GASTONIA**2050**
Comprehensive Plan
Draft 9.03.25

GASTONIA
NC

The Gastonia 2050 Comprehensive Plan represents the joint efforts of the City Council, Planning Commission, the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Group and members of ten Focus Groups, (see Acknowledgements next page). Coordination and facilitation of meetings, both public and administrative, were guided by City Planning Staff, who were also instrumental in vetting strategies and reviewing the work that went into compiling this Document. Finally, the consultant team constituted a progressive group of thinkers and practitioners in the design of economically and socially successful communities, and the preservation of natural environments and public open spaces.

The Gastonia 2050 Comprehensive Plan rests on a compilation of background reports and technical information pertaining to the Study Area (see Future Placed Based Map page XX). Opportunities and constraints were gathered over a five-month process of public and private workshops as well as from previous studies and existing data provided by the City and the various agencies and organizations that constituted the ten Focus Groups. The information forms the foundation for the planning and policy initiatives presented herein.

The Gastonia 2050 Comprehensive Plan's planning and policy initiatives are summarized by The Vision, Outcomes, and Tasks contained within the Document. These identify the key issues and factors influencing the importance of each as the needs of the Community evolve over the next 25 years. It is not intended to be a full analysis of issues raised by the narratives provided, but rather a summary of how each element of "place making" can properly support the agreed upon "Vision" to provide the City, landowners, and residents a guide for how to zone, invest, and build in the years to come.

As such, this Comprehensive Plan should be understood as setting the stage for a robust and more detailed effort to follow with greater public input and technical assessments as soon as practically possible. By adopting the "Vision" the City will be able to guide with purpose future planning and policy actions to positively impact the development of Gastonia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CITY LEADERSHIP

City Council:

- Mayor Richard Franks
- Demetrios Koutsoupias – Ward 1
- Mayor Pro-Tem Dave Kirlin – Ward 2
- James Gallagher – Ward 3
- Cheryl L. Littlejohn – Ward 4
- Jennifer M. Stepp – Ward 5
- Donyel Barber – Ward 6
- Charles Odem - Former Ward 4 Member

City Management
- City Manager - Michael Peoples
- Asst. City Manager - Quentin McPhatter
- Asst. City Manager - Adrian Miller
- Asst. City Manager - Brian Potocki

Planning Commission:

- Chair Kristie Ferguson – At large
- Vice-Chair Chad Ghorley – Ward 1
- Glenn Silverman – Ward 2
- Jeff Howe – Ward 3
- Carl Harris Sr. – Ward 4
- Julie Ann Coffey – Ward 5
- Megan M. Chapman – Ward 6
- David Wilson - At large #2
- Anthony Gallant – Former at large #2

ADVISORY GROUP

- Kristie Ferguson, Planning Comm. Chair

- Bill Marino, Bethesda Oaks HOA
- Steve D'Avria, Gaston Business Association (GBA)
- Kaitlyn Peeler, Historic District Commision Member
- Carl Harris, Highland Neighborhood Association / Planning Commission
- Bessie Harvey, Gaston County Schools
- Jim Morasso, Economic Developer, Downtown Business Owner
- Kevin Wilson, Gaston County Family YMCA
- Tiffany Wylie, Nolen Farms HOA Member
- Shaun Jones, Resident, Realtor, Former BOA Member
- Jane Love, Carolina Thread Trail.
- Eric Riley, Local Construction/Builder, County Resident
- Eric Clay, MECA Development.
- Angelica Mejia, Community Development Board Member, Resident
- Brian Levy, Resident, Bank of America.
- Tony Giacobbe, Resident, Retired GC Schools Teacher
- Stephen Crane, Our Neighbors, Inc (Affordable Housing)

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

Planning Department

- Planning Director - Sushil Nepal
- Asst. Planning Director - Joe Gates
- Senior Planner - Madison Gates
- Senior Planner - Jordan Tubbs
- Julia Baker-Granata - GIS Specialist

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Transportation

- Director of Transportation (City of Gastonia) – Randi Gates
- Principal Transportation Planner/ GCLMPO Administrator – Tori Dellinger;
- Senior Planner (GCL MPO/City of Gastonia) – Julio Paredes
- Senior Planner (GCL MPO/City of Gastonia) – Makenna Sturgis;
- Senior Planner (Gaston County) – Juan Garcia

Public Works, Dev. Services & Utilities

- Assistant City Manager – Brian Potocki
- Assistant Director of Utilities – Stephanie Scheringer
- Public Works Director – Dale Denton
- Two Rivers Utilities Engineering Manager – Jason Wallace
- Assistant Public Works Director – Robert Cloninger
- Solid Waste Manager – Allison Brockman
- Stormwater Administrator – Danon Lawson
- Director of Engineering – Tucker Johnson
- City Engineer – Keith Lineberger

Public Schools

- Assistant Superintendent for Operations (Gaston County Schools) – Bessie Harvey

Public Safety (FIRE)

- Fire Chief – Phil Welch
- Fire Marshal – Chris Stowe
- Assistant Fire Marshal – Terry Revis
- Deputy Fire Chief – Brad Best
- Assistant Fire Chief – Matt Young

Public Safety (POLICE)

- Police Chief – Trent Conard

Economic Development

- Economic Development Director – Kristy Crisp
- Senior Vice President (Gaston Business Association) – Steve D'Avria
- EDC Executive Director (Gaston County) – Donny Hicks

Affordable Housing

- Housing and Neighborhoods Director – Danette Dye

Parks & Rec / Greenways

- P&R Director – Tripp White
- P&R Assistant Director – Ryan Resendez
- Senior Administrative Coordinator – Andy Stahr
- Assistant City Engineer – Alex DeLong

Gaston County

- Planning Director (Gaston County) – Jamie Kanburoglu
- Senior Planner (Gaston County) – Juan Garcia

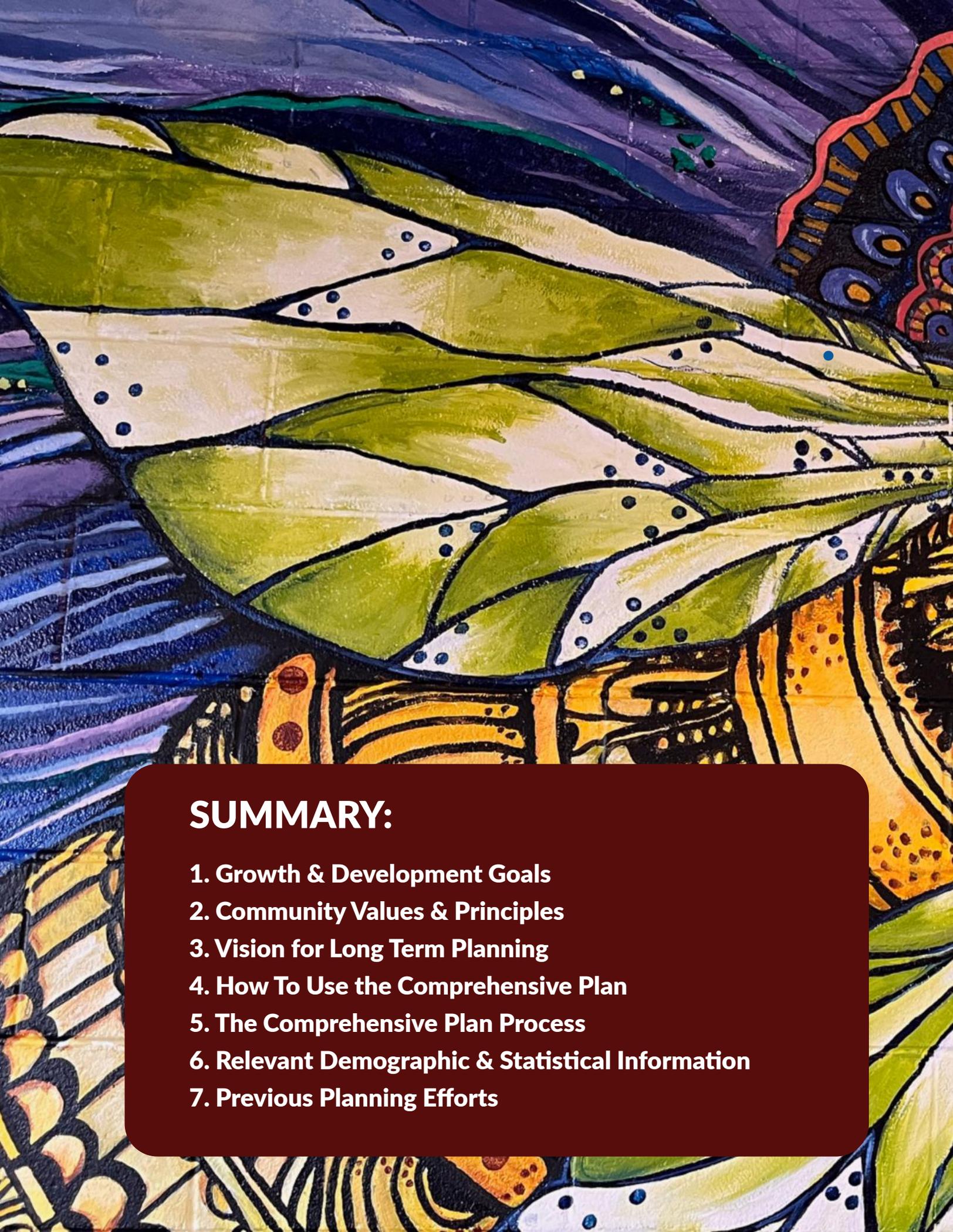## Planning Consultants

- Metrocology
- TownStudio

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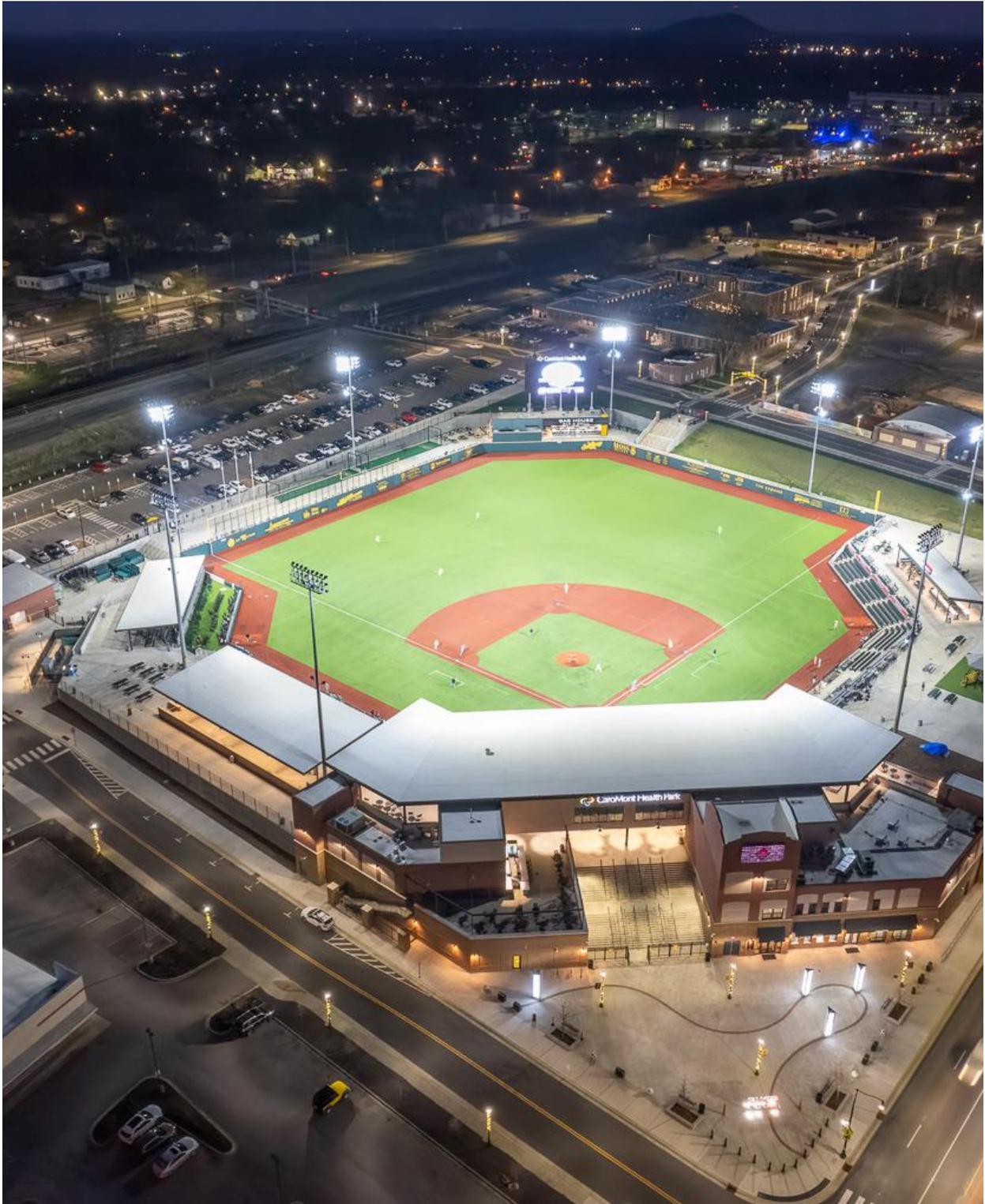
INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A Comprehensive Plan is a formal planning document adopted by resolution to provide aspirational and strategic continuity across time; and to support successive public bodies with a shared community vision. When properly adhered to a Comprehensive Plan can successfully guide growth and development to leverage positive outcomes for a community and its citizenry.

