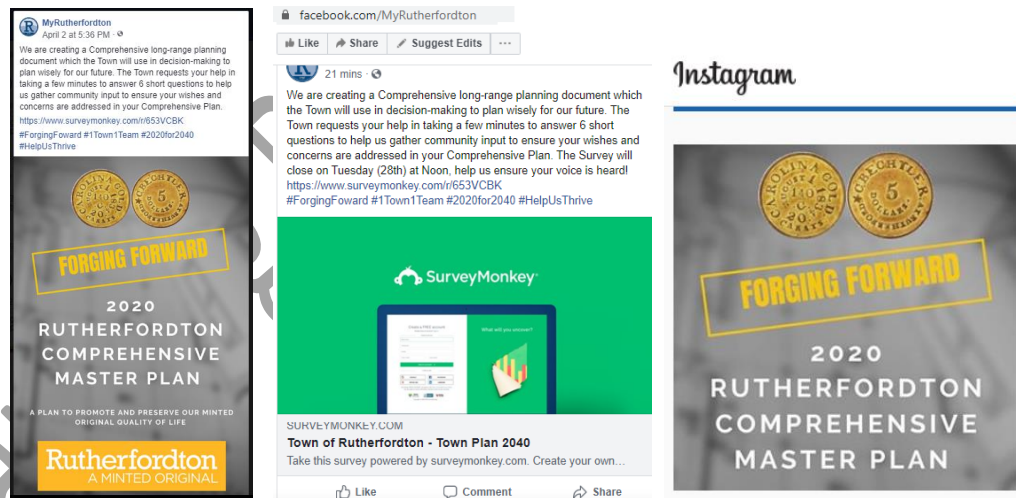
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5. VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

Determining what is important to a community is critical. The information gathered through various forms of community participation will establish the foundation of the plan. The voice of Rutherfordton was sought by the techniques described below. This information, when summarized and ranked in order of popularity, provides the “value statements” about Rutherfordton. These statements provide the foundation for the preparation of goals and objectives. From these goals and objectives, the team crafted draft strategies refined for Rutherfordton’s needs by its elected leadership.

5.1 Community Participation – *What does our community want?*

Community participation for the initial planning process in the Summer of 2020 was provided through an online survey to gain an in-depth understanding of ‘likes’, ‘dislikes’, ‘wishes’, and ‘fears’ in the community, as well as identify top priorities for the Town’s progression toward the future. The survey was advertised through the Town’s website, Facebook page, and Instagram account. The survey was posted for participation from April 2 through April 28. This plan was prepared during the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 and 2020 which prevented business interviews and group exercises from being conducted due the Town’s compliance with local and state orders. A total of 113 people completed the online survey over a period of four weeks when it was available on the Town’s website. The following sections highlight the process, results and opportunities for action.



5.1.1 Summary Results of Survey – *What our community said!*

The interview responses were categorized and grouped separately for each of the six questions asked:

1. Do you reside within the Town of Rutherfordton?
2. What do you like about Rutherfordton (present)?
3. What do you dislike about Rutherfordton (present)?
4. What wishes do you have for Rutherfordton (future)?
5. What fears do you have for Rutherfordton (future)?
6. What should be the #1 priority for Rutherfordton moving forward?

The responses were then cataloged for ranking purposes enabling the results to be summarized graphically. The following pages illustrate the responses in order of their respective frequency rankings.

The following summary of priorities and charts illustrate responses to the remaining five survey interview questions from the online survey.

The rankings indicate **'Growth'** (14%) as the 1st priority. This answer was consistently emphasized by related answers to other survey questions. A related response to the question, *'What do you like about Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Growth'* (3%). Combined related responses to the question, *'What do you dislike about Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Need More Restaurants and Shopping'* (18%). The top response to the question, *'What wishes do you have for Rutherfordton?'*, was *'More Growth'* (25%). The number one response, by a large margin, given to the question, *'What fears do you have for Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Stagnation'* (64%).

The rankings indicate **'Safety'** (13%) as the 2nd priority. This answer was consistently reinforced by related answers to other survey questions. A related response to the question, *'What do you like about Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Low Crime'* (2%). Related responses given to the question, *'What do you dislike about Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Crime Rate'* (3%). A related response given to the question, *'What wishes do you have for Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Keep Crime Rate Low'* (3%). The second top response, given at 9% of answers to the question, *'What fears wish do you have for Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Drug Problem'*.

The 3rd ranking priority tied between the following three answers:

- **'Support Local Businesses'** (10%)
- **'Downtown Revitalization'** (10%)
- **'Keep Small Town Feel'** (10%)

The rankings indicate **'Support Local Businesses'** (10%) as one of three answers tied for the 3rd priority. A related response, given at 8% to the question *'What do you like about Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Local Businesses'*. A related response to the question, *'What wishes do you have for Rutherfordton?'*, was *'More Support of Local Businesses'* (1%).

'Downtown Revitalization' (10%) as a tied 3rd priority was consistently reiterated by related answers to other survey questions. A related response to the question, *'What do you like about Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Downtown'* (6%). A related response to the question, *'What do you dislike about Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Businesses Moving/Empty Buildings'* (6%). A related response to the question, *'What wishes do you have for Rutherfordton?'* was *'Downtown Improvements'* (11%).

'Keep Small Town Feel' (10%) as a tied 3rd priority was consistently emphasized by related answers to other survey questions. The number one response to the question, *'What do you like about Rutherfordton?'*, which was the highest answer to that question, was, *'Small Town Feel'* (25%). Related responses to the question, *'What wishes do you have for Rutherfordton?'*, was *'Keep Town Like It Is'* (1%). The third highest answer

related to the question, 'What fears wish do you have for Rutherfordton?', was 'Lose Small Town Feel' (8%).

The rankings indicate '**Family Friendly**' (7%) as the 4th priority was consistently affirmed by related answers to other survey questions. A related response to the question, 'What do you like about Rutherfordton?', was 'Family Friendly' (7%). A related response to the question, 'What fears do you have for Rutherfordton?', was 'No Longer Being Family Friendly' (1%).

Final Rankings of Priorities. Since survey results produced three ties for the 3rd ranked priority and five ties for the 6th ranked priority based on the question, 'What should be the #1 priority for Rutherfordton moving forward' it , it was necessary to add percentages of each of these tied priorities to percentages of their related answers throughout the four other survey questions in order to develop a meaningful final ranking of priorities. After combining the tied answers with their related answers, the following topics and their total sum of percentages from all five survey questions fall into the following twelve ranked priorities. Several topics have been enhanced from their short raw survey answers (underlined below) into goal statements. The Town Plan 2040 responds to each of these 10 priorities in section 5.2.

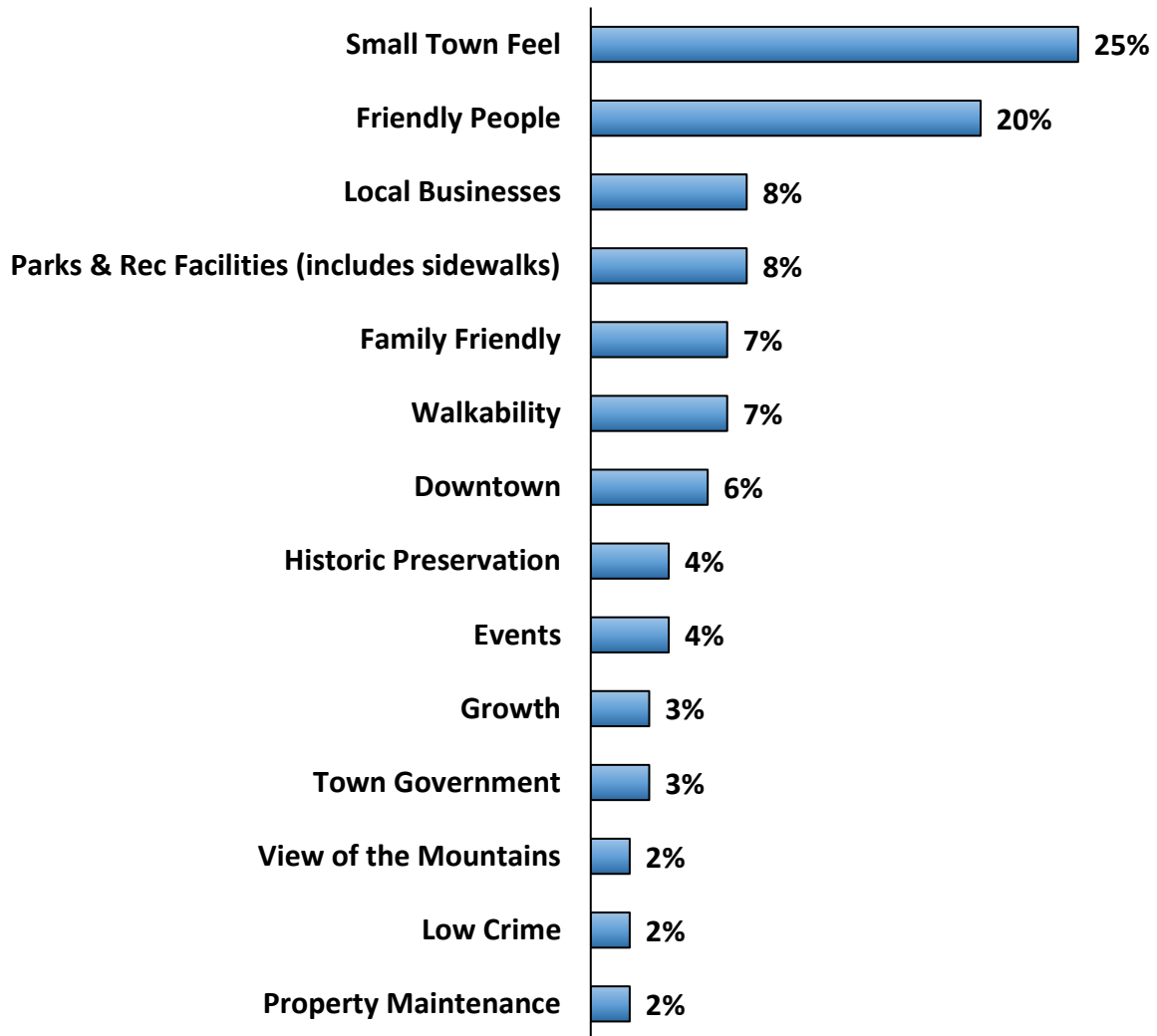
1. '**Retain Businesses & Attract Growth**' (124 percentage points*)
2. '**Keep Our Small Town Feel**' (44 percentage points*)
3. '**Pursue Additional Downtown Revitalization Opportunities**' (33 percentage points*)
4. '**Maintain Safety & Low Crime Rate**' (30 percentage points*)
5. '**Increase Events**' (22 percentage points*)
6. '**Support Local Businesses**' (19 percentage points*)
7. '**Enrich Our Family Friendly Culture**' (15% percentage points*)
8. '**Increase Beautification Programs**' (8% percentage points*)
9. '**Identify & Address Barriers to Help Lower Income People**' (7% percentage points*)
10. '**Enhance the Town's Relationship with Our Hospital**' (6% percentage points*)

*Note: (Total of percentage points from similar answers throughout the five survey questions)

Since the number one answer to the question, 'What Fears do you have for Rutherfordton?' had such a dominant percentage over all of the other answers given (64%) with the answer 'Stagnation', special attention should be given to priorities that will help discourage stagnation in Rutherfordton's growth and economy. The new unified development ordinance (UDO), being prepared at the time of adoption of this plan, will also address many of these priorities.

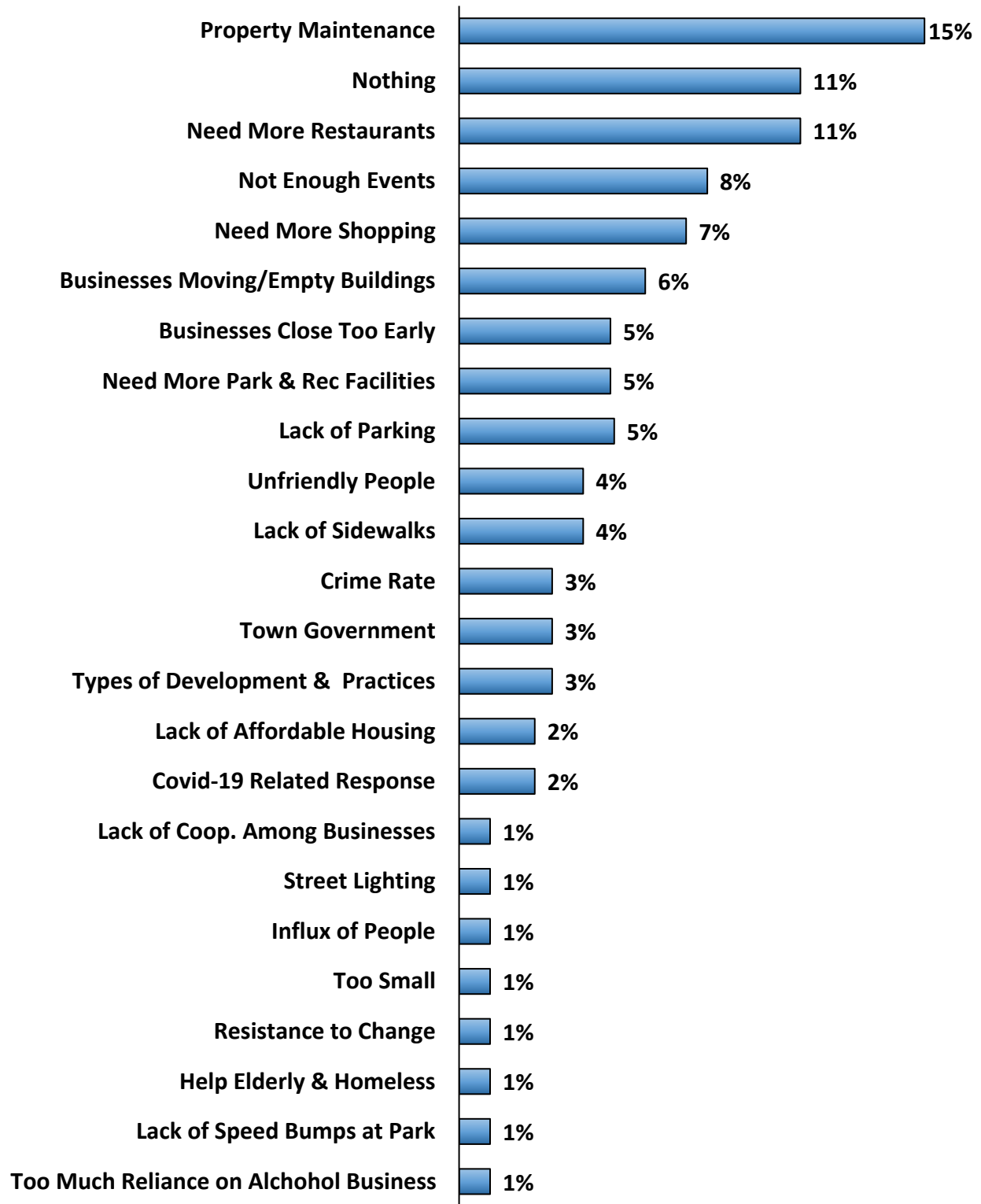
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What do you like about Rutherfordton?

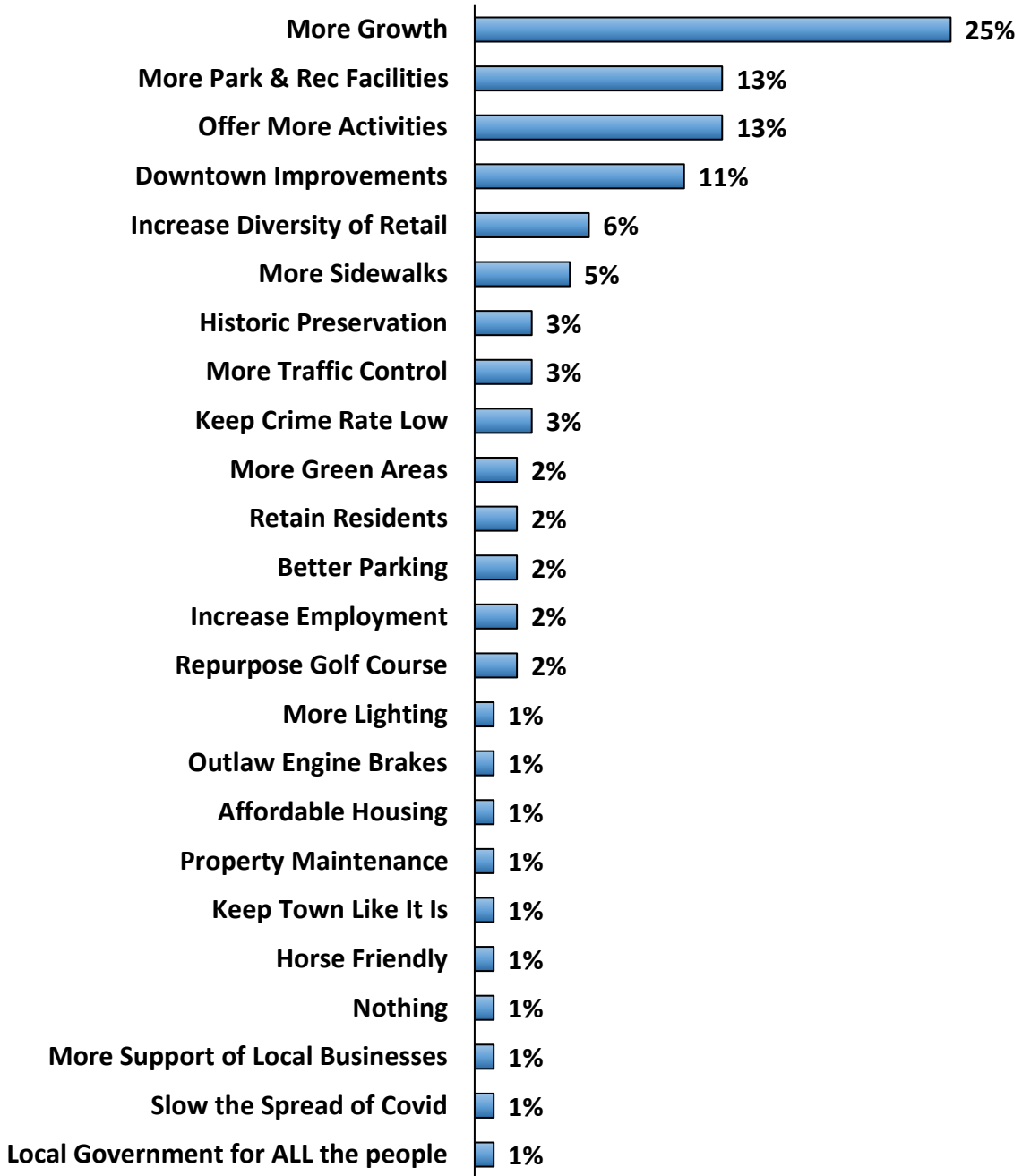


Plan...

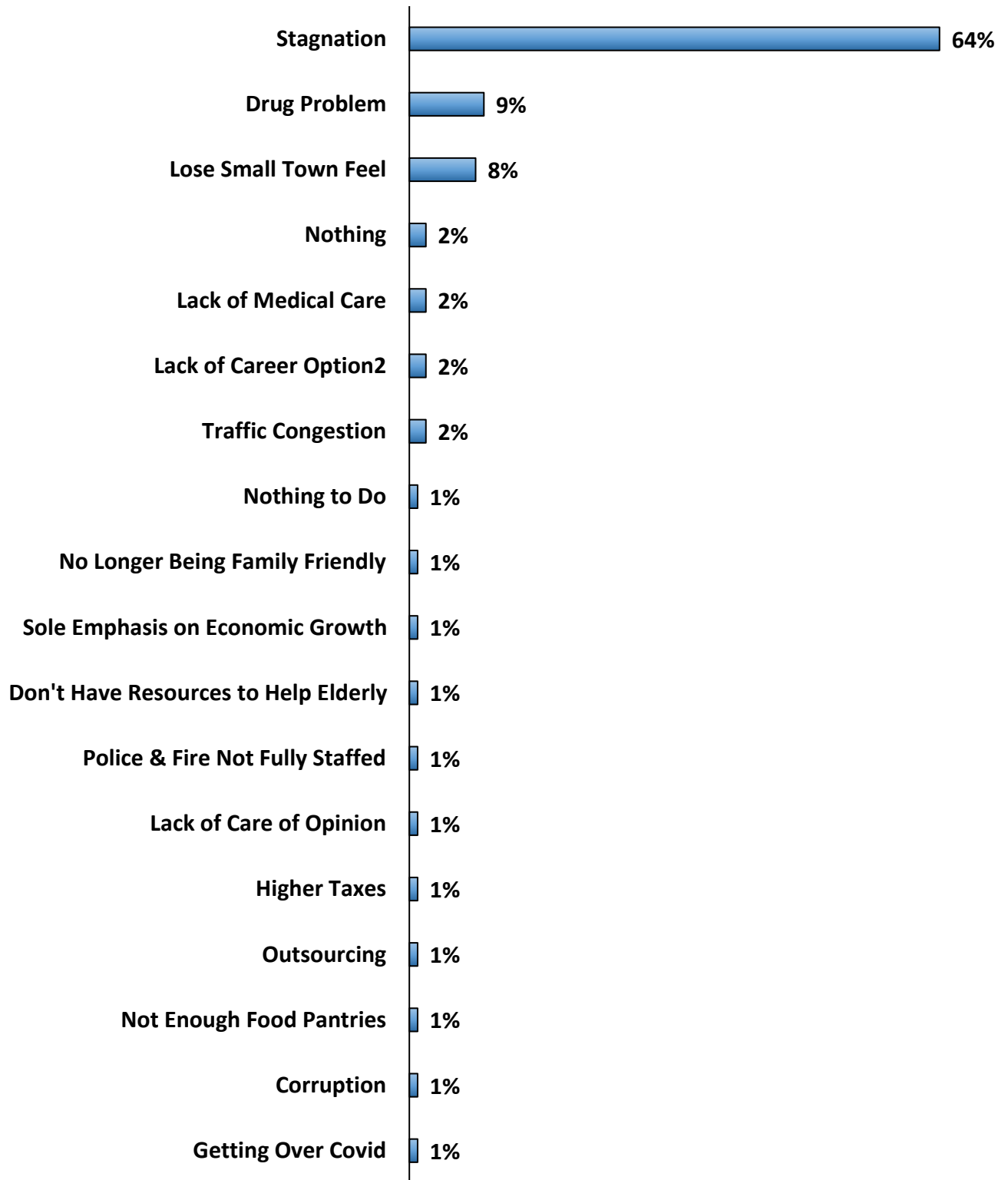
What do you dislike about Rutherfordton?



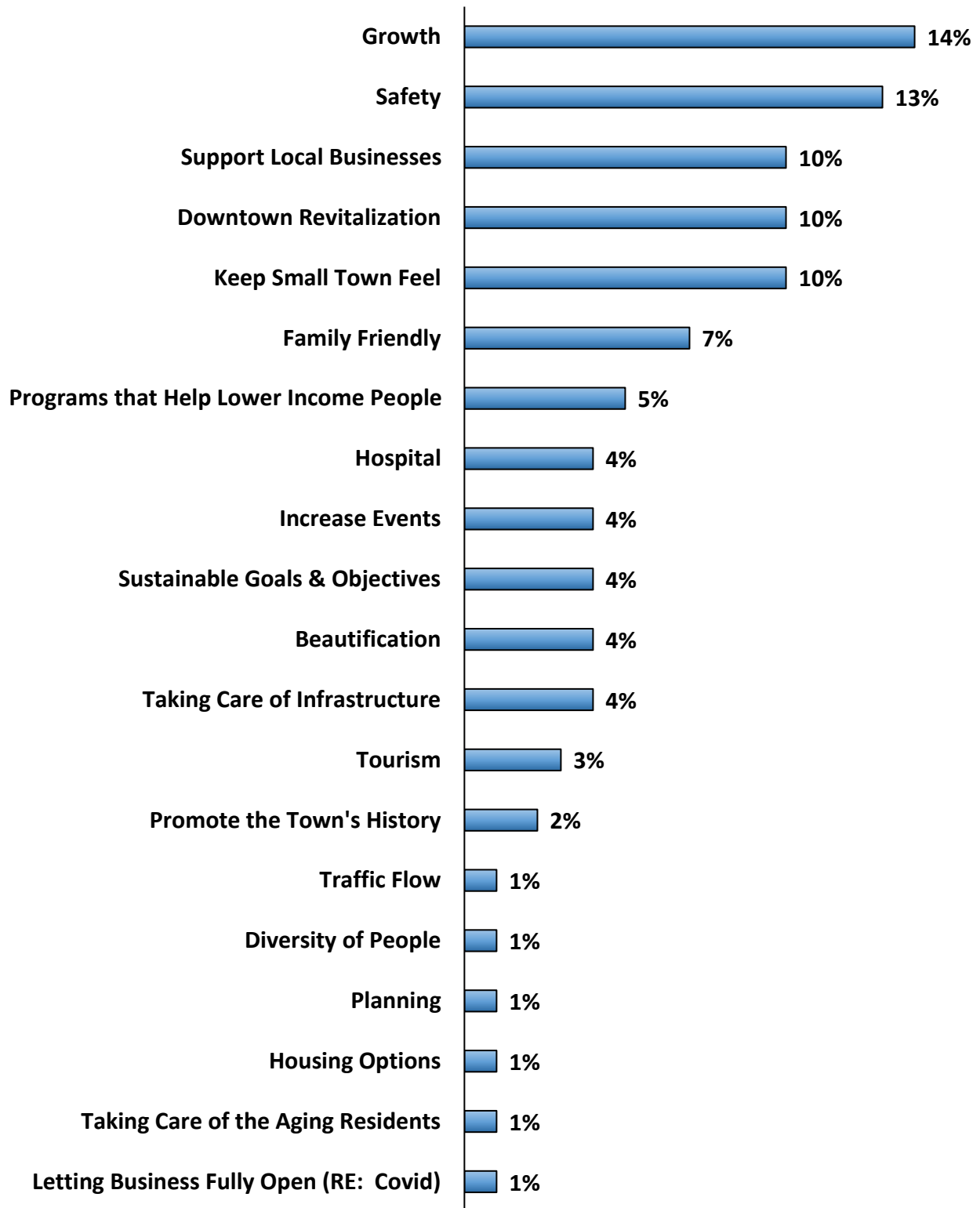
What wishes do you have for Rutherfordton?



What fears do you have for Rutherfordton?



What should be the #1 priority for Rutherfordton moving forward?



5.1.2 Social Media Platform

Social media applications (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) have become commonplace. Ninety percent of Millennials (adults born between 1982 and 1998) use social media on a regular basis, along with 77% of adults born between 1966 and 1981. Baby Boomers' use of social media has tripled since the year 2010, and 35% of those aged 65 and older report using social media regularly.¹ Social media has revolutionized the way we communicate with each other (just as the telephone once did) and has become a vital means of interaction between individuals, organizations, and communities.

Local governments are using social media for outreach to constituents, for transparency in their operations, and to increase citizen participation. Common uses of social media include crime prevention and police assistance, emergency alerts and severe weather updates, local activities and event registrations, construction updates and road closings, advertising job openings, public service announcements, and announcements of Town Council and advisory board meetings. However, local governments increasingly find social media to be more than just a means of disseminating information, and see it to help staff, citizen advisory groups and elected officials make better decisions, broaden community engagement and improve public discourse, and ultimately to increase trust in government.²

The Town of Rutherfordton has a social media coordinator who assisted in using the Town's website, Facebook page, an Instagram account to facilitate community participation. The survey address, documents, meeting announcements, and other information were also posted by the social media coordinator on the Town's website.

In October 2020, the Town launched a new [website](#) with a robust search feature, a 'report a concern' function, detailed contact information, and other municipal services on a platform that is American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant and easily navigable. The Town maintains [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) accounts. On the Town's Facebook account, the Town hosts weekly informative and interactive online presentations of topics important to the community each Friday morning by Mayor Dancy, staff and guest speakers entitled, "Brewtiful Mornings with Mayor Jimmy Dancy."

After adoption, the Town can use social media to build support for implementation of the Town Plan 2040. As a tool for citizen engagement, the Town's social media platform can help the *Rutherfordton Town Plan 2040 Comprehensive Land Use and Master Plan* remain fresh and in the forefront of this dialogue, becoming a 'living' document to help Rutherfordton achieve its goals. Refer to 5.2.5 for strategies to update and expand the Town's social media platforms.

¹ Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/08/social-networking-usage-2005-2015/>

² Institute for Local Government, <http://www.ca-ilg.org/social-media-strategies>

5.2 Goals-Objectives-Strategies

The objectives and strategies appearing under each goal appear in priority rankings based upon the number of public comments. These may be pursued as deemed appropriate by the Town, its citizens and businesses.

5.2.1 Goal 1: **RETAIN BUSINESSES & ATTRACT GROWTH!**

5.2.1.1 Objective 1: **Direct and manage growth within Rutherfordton.**

Strategy 1: *Encourage development first in areas where existing infrastructure and convenient proximity to Town services are already provided.* Rutherfordton's growth will be directed, through application of the future land use map and zoning map, to areas where utilities and services are already provided.

Strategy 2: *Apply standards of the new UDO to assure quality growth.* The new unified development ordinance (UDO) being prepared at the time of adoption of this plan will address the community's priorities to manage growth to assure safety and quality.

5.2.1.2 Objective 2: **Have a good plan and ordinances so projects achieve the mission of the plan.**

Strategy 1: *Adopt Town Plan 2040 to establish Rutherfordton as a successful community and a partner in the future growth and re-development of the area.* Establishing a clear vision and the action steps to achieve the goals established by the Town is the first task toward a bright future. (See section 8.5 of this document.)

Strategy 2: *Prepare and adopt new UDO establishing standards and specifications for new development and re-development consistent with Town Plan 2040.* The replacement of antiquated ordinances with relevant modern development standards will establish Rutherfordton as a leader in south-western North Carolina in proactively seeking to refresh itself into a 21st century community. (See section 8.5 of this document.)

5.2.2 Goal 2: **KEEP OUR SMALL TOWN FEEL!**

5.2.2.1 Objective 1: **Preserve the small town appeal of Rutherfordton while encouraging compatible business growth through development of revised development standards and specifications.**

Strategy 1: *Create a Main Street District (MS) through zoning standards and specifications with architectural design standards and specifications and development incentives designed to allow existing business to grow and encourage compatible new development.* Careful consideration will go into the preparation of design standards and specifications that reinforce the small town feel through an understanding of architectural and urban design principles that direct the placement and massing of structures. Attention will be also given to what may be considered the public realm, typically composed of streets, sidewalks, and civic spaces to help guide the Town's

decision-making of details when investing in light posts, outside furniture, landscaping and sidewalk surfaces.

Strategy 2: *Give attention during preparation of the Main Street District (MS) to address development standards of adjacent properties and streets.* As the core area of Rutherfordton increases in development interest and popularity as a destination for commerce, entertainment and civic events, it is important to allow adjacent areas to have the option to transition to new uses that may offer supportive roles through the service sector, such as professional offices, while remaining compatible to adjacent residential uses. This transition also helps add to the number of employees and the private-sector clients who may become frequent patrons of restaurants and businesses within Rutherfordton's core area. Dismissive planning of support areas to Main Streets inadvertently restricts the primary destination streets from maximizing their potential in retaining the community-cherished small town feel. The UDO can provide flexibility to allow access for parking, deliveries and other utilitarian functions.

Strategy 3: *Have the Town consider adaptive reuse of historic structures for public uses before designing new structures.* There may be existing historic structures contributing to the small town feel of Rutherfordton that are in need of significant reinvestment beyond the current property owner's abilities to provide. As opportunities arise, the Town will explore whether such historic structures may be repurposed into new and diverse uses including residential.

Strategy 4: *Have the Town consider context-sensitive designs when it is time for Town-owned buildings to be constructed so that designs reinforce the small town feel.* The architectural style of publicly owned buildings has historically provided inspiration for privately developed buildings which often mimicked many design elements to create a cohesive sense of place. Large investments by the Town of Rutherfordton of civic buildings can positively or negatively have a domino effect on the designs of private-sector investments in land development. To successfully respond to the community's desire to retain a small town atmosphere, the Town must dedicate resources to design structures which emulate enduring qualities expressed by the community. An example of this principal was the design for the Town of Edenton, North Carolina's new Police Headquarters building. Its design was inspired by the Town's historic cotton mill and although it served a large governmental function, the building blended in well with the surrounding historic neighborhood and instantly created a sense of pride for the Town and area residents.

Strategy 5: *Incorporate a sense of small town ambiance in public infrastructure.* The details within the public realm of a town can be as important as the privately-owned buildings themselves for maintaining a tangible small town look. When the Town of Rutherfordton is tasked with selecting sidewalks, outside furniture, utility posts and even landscaping, the Town should have a pre-selected palette of elements from which to order that are in harmony with the small town ambiance.

5.2.3 **Goal 3: PURSUE ADDITIONAL DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION OPPORTUNITIES!**

5.2.3.1 **Objective 1: Pursue the selection of future public offices and facilities in the downtown area.**

Strategy 1: *Obtain property for key public uses within the downtown area.* Emphasizing the role of downtown as the heart of the community by concentrating future public investments will add economic strength to this vital area by providing both jobs and purpose for citizens to be in the downtown core area.

5.2.3.2 **Objective 2: Adopt standards and specifications and take actions that attract new businesses and residential uses within downtown with higher development and code enforcement standards to assure quality development.**

Strategy 1: *Ensure the future UDO encourages investment in downtown Rutherfordton through mixed uses and densities balanced with architectural and enforcement standards.* The UDO should incentivize investment downtown through an allowance of compatible mixture of uses, horizontally and vertically, and a mixture of residential density coupled with architectural design standards and enhanced enforcement requirements. Also see section 8.5.1 of this document for additional information.

Strategy 2: *Maintain Rutherfordton's way-finding signs throughout Town to enhance the visitor experience.* Ensure the way-finding and directional signage are kept updated with current information to help guide visitors to the concentration of shopping, services, accommodations, and food/beverage businesses in Rutherfordton. (Also see sections 6.8.2.2 of this document for additional information.)

Strategy 3: *Attract motorists from the new U.S. 221 Bypass into downtown Rutherfordton.* Before construction of the U.S. 221 Bypass commences, commit resources to design and decide on sign messaging and locations along the Bypass to attract travelers to local businesses. Provide clear concise information on special signage designed specifically to capture attention of non-local travelers.

5.2.3.3 **Objective 3: Identify shared parking opportunities for downtown businesses**

Strategy 1: *Provide standards and specifications in the new UDO that encourage shared parking in downtown Rutherfordton for businesses that have different hours of parking demands.* The land area and cost to develop parking is a large cost of land development that could be reduced if shared parking is allowed. The UDO should allow rear alleys downtown that provide standards that allow businesses to provide rear parking as well as allowing shared parking with other businesses of complementary hours will be recommended.

5.2.4 **Goal 4: MAINTAIN SAFETY & LOW CRIME RATE!**

5.2.4.1 **Objective 1: The Town of Rutherfordton will explore ways to receive training in Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) and apply CPTED concepts to Town-owned properties.**

Strategy 1: *The Community Planning and Development Department and the Police Department will collaborate to seek funding to receive CPTED training.* CPTED is the intentional design of the physical environment in ways that reduce or remove identifiable crime risks. *CPTED concepts are composed of: natural surveillance (increases visibility); natural access control (controls access); and territorial reinforcement (promotes a sense of ownership).*

5.2.4.2 **Objective 2: The Community Planning and Development Department and the Police Department will apply principles of CPTED, after receiving training, to their areas of authority to help reduce crime.**

Strategy 1: *The Community Planning and Development Department staff will promote the use of CPTED concepts while reviewing site plans of new development.*

Strategy 2: *Staff will promote the use of CPTED concepts by performing reviews of town-owned property and generating a prioritized list of retrofit projects, and complete them as funding allows.*

Strategy 3: *The Police Department staff will offer property surveys to homeowners and businesses; and provide recommendations for making changes to bring their property into compliance with CPTED concepts.*

5.2.5 **Goal 5: INCREASE EVENTS!**

5.2.5.1 **Objective 1: Add new community traditions by committing resources to schedule and hold events at the reconstructed Kiwanis Park.**

Strategy 1: *Attract residents and visitors to Rutherfordton by planning new events in the reconstructed Kiwanis Park to increase pride in the community.*

5.2.5.2 **Objective 2: Continue to offer and promote Rutherfordton's large annual civic events downtown while adding a new small event series.**

Strategy 1: *Commit resources to increase promotion and advertising of Rutherfordton's large annual community events.* To response to citizens' expressed appreciation of Rutherfordton's existing community-wide events, explore additional marketing outreach to attract residents and visitors.