The Gastonia Comprehensive Plan supports a vision for the City and its environs established through a combination of resource analysis, municipal staff review, key stakeholder input, and citizen-driven surveys, workshops, and presentations. The Plan is supported by a framework that guides future public and private investments, creating political and societal accountability for its own success.

In North Carolina, all Comprehensive plans are guided by state law under the framework of the North Carolina General Statutes (NCGS). While comprehensive plans are not explicitly mandated, they are required for local governments to enact zoning ordinances and other land-use regulations. The legal requirements and guidelines related to Comprehensive Plans in North Carolina are as follows:

LEGAL BASIS:

1. **Governing Statute: Chapter 160D of the NCGS**
   - North Carolina's Chapter 160D governs planning and development regulation for local governments. This law consolidates and modernizes planning statutes for cities and counties.
   - Section 160D-501 emphasizes the preparation of a Comprehensive Plan or land-use plan as a prerequisite for adopting and applying zoning regulations.

2. **Plan Requirement for Zoning**:
   - A Comprehensive Plan or similar document must exist to guide the adoption and enforcement of zoning ordinances. This ensures zoning decisions align with an overall vision for development.

3. **Plan Adoption Process:**
    - The plan must be adopted by the governing board (e.g., city council or board of county commissioners) following a public hearing.
    - Public participation is encouraged during the drafting and review phases.

Purpose of the Plan

1. Plans should guide coordinated, efficient, and orderly development, grounded in analysis of current conditions and future trends— covering demographics, economy, environment, culture, and more.

2. The planning process must include opportunities for citizen engagement during plan preparation and adoption.

Suggested Plan Contents

Chapter 160D doesn't mandate a rigid checklist of elements, but **G.S. 160D-501(b)** lists **topics that may be included**, such as:

1. Issues and opportunities, including trends, community vision, and guiding growth principles.

2. Desired patterns of growth and civic design: future land use, urban form, utilities, and transportation.

3. Economic and community development, including employment opportunities.

4. Public services and infrastructure (e.g., water, utilities, waste disposal, emergency services, transportation, education, recreation, community facilities), including how they're funded.

5. Housing variety and affordability for all types and income levels.

6. Recreation and open space.

7. Natural hazard mitigation: flooding, wildfires, wind, unstable lands.

8. Protection of environment and natural resources: agricultural, mineral, water, and air quality.

9. Protection of architectural, scenic, cultural, historical, or archaeological resources.

10. Analysis of implementation strategies: regulations, public investments, educational programs.

Periodic Review and Updates

- The Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure it remains relevant and effective.
- While no fixed update schedule is mandated, updates are typically conducted every 5–10 years.

Legal Implications

- A Comprehensive Plan serves as a guiding document. The Plan's content can significantly influence zoning and land-use decisions, however it is not a regulatory document on its own.
- Local governments are required to ensure consistency between the Comprehensive Plan and zoning ordinances. Courts may scrutinize zoning actions that deviate from an adopted Comprehensive Plan.

CRITICAL GOALS:

1. **Integrate existing plans and initiatives into a community-wide Vision for future development.**
2. **Create a resource to inform policy decisions based on the Vision.**
3. **Set priorities and responsibilities for the goals and strategies needed to achieve the Vision.**
4. **Align Strategic Plans, Capital Improvement Plans (CIP), Budgets, and Department Action Plans to the implement the Vision.**

The Gastonia Comprehensive Plan includes goals, strategies, place-based plans, and the implementation measures that reflect the community-driven process. The Plan is the starting point that articulates the vision and identifies implementation goals. It describes the policy frameworks for actions needed to successfully execute on the Vision, but purposefully does not resolve all opportunities and challenges they present, due to the long-term nature of these.

As the City's playbook for success, this document consists of written recommendations supported by maps, definitions, and action items to guide city leaders in making decisions that will impact Gastonia over the next 30 years. It should be used when departments are making plans for the year when budgets are being created and to influence the City's long-term focus and work.

VISION AND PRINCIPLES

GASTONIA'S VISION:

Since 2025 Gastonia has grown smartly, based on its shared values, into a City balancing economic growth and natural resource preservation, with equitable access to employment, health care, education, culture, and recreation.

Gastonia is a unique place within metropolitan Charlotte leveraging its position, as one of the earliest and largest municipalities in the region, to support a broad offering of cultural events, a vibrant central city, and diverse neighborhoods, all while maintaining an attractive cost of living and high quality of life.

Gastonia's high quality of life is grounded in the City's Neighborhoods, which are conveniently accessible, to jobs, shopping, education, and recreation, through a smartly designed pedestrian friendly road network, and transit system, that are augmented by extensive greenway, trail, and cycle facilities.

Instead of social isolation and constrained mobility Gastonia chose a vision that has allowed the Community to develop into an equitable and safe City, providing its residents a great place to live and prosper.

GASTONIA'S VALUES:

The Comprehensive Plan incorporates the following values to guide the growth policies, codes, plans, designs, and construction projects initiated by the City through its development review and administration process.

Culture and History

Acknowledge history while embracing beneficial change.   As Gastonia grows actions to protect important existing character must be balanced by policies that add value to the overall community. New residents and new developments are the foundations for ongoing prosperity, and prosperity is what enables history to be relevant within the narrative of a city.

Downtown is the "Core" of Gastonia. New growth and redevelopment of the Core is essential to the overall health of the City. Its vibrancy, safety, and charm are what set the tone for the entire community, and policies must be enacted to support investments that draw residents to visit and shop downtown, encourage people to want to live and open places of employment downtown, and increase the tax base to support a robust municipal budget.

The natural landscape is a critical asset, one that plays an integral role in the quality of life and standard of living of all residents and businesses.   Growth must support the ability

of surrounding natural systems to thrive. The health of residents, their ability to raise families, build businesses, and invest in community are dependent on the capacity of the natural landscape to mitigate the negative impacts of these ambitions. Without proper care of the natural systems and landscape, the cost of living and the quality of life for all residents are diminished.

Mobility

On par with the importance of a healthy natural landscape, mobility and access within and through the City is paramount. Streets, greenways, and trails form a cohesive, well-planned network, offering multiple convenient routes to parks, shops, schools, and workplaces. As the community grows, and transit becomes viable, more of the community's residents who do not have access to cars will be empowered to participate in the City's economy and culture with a multifaceted and robust transit plan in place.

Residents must be seamlessly linked to areas of employment and community assets. By expanding sidewalks, bikeways, trails, and future transit opportunities, all residents will have easy access to jobs and improved standard of living, and the natural and cultural resources that enhance quality of life.

Community Character

Neighborhoods are the foundation of any Community. The support and proper delivery of Neighborhoods within the City will enhance the development and redevelopment of the Centers, Districts, Corridors and Green Spaces. Gastonia should add value to its existing Neighborhood fabric by increasing connections and accessibility to amenities and improved housing options.

Streets are designed for people, transit, and cycling, not just cars. Streets represent the largest area of land within any city that is open to the public and undeveloped with buildings. Design policies should approach streets as spaces within which, safety, and the comfort, of the non-automotive public should be prioritized.

Neighborhood Parks and recreational opportunities are important. In addition to active sports fields and sports tourism, which service the entire City, a community also requires neighborhood parks and playgrounds. These cater to all ages, genders, and abilities, with safe routes for walking, biking, and other modes of travel immediate to the surrounding population.

Infill development is important and encouraged in areas with existing infrastructure to broaden the diversity of housing options for residents. Revitalizing

underutilized land supports housing affordability, market changes, and the needs of younger generations and seniors.

Economic Opportunity

Fiscal responsibility is a primary concern for municipal government. How a City grows directly impacts a City's ability to provide the services demanded by residents. Development decisions must balance the direct needs of a population for housing, jobs, and shopping, with a sustainable return of investment to the City for the services required to provide these needs.

Regional partnerships that drive economic development, improve education, enhance infrastructure, protect the environment, and advance transportation, health, and safety are important. Policies must be receptive to and encourage collaboration and partnerships beyond the Study Area to enhance regional strengths and mitigate regional challenges.

Environmental Stewardship

The built environment must help to mitigate external impacts on the natural environment. Design and engineering practices must ensure the health of rivers, streams, and creeks and protect forested areas that are, or will be preserved. The greatest mitigation efforts fall upon developments at the edges of the community, immediately adjacent to large scale drainage systems and forested areas.

New developments and multimodal streets need to be supportive of environmental stewardship. Plans and policies need to promote walking and cycling, public transportation opportunities, provide shade with tree plantings, and promote efficiently constructed buildings to reduce energy demands, and heat island impacts.

Diversity

Cultural and demographic diversity are important to growth, standard of living and quality of life. Gastonia is becoming increasingly diverse, with a growing population of Hispanic, African American, and other immigrant communities. This diversity is reflected in the city's food, festivals, and cultural organizations, which bring together various cultural traditions and food options.

USING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is more than a Vision Document. It represents an agreed upon framework of Policy Directives, made implementable through an Action Plan that prioritizes public/private investment opportunities, and guides development decisions based on fiscal responsibility, and sustainable economic, social, and environmental practices. To be successful City leaders and staff should actively reference, apply, and update the Comprehensive Plan according to the following steps:

1. **Understand the Vision:**
   The Vision articulates the community's agreed upon, long-term aspirations and sets the foundation for all policy and growth initiatives. It reflects Gastonia's desired future—socially, economically, and geographically—and serves as the "intent" statement to guide decisions on citywide priorities. (see page 7)

2. **Align Citywide priorities with Policy Directives:**
   The citywide priorities translate the Vision into Policy Directives that coordinate actions across City departments and external partners for five key Strategies: economic development, place-based planning,

infrastructure investment, sustainability, and growth management. The Directives ensure the strategies result in outcomes that are collaborative and impactful. (see Investment Priorities Chapter page 63)

3. **Engage Strategies through the Action Plan:**
   The Action Plan should function as a living document, updated regularly in alignment with annual budget cycles, departmental work programs, and capital improvement planning. The Action Plan provides a roadmap for short- and medium-term implementation, facilitates interdepartmental collaboration, and enhances transparency and accountability through measurable actions and timelines. (see Action Plan pages.93-110)

4. **Use Place-Based Planning Tools to inform Development Reviews:**
   Place Based Planning Tools provide context-sensitive guidance for where and how to allocate density and uses as development occurs. Place-based planning prioritizes the character of development, defined by Type, using guidelines for walkability, housing variety, proximity to employment and shopping, and access to amenities. The Future Place-Based Plan reflects existing and future infrastructure capacities, environmental impacts, and community

needs. The order for applying Place Based Planning Tools to development submissions is as follows:

a. Determine the Place Type of a property, or properties, using the Place-Based Future Master Plan. (see page 65)

b. Identify the planning criteria for the associated Place Type under which the property, or properties, is classified. (see pages 37-41)

c. Apply the Zoning Districts within the City's UDO that are associated with the Place Type to inform site design requirements. (see page 42)

5. **Support and Encourage Growth that Aligns with the Place-Based Future Master Plan. Development applications, and municipal led planning initiatives should align with the mapped Place Types as follows:**

a. **Centers:**
Developments that mix uses, and support higher population densities than the Residential Place Types. Reference the Plan's descriptions of and designations for Centers (e.g., Neighborhood, Secondary, Primary). Encourage development that promote walkability, high connectivity, access to public spaces, and efficient infrastructure and service delivery. (see pages 50-52)

b. **Districts:**
Developments that primarily support employment and cultural uses. Reference the Plan's descriptions of and designations for Districts (Innovation, Campus, Industrial, Warehouse). Encourage development that promotes high connectivity, access to support commercial and residential uses, and efficient infrastructure and service delivery. (see page 53)

c. **Residential:**
Developments that are (Rural Residential, Suburban Residential, Neighborhood Residential) when evaluating investment in infrastructure, rezoning, planning for schools, community supportive elements, land conservation and environmental protection, and/or public-private development partnerships. (see page 54)

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Community Engagement was a priority in the development of the Comprehensive Plan. Multiple opportunities were provided to the public, both in person, and on-line to participate and offer input, voice concerns and comment on plans as they were being developed.