Strategy 2: *Invest in hosting a small event series designed to create community and connection to produce impactful results at the local level.* The Town launched F.A.B. Fest (Food, Art 7 Brews) as a monthly first Friday events series to continually attract people downtown.

5.2.5.3 Objective 3: To keep the public engaged and informed of community information and events, continue to update and expand the Town’s social media platforms.

Strategy 1: Provide event announcements when they are scheduled. The Town launched a new website in October 2020. The website includes a “connect with us” feature and allows users to sign up for electronic newsletter subscriptions which will include event announcements.

5.2.6 Goal 6: SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES!

5.2.6.1 Objective 1: Foster growth in local-craft businesses.

Strategy 1: Adopt a new UDO with standards and specifications that respond to challenges associated with expanding and attracting local-craft businesses in downtown Rutherfordton. Restaurants, artisan specialty shops, and entrepreneurs producing products high in craftsmanship within proximity to each other will continue to generate interest in Rutherfordton as a destination. Ensure the UDO acknowledges the fiscal challenges start-up businesses have when otherwise required to develop property under the same conventional standards and specifications as a national retailer regarding minimum lot area, building setbacks, parking and other site development standards. Adopt standards and specifications that allow conversions of existing structures into new uses, encourage shared parking, and provide flexibility in building setbacks to respond to unique lot dimensions. Adopt administrative review procedures sensitive to challenges faced by local craft businesses to improve their successful start-up and expansion in Rutherfordton.

Strategy 2: The Town should explore recruitment of a business incubator or co-workspace in order to foster economic growth, strengthen and diversify the local economy, and create new jobs. The Town should help recruit a business incubator or co-working space that provides more permanent spaces for new businesses than those valuable, yet temporary, facilities currently provided at the PO Box (Pop Up Opportunity Box). The mission of the incubator or co-working space would be to attract, develop, and stimulate entrepreneurial talent in the region to locate into a building that provides support services such as high-speed broadband, utilities, reception, and security, along with amenities like audio-visual equipment, conference rooms, and distance-learning capability.

5.2.6.2 Objective 2: Support existing businesses and encourage additional businesses outside the downtown area that complement and not compete with downtown.

Strategy 1: Ensure Town standards and specifications encourage growth and expansion of businesses. The Town will write a new UDO following adoption of this plan to identify different commercial zoning districts with varying permitted uses and development standards.

Strategy 2: *Create a vehicle-based services and repair district to allow for clustering of such services.* The new unified development ordinance (UDO) that will be prepared after plan adoption should establish a “Vehicle Services and Repair District” or VSR, which will establish standards and specifications for addressing the concerns experienced with business establishments which are vehicle-based service, motor vehicle repair, and storage of disabled motor vehicles. This district should be used in strategic locations, and likely not in the downtown area, as these existing or new businesses serving these needs often seek additional space.

5.2.7 Goal 7: ENRICH OUR FAMILY FRIENDLY CULTURE!

5.2.7.1 Objective 1: Ensure the zoning map and UDO advance interests of families in the approval process of siting child care facilities.

Strategy 1: *Review the zoning map to ascertain if zoning districts where child care facilities are allowed are convenient to neighborhoods and employers.*

Strategy 2: *Ensure the UDO’s approval process for child care facilities balances convenience to families while ensuring compatibility to surrounding land uses.*

5.2.7.2 Objective 2: Identify opportunities to add parks as the number of neighborhoods grow.

Strategy 1: *Explore properties the Town could acquire to construct public parks.*

Strategy 2: *Identify opportunities for new development to provide parks in their plans.*

5.2.7.3 Objective 3: Pedestrian Pathways.

Strategy 1: *Require developers construct sidewalks in new neighborhoods and commercial developments.*

Strategy 2: *Annually review the 2017 [Connect Rutherfordton, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#) to monitor implementation and funding toward building a sidewalk system connecting existing and future neighborhoods to schools and town amenities.*

5.2.8 Goal 8: INCREASE BEAUTIFICATION PROGRAMS!

5.2.8.1 Objective 1: Enforce and strengthen property maintenance standards.

Strategy 1: *Enforce and Strengthen Existing Garbage-Related Ordinances.* Enforce existing standards regarding dumpster maintenance, homeowner trash receptacles, and private garbage hauling. Establish enforceable rules that require prompt removal of garbage cans from curbs after pickup service.

Strategy 2: *Strengthen Property Maintenance Standards.* Adopt and enforce stronger property maintenance standards in the future UDO.

5.2.8.2 Objective 2: Assign staff member(s) to monitor and coordinate roadside litter pickup efforts among participating civic and community organizations.

Strategy 1: *Coordinate litter pickup locations and efforts within the Town of Rutherfordton between Town staff, Rutherford County, NCDOT, and volunteer civic and community organizations.*

Strategy 2: *The Town of Rutherfordton should explore the creation of an “Adopt-A-Street” volunteer program within the town limits to tangibly demonstrate civic pride, contribute to a cleaner environment, help retain and attract economic development, and serve as a reminder to the public not to litter the roadways.*

Strategy 3: *The Town of Rutherfordton will promote NCDOT’s existing “Adopt-A-Highway” volunteer program to attract participation within the town limits.*

Strategy 4: *The Town of Rutherfordton Public Works Department will ensure garbage trucks use best management practices to reduce accidental release of litter from trucks.*

5.2.9 Goal 9: IDENTIFY & ADDRESS BARRIERS TO HELP LOWER INCOME PEOPLE!

5.2.9.1 Objective 1: Identify which barriers currently exist in Rutherfordton that may unintentionally inhibit it from being affordable to people earning a lower income.

Strategy 1: *Identify whether the following barriers for lower income people exist in Rutherfordton: lack of affordable housing; exclusionary and single-use zoning; insensitive urban design; property tax too high; lack of services; lack of quality education; and crime.*

5.2.9.2 Objective 2: Continue to support housing at affordable prices.

Strategy 1: *Continue to offer practices within the Town’s ability to foster development of housing at affordable prices.*

5.2.9.3 Objective 3: Continue Rutherfordton’s membership and support in the Isothermal Planning and Development Commission.

Strategy 1: *Continue to offer membership and support in the Isothermal Planning and Development Commission’s programs that advance the region’s and Rutherfordton’s affordability, housing, and employment opportunities.*

5.2.10 Goal 10: ENHANCE THE TOWN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR HOSPITAL!

5.2.10.1 Objective 1: Design and install pedestrian and wayfinding enhancements between the Rutherford Regional Medical Center and downtown Rutherfordton.

Strategy 1: Design new and improved sidewalk improvements. Rutherford Regional Medical Center is less than a half mile to downtown Rutherfordton yet downtown and the Rutherford Regional Medical Center could mutually benefit by enhanced sidewalks.

Strategy 2: Add a wayfinding sign from the Rutherford Regional Medical Center to downtown. In addition to the Town's successful wayfinding project, add a wayfinding sign at the Rutherford Regional Medical Center's exit onto S. Ridgecrest Dr. informing people of the direction to downtown and its close proximity.

5.2.10.2 Objective 3: Add website links to the Town's and Rutherford Regional Medical Center's websites to one another to connect marketable features of each entity.

Strategy 1: On the Town of Rutherfordton's website heading "Newcomers Guide," add a subheading "Medical Services in Rutherfordton" to raise awareness of the Rutherford Regional Medical Center's presence in Rutherfordton. Businesses, retirees, and families researching a possible relocation are usually interested in knowing of a community's access to convenient health care in their relocation decisions.

Strategy 2: On the Rutherford Regional Medical Center's corporate Life Point Health website [Duke LifePoint Healthcare](#), request Rutherford Regional Medical Center replace the photograph of downtown Forest City with one of downtown Rutherfordton and add a link to the [Rutherford Town Revitalization \(RTR\) website](#). Physicians, medical staff, and patients and their families researching hospitals for employment or long-term treatment are usually interested in knowing of a community's amenities and qualities of life in their relocation or family hospitalization decisions. Having Rutherford Regional Medical Center provide a convenient link to the RTR website may help facilitate important decisions to select Rutherfordton for career and health care pursuits.

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6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Rutherford County is in the south-western part of North Carolina. The Town of Rutherfordton, North Carolina is centrally located in and is the county seat of Rutherford County. Rutherfordton is adjacent to the Towns of Ruth and the Town of Spindale to the east.

The Town is located approximately 31 miles north of Spartanburg, SC, 55 miles southeast of Asheville, NC, and 73 miles west of Charlotte. The Town of Rutherfordton and Rutherford County are members of the Isothermal Rural Planning Organization (RPO) along with McDowell and Polk Counties and their municipalities which have a combined population of 132,845 residents. The population of Rutherfordton decreased every year between 2010 to 2016 and increased in years 2017 and 2018. Rutherford County's important tourism assets of the mountains and foothills are both a generator of jobs and a major component on the local quality of life. The Town of Rutherfordton has access to I-40, located 20 miles north via US Hwy 221. Rutherfordton has access to US Hwy 74, located 5 miles south, via US Hwy 221. The Town of Rutherfordton is bisected from east to west by US Hwy 64 and from north to south by US Hwy 221.

The Town of Rutherfordton was founded in 1787 in honor of General Griffith Rutherford, of Revolutionary War fame. From the late 18th century until the early antebellum period, Rutherfordton was the most important commercial and political center in western North Carolina.

6.1 Why Focus on Economic Development

Economic development is critical to a community for two reasons: 1) to provide an employment and income base for the community; and 2) to enable a community's leadership to maintain the lowest reasonable rates for its utility rate payers and taxpayers.

Effective economic development starts with the latter. Prudent management procedures for the efficient and effective operations of both utility enterprises and tax revenue systems will ensure that all money due to both the Town and the County is collected. Effective collection allows leadership to establish and maintain the lowest responsible rates for all rate payers and taxpayers.

6.1.1 Utility Rates

Utility rates should be established after the clear determination of the proper maintenance and operations of the Town's sewer system. Aging infrastructure will need to be holistically inventoried and analyzed for replacement to control leaks, eliminate infiltration, and ensure proper performance for the next century. Rates need to be set in a manner to ensure the viability and resilience of the sewer system with an emphasis on the care of the environment and natural resources balanced with its affordability.

Another important approach to improving the return on public investment is to carefully manage the growth and expansion of the system. Extensions should be prudently studied and examined to determine the effective advantages to the current rate payers of such expansion and ensure sound decision making. Extensions without annexation may increase utility revenue, but at the same time may expose the rate payer, and taxpayer, to financial obligations while the benefactor of the extension shares little or no risk in the cost of the extension. Exceptions should only be considered when public health is at risk

and annexation is not eligible; therefore, obtaining a voluntary petition for annexation to be held until eligibility is attained can protect the Town, its rate payers and taxpayers.

A third important factor in increasing the return on the public's investment in the utility enterprises is to encourage infill development and redevelopment. Improving under-developed and under-utilized areas of existing development within the Town can increase the return on investment in existing infrastructure and contribute greatly to reducing utility and property tax rates.

6.1.2 Jobs and Economic Base

The economic base of a community is the collective group of business activities that bring money into the Town by providing a product or service. The category of "Management, business, sciences and arts" occupations has been the top sector in recent years bringing money into Rutherfordton, followed by "sales and office occupations." The 2017 [Isothermal Regional Economic Development Strategy](#) identified three targeted industry growth clusters: Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Tourism. When "travel and tourism" is part of the economic base, many businesses serve both purposes; restaurants are a good example because they serve both local and non-local customers routinely. "Hotels and other hospitality" businesses can serve both the tourism and corporate sector of our future economic base.

The economic base establishes a true purpose for the community. The jobs created by the basic sector businesses are the obvious direct benefit of the economic base. Jobs are critical because much of the impact of the economic base depends on how well money is distributed throughout the community, and jobs are the primary method of distribution. Automation often tends to allow economic activity to skim over the surface of a community and not have as deep an impact. One way to maximize a positive economic impact of the local economic base sector business community is to establish local relationships with companies and enterprises to provide as much local support and local resources as possible to increase distributions of wealth locally.

Increases in the value of local properties by infill development and redevelopment of under-utilized areas help lower property taxes for all taxpayers, further improving the local return on the investments made in existing infrastructure.

6.2 Current Economic Profile - Conventional Sectors

6.2.1 Management, Business, Sciences, and Arts

The largest number of the Town's citizens in the workforce are employed in the "Management, business, sciences, and arts" occupations, making up 41.6% of the workforce. This category is composed: of management, business and financial occupations; computer, engineering and science occupations; education, legal, community service, arts and media occupations; and healthcare practitioners and technical occupations. The second most numerous categories are "Sales and Office" occupations, making up 21.5% of the workforce. This category is composed of sales, office, and administrative support. (See Table 3.5.1 in section 3 of this document)

These occupation groups are service and commercial in nature and show that the service and commercial sectors are not only the key to Rutherfordton's success, but these sectors will flourish when given the proper business climate and innovative options to attract attention. The updating of local zoning standards and specifications, as discussed in section 8, will improve the business community's options for innovative development.

A healthy commercial services sector is critical to supporting strong industry; therefore, practical standards and specifications such as zoning rules and non-residential property maintenance codes must be administered to support the sector. Standards and specifications must be updated to protect property rights while preserving natural resources and establishing reasonable standards for enhancing the appearance of all new development and redevelopment. Equally important to updating the Rutherfordton development ordinances is professional administration to ensure equal and fair treatment to all Rutherfordton's businesses and citizens. Proper implementation will enhance these industries and occupations, allowing them to become more prosperous.

6.2.2 Manufacturing

The County's manufacturing tradition is provided by the [Rutherford County Economic Development Commission](#). In 1874, Rutherford County's first textile mill opened near the community of Henrietta. In 1885, R.R. Haynes and S.B. Tanner built a cotton mill in Henrietta. Other textile mills and villages began operations in Rutherfordton, Forest City, Spindale, and Ruth. Textiles remained an important economic force in the county well into the 21st century. When textile, sewing operations and furniture industries shifted to mainly overseas operations, Rutherford County looked to redefine itself and diversified its industry base. The 2017 [Isothermal Regional Economic Development Strategy](#) identified three targeted industry growth clusters: Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Tourism.

6.3 Importance of the Infrastructure Networks

Infrastructure, including water, sewer, electricity, natural gas, telecommunications, high-speed internet, roads, railroads, and airports make up the core infrastructure for a community. These networks often seem unrelated; however, lack of coordination between these unique systems can result in poor decisions regarding land use development.

Municipal utilities such as water, stormwater, sewer, streets, sidewalks and greenways generally represent most hard structure utilities. These utilities generally are based upon the network of streets and roads.

Non-municipal services such as electric, telecommunications, natural gas and broad-band fiber generally utilize flexible conduits for their conveyances. These service providers are typically located within or adjacent to public street and road right-of-way and therefore utilize much of the same network for distribution.

Coordination among these various service providers, as well as other governmental counterparts such as the North Carolina Department of Transportation, Rutherford County and other providers, is also vital to efficient operations of Rutherfordton's utilities and public works functions. Conducting periodic meetings to review planned improvements and proposed developments by

private development interests can often improve the level of service to all of Rutherfordton's businesses and citizens by identifying opportunities for cost savings through coordination. Inclusion of representatives of these various agencies on a local technical review committee coordinated by the Town's professional planning department will reduce costs to Rutherfordton rate and taxpayers.

Examples of cooperative initiatives may include provision of services for manufacturing facilities, where dual feed electrical supply, water, sewer, and a host of other functions can be coordinated ahead of time to ensure appropriate capacity is provided and corridor limitations are foreseen. Projects to consider should be evaluated based on merit to the Town's utility rate and taxpayers.

6.4 Existing Business Retention and Expansion

Rutherfordton is ideally located to grow its commercial services sector. Diverse businesses including resilient job creators, specialty markets, professional services, health professionals, and food and beverage establishments supplemented by small industry, craftsmanship, and artistic endeavors (both for-profit and non-profit) will be required if Rutherfordton is to refresh its local purpose in the region. Without this emphasis we risk becoming dependent on franchise and chain business enterprises with limited long-term commitment to the community.

6.5 Tourism, Travel and Hospitality

Projects that enhance the tourism experience in Rutherfordton should be considered and programmed into capital budgets over time to stimulate a continuation of new investment (both public and private) for the ever-changing tourism based industry. Professionally published maps, pamphlets and educational materials are available [online](#), at Rutherfordton's Town Hall, and within the Rutherford County Visitors Center #2 in downtown Rutherfordton's at 146 N. Main St., to inform residents and welcome visitors to explore Rutherfordton's historical and recreational amenities.



In 2016, Rutherfordton was named "Outstanding Small Town of the Year" by the N.C. Rural Center in response to the town's successful marketing and promotional efforts. The award recognized Rutherfordton as a town that embraces citizen engagement, values diversity, fosters strong partnerships, employs innovative economic development projects and programs to foster an entrepreneur-friendly environment. As reported on the online [Visit Mall Towns Blog](#), October 2016, Rutherfordton's marketing initiatives included development of "A Minted Original" town

brand, billboard and marketing campaign, trail guides, street banners, two new websites, and new downtown signage. Rutherfordton also focused on outdoor and heritage initiatives including the installation of the Purple Martin Greenway, Downtown Historic Walking Trail, and the Gold Mile, a commemorative walking trail dedicated to Rutherfordton's legacy as the home of America's one-dollar gold coin and part of a 30-county North Carolina Gold Trail. In the digital realm, the Town of Rutherfordton increased its social media presence on include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Among other projects, Rutherfordton went the extra mile to also implement a branded recycling campaign and a monthly live music series called FUNC (Fridays UNplugged on Central).

6.5.1 Heritage Tourism

Heritage Tourism is defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as "traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic, and natural resources." It is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism and hospitality industry overall, and a major focus of the [State of North Carolina's tourism promotion](#) efforts.

Opportunities for the growth of Heritage Tourism include businesses that provide support services for artists and craftspeople. Such businesses include tool and musical instrument repair, wholesale, retail, and distribution of specialty materials used in the creative arts (weaving, basket-making, blacksmithing, pottery, woodworking, etc.), and services provided to residents and tourists such as demonstrations, guided tours, private lessons, and programming for public institutions and private and non-profit entities.

Three miles of the multi-state [Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail](#) (OVHT) passes through the Town of Rutherfordton. The Town of Rutherfordton has designated on-road bicycle routes throughout Town limits along Hwy 221, Hwy 221 Alternate/74 Business, and SR 1153 (Edwards St.).

The [Gold Mile Trail](#) is a commemorative walking trail in downtown Rutherfordton dedicated to the town's legacy as the home of the first one-dollar gold coin minted in the United States. The Town of Rutherfordton was home to Christopher Bechtler who minted the first one-dollar gold coin approximately 17 years before the U.S. Mint minted their first one-dollar gold coin. The Gold Mile Trail is part of the 30-county [North Carolina Gold Trail](#) which is a heritage trail designed to educate visitors about the national influence of the state's gold rush that proceeded the California gold rush. The N.C. Gold Trail's headquarters is located in the Bechtler House Heritage Center, 130 W. 6th St., Rutherfordton.

The [Historic Downtown Walking Tour](#) in Rutherfordton features historic buildings and plaques with engraved quick response (QR) codes tour visitors may scan on their smart phones to bring up historical details. The Historic Downtown Walking Tour features the largest cluster of antebellum homes and public structures anywhere in the southern foothills of North Carolina.

The [Kid's Main Street Safari](#) is an activities-based trail for designed to encourage children of all ages to explore historic downtown Rutherfordton. This trail has games, tree

climbing, gold hunting and a search through a Civil War cemetery. The trail teaches children about history and nature along the way.

6.5.2 Recreation and Parks/Eco-Tourism

The Town of Rutherfordton's Parks and Recreation Department maintains four [municipal parks](#), detailed in Section [4.2.1](#): Crestview Park; Kiwanis Park, currently under reconstruction and facility amenity upgrades; 2nd Street Park; and Main St. Park. The Rutherfordton Clubhouse is the community center for the Town. Built in the mid-1930's, the Clubhouse building and grounds are programmed for a multi-phase renovation. The [Purple Martin Greenway](#) is a 2.1-mile, 10-foot wide paved greenway trail that connects to Crestview Park via a half-mile sidewalk and follows Cleghorn Creek north to Kiwanis Park. The [Thermal Belt Rail Trail](#) is a 13.5 mile, 12-foot wide multi-purpose recreational trail which runs from Spindale, through the east side of Rutherfordton, and north to Gilkey. The Town hosts several events throughout the year including: Annual Winter Rutherford Town Revitalization Fund Raiser; FAB Fest (Food, Art, Brews); July 4th Freedom Fest; Hilltop Fall Fest; Trick-or-Treat on Main Street; Salute to Rutherford County Veterans; and Christmas Parade.

The Town of Rutherfordton's municipal golf course was closed in 2018 and has been master-planned into the Norris Recreation Complex. At the time this Town Plan 2040 was being prepared, the Complex's facilities were still being formulated. Facilities in the draft master plan by Wirth & Associates, dated October 23, 2020, featured a large recreation center with an indoor swimming pool, a championship level disc golf course with advanced and intermediate tee pads, as well as a par-3 beginner layout, a 1.3-mile natural surface hiking/biking loop, a pump track, an indoor training facility, a playground and splash pad area and a restroom and picnic shelter. The Norris Recreation Complex draft master plan also featured a signature golf practice area with three par-3 holes, a 40-yard chipping area, a 4,500 SF putting green, driving cages, and a golf shelter and memorial. The Norris Recreation Complex will serve as the centerpiece of recreational offerings for the town for the next 20 years.

Although there are too many recreational parks and eco-tourism venues conveniently located outside Rutherfordton to list, a few of the larger amenities include the following.

The Cleghorn Golf and Sports Club at Tryon Resort, (formerly Cleghorn Plantation) is a private membership golf course located in a satellite portion of the Town of Rutherfordton's town limits approximately 4 miles south of Rutherfordton's main town limits.

Forest City's Pavilion on Park Square (POPS), completed in 2019, features a 2,000-seat amphitheater, two splash pads and a concession stand. POPS offers daily recreational activities as well as scheduled national entertainment performances, movie nights, festivals, yoga classes, and more.

The [Tryon International Equestrian Center](#) (TIEC) is located approximately 15 minutes from downtown Rutherfordton. TIEC offers first-class equestrian facilities and showcases numerous events. The equestrian center's on-site venue includes restaurants, shopping, lodging, and family entertainment; while additional off-site venues such as the Cleghorn

Gold and Sports Club, include the Cleghorn Gun Club and the Lodge on Lake Lure. The TIEC also offers non-equestrian entertainment events such as the Earl Scruggs Music Festival.

Chimney Rock State Park features hiking trails for all skill levels, views of Devil's Head, and a 404-foot waterfall, Hickory Nut Halls. Its most notable feature is a 315-foot granite monolith named Chimney Rock, which is accessible by elevator and provides views of the park and surrounding countryside.

Broad River Paddle Trail is a 41 mile, class I and II trail for canoes, kayaks and tubes.

Lake Lure offers boating, fishing and swimming. Lake Lure has lakeside and mountain-view homes, inns, cabins and resorts.

6.5.2.1 Automobile Touring (Motoring/Automobiling)

Opportunities include support for growth and expansion of existing business serving the motoring tourist with overnight and seasonal housing accommodations, base camp facilities, extended vehicle parking, outfitters, outpatient medical services, automotive services/repairs, and food/beverage services located within proximity to one another. The Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVHT) passes through Rutherfordton. The OVHT includes a hiking and [commemorative motor route](#) along US Hwy 221. The Blue Ridge Parkway is a National Parkway, noted for its scenic beauty. Access onto the multi-state parkway is convenient located approximately 50 miles west of Rutherfordton near Asheville and runs along the spine of the Blue Ridge mountain chain.

6.5.2.2 Bicycling and Hiking

Rutherfordton provides the following bicycling and hiking recreational amenities.

The [Purple Martin Greenway](#) is a 2.1-mile, 10-foot wide paved greenway trail that connects to Crestview Park via a half-mile sidewalk and follows Cleghorn Creek north to Kiwanis Park. The [Thermal Belt Rail Trail](#) is a 13.5 mile, 12-foot wide multi-purpose recreational trail which runs from Spindale, through the east side of Rutherfordton, and north to Gilkey. Three miles of the multi-state [Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail](#) (OVHT) passes through the Town of Rutherfordton. The Town of Rutherfordton has designated on-road bicycle routes throughout Town limits along Hwy 221, Hwy 221 Alternate/74 Business, and SR 1153 (Edwards St.).

6.5.2.3 Camping

Eleven campgrounds are convenient located within Rutherford County

- Four Paws Kingdom Campground, 335 Lazy Creek Dr., Rutherfordton
- River Creek Campground, 217 River Creek Dr., Rutherfordton
- Foothills Family Campground, 1661 Hogan Rd., Forest City
- Dogwood RV Camp, 695 Main St., Chimney Rock Village
- Hickory Nut Falls Family Campground, 639 Main St., Chimney Rock Village
- Hitching Post Campground, 620 Girls Camp Rd., Lake Lure
- Apple Valley Farm, Motorcoach Resort, 959 Buffalo Creed Rd., Lake Lure
- Rutherford Mountain Campground & RV Resort, 234 Otter Creek Rd., Union Mills
- Thermal City Gold Mine & Campground, 5240 U.S. Hwy 221 N, Union Mills

- Orchard Park, 957 Whitesides Rd., Forest City
- Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park Camp-Resort, 164 Girl Scout Camp Rd., Bostic

6.5.2.4 Equestrian Facilities

Seven horse facilities are conveniently located within Rutherford County

- Tryon Equine Services at a Hide Away Cabin, 3184 Polk County Line Rd., Rutherfordton
- Cedar Creek Stables, 542 Cedar Creek Rd., Lake Lure
- Riverside Riding Stables, 1325 Freeman Town Rd., Lake Lure
- Bed and Barn Farms, 661 Big Island Rd., Forest City
- Barefoot Farms, 350 Morningstar Lake Rd., Forest City
- Windridge Farms and Services, 882 Goodes Creek Church Rd., Ellenboro
- Squirrel's Nest Farm, 1811 Old Caroleen Rd., Forest City

The [Tryon International Equestrian Center](#) (TIEC) is located approximately 15 minutes from downtown Rutherfordton. TIEC offers first-class equestrian facilities and showcases numerous events. The equestrian center's on-site venue includes restaurants, shopping, lodging, and family entertainment.

6.5.2.5 Angling (Fishing)

Publicly-maintained fishing areas in and around Rutherfordton include:

- Broad River from Gray's Bridge to Coxe Rd. maintained by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NC WRC) maintains a gravel parking area for 5-6 vehicles. There is good put-in float location to Coxe Road Public Fishing Area.
- Lake Adger, maintained by the NC WRC
- Laughter Pond, maintained by Polk County.
- Lake Lure is a deep clear lake with depths over 100 feet. Both warm and cold-water species of fish inhabit Lake Lure, such as large mouth and small mouth bass, trout, bream/bluegills, crappie, perch, white bass, carp and several species of catfish.

6.5.2.6 Agritourism

The [Rutherford County](#) website provides a list and links to known agritourism venues throughout the County which include:

- The Hardscrabble Hollow Farm, located at 150 Rabbit Moffitt Rd., Rutherfordton
- The New Beginnings Historic Farm, located at 5370 US 64-74A, Rutherfordton
- The Possum Hollow Farm, located at 371 CC Lovelace Rd, Rutherfordton
- Goodness Farms, located at 434 Cherry Mountain St., Forest City
- Pangaea Plants, located at 1235 Conner Rd., Lake Lure
- The Zimmerwald Estate Barn and Grainery, located at 1001 Romey Campbell Rd, Ellenboro

6.6 Manufacturing

Leadership boards of local government, both municipal and county, traditionally feel an obligation to emphasize traditional manufacturing; however, traditional manufacturing may only be a small part of the future economy of Rutherfordton and most other small towns.

Technological innovation and globalism are fueling transformational change in both our cultural and business environments. An increasingly mobile workforce is utilizing digital, web-based technology – the ubiquitous ‘mobile app’ – that enables a business owner or employee to work from anywhere. Many jobs are no longer tied to a specific location. Anyone with a Smartphone and an idea can become an entrepreneur.

Opportunities for Rutherfordton in this new economic realm are directly related to the ‘quality of place’ issues that are explored throughout this Town Plan, particularly tourism, crafts, and other natural resource-based sectors described elsewhere in this Plan. When employers, innovators and entrepreneurs can choose to live and work anywhere, it is quality of place – in addition to the basics of infrastructure and support services – that is often the deciding factor.

Rutherfordton has the attributes to successfully compete in this age of global commerce. The Town can glean from other proven economic development strategies and build its foundation by retaining young talent and attracting innovators from the greater region and around the country.

Traditional manufacturing blends traditional manufacturing with forward thinking values of naturally sourced and locally produced materials to produce tangible goods for a value added industry.

While these traditional opportunities do exist, Rutherfordton must recognize there are also pitfalls to placing all hope on ‘traditional industry’ – a sector that may inevitably employ humans to manage facilities that are designed for a specific level and duration of productivity. The reality is that smaller facilities are often the disposable ones. Larger facilities require a larger investment and typically are considered long-term commitments.

In this context, Rutherfordton must recognize its place in the region and the country. The reality for Rutherfordton will require support for a “rural community plan”. Recognizing these realities and our need to look at new kinds of economies, such as the GIG Economy, the app-based economy and the shared economy, Rutherfordton can and will meet the future.

6.6.1 Economic Transformation

An increasingly mobile workforce is utilizing digital, web-based technology – the ubiquitous ‘mobile app’ – that enables a business owner or employee to work from anywhere.

The global pandemic COVID-19 that emerged in late 2019 led to many employees to remain home, at least temporarily, to help reduce the spread of the virus. Employees who were fortunate enough to remain employed while working from home replaced face-to-face meetings with computer-based meeting platforms, such as Zoom. As mentioned in an article entitled, [“What is the Future of Cities,”](#) appearing in NPR’s Planet Money on May 19, 2020, author Greg Rosalsky reported how some major companies signaled that

remote work from home is here to stay. The article quotes Harvard University professor Ed Glaeser, whom Rosalsky calls the leading scholar of urban economics, as saying that, at least in the short run, how large dense cities, having large employment centers, may suffer in the foreseeable future, while companies open small offices in more affordable lower-density mid-sized cities where employees may work remotely, once the pandemic is over.

Many jobs are no longer tied to a specific location. Anyone with a Smartphone and an idea can become an entrepreneur. As stated above, technological innovation and globalism are fueling transformational change in the cultural and business environment.

Opportunities for Rutherfordton in this new economic realm are directly related to the 'quality of place' issues that are explored throughout this Plan, while recognizing tourism, crafts, and other natural resource-based sectors. When employers, innovators and entrepreneurs can choose to live and work anywhere, it is quality of place – in addition to the basics of infrastructure and support services – that is often the deciding factor.

Rutherfordton has the attributes to successfully compete in this age of global commerce. The Town can glean from other proven economic development strategies and build its foundation by retaining young talent and attracting innovators from the greater region and around the country.

6.6.1.1 APP Based Economy

The 'app-based' economy isn't just creating a new digital platform for freelance work. It is spawning a host of new economic activity. For example, more than a million 'makers' sell jewelry, clothing, craft supplies and tools, and all manner of home goods and accessories through the online marketplace

6.6.1.2 SHARING (or SHARED) Economy

The well-known lodging website [Airbnb](#) and similar accommodation platforms such as [Love Home Swap](#) and [onefinestay](#) have close to a million 'hosts' in nearly 200 countries. [Uber](#) and [Lyft](#), two other mainstays in the emergent realm of 'crowd-based capitalism', are transforming how we think about transportation. Uber, which started with four people around a desk and two cars on the streets of San Francisco, is a global phenomenon, serving over six continents with well over 1,000,000 drivers.

6.6.1.3 GIG Economy

The GIG economy is part of a shifting cultural and business environment fueled by technological innovation and globalism. An increasingly mobile workforce is utilizing digital, web-based technology that enables employees to work from anywhere, so that jobs are no longer tied to a specific location. Companies such as Uber, Lyft, and AirBnB are examples of this emergent realm.

The workforce of this new 'gig' economy largely consists of freelance 'independent contractors' who can select among temporary jobs, referred to as 'gigs' (hence the term), and short-term projects from anywhere in the world. Likewise, employers can select the best individuals for specific projects from a 'global' labor pool and are no longer confined to any given area.

Opportunities for Rutherfordton in the GIG Economy are directly related to the speed and quality of digital connectivity and the 'quality of place' issues that are explored throughout this Plan.

6.7 Economic Development Opportunities

Several opportunities exist for Rutherfordton to re-establish a strong economic base. As detailed in section 6.5, Rutherfordton was named "[Outstanding Small Town of the Year](#)" in 2016 by the N.C. Rural Center in response to the town's successful marketing and promotional efforts. The award recognized Rutherfordton as a town that embraces citizen engagement, values diversity, fosters strong partnerships, employs innovative economic development projects and programs to foster an entrepreneur-friendly environment.

The following topics focus on first steps for advancing in the '21st Century'.

6.7.1 Innovation Districts

Innovation Districts are an outgrowth of the culture and technology driving today's economic transformation. Instead of focusing economic development efforts on isolated campuses or business parks, Innovation Districts focus on clustering start-ups and incubators in compact, amenity-rich areas (i.e., walkable downtowns, mixed use districts, etc.) where a mix of entrepreneurs work in collaborative spaces and share knowledge and resources (a staple of the 'Shared Economy'). Existing incentive programs would be paired with a partnership of 'innovation cultivators' – the companies, organizations, and other groups that support the growth of individuals, firms, and their ideas. They include incubators, small business and technology development centers, community colleges, local high schools, job training firms and others advancing specific skill sets for the innovation-driven economy. The initial focus should be a future downtown 'cluster' of businesses utilizing available properties, beginning with development of a single 'innovation space', or business incubator.

6.7.2 Home-based Businesses

Technological innovations make it imperative to re-examine and update zoning provisions that limit or prohibit work at home. The Town should analyze the content and impact of existing standards and specifications with an attitude toward implementation and enforcement that encourages entrepreneurship, creativity, and individual expression while protecting neighborhood residential character.

6.7.3 Small Business Incubator

The Town owns and operates a room within the Woodrow Jones Community Hall at 146 N. Main St. in downtown Rutherford named the "PO Box" ([Pop Up Opportunity Box](#)). The Town of Rutherfordton and Rutherford Town Rising partnered to create the PO Box to help grow our businesses and provide a free community space for small groups to work. The PO Box room includes a conference table, whiteboard, office supplies, Wi-Fi, a Wi-Fi printer/scanner, and a bookshelf of small business resources. Hall.

The Town should explore the necessary public-private partnerships and funding sources to plan and develop a business incubator downtown that provides more permanent spaces for new businesses in addition to the PO Box currently provides. The incubator's

mission would be to recruit, develop, and stimulate entrepreneurial talent in the region in order to foster economic growth, strengthen and diversify the local economy, and create new jobs. For example, a partnership-funded non-profit organization would lease (or own) a building that provides support services such as high-speed broadband, utilities, reception, and security, along with amenities like audio-visual equipment, conference rooms, and distance-learning capability. The PO Box provides a great solution for businesses that can still be portable by bringing in their files and leaving with their files, but a small business incubator setting would allow new businesses to leave their documents from day to day while renting space in the facility. Collaborative efforts with Isothermal Community College, McDowell Technical Community College, and/or Gardner-Webb University could offer support systems such as business plan and marketing strategy development, technical assistance, funding proposal preparation, and more.

In addition to discussion of small business incubators for adults, Rutherfordton has an existing and expanding hands-on maker space for children ages 11 and up, called [The Factory](#), an expanded division of [KidSenses](#). The Factory is currently located in the Woodrow Jones Community Hall in downtown Rutherfordton while a new facility is under construction. Tools such as 3-D printers, laser cutters, and a robotics laboratory are available for use with adult guides. The Factory encourage youth to become part of an environment where they can meet friends, share ideas, and invent.



A rendering of The Factory building from the website, KidSenses.org

6.7.4 Collaboration and Regional Partners

Economic development has been a major element of regional initiatives in recent years. All contain a host of economic development strategies to achieve the goals of job creation, talent retention, and entrepreneurship. The Town should take a leadership role in implementing those strategies that will help the community benefit from its world-class natural and cultural resources by tapping the technological potential of the 21st century economy, opening Rutherfordton and the region to the global marketplace.