Efforts were made along the way to adjust the approaches to reach as many segments of the community as possible. Workshops were scheduled throughout the process of creating the plan so that input directly influenced the development of the plan. Several techniques were used to engage the community, including presentations, pop-ups, polling, table exercises, and one-on-one or group meetings.

ADVERTISING ENGAGEMENT

The City used multiple methods to drive engagement, including direct mail, email blasts, website, social media, press releases, and word of mouth.

PLANNING COMMISSION AND CITY COUNCIL

The consultants and planning staff met with the Planning Committee and City Council at key milestones to solicit feedback on the development of the draft plan. These meetings were both public meetings, and workshops.

WEB AND MEDIA PRESENCE

The comprehensive plan was developed alongside a 24/7 web presence via the City website that allowed free and open access to key plan documents as well as a platform for the public to interface with and react to the plan's development. The plan was advertised and reported on in a variety of local media, including press releases, email, and the City 's social media platforms.

PUBLIC ONLINE POLLING

The plan was influenced by online public polling that mirrored the topics within the process of creating the plan. The polling began a dialogue about Gastonia's strengths as a community, evaluated citizen satisfaction with existing City services and qualities, discussed options for growth, housing, open space, and parks, and offered a glimpse into public preferences for prioritizing future

investment. Our initial polling attracted over 600 responses and provided the plan guidance on key issues.

EVENTS

Get to Know Gaston, Fan Fest at Gastonia Ghost Peppers 2025 Home Opener.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

In person public workshops were conducted with the community. These were focused on specific topics as follows:

1. Vision, Principles, High Level Goals.
2. Transportation Connectivity, Open Space, Growth Patterns and Locations, Land Use.
3. Sharing how community input was directly integrated into the Comprehensive Plan.

The meetings offered the community the chance to share ideas and priorities through live polling and chat function.

IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS

The following topics relating to growth came to the forefront during the Engagement Process:

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Gastonia will continue to attract businesses, particularly as other parts of the metro area become fully developed, making Gastonia a more appealing and viable alternative for growth.

UTILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The City will strategically organize its infrastructure and utility services to support areas with the greatest economic development potential, while limiting extensions into less suitable regions.

TRANSPORTATION

Gastonia will enhance major roadway connectivity, implement "Complete Streets" designs, expand its bike and greenway networks, and continue promoting on-demand transit services. The City will also support future light rail connections to Charlotte and the broader region.

HOUSING

Future policies, zoning, and planning will encourage a diverse housing stock that aligns with the income levels of Gastonia's residents. Economic development efforts will raise income levels by providing a broader range of job opportunities.

FOCUSED GROWTH

Gastonia will focus on organized growth, targeting areas accessible by transportation networks, with land that meets environmental standards, and growth pacing that aligns with infrastructure and community services, such as schools. Downtown will remain a priority for growth, with redevelopment of underperforming commercial sites to foster a more viable mix of uses. Growth will also be directed along transportation corridors like 321 South, East Franklin, West Garrison, and Hudson.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Gastonia will protect its natural resources, including steep slopes, creek and stream corridors, and rural lands, through zoning and development policies. The City will collaborate with Gaston County to maintain development standards that preserve environmentally sensitive areas, especially those targeted for lower density or preservation.

TOOLS AND POLICIES

Future planning efforts will focus on creating the necessary tools to achieve preservation outcomes, incentivize affordable housing, and develop area plans that promote a revitalized public realm. These efforts will align with the Comprehensive Plan's vision and guide broader community improvements.

POLLING DATA

Growth Management Ranking

1st		Manage growth more carefully
2nd		Grow taller & denser
3rd		Focus growth in compact, specific locations with easy access to utilities
4th		Let the market control growth & expansion
5th		Limit growth to lower density housing
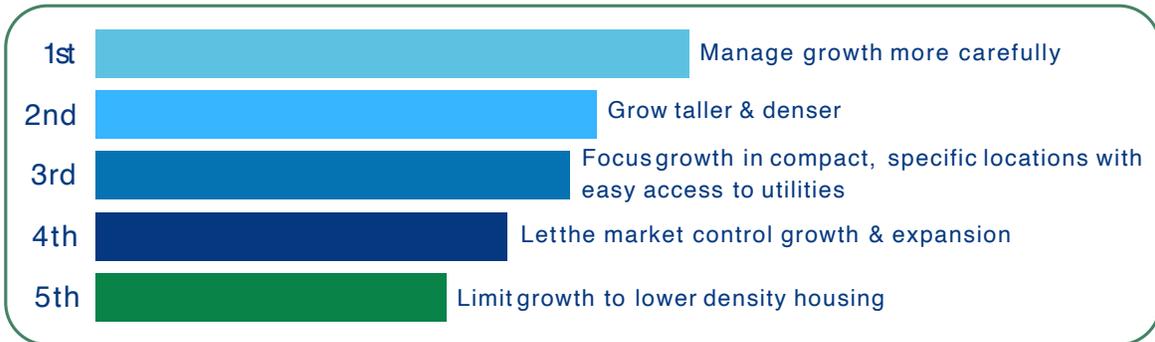
How can Gastonia Improve?

30% Appearance & Character

26% Transportation choices

28% Safety

16% Schools

The top priorities for Gastonia in the future are...

Education & youth development

Public Safety

Managing growth & traffic

Jobs & Economic Development

GASTONIA**2050**

"CHIP GAME" PLANNING EXERCISE
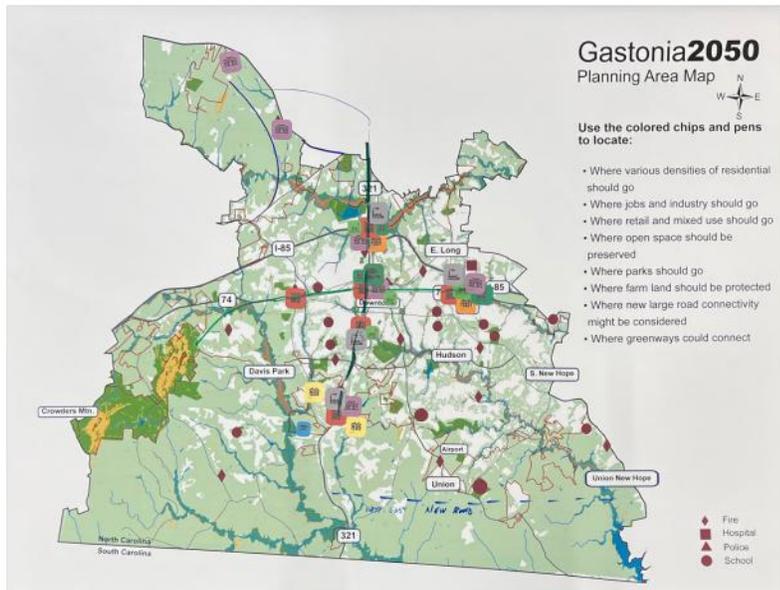
During the second Community Workshop participants were arranged into groups and asked to prepare a planning map to illustrate how they would like to see Gastonia grow.

Using "chips" that identified land uses, each group mapped how development should occur within the Study Area. The maps were compared against each other to determine similarities and differences.

The main ideas where compiled to create a discussion list. Planning principles and techniques were explained and the ideas with the most agreement amongst the participants were taken on board during the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan.

PROCESS SCHEDULE

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

STAKEHOLDER ME

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

DRAFTING THE PLA

AUG 2024	SEP 2024	OCT 2024	NOV 2024	DEC 2024	JAN 2025	FEB 2025	MAR 2025	APR 2025

PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP MEETINGS
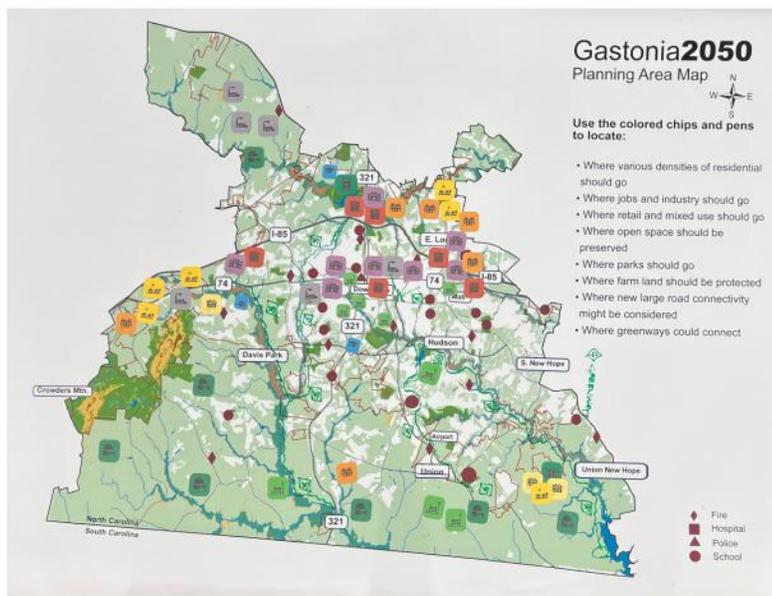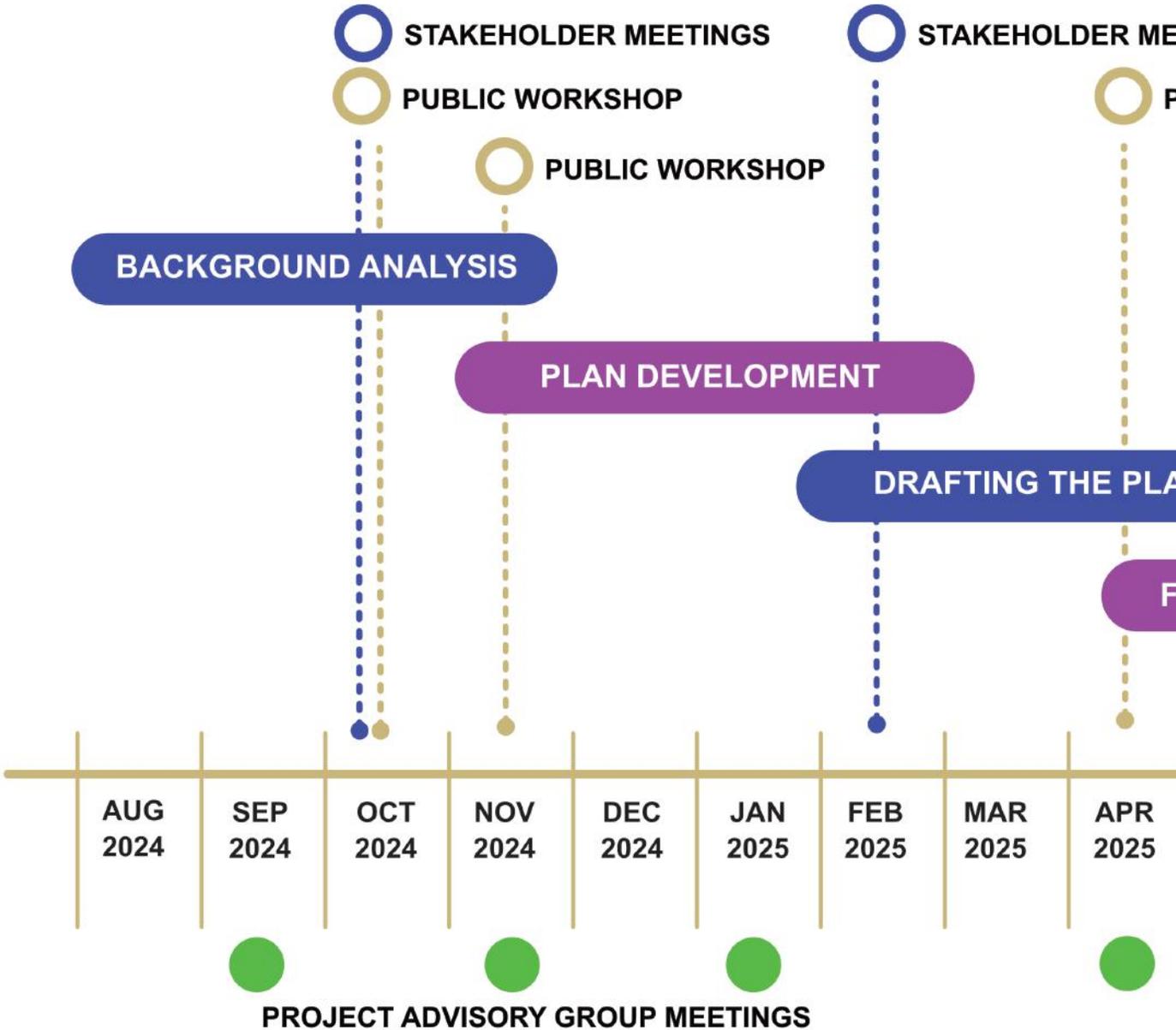
The Comprehensive Plan process began with background analysis, proceeded into discussions with the community and stakeholders, and culminated in a document that was reviewed by the Stakeholders and presented to Planning Commission and City Council for adoption.