[Rutherford Town Revitalization](#) (RTR) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that drives Rutherfordton's economic progress and prosperity. Working in partnership with the Town of Rutherfordton, businesses, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, and other agencies through the dedication of our board members and volunteers, RTR works to provide downtown businesses with the support and promotional assistance they need

to succeed and to help our Town flourish. RTR’s activities enrich our quality of life for our citizens and guests, promote economic development. Activities of RTR include:

- Administering façade grants;
- Assisting downtown merchants in historic preservation;
- Organizing, hosting, and promoting events and annual festivals;
- Providing professional training;
- Assisting in capital investments; and
- Marketing and promotion



In addition to area collaboration among adults, Rutherfordton also has two facilities that engage our community’s children, KidSenses Children’s InterACTIVE Museum and The Factory. Since opening in 2004, [KidSenses](#) has welcomed over 275,000 visitors to our 10,000 square-foot space, which features 12 different interactive exhibit areas, curriculum-based workshops for field trip groups, a 7,500 square foot children’s garden, and unique opportunities to stimulate the imagination and educate the mind. The concept of KidSenses began as one person’s dream, which, when shared with other creative minds in a very special community, grew and grew into a reality that has exceeded everyone’s expectations. KidSenses, located in downtown Rutherfordton, has interactive facilities and programs developed for children, ages infancy through 10.

[The Factory](#), developed for children ages 11 and up, is currently located in the Woodrow Jones Community Hall in downtown Rutherfordton while a new facility is under construction. The hands-on maker space provides tools such as 3-D printers, laser cutters, and a robotics laboratory. The Factory, an expanded division of KidSenses, encourage youth to become part of an environment where they can meet friends, share ideas, and invent.

6.8 Economic Development ***ACTION ITEMS!***

The economic development opportunities Rutherfordton enjoys clearly fit into three categories. These are described as “Immediate”, “Programmable” and “Opportunity”.

6.8.1 Immediate Action Items:

The following immediate action items should be prioritized to accomplish in earnest. These items are intended to begin producing immediate results and improve the personality of Rutherfordton as a community addressing its goals.

6.8.1.1 Eliminate obstacles to the goals set by the Town in this plan.

Clearly identify opportunities and obstacles within local zoning policies to encourage a destination area located within downtown. Ensure walkable options for visitors requiring flexible alternatives. Establish clear signage standards to alleviate clutter and establish fairness among businesses. Establish opportunistic standards for business types in manufacturing, commercial service, and home-based business sectors to stimulate opportunity while establishing specifications for development to protect these investments, neighborhoods and the environment as mutual benefactors. Standards and specifications must be evaluated to support additional action items below.

6.8.1.2 Promote Rutherfordton as a “base camp” for travelers.

Promotion of Rutherfordton as a host community and base camp for individuals and groups seeking access to a variety of food/beverage choices will clearly set Rutherfordton apart from other communities catering to these visitors.

6.8.1.3 Promote Rutherfordton as a location for modern manufacturing mated with a rural adventure lifestyle.

Promote Rutherfordton as a community for entrepreneurs of forward-thinking business enterprises seeking both a rural community and adventure lifestyle setting near urban amenities.

6.8.2 Programmable Action items:

The following programmable action items should be assigned to specific teams or departments to develop the ways and means to accomplish the tasks.

6.8.2.1 Maintain and periodically expand local way-finding signage.

The Town’s recently-installed way-finding signage helps guide visitors to civic, historical, educational and recreational amenities. Program annual budgets to maintain these signs and replace and expand these investments as needed.

6.8.2.2 Establish partnerships

Resources for collaboration and support of economic development initiatives are not always consolidated into one neat package. The resources in North Carolina flow into communities and regions through multiple agencies. Organizing strategic interagency partnerships and participating in effective ways often becomes cumbersome; therefore, identifying the best partnerships and managing effective relationships among those partnerships should be a defined responsibility of either the Town Administrator or Town Planning and Zoning Administrator.

The Town should explore the necessary public-private partnerships and funding sources to plan and develop a business incubator downtown. *(Also see sections 6.7.3 and 6.7.4 of this document for additional information.)*

6.8.3 Opportunity Based Action items:

The following opportunity-based action items will require continuous planning and forethought to recognize opportunities to act.

6.8.3.1 Support growth and expansion of eco-tourism businesses.

Support for growth and expansion of both existing and new businesses serving the motoring tourist with overnight and seasonal housing accommodations, RV camping, base camp facilities, extended vehicle parking, outfitters, outpatient medical services, automotive services/repairs, and food/beverage services located within close proximity to one another.

6.8.3.2 Establish criteria for financial participation in opportunities to expand the job and property tax base through strategic expansion of infrastructure.

Establish clear criteria for expansion of infrastructure (broadband, stormwater, potable water and sewer systems) based upon measurable benefits and a “return on investment” business model. Criteria should also include contingency factors for public health and welfare needs when potable water and sanitary sewer needs are critical.

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7. INFRASTRUCTURE

7.1 Water and Sewer Utility Systems

The Town of Rutherfordton obtains its water from the Broad River Water Authority ([BRWA](#)). The source of the public water supply is the Broad River which originates in the Blue Ridge Mountains of eastern Buncombe County, above Lake Lure, N.C., and flows southeast through Rutherford County. The Town of Rutherfordton has its own sewer system.

7.1.1 Water Supply

The source of the public water supply is the Broad River which originates in the Hickory Nut Gorge area, above Lake Lure, N.C., and flows southeast through Rutherford County. BRWA treatment capacity is 8 mgd and their average daily usage is approximately 5 mgd. The BRWA water treatment facility is located at 1661 Baber Road in Rutherfordton.

7.1.1.1 Water Supply Action Steps

The Town of Rutherfordton will continue to coordinate with BRWA on water facility upgrades and extensions when conducting future land use planning and when considering land use decisions. The Town will consult the [Future Land Use Map](#) appearing in Figure 8.4.1 to guide decisions about future infrastructure investments and other public services for Rutherfordton's future growth. The Town will refresh Rutherfordton by developing underutilized areas "close-in" first to redevelop strategic sites in existing underutilized locations where existing water infrastructure and location dynamics combine to support successful new investments.

7.1.2 Sewer Service

The Town of Rutherfordton has its own sewer system with a treatment capacity of 3 mgd and average daily usage of less than 1 mgd. All waste water operations, maintenance, and capital improvements are funded through the sewer fund which is also known as an "Enterprise Fund." The Fund is under a contract with United Water for collections and treatment operations, and a contract with Broad River Water Authority for billing, while the Town of Rutherfordton handles all maintenance and system expansion.

In addition to service within the town limits, the Town serves the industrial area north of Town near Broyhill Road and southwest of Town, north of Thunder Road and south along Coxe Road to Polk County. The sewer system service area has also been recently expanded to the Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC).

7.1.2.1 Waste-water Treatment Action Steps

The Town of Rutherfordton will continue to invest in the upkeep and repair of our sewer system through the Town's budgeting process and capital planning. As we move ahead, a systemwide asset inventory and management plan will need to be performed to assess all of the Town's infrastructure and to evaluate the need for replacement. This plan will drive the investments needed in the sewer system over the next decade that will have lasting impacts over the next century of operations. As stated in the FY 2018 Budget, regarding the Sewer Fund, Town Council has taken a proactive approach over the past five years to make the fund self-sufficient which allowed expansion of the service area to the Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC). The sewer fund will be used to

undertake significant maintenance and upgrades to the second half of the Clarifier and Chlorine chambers at the Waste Water Treatment Plan.

7.2 Transportation Network

Recognizing trends and how peoples' preferences can and do change over time will enable Rutherfordton to position itself as a welcoming community for multiple generations into the future. This approach to planning reinforces the community's desire to create a place where younger people will desire to locate and remain, while aging members will choose to age in place. This can be achieved by creating and sustaining a transportation system that is successful in meeting both the existing and anticipated needs of a diverse community that multiple generations will find attractive by including transportation options and choices that are safe, attractive and convenient.

One of the most common components of the transportation network and most visible characteristics of a neighborhood is the *street*, often taken for granted even though it can change everything about a neighborhood. The street strongly influences how people behave in their community. The following questions are presented to stimulate thoughts about neighborhood streets as an example of how important this simple concept is.

- Does the street have room to pass another car?
- Does the street have room for a visitor or emergency vehicle to park in front of a home or business?
- Does the street feature ditches or curbing for drainage?
- Does the street include sidewalks along its route?

The answers to these questions clearly define the character of the neighborhood, *for example*: neighborhood streets lined with ditches for storm-water conveyance will cause people to walk in the street just to visit a neighbor, or they may even give cause for residents to choose to drive a block away to visit that neighbor. By contrast, neighborhood streets containing curbing with sidewalks set back from the curb encourage people to spend time outside to walk or play together. Streets designed properly provide a place to learn to skate or ride a bike. The street with sidewalks becomes the neighborhood's central gathering place, where multiple generations of citizens associate in many ways. The properly designed street will change the characteristics of human behavior and contribute to improved and healthy lifestyles. How many times have you heard concerns about kids not getting enough exercise? Well, maybe our streets have not helped much with that problem. We can do better. We can improve the quality of neighborhoods in many ways.

Beyond the neighborhood street is a network of collector streets, often called arterials. These collector streets or arterials connect the neighborhood streets to the thoroughfares and highways that bring us all together. Streets also provide our principal connections to other modes such as airports and railroads. The following information about our transportation network and the actions we can take locally to improve how this network serves Rutherfordton's citizens and businesses will provide the foundation for many decisions facing the Town.

7.2.1 Roads and Highways

Existing major thoroughfares, as inventoried in the [Rutherford County Comprehensive Transportation Plan](#) (CTP), [Highway Map](#) within the Town of Rutherfordton include:

- US 221
- NC 74 Business
- NC 64 / NC 74 Alternate

Existing minor thoroughfares within the Town of Rutherfordton, include:

- SR 1166 (Ridgecrest St.)
- SR 1218 (Washington St)
- SR 2271 (Industrial Park Rd.)
- SR 2201 (Thunder Rd.)
- SR 2193 (Stonecutter Rd.)
- SR 2203 (Laurel Hill Dr)

SR 108 (Tryon Rd) enters Rutherfordton on the southwest side and terminates at S. Ridgecrest St. It is not identified on the CTP's Highway Map.

7.2.1.1 Road and Highway Specific Action Steps

The [Rutherford County Comprehensive Transportation Plan](#) (CTP), November 21, 2018, was prepared by the RPO as a joint effort between Rutherford County, the Towns Rutherfordton, Ellenboro, Forest City, Ruth, Bostic, Spindale, and the NCDOT. On December 6, 2017, the Town of Rutherfordton adopted its portion of the CTP.

Recommendations in the 2018 CTP's Highway Map include the US 221 Bypass, NC 64/NC 74 Alternate improvements, SR 2203 (Laurel Hill Dr.), and improvements identified as "Landfill Access." The US 221 Bypass has continued to advance forward and NCDOT has acquired most of the right-of-way along the route within the Town of Rutherfordton.

Another document, the [2019 Rutherfordton Action Plan](#), identifies key initiatives including Development of Commercial Corridors. Within that initiative, one of the Action Plan's goals related to that topic is to, "Ensure that the Town growth is not bypassed along with the construction new 221, this goal looks to ensure ways to have planned growth and development around the new road and to link the Town with new corridors to the roadway." The goal extends into more detail under the subheading "Guide Development Along New Entrances" and directs, "Look for ways to restructure and redevelop high traffic intersections and evaluate road diets in areas that the bypass alleviates traffic."

7.2.2 Railways

CSX rail lines pass through Rutherford County, but does not enter Rutherfordton, which provide a links to the Port of Wilmington, as well as to East Coast and Midwest US markets. This infrastructure is particularly important since there is no interstate highway in the County. The closest Amtrak passenger railroad station to Rutherfordton is approximately 98 miles south of Rutherfordton in Spartanburg, S.C.

7.2.2.1 Railway Specific Action Steps

While the *State Rail Plan* is not a financial or capital plan, it does provide a blueprint for potential future rail investments and priorities through 2040.

7.2.3 Aviation

Rutherford County Airport - Marchman Field (FQD) is located on 250 acres and has an average of 92 aircraft operations a day. The airport has a 5000 foot long runway at the low elevation of 1057 feet which offers the ability to serve all general aviation airplanes, except the largest corporate jets. Consequently, it is a valuable asset for business and tourist traffic. The Asheville Regional Airport is approximately 52 miles west of Rutherfordton and the Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport is approximately 52 miles southwest of Rutherfordton. Foothills Regional Airport and Hickory Regional Airport are approximately 53 miles northeast of Rutherfordton. The Charlotte Douglas International Airport is approximately 66 miles east of Rutherfordton.

7.2.3.1 Aviation Specific Action Steps

The Town of Rutherfordton will continue to cooperate with the County regarding planning assistance associated with the Rutherford County Airport – Marchman Field (FQD).

7.2.4 Bicycle and Pedestrian

On September 6, 2017, the Town of Rutherfordton, adopted [Connect Rutherfordton, Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan](#). Recommendations included adopting or modifying local ordinances to facilitate multi-modal transportation options making existing roadways safe and accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles. The formation of a Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee was encouraged in the Plan among other recommendations.

7.2.4.1 Bicycle Facilities

The Town of Rutherfordton has designated on-road bicycle routes throughout Town limits along Hwy 221, Hwy 221 Alternate/74 Business, and SR 1153 (Edwards St.). The Town currently has two multi-purpose trails. The [Purple Martin Greenway](#) is a 2.1-mile, 10-foot wide paved greenway trail. It connects to Crestview Park via a half-mile sidewalk and follows Cleghorn Creek north to Kiwanis Park. The greenway is a family friendly shady trail with access points to Cleghorn Creek and multiple picnic shelters. The trail is well used and is open to cyclists as well as pedestrians. Phase 5 is planned which will extend the trail north to connect to the Thermal Belt Trail in partnership with NCDOT as a part of the Hwy 221 Bypass project. The [Thermal Belt Rail Trail](#) is a 13.5 mile, 12-foot wide multi-purpose recreational trail which runs from Spindale, through the east side of Rutherfordton, and north to Gilkey.

The Rutherford County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP)'s [Bicycle Map](#), dated September 29, 2017, recommends improvements to Rutherfordton's bicycle route and recommends multi-use paths. Recommended projects in the CTP's Bicycle Map and the Bicycle Map in the Connect Rutherfordton Plan appear to have been coordinated with one another, as they were being finalized within the same month.

7.2.4.2 Pedestrian Facilities

The Town currently has two multi-purpose trails as detailed in Section 7.2.4.1. The [Purple Martin Greenway](#) is a 2.1-mile, 10-foot wide paved greenway trail that follows Cleghorn

Creek north to Kiwanis Park. The [Thermal Belt Rail Trail](#) is a 13.5 mile, 12-foot wide multi-purpose recreational trail which runs from Spindale, through the east side of Rutherfordton, and north to Gilkey.

The Rutherford County CTP's [Pedestrian Map](#), dated September 29, 2017, identifies existing sidewalks in Rutherfordton and recommends pedestrian route improvements. Although there are existing sidewalks within the Town of Rutherfordton, particularly in the downtown area, not all residential subdivisions have sidewalks. Recommended projects in the CTP's Pedestrian Map and the Pedestrian Map in the Connect Rutherfordton Plan appear to have been coordinated with one another, as they were also being finalized within the same month.

7.2.4.3 Bicycle and Pedestrian Specific Action Steps

Establish specifications for adequate street construction by developers for both bicycle and pedestrian safety. *(See sections 7.2.4.1, 7.2.4.2 and 8.5.1 of this document.)*

The [2019 Rutherfordton Action Plan](#), identifies key initiatives including Outdoor Recreation. The goal stated in the Action Plan extends into more detail under the subheading "Improve the walkability of the Town" and directs, "Implement the pedestrian master plan for the Town."

7.2.5 Transit Service

There is existing bus transportation, [Rutherford County Transit](#), that runs from Rutherfordton, through Spindale, and into Forest City.

7.2.5.1 Transit Service Specific Action Steps

The Town of Rutherfordton will continue to cooperate with the County regarding planning assistance associated with Rutherford County Transit.

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8. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

8.1 Analysis of Existing Land Use and Development Patterns – *Where to Begin!*

Rutherfordton has a strong well-defined existing land use pattern that immediately succeeds in conveying a historic small-town, yet progressive atmosphere. The downtown core area has a strong sense of place with its grid streets, one and two-story buildings built up to the sidewalks while the surrounding neighborhoods have retained their historic character. The downtown transitions well to the surrounding neighborhoods.

There is a wide variety of existing land uses in Downtown Rutherfordton which include, but are not limited to, government and professional offices, places of worship, medical offices, specialty retail shops, restaurants, a brewery, bars, lodging, parks, public plazas, and a children's museums. Rutherford Regional Medical Center is also located at the south side of downtown. Although downtown has a mix of uses, it lacks residential uses. Buildings along Main Street are one and two-story commercial structures from the turn of the 20th century with brick facades. A healthy percentage of buildings have either maintained their historic character or historic elements have sensitively replaced original elements that may have been lost. Even though the Rutherford Regional Medical Center is located along the fringe of the Study Area, it has influence over the growth and redevelopment of downtown Rutherfordton.

Outside of downtown, the northern half of the town is primarily single family detached homes, with exception of commercial uses at the corners of Main Street and Mountain and a few commercial uses on Hickory. Rutherfordton has less strip development than many towns its size or larger. The southeast portion of Rutherfordton includes existing employment and manufacturing land uses. Two main areas where existing strip commercial uses are located south side of downtown town along US 221 South, on the east side at all four corners of Main St. and Railroad.

8.2 The Plan - *What do we want our community to be? How do we get there?*

8.2.1 Housing Growth

Recognizing trends and how market dynamics can and do change will enable Rutherfordton to position itself as a welcoming community for multiple generations looking at buying or renting a home. This approach to planning reinforces the community's desire to create a place where younger people will desire to locate, while aging members will choose to remain. A community where both the new and existing home markets are attractive to future generations and allow for aging members of the community to remain in the community by offering a variety of housing products.

According to contemporary real estate experts, the "50+" real estate market is changing. In the next few years, Generation X will be joining the Boomers and Matures; serving the 50+ market will become a challenging puzzle for both communities and the real estate industry.

8.2.2 Commercial/non-residential Growth

As with the housing markets, ever changing trends in consumption, product development, technology and generational shifts in personal choices/values must be considered when making decisions about commercial and other non-residential growth. This approach to planning reinforces the community's desire to create a place where younger people will desire to locate, while aging members will choose to remain. A community, where traditional values accompany craftsmanship must embrace the presence of technology in everyday life, commerce, and business.