ETINGS

PUBLIC WORKSHOP

AN

INALIZING THE PLAN

ADOPTION PROCESS

| MAY 2025 | JUNE 2025 | JULY 2025 | AUG 2025 | SEP 2025 | OCT 2025 | NOV 2025 |

CITY DATA SNAPSHOTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gastonia, North Carolina, is a city with a diverse population of approximately 83,639 as of 2024.

Race and Ethnicity:

- White: Around 60-65%
- Black or African American: Approximately 25-30%
- Hispanic or Latino: About 10-15%
- Asian: Around 1-2%
- Other races and ethnicities make up the remaining percentage.

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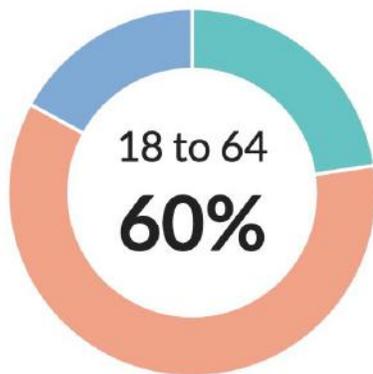
18 to 64
60%

Under 18   18 to 64
65 and over

INCOME

14.7% of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Gastonia, NC (11.6k out of 78.6k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 12.5%.

Gastonia, NC median household income diversity across racial categories

In 2022, White households had the highest median income of $75,703.
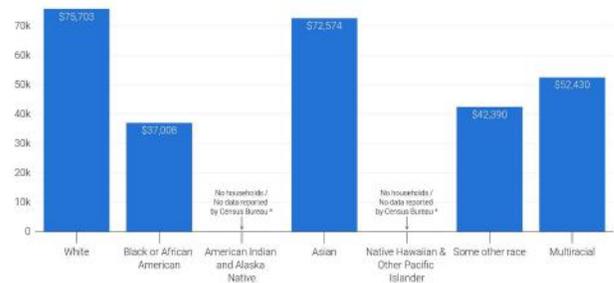
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2022 1-Year Estimates

Neilsberg

Gaston, NC households distribution by income bracket and age group

Number of households, by income brackets & age groups

Under 25 years   25 to 44 years   45 to 64 years   65 years and over
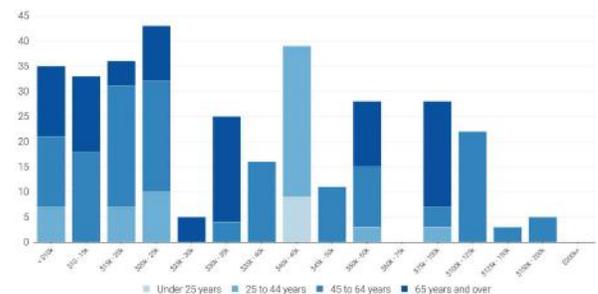
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021 5-Year Estimates

Neilsberg

ECONOMY

The economy of Gastonia, NC employs 38k people. The largest industries in Gastonia, NC are Manufacturing (5,505 people), Health Care & Social Assistance (5,311 people), and Retail Trade (4,819 people), and the highest paying industries are Utilities ($77,857), Information ($67,733), and Finance & Insurance ($66,925).

HOUSING

Gastonia's housing market continues to show limited activity and price growth as of late 2024. The reasons for this are predominantly a factor of the concentration of housing stock in either older single family product, and multi-family products.

Gastonia, NC median household income trends across races, 2010-2022
All incomes are in 2022 dollars, adjusted with the Retroactive Series (R-CPI-U-RS) for inflation
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) 2022 1-Year Estimates
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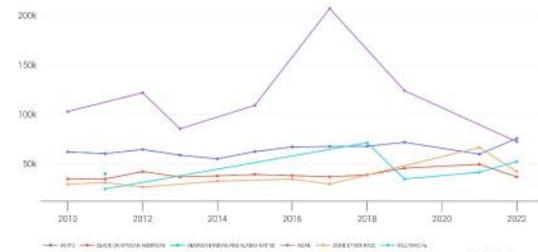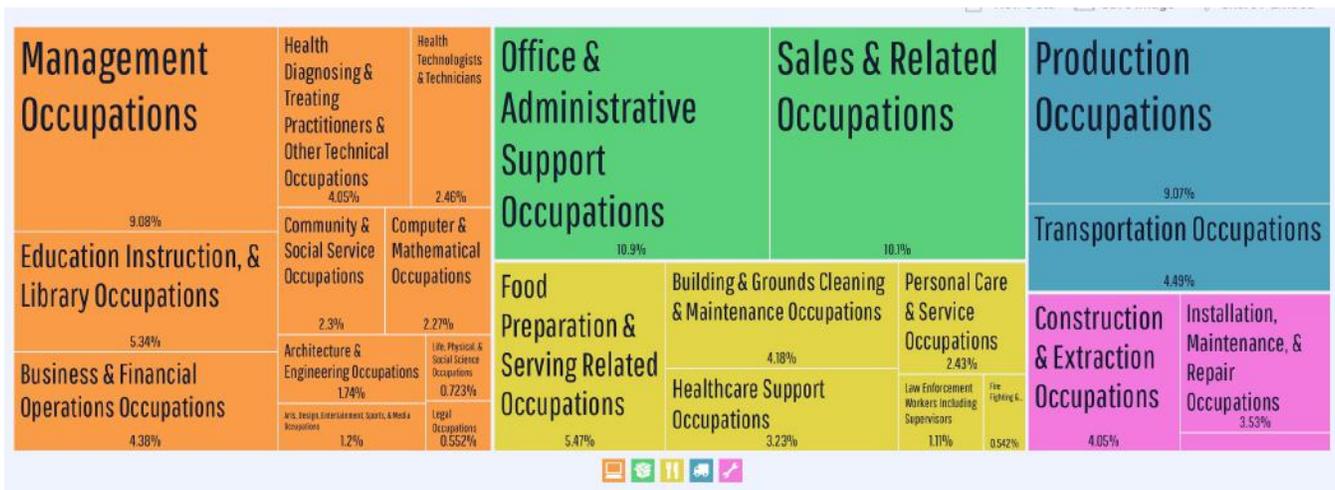
PREVIOUS PLANNING WORK

Gastonia Reimagined

The Gaston Business Association created a forward looking plan to develop key publicly-owned properties that complement and respect historic character, create an enjoyable public realm, deliver attainable housing, provide public green space, and connect to surrounding neighborhoods.

Gastonia Downtown East

The Gastonia Downtown East Small Area Plan is a strategic initiative by the City of Gastonia to revitalize and expand the eastern section of its downtown area. The plan focuses on transforming underutilized spaces into vibrant, mixed-use developments that enhance connectivity, economic growth, and community engagement.

NC-7: "Gastonia's Other Main Street"

North Carolina Highway 7 (NC-7) is a significant state highway in Gaston County, North Carolina, connecting the City of Gastonia with the towns of Lowell, McAdenville, and Belmont. The route spans approximately 12 miles, beginning at U.S. Route 321 in Gastonia and terminating at U.S. Route 29/U.S. Route 74 in Belmont.

FUSE

The Franklin Urban Sports and Entertainment (FUSE) District in Gastonia, North Carolina, is a multi-phase, mixed-use development initiative designed to revitalize the area between Gastonia's downtown and the Loray Historic District along Franklin Boulevard. Anchored by a new multi-purpose sports and entertainment facility, the district aims to stimulate economic growth by attracting private investment and increasing residential and commercial density.

Eastridge Mall

Eastridge Mall in Gastonia, North Carolina, is undergoing a significant transformation to revitalize its space and adapt to changing retail landscapes. The redevelopment plan focuses on repurposing existing areas and introducing diverse functionalities to attract visitors and enhance the mall's appeal.

Highland/Sims

The Highland Neighborhood in Gastonia, North Carolina, is undergoing a comprehensive revitalization effort aimed at addressing economic, social, and health disparities while preserving its cultural heritage. A key component of this initiative is the development of a mixed-use project centered around the RAMS Kitchen (Really Amazing Meals with Soul), a nonprofit food kitchen established in 2021. This project serves as a catalyst for broader urban development strategies within the community.

The Hand-Wilson Master Plan

The Hand-Wilson Master Plan is a conceptual framework developed to guide the future development of the Hand-Wilson area in Gastonia, North Carolina. Prepared by Metrocology and presented to the Gastonia Planning & Zoning Commission on April 24, 2020, the plan outlines strategies for land use, transportation, and community amenities to foster a cohesive and sustainable urban environment.

West Franklin Redevelopment Plan

The West Franklin Redevelopment Plan, adopted in 2019, covers approximately 288 acres along West Franklin Boulevard—an area marked by aging buildings, vacant land, and transitional neighborhoods that meet the state's definition of "rehabilitation, conservation, and reconditioning" due to widespread blight. The plan serves as a flexible blueprint for revitalization, empowering the City to guide development, acquire and sell property (though condemnation is a last resort), and coordinate public-private efforts.

Comprehensive Bicycle Plan

The City of Gastonia has developed a Comprehensive Bicycle Plan to enhance cycling infrastructure and promote safe, accessible biking options for residents. This initiative builds upon the City's 2025 Comprehensive Plan and was funded through a North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) grant.

The Gastonia Transit Expansion Study

The Gastonia Transit Expansion Study was initiated to evaluate the feasibility of enhancing transit services within Gastonia and extending them to neighboring municipalities in Gaston County. The study aimed to address service needs such as increased operational hours, improved service frequency, and the development of expanded services to adjacent counties.

Parks and Recreation Masterplan

The City of Gastonia's Parks and Recreation Master Plan, titled "Stepping Ahead to a Healthier Tomorrow," serves as a strategic guide for the development and enhancement of the city's parks and recreational facilities from 2019 to 2029. The plan aims to promote a healthier lifestyle among residents by assessing current facilities, identifying areas for improvement, and setting priorities for future developments.

Gastonia - Crowders Mountain Paved Pathways Feasibility Study

The Carolina Thread Trail is a regional network of connected greenways, trails, and blueways spanning 15 counties in North and South Carolina, aiming to link communities and preserve natural areas.