In order to grow commercial and non-residential offerings a community must create opportunities for success. The first step is to promote interest in both residents and visitors alike. By increasing the presence of people in commercial setting, the critical mass necessary for businesses to sustain themselves will ensure vibrancy as the tourism visitors flow into and through the community. To accomplish this, the local zoning ordinance in existence at the time of this plan adoption, must be repealed and replaced with development standards and specifications to promote refreshing internal growth.

8.3 Existing Land Use Issues – *Recognizing the Problems of our Past*

A plan, any plan, is only as good as the community's commitment to implement. While implementation strategies vary widely depending on the specific goals and objectives, many strategies will often include some form of incentive, motivation, criteria, or specifications for new growth, development and construction. Throughout various sections of this document there are descriptions of incentives and motivations offering opportunities for success; however, a plan can fail when the criteria and specifications are inconsistent with the plan. The following subsections describe the challenges Rutherfordton faces with policies in effect at the time of adoption of this plan. The discussion continues in sections 8.4 and 8.5 of this document with insight on recommended new approaches to refreshing Rutherfordton's economy and stimulating investment in Rutherfordton's future. These recommended policy changes are designed to achieve the goals, objectives, and successes noted and illustrated in this plan.

As a prelude to the discussion, Jonathan Coppage, a visiting senior fellow at the 'R Street Institute' researching urbanism and civil society posted an article challenging leadership to re-think how we administer and regulate development. The following excerpts are from his article posted by the American Planning Association October 20, 2016.

“Establishing by-right development and streamlining local permitting processes will allow developers to respond nimbly to market demands and will relieve the “guilty until proven innocent” status of new building development, which depresses construction starts across the country by delaying and inhibiting housing projects. What's more, adopting leaner codes would remove obstacles to the countless smaller developers and would-be builders who want to invest in strengthening their local communities, but currently can't afford to navigate the vast regulatory burdens and uncertain futures awaiting anyone who tries to build in America today. Trulia economist Ralph McLaughlin found that these regulatory delays may have an even bigger impact on housing production than zoning restrictions.”

“Main Street-style development — the “storefront on the first floor, apartments rented out above” style that forms the core of any older town's historic center — is a residential

building form that uses first-floor commercial space to serve community members and enliven a neighborhood. This low-rise density helps prop up the balance sheets of towns responsible for running utilities all the way out to suburban developments, as former city planner and engineer Charles Marohn [has repeatedly demonstrated](#). It also keeps a constant set of the “eyes on the street” that Jane Jacobs identified as necessary for safe streets; renters keep an ear out for burglars after business hours and shopkeepers keep the same at bay during the day. It is, in other words, the core of any successful town-building.”

8.3.1 Utility Policies at the Time of Plan Adoption

The Town of Rutherfordton obtains its water from the Broad River Water Authority ([BRWA](#)) while the Town of Rutherfordton has its own sewer system. Public water and sewer systems often provide the stimulus or “plant the seeds” for growth. Growth that is simply chasing utilities will result in higher rates for all rate payers and the resulting inefficiencies in other services will drive up taxes. The most effective way to keep tax and utility rates lower, increase the return on investment of the existing systems, and provide adequate revenue for the operations and maintenance of these systems is to be very deliberate in the extension of utilities. For the most part, the Future Land Use Map has been developed to focus redevelopment and new development of sufficient densities in areas where utilities already exist or are already programed to be extended.

8.3.2 Land Development and Construction Ordinances at the Time of Plan Adoption

“Land development” includes the installation of infrastructure as the first step toward new building construction. This phase of a project involves land planning that leads to civil engineering to establish the layout of roads and buildings. The criteria or specifications included in these ordinances should accomplish some basic objectives including:

- Ensure the purchaser or owner receives a safe and reliable building product,
- Ensure the state and federal mandates are satisfied to avoid penalties, and
- Ensure the result does not increase the burden on other tax and utility rate payers without deliberate determination that such increases are for the overall benefit of the community.

The following sections describe how ordinances in effect at the time of plan adoption are counter-productive to the objective set forth in this document. A recommended approach to replace these policies and ordinances is described in section 8.5 of this document.

8.3.2.1 Zoning Code

The current zoning code located in the Town of Rutherfordton Code of Ordinances, Part 1, Chapter 30, *Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)*, establishing criteria and specifications for new and existing development, evolved over time from an early state model ordinance. The State encouraged the adoption of their model to help communities begin their introduction into managing growth for the long-term benefit of the community. The intention was that local governments would continue to modernize these policies, and this would yield desired results from state shared funding (grants and loans) the State was providing to local governments. The State’s mistake was to accept zoning as a substitute for a town plan.

These ordinances were flawed from the onset because of some basic assumptions about important issues. In short, these policies did little to manage growth, but in fact have led many communities to “paint by numbers” in administering growth, development and construction. Local governments began to lead new growth with zoning rather than preparing a plan based upon what a community desired to become as it matured. This approach is the cause of animosity toward zoning. The role of the zoning ordinance should have been to ensure consistent criteria and specifications as new growth and development occurred.

The existing UDO establishes a pyramid of uses in the districts moving upward toward the presumed greatest use - the single-family home. This approach watered down business investments and lead to sporadic patterns where businesses are not in the least protected from the pressures of the single-family home-owner.

Mixed-use development, as it is commonly referred to today, can be and often is very beneficial when the location works, and the criteria and specifications are deliberate. However, the mixes of uses in the mid-twentieth century zoning pyramid to be effective in improving many towns when they omitted a critical step - the preparation of a master or area plan. And, “failing to plan is planning to fail” as many communities can now attest.

This approach can work well provided there is a commitment to areas where the investment in infrastructure has already been made. Growth beyond these areas only encourages abandonment while increasing cost to Rutherfordton’s tax and utility rate payers.

Policies that promote success of neighborhoods, businesses and civic uses alike are far more desirable to all persons involved who care about the future of the community and the preservation of the investments made by property owners in the community. This approach respects property rights in balance. The rights of the subject property owner, and the rights of the adjacent or nearby property owner such that all parties are treated respectfully. When some property owners lose for another one to gain, the development decision must not be particularly beneficial to the community. *(Also see section 8.5.1 of this document for additional information.)*

The new unified development ordinance (UDO), being prepared at the time of adoption of this plan, will address these objectives. Replacing the town’s antiquated zoning ordinance, adding specifications for land development which creates new streets and supporting infrastructure, and maintaining quality control over the implementation of these standards must be prioritized to protect property rights of all parties while creating common-sense opportunities that avoid growth and development failures in the future.

8.3.2.2 Subdivision Ordinance

As of the time this plan was prepared, specifications for the extension of streets and utilities to serve newly created lots exist in the Town of Rutherfordton Code of Ordinances, Part 1, Chapter 30, *Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)*; however, a new unified development ordinance, described in section 8.5 below, will be completed following plan adoption. The adoption of new standards will establish cost saving measures for the tax and utility rate payer for all new subdivisions. When new streets are

built properly, they last longer and are far less costly to maintain. These new streets must also be reported to the NCDOT upon completion to ensure the local share of the fuel tax collected from every motorist when they purchase fuel, will be returned to the Town. When these fuel taxes are returned each year, they can do more for the older streets where repairs may be warranted.

Subdivision criteria and specifications also improve utility performance and reduce cost to serve all rate payers. By establishing specific criteria for the location of lines we can reduce confusion and improve the effectiveness of future maintenance and repairs. Each utility is designated a specific location in or near the street.

8.3.2.3 Building Code

The Building Inspections Department of Rutherford County administers issuance of building permits and within the Town of Rutherfordton town limits using the North Carolina Building Code.

8.3.2.4 Floodplain Management

Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance regulates development that would occur within a floodplain. While this ordinance is in place, it mainly covers building specifications like elevation, and public infrastructure, such as sewers. The existing ordinance does not adequately address land use in floodplains. This ordinance is mandatory in order to be eligible for the National Flood Insurance Program administered by the federal government.

8.3.2.5 Storm-water Management and Watershed Protection

A small area within the northwest portion of the Town of Rutherfordton lies within a designated WS-IV Water Supply Watershed (Protected) and a small parcel in a satellite area southwest of Town limits lies within a designated WS-IV Water Supply Watershed (Critical) area. The new UDO will address land uses and use specifications, (i.e. lot size, coverage, etc.), and stream buffers within this sensitive area to comply with mandates of the State of North Carolina.

8.4 Future Land Use – *Where We’re Going Next!*

The exciting aspects of this plan are not captured by the issues we’ve faced or the problems we believe we have, but the opportunities we have before us. The opportunities to build upon our previous successes are the greatest asset the businesses and citizens of Rutherfordton possess. This plan recognizes those attributes, identifies the community stakeholders’ goals, and crafts a vision of our future. Along with the actions we must undertake to achieve the goals stated in this document, this plan provides the foundation for systematic decision-making by businesses, citizens, prospective investors in our community, and leadership at various levels.

Simply stated, the key to our success is to increase the population of the community by reasonable numbers in order to increase the economic activity to a level that will support the services we desire. The three groups to focus our energy on are as follows:

- Retain our young adults by creating the home-town they dream about.
- Attract newcomers by offering the dynamic small-town feel they seek.
- Encourage opportunities for our citizens to age-in-place through local options for senior living.

Creating an attractive atmosphere in Rutherfordton will contribute toward our efforts to attract young adults to return, to come home when they seek that long-term location to settle into. These same investments will attract the newcomers seeking a special small-town atmosphere with lifestyle opportunities they find attractive. When a community feels good about itself it shows and that will become its greatest attribute in attracting visitors who just want to be a part of it all. That's what successful towns do, they become special by taking deliberate steps toward that goal and they reap the rewards when they do it well.

The following "steps" provide guidance for implementing the recommendations of this plan. While they are not rigid in their order, their importance is unwavering to the future success of Rutherfordton in the 21st century.

8.4.1 Step 1: Refresh Rutherfordton by Developing Underutilized Areas "Close-in"

First

Focusing attention on strategic locations to bolster continued interest in downtown and enhance existing commercial development along corridors can boost investment by re-thinking development. Incentives to refresh and redevelop strategic sites in existing underutilized locations where existing infrastructure and location dynamics combine to support successful new investments will reinforce property values within these strategically important locations. Figure 8.4.1, **Future Land Use Map** depicts a pattern of development to accommodate a combination of residential, non-residential, and mixed-use growth and redevelopment. The map serves as the overall plan to guide decisions about future infrastructure investments and other public services for Rutherfordton's future growth. **Zoning changes are required by North Carolina statute to be made based upon both reasonableness and consistency with this plan.**

8.4.2 Step 2: Catalyst Areas

This Town Plan 2040 outlines two areas, shown in Figure 8.4.2.1, **Growth Opportunities**, labeled **Catalyst Area #1** and **Catalyst Area #2**.

8.4.2.1 Catalyst Area #1 – Town Core

Catalyst Area #1 – Town Core encompasses all of downtown Rutherfordton, extends northward to McBrayer Dr., extends southward to Park Lane, extends eastward toward Cleghorn St., and extends westward to Washington St. This is a general area and the boundaries shown on Figure 8.4.2.1 and described above should be considered general area that could be constricted or expanded as parcel lines or physical conditions are studied more closely. The downtown core area has a strong sense of place with its grid streets, one and two-story buildings built up to the sidewalks while the surrounding neighborhoods have retained their historic character. Although downtown has a mix of uses, it lacks residential uses.

Adding more residential choices and allowing higher residential density in the Town Core area is needed to stimulate second floor conversion of existing buildings along Main St. to residential uses. A balance will need to be achieved between allowing higher residential densities with higher aesthetic development standards to ensure infill buildings and redeveloped properties are designed so they relate architecturally in their massing and placement on parcels to surrounding historic buildings while they should also

be designed to reinforce the pedestrian scale at street level so they are comfortable to walk along their street level facades.

The core area of property within Catalyst Area #1 – Town Core , except for civic uses, should be encouraged to provide for new development, revitalization, reuse, and infill development in Rutherfordton’s core downtown. The development pattern in this area should integrate shops, restaurants, services, workplaces, civic, educational, and higher density housing in a compact, pedestrian-oriented environment. Catalyst Area #1 will serve as the hub of the surrounding neighborhoods and of the broader community. A broad array of uses should be allowed to enable the needs of residents and visitors to be met. Allowed building/lot types in this Catalyst Area #1 should include urban workplaces, shop-fronts, detached and attached houses, multi- family buildings, and civic buildings.

The periphery property within Catalyst Area #1 – Town Core should be encouraged to provide for the completion of residential neighborhoods in the residential area(s) surrounding the core area of the Catalyst Area #1 through in-fill development. This periphery area should be encouraged to allow gradual transformation of existing development to high quality mixed density residential development which is needed to support the central core of the Town. Higher density residential development allows a greater number of households to walk or bike, thus supporting businesses while reducing the parking demand and providing environmental and health benefits. Allowed building/lot types in the periphery with Catalyst Area #1 should be encouraged to include detached and attached houses, and multi-family buildings. Streets should be interconnected, with streets and sidewalks providing a connection from Rutherfordton’s core area and mixed-use developments to single-family residential areas surrounding Catalyst Area #1. A range of housing types should be encouraged within the periphery of Catalyst Area #1 with criteria for the mix of building types to establish compatibility.

This Catalyst Area #1 – Town Core should be the subject of subsequent development concept planning as soon as possible to provide site specific ideas and guidance to property owners, developers, businesses, citizens and leadership. Thoughtful planning to identify opportunities and illustrate concepts citizens and property owners may find feasible will provide a foundation for creative projects that will benefit the community while meeting the goals of growing the business community and improving the offerings in Rutherfordton.

8.4.2.2 Catalyst Area #2 – Northwest Area

Catalyst Area #2 – Northwest Area encompasses the intersection of W. Mountain St., Frady St., and N. Washington St. well as property surrounding his intersection for approximately three quarters of a mile in all directions. This is a general area and the boundaries shown on Figure 8.4.1, Future Land Use Map as Commercial.

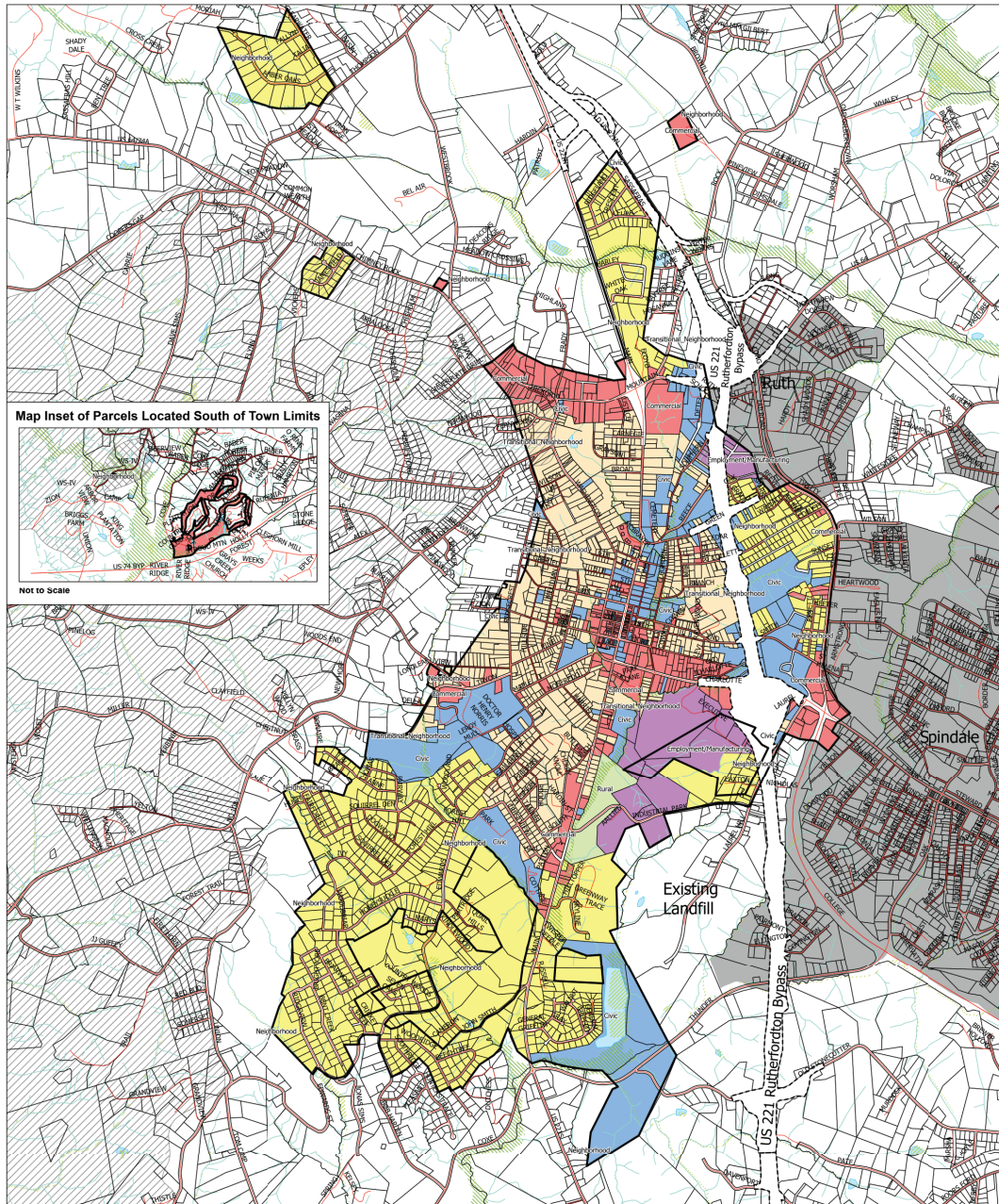
Existing commercial uses within this Catalyst Area #2 – Northwest Area, should be encouraged to provide opportunities for both compatible and sustainable re-development where underutilized commercial properties already exist as well as infill sites where site specific land planning of new development creates opportunities for businesses and various housing designs sharing community amenities and enhancements. Existing auto-oriented street, lot, and building designs can create uncomfortable pedestrian environments; however, with careful site planning these areas will allow a

greater number of residents to walk or bike to businesses and services with an interconnected network of streets and sidewalks. Catalyst Area #2 is expected to serve Rutherfordton residents as well as persons who travel from surrounding communities with a development pattern that acknowledges the role of the automobile, with parking and access provided to promote safety for the motoring public. Allowed building/lot types that should be encouraged in Catalyst Area #2 include highway commercial buildings, urban workplaces, shop-fronts, detached and attached houses, and multi-family buildings. Dominant uses in this Catalyst Area #2 should be residential, retail and office. Development standards should be prepared for this area that promote the creation of a pleasant pedestrian-friendly auto-oriented environment while enabling a compatible transition to uses in adjacent neighborhood districts. Since the western portion of property west of N. Washington St. lies within a WS-IV Water Supply Watershed (Protected) area, re-development and infill development must comply with the Watershed Water Supply Ordinance.