Gastonia Affordable Housing Plan

Gastonia's Affordable Housing Plan, completed in October 2023 and adopted by the City Council on November 21, 2023, charts a 10-year strategy to expand housing accessibility and fairness in the community. Key initiatives include establishing a dedicated housing trust fund, launching a centralized housing resource center to streamline access to services, and leveraging partnerships with developers and agencies to increase the supply of affordable units.
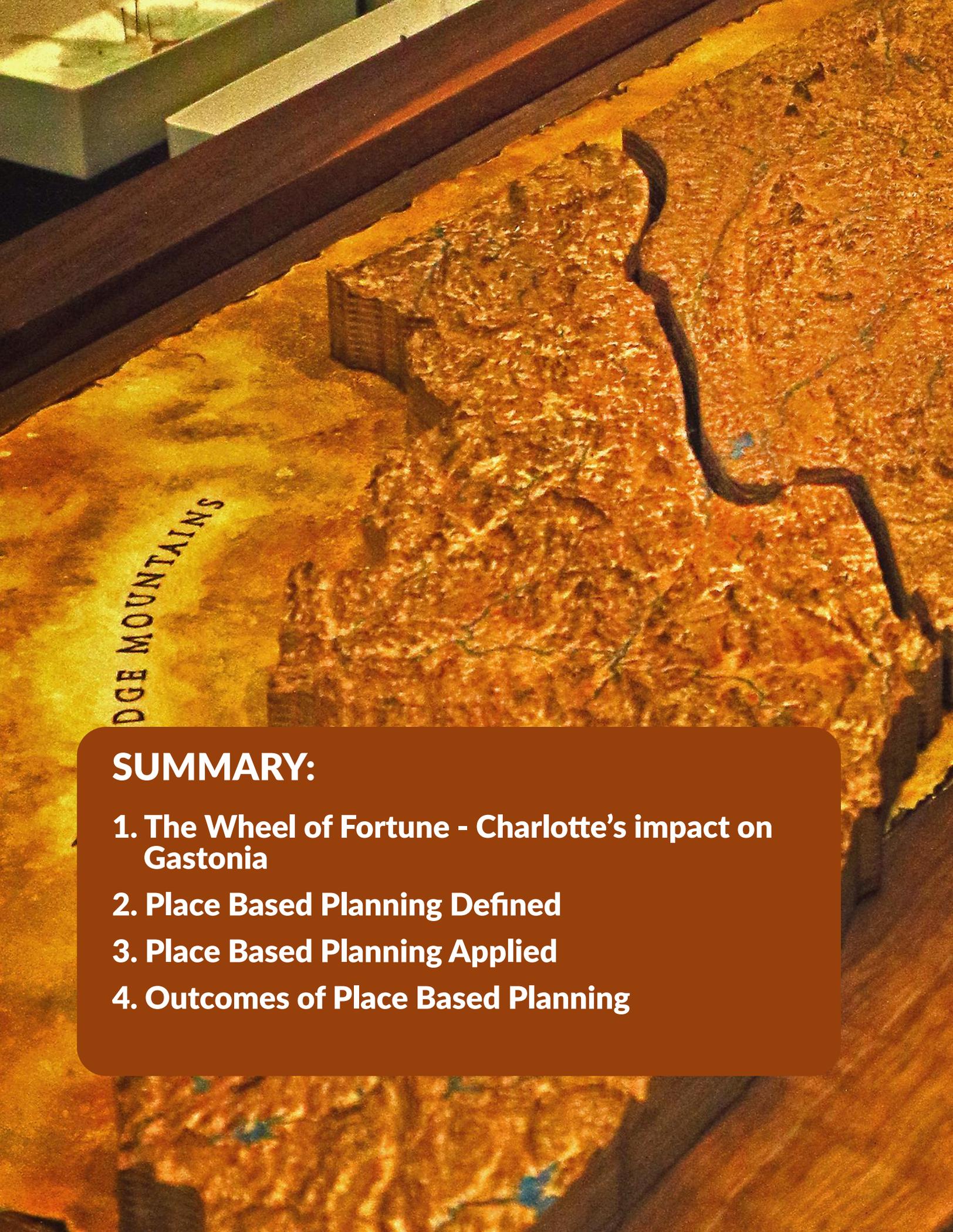
SUMMARY:

1. **The Wheel of Fortune - Charlotte's impact on Gastonia**

2. **Place Based Planning Defined**

3. **Place Based Planning Applied**

4. **Outcomes of Place Based Planning**

PLACED BASED PLANNING

- **Regional Growth Context**
- **Growth Projections**
- **Study Area Context**
- **Place Based Planning**
  - **Neighborhoods, Districts, Corridors**
  - **Gastonia's Planning Structure**
- **What are Place Types**
  - **Living Place Types (Neighborhoods)**
  - **Mixed Use Centers (Centers)**
  - **Working Places (Districts)**
  - **Relationship to Conventional Zoning**
- **Urban Patterns and Form**

REGIONAL GROWTH CONTEXT

Until the late 2000's Gastonia and Gaston County had not experienced Charlotte's rapid growth - with population expected to be approximately 170,000 in 2050 - mainly due to historic, geographic, and environmental constraints. Together these factors limited access, and land development opportunities. However, as other areas of metropolitan Charlotte boomed increasing costs, and congestion, Gastonia and Gaston County are now seen as having compelling value. Development pressures have begun and will increase substantially in the years to come.

The growth that has both benefited and plagued other areas of metropolitan Charlotte will have similar impacts on Gastonia, but with a shorter time horizon given that the underlying constraints of geographic, environmental, and historic factors are still present. To ensure long-term growth sustainability and economic resiliency, the City must take a proactive approach to planning for growth, by creating the strategies and implementing the tools needed to shape development that reduces its negative impacts.

A smart and efficient pattern of growth for Gastonia includes:

- Organizing the expansion of development infrastructure along key Corridors to accommodate growth.
- Identifying places for Nodes that will accommodate walkable mixed-use development located along multi-modal Corridors.
- Identifying areas for distinct Districts to support commerce, health care, industry, etc.
- Creating 'Green" Connectivity through greenway and bike / pedestrian infrastructure expansion.
- Integrating Place Based Planning to define the make-up of Nodes, Districts, and Neighborhoods.

REGIONAL GROWTH PATTERNS OVER TIME
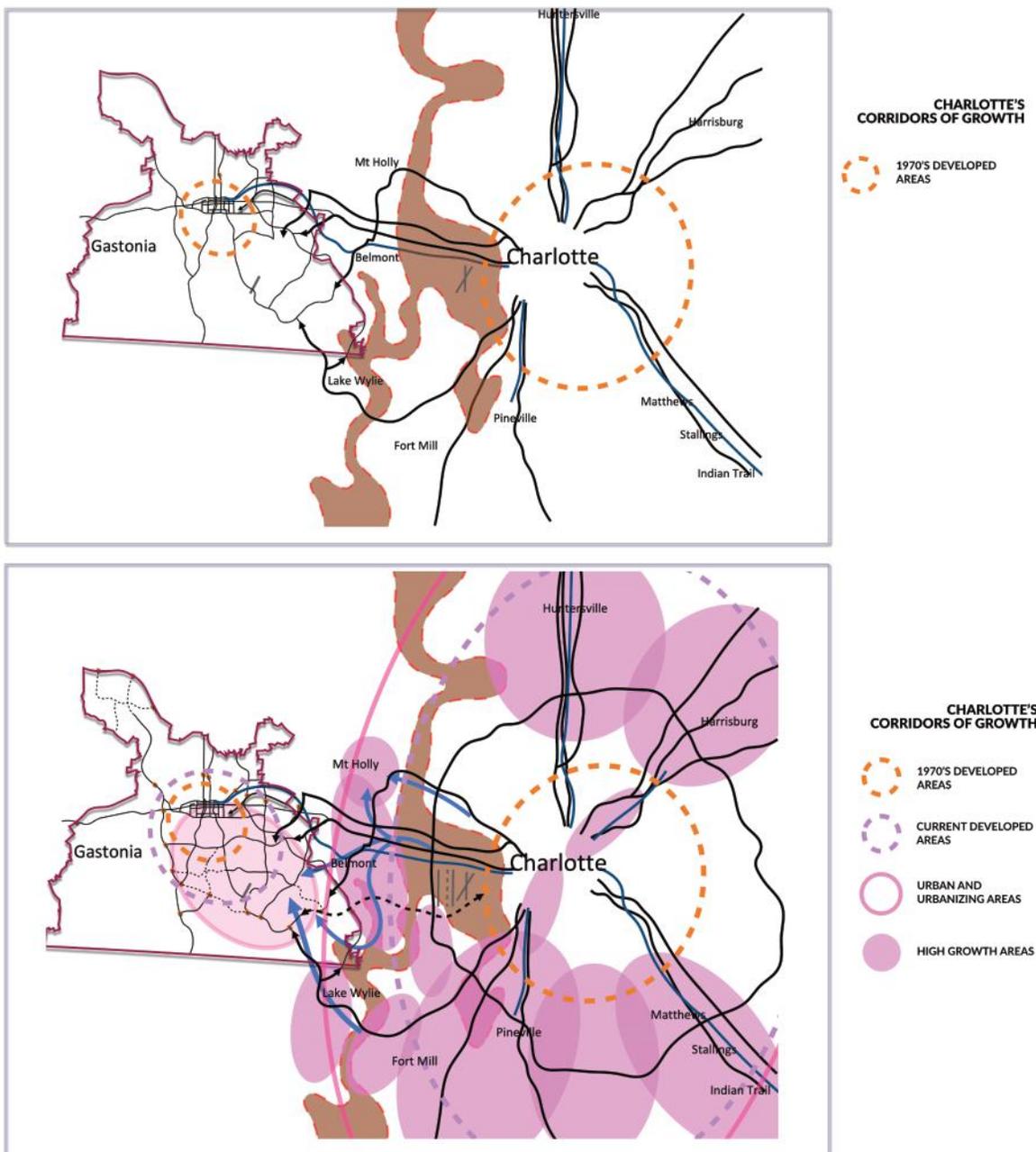
The rapid expansion of Charlotte has historically occurred along the transportation corridors that radiate from its downtown. As construction and populations peak along a particular corridor development moves to the next. This pattern occurs approximately each decade, and has been moving counterclockwise around the City since the 1980's. Growth has finally reached Gaston County, and in the decade to come Gastonia will be the recipient of the next growth wave.

ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS

Legend:
- Hospital
- Police Station
- Fire Station
- School

- Mostly Developed & Developable Lands
- Mostly Undeveloped & Moderately Developable Lands
- Mostly Undeveloped & Development Challenged Lands
- Un-developable Lands
- Main Roads
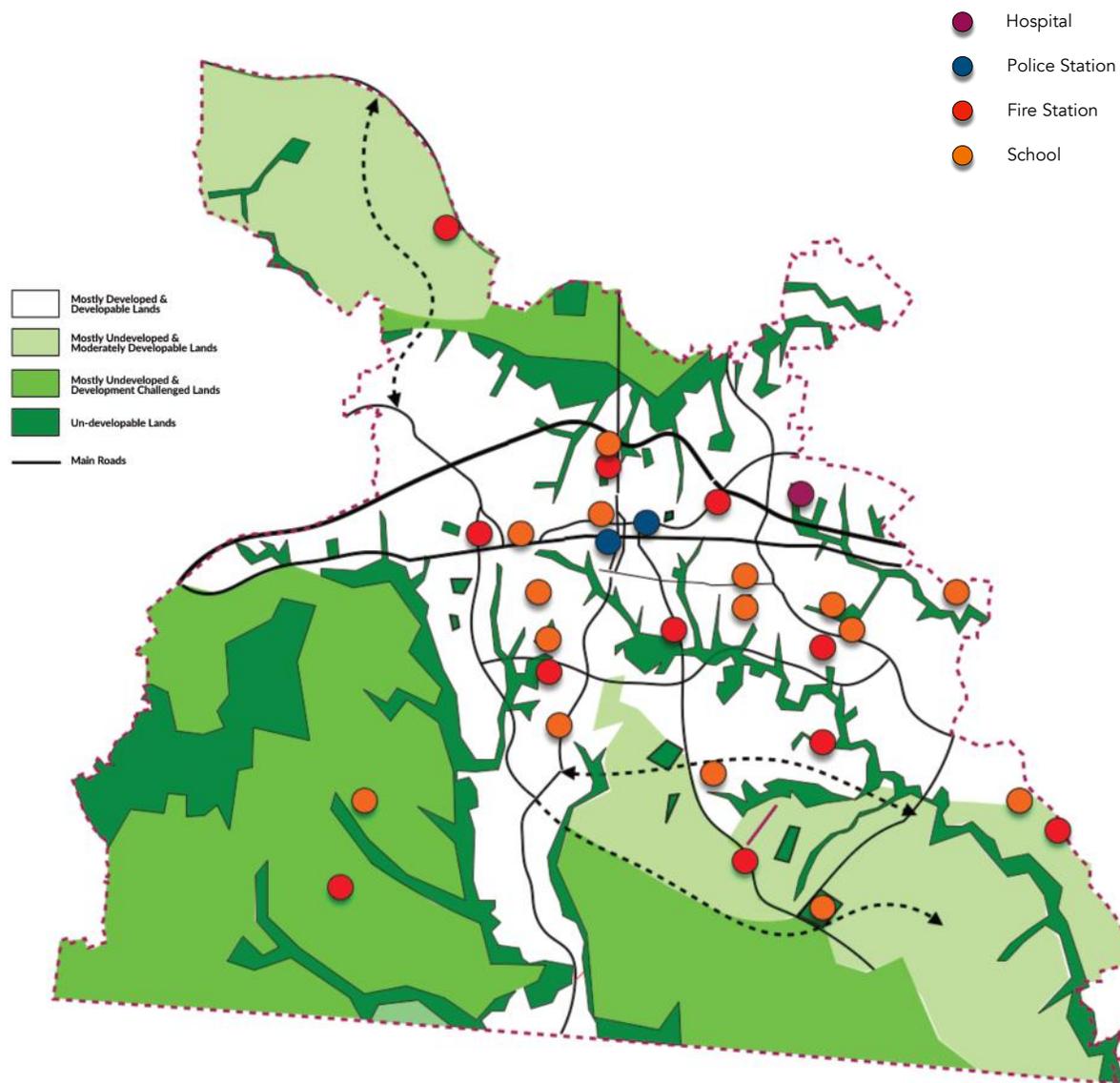
The Comprehensive Plan Study Area includes areas within the current City limits, areas of annexation, and strategic areas within Gaston County that the City can expand into. The Study Area is crossed by important natural systems that are part of the regional river and floodplain geography. This geography impacts the cost to the City of delivering services to new development, making some areas more challenging and costly for accommodating future growth than others.