This Catalyst Area #2 – Northwest Area should be the subject of subsequent development concept planning as soon as possible to provide site specific ideas and guidance to property owners, developers, businesses, citizens, and leadership. Thoughtful planning to identify opportunities and illustrate concepts citizens and property owners may find feasible will provide a foundation for creative projects that will benefit the community while meeting the goals of growing the business community and improving the offerings in Rutherfordton.

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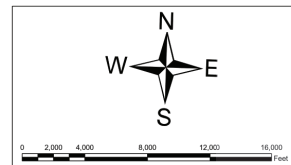
Figure 8.4.1 **Future Land Use Map**



Future Land Use Map - DRAFT

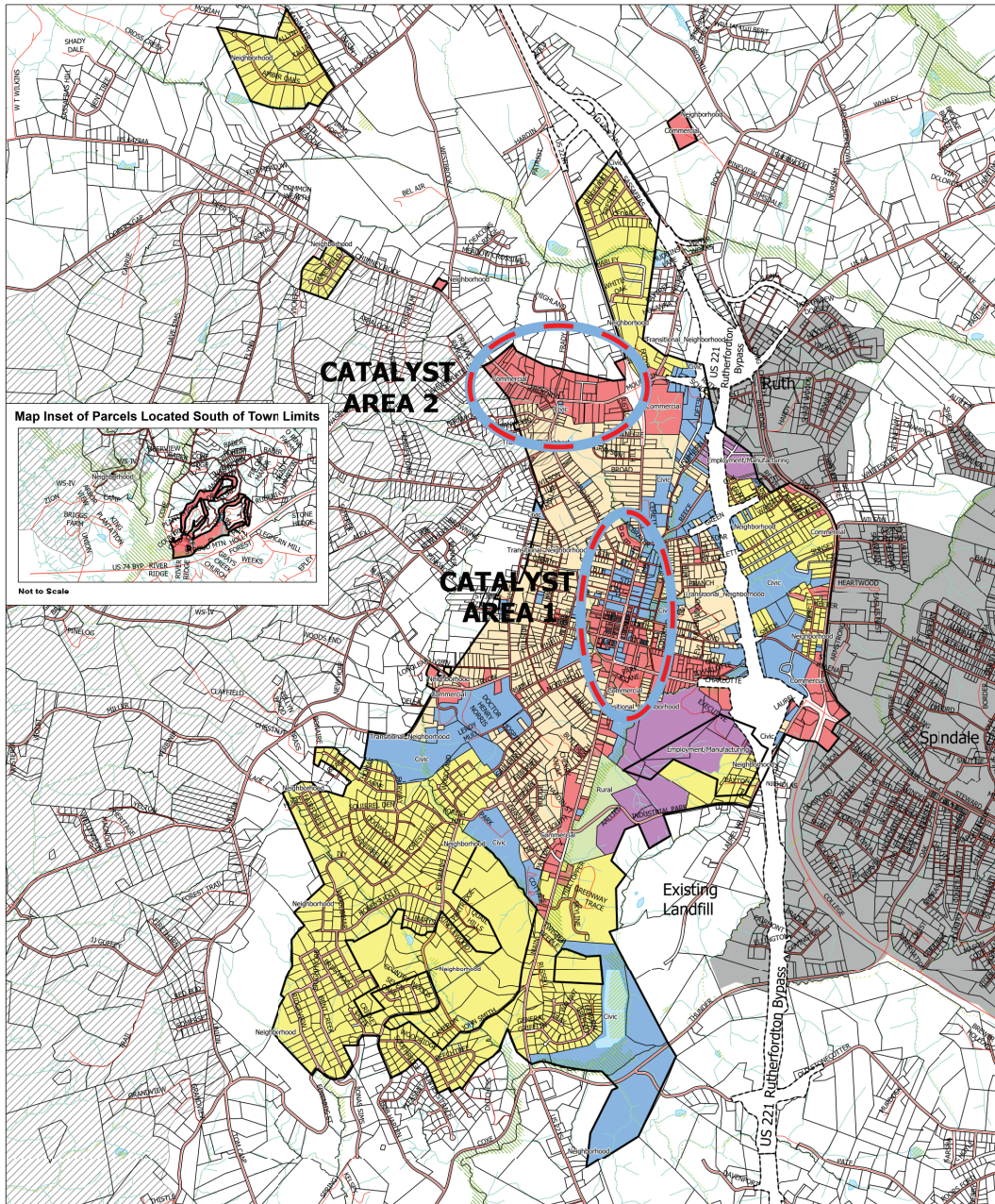
Rutherfordton, NC September 10, 2020

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Town Limits | Proposed US 221 Rutherfordton Bypass |
| Water / Rivers | Rural |
| Roadways | Neighborhood |
| Parcels | Town Center |
| 2018 Flood Zone | Transitional Neighborhood |
| Wetlands Identified by USFWS | Civic |
| Surrounding Municipal Jurisdictions | Commercial |
| WS-IV Water Supply Watershed (Protected) | Employment/Manufacturing |
| WS-IV Water Supply Watershed (Critical) | Mixed Use |



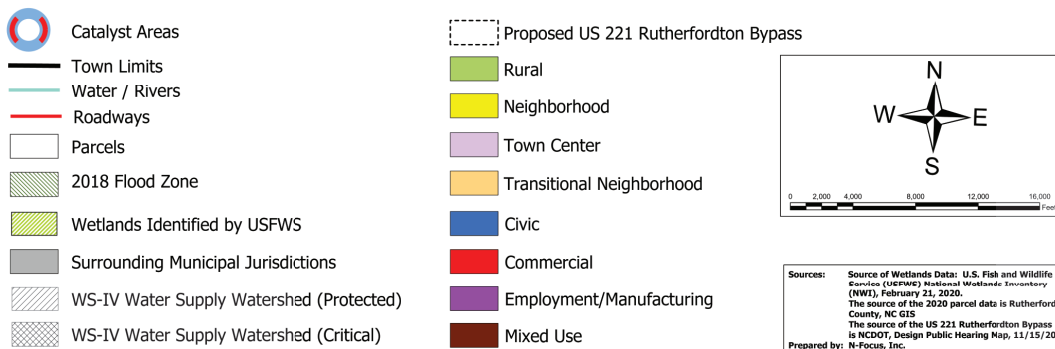
Sources: Source of Wetlands Data: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), February 21, 2020. The source of the 2020 parcel data is Rutherford County, NC GIS. The source of the US 221 Rutherfordton Bypass is NCDOT, Design Public Hearing Map, 11/15/2011. Prepared by: N-Focus, Inc.

Figure 8.4.2.1 **Growth Opportunities**



Growth Opportunities - DRAFT

Rutherfordton, NC September 10, 2020



8.4.3 Preservation and Conservation Areas

Given Rutherfordton's role in local governance in east-central Rutherford County, our most effective tools for preservation and conservation are the moderation of growth and expansion of our municipal services and the policies governing expansion of the systems we operate. By working together with our counterparts at the county level we can stimulate investments where warranted and discourage investments in areas that will not be good for either Rutherfordton or Rutherford County. This approach leaves these lands completely under the control of their elected Rutherford County officials. The only time Rutherfordton officials will be involved is when the topic of municipal service levels is explored.

8.4.4 Future Growth beyond the Town Limits

The outward expansion and growth of Rutherfordton must be guided by a combination of this plan and the information gathered when examining specific development plans and proposals in the future. This plan identifies known and projected growth areas on Figure 8.4.4 ***Rutherfordton Growth Opportunities*** to provide guidance to the businesses, citizens, Rutherfordton leadership, and others seeking to make important financial and/or policy decisions.

When considering growth and development proposals outside Rutherfordton's municipal limits, priority must first be given to the existing businesses and citizens, utility rate payers and property taxpayers. The following questions should be made a part of the formal consideration of request for annexation and extension of services, whether publicly or privately funded:

- Will the project contribute to the overall wellbeing of Rutherfordton's business and citizen well-being?
- Will the project contribute to the reduction of cost overall for services to current rate payers on the system?
- Will the project avoid the obligation of debt by the rate payer or taxpayer generated revenues in order to serve the project?

When these questions are answered by a resounding "yes", the project is likely worthy of further consideration; however, if not, the project should be avoided.

8.5 Re-thinking Rutherfordton's Zoning - A Common Sense Approach!

8.5.1 Planning, Zoning and Development – The Town 'Plans and Specs'

The traditional approach to land development ordinances in North Carolina was to adopt several different ordinances with individual topics based in the enabling legislation of the State. However, today provisions have been made to combine these varied ordinances into a single or unified development ordinance or UDO as they are commonly known. The UDO approach brings everything into one, albeit lengthy, ordinance with the benefits of consolidation eliminating the confusion over administration and procedure for the business or citizen undertaking a project. No longer would the applicant need to research separate ordinances to compile the criteria and specifications for their project. The

exceptions to this consolidation or unification remain the building code governing structural, mechanical, plumbing, and electrical standards plus certain state and federal mandates governing the environment.

Given the status of the Town's existing ordinances relating to growth and development, particularly following the 2019 and 2020 legislative sessions in North Carolina, the Town has contracted to prepare a new UDO consistent with this plan. The new UDO is being prepared nearly simultaneously with the preparation of this Town Plan 2040 both of which are scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2020.

Adoption of the new UDO will accomplish two primary objectives: to modernize the Town's criteria and specifications to meet current statutory requirements, and to make certain the criteria and specifications are designed to help Rutherfordton thrive once again.

This approach emphasizes the adopted plan and then seeks to achieve the goals of the plan. Tying the Town Plan to the UDO not only achieves statutory compliance but transforms the role of zoning from regulatory in nature into more of a set of criteria and specifications.

This *'plans and specs'* approach to town building improves the relationship of the Town with its businesses and citizens by establishing objectives, then administering the UDO to simply achieve those objectives. By using common sense policies to encourage re-use and reinvestment in Rutherfordton, the Town can reduce tax and utility rates as the plan is implemented. This approach benefits all Rutherfordton's businesses and citizens.

An article posted online at [RISMedia Daily e-News written by Suzanne De Vita](#) on November 3, 2016 discussing a report from the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) and PwC's, "[Emerging Trends in Real Estate® 2017](#)," analyzes trends-to-come in both the U.S and Canada housing markets. Ten "gateway" markets, as defined in the report—those with both a diverse economy and "niche" neighborhoods—will stand above the rest (It should be noted that the Raleigh-Durham market has been identified as the number 7 "gateway" market in the nation). The report highlights the importance of practical zoning standards and specifications to meet the needs in today's real estate market. Ms. Vita writes: *"Both on the investor side and the user side of the market, optionality—not just one use, not just one user, not just one user profile—may be gaining favor as a way to navigate the cross-currents of volatile markets,"* the report's authors state. *"Optionality from a user standpoint allows for the adjustment of space needs to vary in terms of size, location, and use on an as-needed basis."*

The trends discussed in the report point to a need for communities to be very deliberate in how they establish development related standards and specifications, including how they implement such non-conventional approaches to stimulating investment in the community.

As described in section 8.3.1.1 of this document, today's businesses seek "hot spots" for business location. This clustering of complementary businesses (i.e. shopping, dining, etc.) draws potential customers to locations where their interests or needs can be met. Location economists call this agglomeration. The benefit of agglomeration to the

customer is both improved choices and typically better pricing of goods and services. A simple example of this phenomenon can be seen in a portion of downtown Rutherfordton, where several personal services establishments (salons and barbershops) are located within proximity of one another.

The best remedy for Rutherfordton's existing underutilized commercial areas is to encourage re-use and re-development through new zoning criteria and specifications. This approach can work well provided there is a commitment to areas where the investment in infrastructure has already been made. Once the Town has reinvigorated these areas, then growth beyond the current Town Limits should be studied to determine benefits for the Town's businesses and citizens.

Policies that promote the success of neighborhoods, businesses and civic uses alike are far more desirable to all persons involved; promote a more viable future of the community; and preserve the investments made by property owners in the community. This approach respects property rights in balance: the rights of one property owner, the rights of the adjacent or nearby property owner(s), and the town-wide interests linked to a vibrant community.

Black's Law Dictionary defines 'property rights' as ***"The rights given to the person or persons who have a right to own the property through purchase or bequest. These are basic rights in any society though absolute right for a property is rare in any society."***

Law Dictionary: [What is PROPERTY RIGHTS? Definition of PROPERTY RIGHTS \(Black's Law Dictionary\)](#)

In North Carolina, and in most states, municipalities are created for the provision of services to the benefit of its businesses, citizens and property owners. The decision to reside in close proximity with others and to share in the provision of beneficial services provided by an organized local government defines the purpose of municipalities: 'to facilitate mutual benefits to those choosing to reside within a municipality'. Therefore, municipalities inherently seek to balance property rights for the mutual benefit of those affected by the actions of the individual. This compromise on the absoluteness of property rights is therefore an understanding that rules may be enacted for the benefit of the greater community. Simply stated, when adjacent property owners must lose something of value to them for another property owner to gain, then an action or decision by that individual must not be particularly beneficial to the community. These assumptions of mutual benefit, the foundation of a municipality or community, are the basis for the establishment of rules governing development and the up-keep of properties within a municipality.

The challenge becomes how well a community balances those rules with the protections of individual property rights, rather than to unreasonably suppress them.

A balanced and fair approach to the establishment of rules, standards and specifications must be the norm, not the exception. Focusing on the goals of the community rather than restricting a community out of fear or unwarranted bias must become the established culture and philosophy when making policy. The replacement of the current

ordinances governing land development with professionally administered innovative policies instills trust and support for the municipality while creating greater opportunity.

First and foremost, in the effort to invigorate Rutherfordton is the approach to new housing construction. This plan, and the new UDO, should address gaps in housing market product offerings and land development specifications appearing in the Town's ordinances. The new provisions must be adequate to accommodate these trends. Replacing the Town's antiquated zoning ordinance, adding specifications for land development (which creates new streets and supporting infrastructure), and maintaining quality control over the implementation of these standards, will be the priority. This approach will protect property rights of all parties while creating common-sense opportunities that avoid growth and development failures in the future. *(Also see section 8.2.1 of this document for additional information.)*

The Town's current water and sewer utility service areas that already extend beyond the Town Limits will require clear policies on connections to avoid falling victim to decisions that do not benefit property tax and utility rate payers. While the UDO will not apply to any property outside the Town Limits, it will apply to property voluntarily annexed into the Town to gain access to those utilities. In areas where voluntary annexation petitions would not be eligible at the time a request for connection is made, the Town should still obtain a petition by the property owner, binding on future owners, allowing the Town to proceed with annexation when the statutory criteria are met. *(See sections 8.3.1 and 8.5.4 of this document.)*

The following descriptions of districts or zones the new UDO should establish describe the character of the various neighborhoods and non-residential parts of Rutherfordton. These new districts should replace all existing districts and be accompanied by opportunity-driven district standards: opportunities for both growth and preservation of natural areas.

Careful consideration must be given when crafting the criteria and specifications for development to avoid as much non-conformity or "grandfathering" as possible. While some properties may not avoid a non-conforming (grandfather clause) status, it is very important to make as much existing development compliant as reasonably possible. This attempt should not be misguided into making fundamentally poor choices in drafting the UDO, nor should it fail to recognize the role of property maintenance rules.

8.5.1.1 Agriculture District

The Agriculture District (AG) is established to protect lands used for agricultural production, agriculturally based businesses and related activities. Farmland is a defining element of Rutherfordton's traditional identity and the protection of these lands aids in preserving the character of the Town until such time as new development is preferred by the Town. Listed uses are limited, with an emphasis on uses that are agricultural in nature. Development density is very low to encourage preservation of agricultural lands while discouraging large lot residential subdivision type development and excessive septic system utility. The Agriculture District can also be used to preserve open spaces.

8.5.1.2 Single Family Residential Districts

The Single-Family Residential Districts (SFR-1, SFR-2 and SFR-3) provide for the completion of existing residential neighborhoods and the development of new residential neighborhoods. Allowed building/lot types in the Single-Family Districts are Detached House. Listed uses are restricted to Single-Family, including duplex (two-family), homes and their accessory uses. Neighborhoods in these districts are the dominant land use in Rutherfordton and are a major element in defining the character of the community. Standards for the Single-Family Residential Districts promote that new development maintains the character of the community. The Single-Family Residential Districts permit the completion and conformity of conventional residential subdivisions already existing or approved in sketch plan form by the Town of Rutherfordton prior to the effective date of the new UDO.

8.5.1.3 Residential Main Street Transition District

The Residential Main Street Transition District (RMST) provides for the completion of residential neighborhoods in the residential area(s) surrounding the Main Street and contiguous Civic Districts through in-fill development. The intent of this district is to recognize that gradual transformation of existing development to high quality mixed density residential development is needed to support the central core of the Town. Higher density residential development allows a greater number of households to walk or bike, thus supporting businesses while reducing the parking demand and providing environmental and health benefits. Allowed building/lot types in these districts are the Detached House, Attached House, and Multi-family Building. Streets in the Residential Main Street Transition District should be interconnected, with streets and sidewalks providing a connection from Rutherfordton's Main Street and other mixed-use districts to the Single-Family Residential districts surrounding these neighborhoods. A range of housing types is encouraged. Criteria for the mix of building types establishes compatibility.

8.5.1.4 Main Street District

The Main Street District (MS) provides for new development, revitalization, reuse, and infill development in Rutherfordton's core downtown. A broad array of uses is listed to enable the needs of residents and visitors to be met. Allowed building/lot types in this district are Urban Workplace, Shop-front, Detached House, Attached House, Multi-family Building, and Civic Building. The development pattern seeks to integrate shops, restaurants, services, workplaces, civic, educational, and higher density housing in a compact, pedestrian-oriented environment. The Main Street District serves as the hub of the surrounding neighborhoods and of the broader community. The Main Street District may be expanded over time to meet the needs of the growing community for downtown facilities and services. Expansion of the Main Street District shall be contiguous and not separated from the primary district area.