31

GROWTH FOCUS AREAS

Legend:
- Hospital
- Police Station
- Fire Station
- School
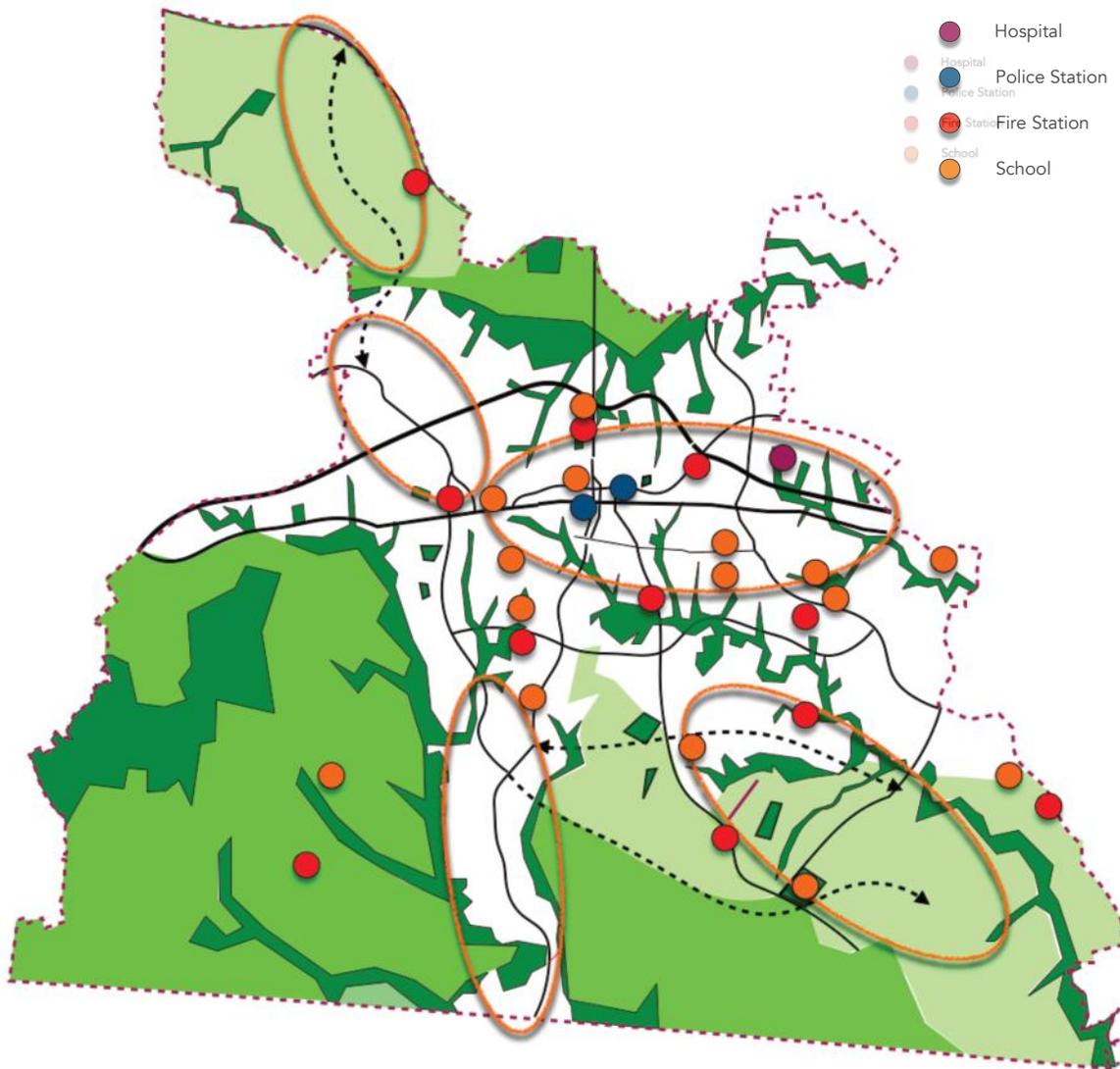
Additional factors such as access to transportation systems, proximity to nearby populations, existing infrastructure, and relation to important natural assets such as parks, forests, and drinking water sources also play an important role in assessing the appropriateness of future growth areas.

STUDY AREA GROWTH PROJECTION ANALYSIS

As described on page 29 of this chapter, Gastonia will experience significant growth into the future. An analysis of potential growth across the Study Area describes where growth will occur in order that Gastonia not only benefits from the growth, but grows in a way that is economically and environmentally responsible, and based on Place Based strategies.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR STUDY AREA SECTOR AREAS

Population projections for the Study Area are organized by Sector in order to calibrate for areas that will grow more based on path of growth from Charlotte and adjacent municipalities, and areas that will grow less due to environmental and access constraints. As will be discussed later in the document, centers and districts within the study area influence where nodes of employment and retail activity will take place to support population growth.

POPULATION DENSITY

Population density will increase over time within the Study Area based on areas that will become more urbanized and areas that will remain more rural.
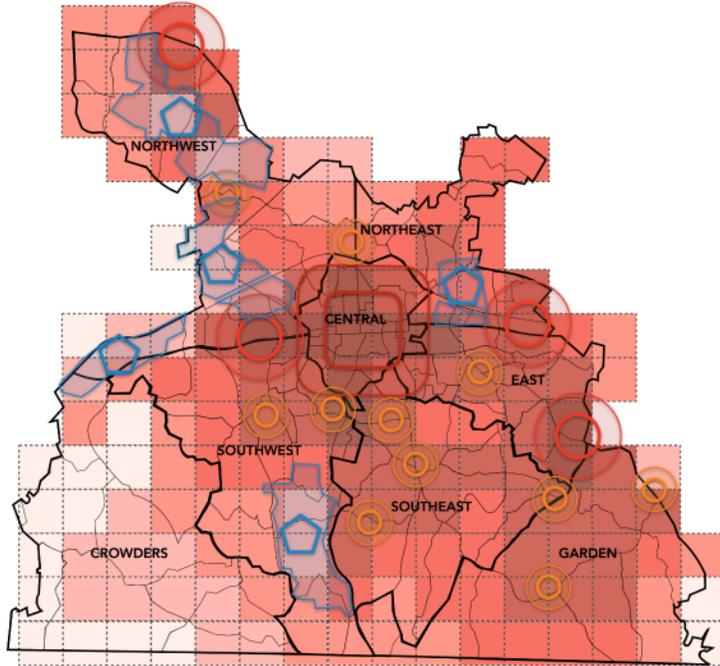
136mi²	2025	2050	2075	2100	2125
Per mi²	0	0	25	50	50
Per mi²	20	25	100	200	250
Per mi²	500	500	1,500	1,750	1,800
Per mi²	900	1,000	2,000	2,250	2,500
Per mi²	1,500	2,000	3,000	3,075	3,250
Per mi²	2,000	3,000	4,000	5,000	6,000
	133,093	169,462	253,900	309,870	342,325
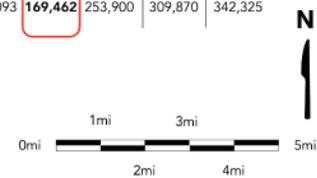
POPULATION PROJECTION

Population growth is projected using an analytical process based on previous growth of surrounding municipalities as well as underlying land characteristics and anticipated paths of growth.
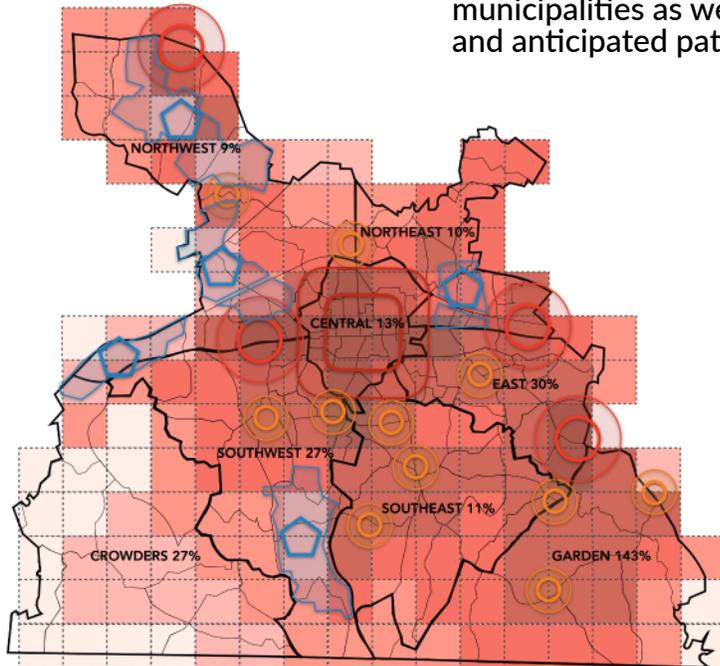
SECTOR	2025	2050	2075	2100	2125	Increase
Southeast	28,539	31,750	41,750	48,250	52,250	23,711
Garden	11,109	27,025	45,250	52,650	57,800	46,691
East	19,326	25,250	33,500	41,750	45,225	25,899
Southwest	17,688	22,500	39,050	48,625	51,050	33,362
Northwest	17,755	19,150	34,500	41,550	46,675	28,920
Northeast	17,755	19,500	26,250	29,750	33,775	16,020
Central	15,761	17,750	24,250	35,000	42,095	26,334
Crowders	5,160	6,537	9,350	12,295	13,455	8,295
Total	133,093	169,462	253,900	309,870	342,325	209,232
Change	✕	+/- 36,369	+/- 84,438	+/- 55,970	+/- 32,455	✕
% Change	✕	27%	50%	22%	11%	157%
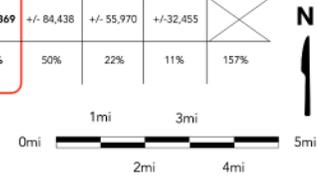
SECTOR POPULATION TOTALS

Population totals are then extracted for each Sector to anticipate infrastructure needs.

NORTHWEST
(19,150)

NORTHEAST
(19,500)

CENTRAL
(17,750)

EAST (25,250)

SOUTHWEST
(22,500)

SOUTHEAST
(32,750)

CROWDERS
(6,537)

GARDEN
(27,025)

	0 - 10,000
	10,001-20,000
	21,001 - 25,000
	25,001 - 30,000
	< 30,000

N

1mi   3mi
0mi ———————————— 5mi
2mi   4mi
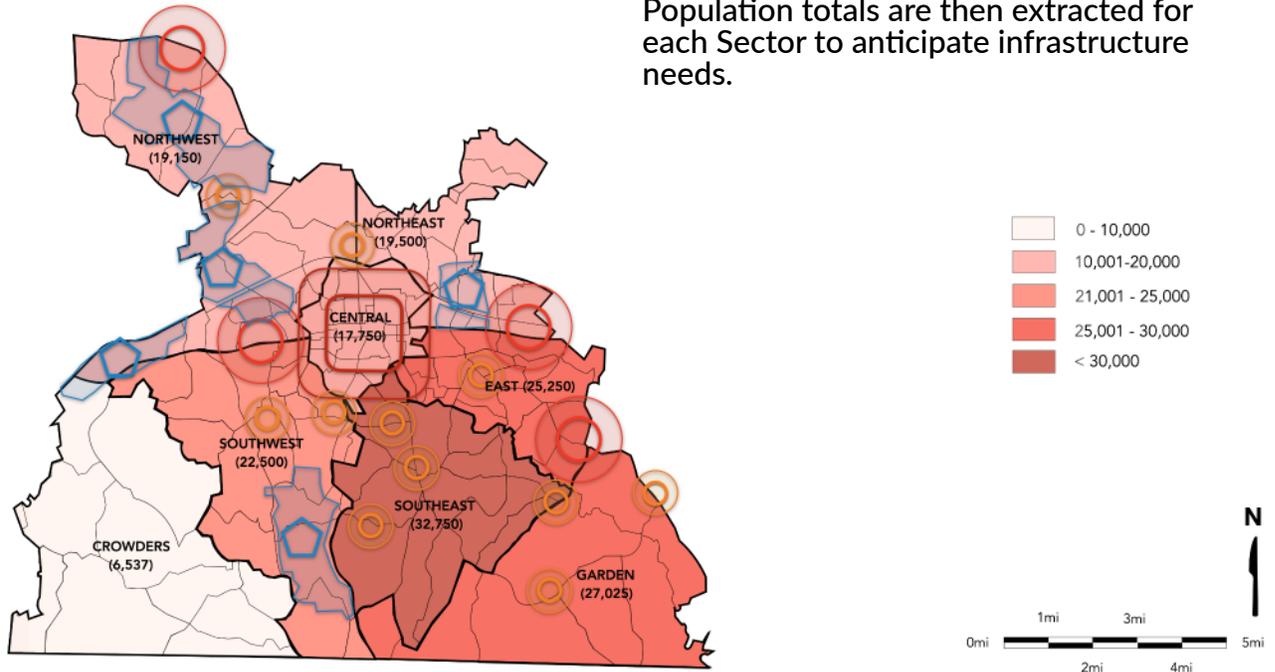
SECTOR POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE

The increased populations within the Sectors will create increased densities per square mile in areas that are to be more urban.

NORTHWEST
(766)

NORTHEAST
(2,167)

CENTRAL
(2,538)

EAST (2,196)

SOUTHWEST
(1,184)

SOUTHEAST
(1,814)

CROWDERS
(247)

GARDEN
(1,318)

	0 - 500
	501 - 1,000
	1,001 - 1,500
	1,501 - 2,000
	< 2,000

N

1mi   3mi
0mi ———————————— 5mi
2mi   4mi

GASTONIA2050
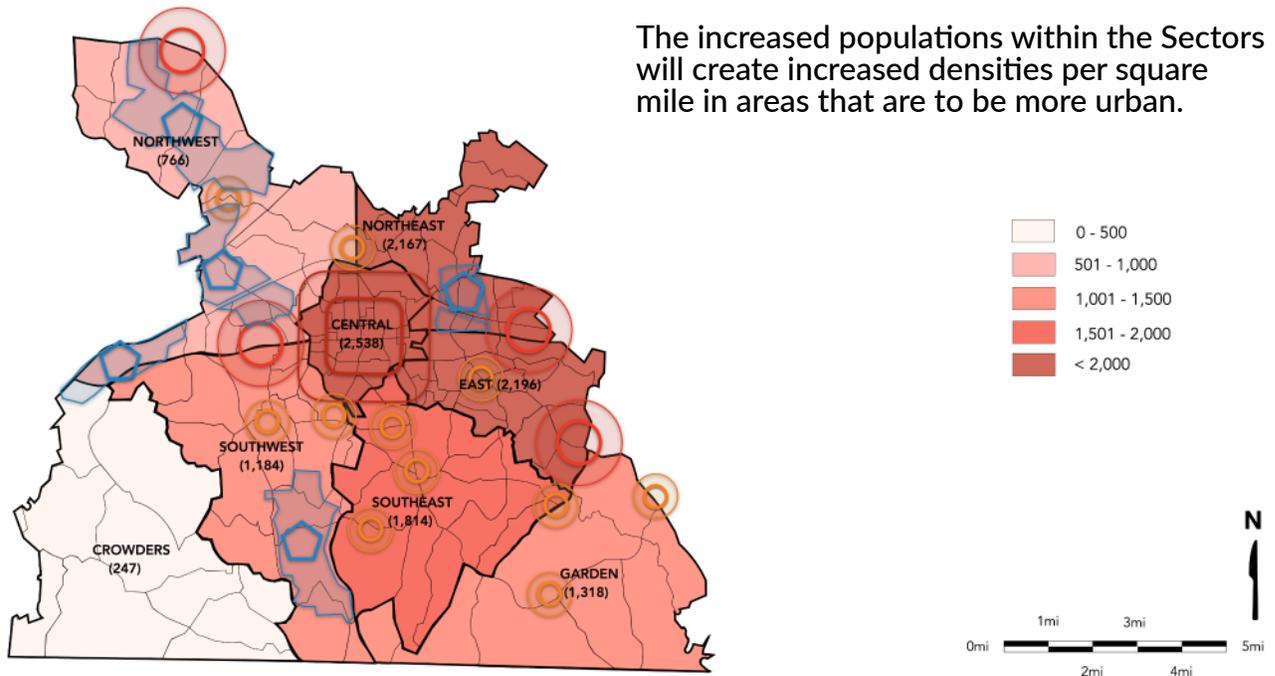
SECTOR POPULATION PERCENT CHANGE

The percentage of population change shows that some sectors will accommodate higher levels of growth than others in terms of percent change.

	0-9%
	10-19%
	20-29%
	30-39%
	< 40%

NORTHWEST 9%
NORTHEAST 10%
CENTRAL 13%
EAST 30%
SOUTHWEST 27%
SOUTHEAST 11%
CROWDERS 27%
GARDEN 143%

N

0mi   1mi   2mi   3mi   4mi   5mi
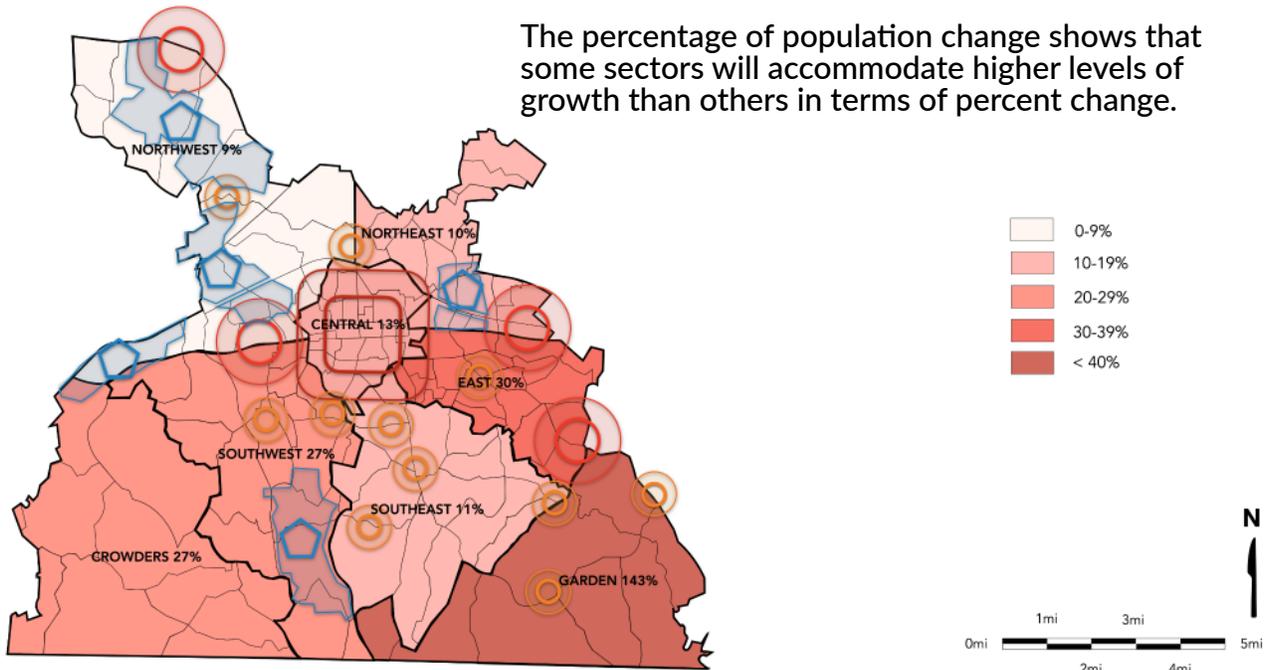
POPULATION ABSOLUTE CHANGE

Similarly, growth will occur in absolute terms based on Sector attributes, location relative to the path of growth, land characteristics, the ability to provide infrastructure efficiently, and access.

	0 - 1,500
	1,501 - 2,500
	2,501 - 4,000
	4001 - 6,000
	< 6,001

NORTHWEST (1,395)
NORTHEAST (1,745)
CENTRAL (1,989)
EAST (5,924)
SOUTHWEST (4,812)
SOUTHEAST (3,211)
CROWDERS (1,377)
GARDEN (15,916)

N

0mi   1mi   2mi   3mi   4mi   5mi
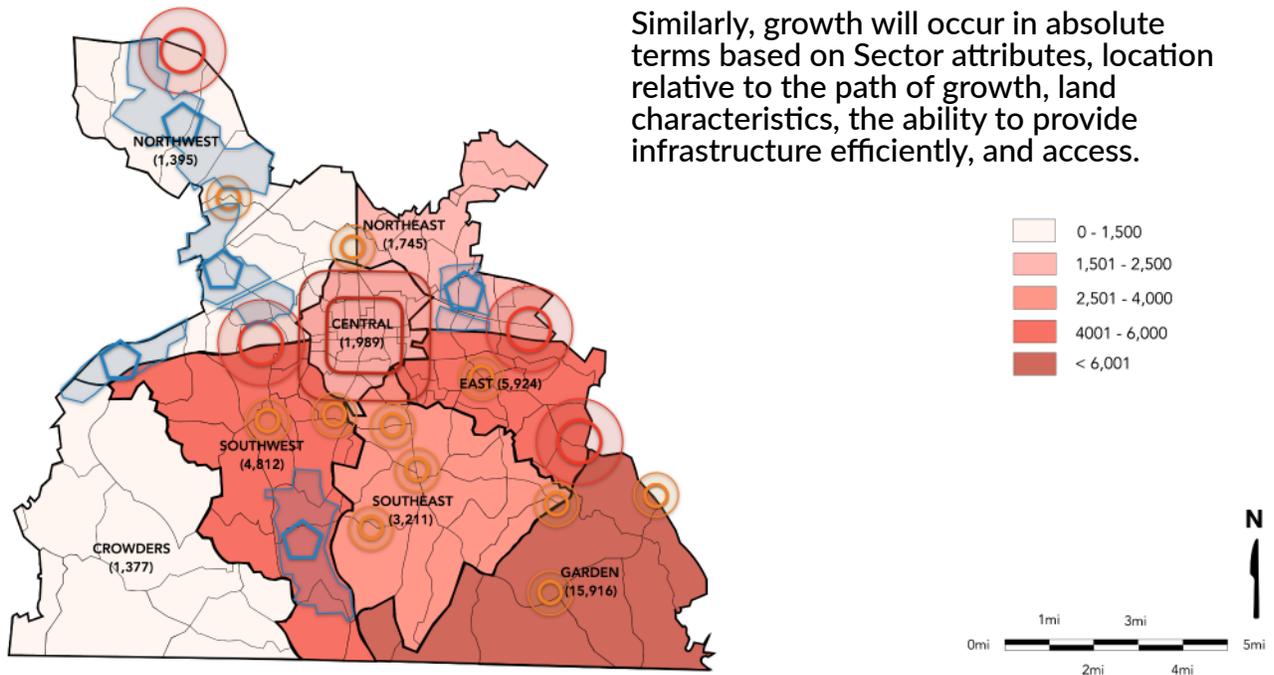
PLACE BASED PLANNING

WHAT IS PLACE-BASED PLANNING?