8.5.1.5 Civic District

The Civic District (CIV) provides a location for educational, medical, governmental, religious, and other institutional uses. Large developments in the Civic District are encouraged to provide a master plan to the Town. Institutional uses in the Civic District are required to provide pedestrian connections on their campuses and, to the extent possible, develop an internal street system with structures fronting on the streets. Parking

should not be the dominant visible element of the campuses developed for institutional uses. Providing a unique district for civic uses will establish uniform standards.

8.5.1.6 Mixed Use Districts

The Mixed-Use Districts (MU-1 and MU-2) are established to provide opportunities for both compatible and sustainable re-development where underutilized commercial properties already exist as well as infill sites where site specific land planning of new development creates opportunities for businesses and various housing designs sharing community amenities and enhancements. Existing auto-oriented street, lot, and building designs can create uncomfortable pedestrian environments; however, with careful site planning these areas will allow a greater number of residents to walk or bike to businesses and services with an interconnected network of streets and sidewalks. Allowed building/lot types are Highway Commercial, Urban Workplace, Shop-front, Detached House, Attached House, and Multi-family. Dominant uses in this district are residential, retail and office. The Mixed-Use Districts are expected to serve Rutherfordton residents as well as persons who travel from surrounding communities. The development pattern in this district acknowledges the role of the automobile, with parking and access provided to promote safety for the motoring public. Development standards in the Mixed-Use Districts promote the creation of a pleasant pedestrian-friendly auto-oriented environment while enabling a compatible transition to uses in adjacent neighborhood districts.

8.5.1.7 US Highway 221 Commercial District

The US Highway 221 Commercial District (C-221) is established to provide opportunities for compatible, resilient and sustainable development along the US Highway 221 business route corridor. Development standards in the US Highway 221 Commercial District (C-221) acknowledge that the automobile is the primary mode of transportation. Development and design standards encourage pedestrian scale development along a secondary street network serving larger projects. Goals of the US Highway 221 Commercial District (C-221) include providing a pleasant calm environment for motorists, a safe environment for pedestrians within a network of streets and pedestrian facilities; promoting the safety of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians; and preserving the capacity of the transportation network outside the core area as shown in the Future Land Use Map. Uses in this district include commercial goods & services, employment, and some limited small-scale industrial. Allowed building/lot types include Highway Commercial, Urban Workplace, and Shop-front.

8.5.1.8 US Highway 74 Commercial District

The US Highway 74 Commercial District (C-74) is established to provide opportunities for compatible, resilient and sustainable development along the US Highway 74 corridor north of core area. Development standards in the US Highway 74 Commercial District (C-74) acknowledge that the automobile is the primary mode of transportation. Development and design standards encourage pedestrian scale development along a secondary street network serving larger projects. Goals of the US Highway 74 Commercial District (C-74) include providing a pleasant calm environment for motorists, a safe environment for pedestrians within a network of streets and pedestrian facilities; promoting the safety of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians; and preserving the capacity of the transportation network outside the core area as shown in the Future Land Use Map. Uses in this district include commercial goods & services, employment, and some

limited small-scale industrial. Allowed building/lot types include Highway Commercial, Urban Workplace, and Shop-front.

8.5.1.9 Vehicle Service and Repair District

The Vehicle Service and Repair District (VSR) is established to provide locations for specific uses that, due to their unique characteristics and importance to the community, and the traveling public, require different criteria and specifications than typical commercial development. Development standards in the Vehicle Service and Repair District acknowledge that the automobile is the primary mode of transportation in suburban communities and there is a vital need for such businesses to be located in close proximity to one another. Uses within the Vehicle Service and Repair District are buffered from adjacent uses. The dominant uses in this district are vehicle oriented and/or dependent and include vehicle-based services, vehicle repair shops and disabled vehicle storage areas. The Vehicle Service and Repair District is reserved for uses which require broad maneuvering spaces and avoid pedestrian interaction with potentially hazardous conditions. Goals of the Vehicle Service and Repair District include providing a pleasant environment for motorists, a safe environment for pedestrians along the network of streets and pedestrian facilities; promoting the safety of motorists and pedestrians; and preserving the capacity of Main Street and its interconnecting network of streets outside the core area as shown in the Future Land Use Map. Uses in this district include heavy commercial goods and services for motor vehicles, and some limited industrial. Allowed building/lot type is Highway Commercial.

8.5.1.10 Industrial District

The Industrial District (IND) is established to provide locations for industrial uses that, due to the scale of the buildings and/or the nature of the use, cannot be integrated into the community. Uses within the Industrial District are buffered from adjacent uses. The dominant uses in this district are manufacturing and warehouse storage. Small scale manufacturing and storage that is compatible with less intensive uses can and should be located in other non-residential or mixed-use districts. The Industrial District is reserved for uses which require very large buildings and/or large parking and loading facilities.

8.5.1.11 Traditional Neighborhood Development Overlay District

The Traditional Neighborhood Development Overlay District (TNDO) provides for the development of new neighborhoods and the revitalization or extension of existing neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are structured upon a fine network of interconnecting pedestrian-oriented streets and other public spaces. Traditional Neighborhood Developments (TND's) provide a mixture of housing types and prices, prominently sited civic or community building(s), stores/offices/workplaces, and churches to provide a balanced mix of activities. A Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) has a recognizable center and clearly defined edges; optimum size is a quarter mile from center to edge. A TND is urban in form, is typically an extension of the existing developed area of the Town and has an overall residential density of up to eleven (11) dwelling units per acre. TNDO districts should have a significant portion of land dedicated to improved open spaces, and reserve un-improved open spaces where environmentally sensitive areas are located.

8.5.1.12 Scenic Corridor Overlay District

The Scenic Corridor Overlay District (SCO) is established to protect the pastoral scenes and open spaces that provide a sense of arrival for residents and visitors traveling the major entrance roads and gateways to the Town. The pastoral scenes and undeveloped property along the entrance roads and gateways contribute significantly to Rutherfordton's community character and sense of place. The Scenic Corridor Overlay District provides development options for the owners of the property abutting the entrance roads and gateways. The goal of this district is to protect the scenic value of the corridors through a mix of incentives and development standards. These standards will preserve the suburban character of the Town by maintaining the sense of a suburban corridor in an urban environment; provide an aesthetically appealing experience for those traveling the corridor; provide multi-modal transportation options for travel; and promote a safe transportation corridor for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

8.5.1.13 Heavy Industry Overlay District

The Heavy Industry Overlay District (HIO) is established to protect all environments from the negative impacts of certain activities and types of development. It is the intent of this district to provide and permit certain public and private heavy industrial uses and facilities that incorporate hazardous materials and/or scientific technology, including wholesale, distribution, storage, processing, manufacturing and production. However, it is required that industries in this district take all necessary actions including but not limited to installation of apparatus and technological equipment available to prevent negative impacts on the environment and the community from the emissions of smoke, dust, fumes, noise and vibrations and other activities and/or products resulting from such hazardous industrial activities in accordance with federal, state and local regulations.

8.5.1.14 Mini Farm Overlay District

The Mini Farm Overlay District (MFO) permits buildings to be grouped on a site, parcel, or property in order to optimize the use of land and resources for both residential and agricultural purposes. By clustering development at a density no greater than one unit per developed acre, projects developed in accordance with these standards can obtain density bonuses while preserving unique natural features for agricultural use. The Mini Farm Overlay District mandates the dedication of both agricultural land and open space with density bonuses provided as an incentive for adhering to the standards. It is the intent of this district to be used for new development in undeveloped outlying areas of the Town and its extraterritorial jurisdiction. Allowed building/lot type is Detached House.

8.5.1.15 Manufactured Home Overlay District

The Manufactured Home Overlay District (MH) is established to protect the standard of living and neighborhood conditions. Established standards that will enable the use of innovative manufactured homes with a higher aesthetic standard will invigorate these communities. Non-conforming manufactured home parks that have not received approval for continuation would be amortized over a period of time to allow the owner/operator to meet reasonable financial payback expectations in accordance with accepted practices in North Carolina. Existing parks could be limited to less fundamental standards and specifications, while new parks are required to meet a higher standard. These parks may be ideally suited for alternative designs such as Tiny House, Park Model and other styles of housing where installation standards are considered temporary. The

overlay could be expanded to apply to permanent installations of innovative manufactured housing in subdivisions or parks in accordance with G.S. 160D-909.

8.5.2 Development Agreements

Accommodating current and projected trends require a partnership of land development and real estate industries with local government leadership. Shifts in social values, particularly among different age groups, indicate a strong propensity to consume goods and services in vastly different ways than prior years. In order to meet the expectations of what consumers' desire, land development will need to change the way it has been functioning since the 1970's. No longer do people rely solely upon the personal automobile for their daily needs. Today, generations young and old are finding new means of sharing within their daily lives as described in sections 3.6, 6.4 and 8.2 of this document. Therefore, local governments must find new ways to manage growth that is inclusive of a diverse and expectant population, development agreements are a new tool for local governments that many find effective in accomplishing new concepts.

Development agreements are a relatively new addition to the local government toolbox that has been recently modified to improve the way development specifications are established for a property. Having been authorized by the North Carolina legislature over a decade ago for the purpose of addressing larger phased developments and the need to hold entitlement to land development approvals for extended periods of time, the development agreement has opened a new avenue to creative design and town building. Section 19 of Session Law 2015-246 amended the statutes to remove the minimum size and maximum term of agreements. The changes effectively opened the window of opportunity just in time to create enormous flexibility in how new land development projects could be structured.

Today, development agreements offer a developer, landowner and the Town the ability to structure common sense approaches to projects that protect property rights and enable effective approvals and administration of projects when all sides agree. Ideally, the development agreement will not be used unwisely by local governments but will be utilized to offer higher degrees of trust. Trust, in the form of stability, eliminates concern that changes in elected local leadership will impact how a project progresses from start to finish.

The development agreement cannot substitute standards and specifications for development but can offer two substantial benefits: it can establish opportunities for participation by the local government and it can freeze zoning standards in place for the life of the agreement.

8.5.3 Ordinance Administration

The administration of the new Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) consistent with this plan must be performed by experienced professionals to ensure protection of the rights of businesses and citizens. Such fair and unbiased administration must be proactive and seek to help these businesses and citizens achieve the successes they may seek that are consistent with both the adopted Town Plan and the UDO.

Proactive administration includes:

- Assisting businesses and citizens inquiring about their proposal and how their ideas fit into the comprehensive plan.
- Ensuring all inquiries enjoy all the privileges of the UDO.
- Providing accurate and prompt information to enable the business or citizen to rely on the information in making very important decisions.
- Identifying invalid permits and determining how to administer.
- Identifying non-conforming uses (showing on map), sending letters to describe how property rights will be preserved and limits on changes to the non-conforming use.
- Meeting with Rutherford County Building Inspections department to establish protocol for future projects.
- Preparing a guide on the “Table of Permitted Uses” to describe 1) why so extensive, 2) why include unwanted uses, and 3) how to use.
- Providing customer service functions to include Town of Rutherfordton’s Planning and Zoning Administrator administering final Certificate of Occupancy (CO) following all inspections by appropriate Town staff and County Building Inspections.

8.5.4 Water and Sewer Utility Extension and Service Policy

The Town’s current infrastructure service areas that already extend beyond the Town Limits will require clear policies on connections to avoid falling victim to decisions that do not benefit property tax and utility rate payers. Updating these extension and service policies should clarify both requirements and incentives for property owners. *(See section 8.3.1 and 8.5.1 of this document.)*

Rutherford County and the Town of Rutherfordton’s current sewer and water extension practices for new development require that access to these utilities be dependent upon the development site being incorporated within the Town limits. Therefore, any and all proposed development within Rutherfordton’s extraterritorial jurisdiction requiring water and sewer access must be accompanied by a petition for voluntary annexation.

While the Rutherfordton’s Development Ordinance (UDO) will not apply to any property outside the Town’s jurisdiction, it will apply to property annexed into the Town to gain access to those utilities. In areas where voluntary annexation petitions would not be eligible at the time a request for connection is made, the Town should still require a petition by the property owner that is binding on future owners allowing the Town to proceed with annexation when the statutory criteria is met.

8.5.5 Stormwater Utility – An Innovative Alternative to Reduce Development Costs

Another way to improve the financial attractiveness of Rutherfordton for new investment seizes an opportunity still in its infancy among municipalities. This approach should be considered when and if the need is deemed either beneficial to the community or mandated by the State and/or federal agencies responsible for water quality. Under State and federal stormwater rules emerging across North Carolina, local governments are often tasked with either requiring new development to install stormwater facilities (BMP’s) or requiring existing property owners of larger development to begin retrofitting

stormwater BMP's in areas that were developed prior to certain years, or both. These rules promulgated by the State and federal agencies mandate local governments to restore natural pre-development flow conditions measured in both quality and quantity when new development is approved. These requirements are very costly and often impact development feasibility in significant ways.

An innovative new alternative to these expansive (and expensive) development requirements is to approach this mandate with a new municipal utility service created in part to finance the installation and maintenance of the required retrofits and to meet the needs of both new development and re-development with common-sense solutions. With a public utility, developers can not only enjoy reduced costs up front, but localities can enjoy enhanced tax base resulting in lower taxes throughout the jurisdiction when compared to the impact upon the pattern of development the traditional alternative of individual on-site BMP's create.

A Municipal Stormwater Management (MSM) Utility comprehensively addresses the stormwater management needs for local governments by providing such services as a municipal function. If new development projects can utilize a municipal system, the cost of development can be reduced dramatically. Traditional on-site stormwater facilities are costly and consume a certain amount of land area that may be better suited for something other than a basin, constructed wetland, or rain garden. By centralizing the treatment of municipal non-point source pollution, the taxpayers' risk and exposure can be reduced, while offering reduced up-front cost to the developer. This logical approach stems from the fact that the ultimate responsibility for all new development resides with the local government issuing the permits for the new construction.

An MSM District in Rutherfordton could ultimately collect a fee from owners within the service area of an MSM District on an annual basis to address ongoing debt service, operations and maintenance. The fee funds both local and regional programs designed to protect and manage water quality and quantity by controlling the level of pollutants in stormwater runoff, and the quantity and rate of stormwater received and conveyed by structural and natural stormwater and drainage systems of all types. Properties not located within the MSM District would not be subject to the fee.

The activities funded by the utility's collections include repair and replacement of BMP's, drainage improvements in various neighborhoods, and as a portion of the funding mechanism for "complete streets" renovations relating to town-owned streets and roadways.

The improvements in the Municipal Stormwater Management District will reduce upland flooding events, improve drainage in the Main Street area, and address density-related corridor concerns. Targeting site-specific projects with an eye toward containing costs, addressing overall drainage improvements in a regional manner, these devices will replace outdated or malfunctioning engineered devices associated with Main Street businesses. Replacing them with regional BMP's will holistically address the stormwater-related nutrient management goals set forth in State and federal rules while creating new opportunities to develop infill projects in the core area.

Relocation of BMP facilities away from the built-environment and creating regional, efficient public amenities reduces cost by concentrating the facilities into centralized single locations in each sub-basin. Maintenance expenses are decreased by reducing the number of sites the Town staff will have to monitor. BMP performance is enhanced during low-flow conditions, and the actual sites where the devices are installed can anchor parks as a water amenity.

Planning Board Approved

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9. BLUEPRINT FOR RUTHERFORDTON - SUMMARY AND PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

9.1 Summary

The responsibility to implement this plan lies with the Town of Rutherfordton's Town Council. Through its leadership, this plan will serve as the blueprint for refreshing revitalizing growth. The core area of Rutherfordton will be strengthened, opportunity for economic success will be established, and the foundation for decision making will be provided.

The tasks associated with implementation will require a steady long-term focus on achieving goals. To identify and prioritize the many tasks associated with implementation of this plan, the following table illustrates which steps to take when, and who should be responsible. These tasks are accompanied by a range of costs for overall budgeting. Seeking partnerships to share in the risk and the reward of joint ventures will improve the success and reduce the cost to the businesses and citizens of Rutherfordton.

9.2 Actions to Implement Town Plan 2040

The information appearing in the Action Items Table 9.2, ***Blueprint for Rutherfordton: Actions to Implement Town Plan 2040*** provides a quick reference guide format for the ultimate prioritization of the actions and recommendations of this plan.

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Table 9.2 BLUEPRINT FOR RUTHERFORDTON: Actions to Implement Town Plan 2040

Check-off		Adopted _____ by the Town Council & Recommended by the Planning Board November 12, 2020	Target year	Plan Reference(s)	Notes	Responsible group
ROUND 1 <i>Getting our house in order!</i>						
	A	Adopt new Unified Development (Zoning & Subdivision) Ordinance (UDO) to improve redevelopment options.	2020	5.2.1, 5.2.3.3, 5.2.6.1, 5.2.6.2, 8.3.2.5, 8.5.1		Planning Town Council
	B	Adopt up-zoning of strategic properties in core and key locations to add residential choices, mixed-uses and commercial development.	2020	5.2.1, 5.2.3.2, 5.2.6.2, 6.8.1.1, 8.4.2.1		Planning Town Council
	C	Prepare development concepts plans for Catalyst Area #1 – Town Core to provide site specific ideas and guidance to property owners, developers, businesses and leadership.	2021	8.4.2.1		Planning
	D	Prepare development concepts plans for Catalyst Area #2 – Northwest Area to provide site specific ideas and guidance to property owners, developers, businesses and leadership.	2021	8.4.2.2		Planning
ROUND 2 <i>Reintroducing Rutherfordton to the world</i>						
	A	Continue expansion of successful way-finding signage to direct people back and forth from Rutherfordton Regional Medical Center and downtown, and budget for new signs to be in place when new Rutherfordton Bypass (US 221) is opened.	ongoing	5.2.3.2, 6.8.2.1		Administration Public Works
	B	Keep social media updated to provide current information to the public.	ongoing	5.1.2, 5.2.5.3		Administration
ROUND 3 <i>Bringing a vibrant atmosphere to downtown</i>						
	A	Encourage development of new residential products in and around core area	ongoing	8.4.2.1		Planning
	B	Adopt standards and specifications that attract new businesses within downtown with higher development and code enforcement standards to assure quality development.	2020	5.2.3.2, 8.4.2.1		Planning Town Council
ROUND 4 <i>Expanding Rutherfordton's contribution to the region to benefit our local businesses</i>						
	A	Adopt a new UDO with standards and specifications that respond to challenges associated with expanding and attracting local-craft businesses to foster growth.	2020	5.2.2, 5.2.2.1, 5.2.6		Planning Town Council