The Place-Based Planning approach utilized by the Gastonia Comprehensive Plan provides a structured and forward-thinking framework for managing growth and development that reflects the unique characteristics and aspirations of the community, while encouraging economic development and fiscal responsibility. Place Based Planning is a tool to bridge the gap between high-level planning principles, and tangible, localized actions in the form of zoning, public works, and building code ordinances. Below is the key takeaways and implications of this methodology.

KEY ASPECTS OF PLACE-BASED PLANNING IN GASTONIA

1. Tailored Growth Patterns:

- Growth is concentrated along Prioritized Corridors and within Nodes to manage land use effectively and enhance accessibility.

- Development patterns are informed by Place Types, which provide a clear vision for land use and its character across different areas.

2. Alignment with Community Vision:

- The focus on Place Types ensures growth balances natural and built environments, supporting Gastonia's goals of inclusiveness, affordability, and sustainability.

- Place Types align with Gastonia's priorities for economic development, multi-modal transportation, health, environmental stewardship, and quality of life.

3. Integration with Future Place-Based Map:

- The Future Place-Based Map illustrates the vision for and how areas will develop, ensuring consistent and predictable growth aligned with the community's vision, pending future modifications to zoning, codes and ordinances.

4. Strategic Resource Allocation:

- Growth is concentrated into manageable service areas, maximizing public investment returns.

- Community Health & Connectivity: Promotes active lifestyles through pedestrian-oriented design and access to green spaces.

5. Economic Vitality:

- Supports diverse housing options and job opportunities, attracting residents and businesses leveraging their proximity to one another.

6. Distinct Identity:

- Creates visually identifiable communities within Gastonia's overall development pattern, allowing residents to enhance cultural and aesthetic appeal at the Neighborhood and District level.

Application with Gastonia's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)

- The UDO will serve as the regulatory backbone to implement Place-Based Planning principles.

- Permits zoning districts to be applied according to the goals of each Place Type.

- Provides the framework to adapt policies to changing community needs while maintaining alignment with the Comprehensive Plan.

NEIGHBORHOODS, DISTRICTS, CORRIDORS

A fundamental principle that will guide Gastonia's growth is the organization of future development into neighborhoods, centers, and districts using a Place Based approach that establishes their character, land use, density, and programming.

CORRIDORS AND WEDGES

WEDGES

- Neighborhood Residential
- General Residential
- Rural Residential

TRANSIT CORRIDORS

══ LR/BRT/Bus

── BRD/Bus
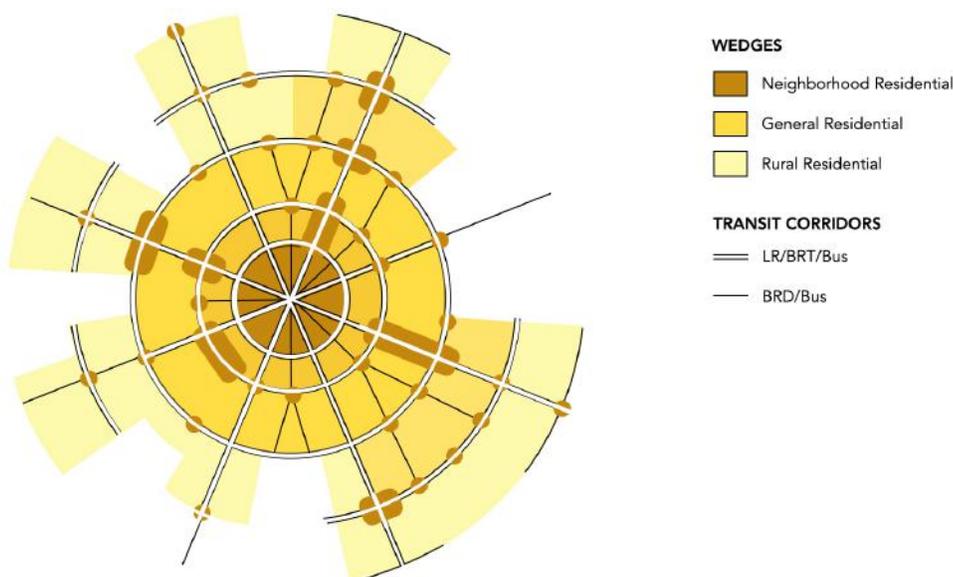
CORRIDORS AND WEDGES

A regional planning method using developmental and environmental based criteria to assign areas for urbanization and preservation. The city is channelized within these boundaries without limit to its geographical extent. Urban growth takes the form of higher density centers and districts located along transposition corridors and transit stops, between wedges of lower density residential neighborhoods, and open spaces.

A secondary system of Corridors include natural components ranging from greenways, parks and wildlife trails which connect urban open spaces such as parks, playgrounds, golf courses and plazas. These continuous spaces can be part of a larger network, connecting the urban centers and districts to the countryside and nature reserves beyond the City, (see Green Spaces & Corridors).

CENTERS & DISTRICTS

WEDGES

- Neighborhood Reside
- General Residential
- Rural Residential

TRANSIT CORRIDORS

- LR/BRT/Bus
- BRD/Bus

CENTERS, DISTRICTS, & N

- Primary Center
- Secondary Center
- District
- Node
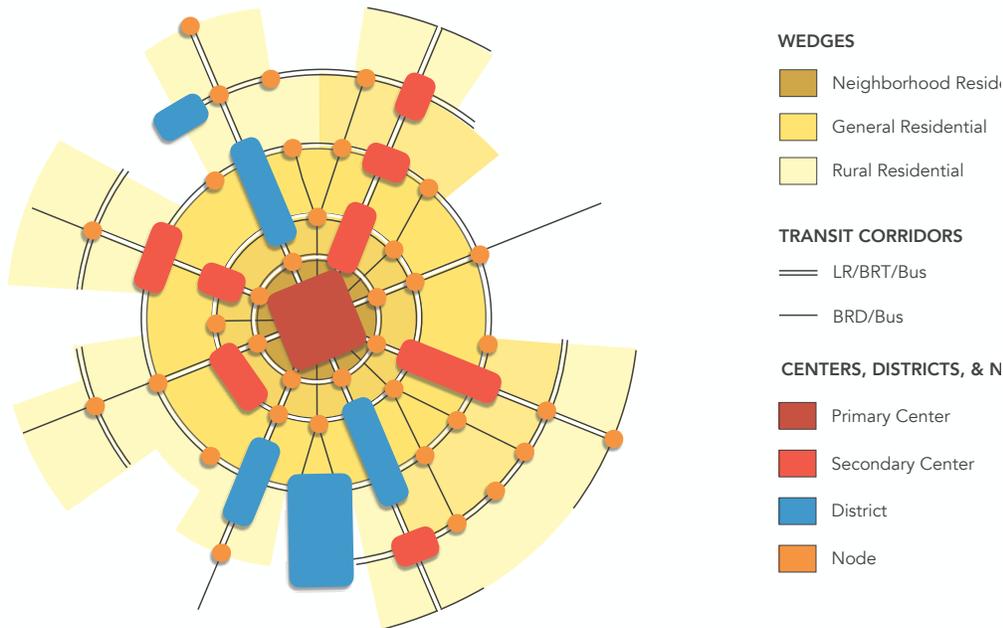
CENTERS & DISTRICTS

A land planning method assigning density and use based on accessibility and location. Centers are the dense multifunctional social condenser of a sector of a City, or a cluster of neighborhoods. A center is usually at a central location, within walking distance, or five to 10 minute transit / automobile ride of surrounding, primarily residential areas. Centers range from the Primary Center, or "downtown" of a metropolitan area, to Secondary Centers at major transportation hubs in suburban locations, to Neighborhood Centers, servicing a grouping of up to four neighborhoods.

A third type of "Center" called a District, is an urbanized area that is specialized around a predominant activity. Districts are exempted from the full range of activities of Centers and Neighborhoods and are only justified if they accommodate uses that cannot be incorporated into a Center, or a Neighborhood, without disruption to the pedestrian quality required of development in such areas. Examples are theater districts, capitol areas, and college campuses. Other districts accommodate large scale transportation or manufacturing uses, such as airports, container terminals, refineries, and the like. The structure of the District should parallel that of the neighborhood: an identifiable focus encourages orientation and identity, while clear boundaries facilitate the formation of special management organizations. Districts benefit from transit systems, and should be appropriately located within the regional network. Where practical interconnection with adjacent neighborhoods should be provided.

TYPICAL NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

Legend:
- Neighborhood Center
- Neighborhood Residential
- General Residential
- Recreational Open Space
- Environmental Corridor & Recrea
- Institutional Use
- Transit Line/Station
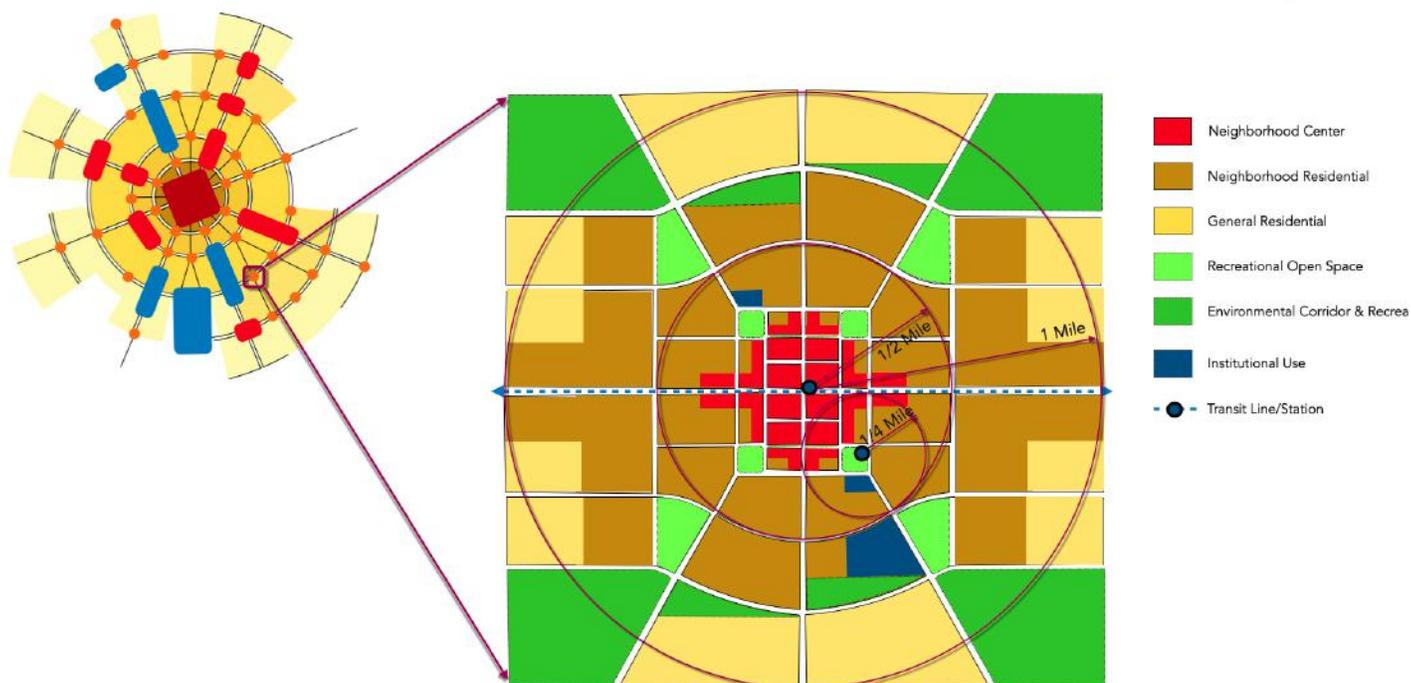
TYPICAL NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

The smallest in area and least dense Center is a Neighborhood Center. A Neighborhood Center is the mixed-use focus of a cluster of up to four individual neighborhoods that are each structured on the five minute 1/4 mile pedestrian walking shed as measured from a major intersection and/or transit stop. Taken together, such a grouping of neighborhoods provides a land area with a 1/2 mile catchment that is ideal for walking, and an additional 1/2 mile driving/cycling shed to access daily uses and various transit options as available to the community, The advantage of this model is the high ratio of the Neighborhood area that is within the pedestrian catchment. Taking the mile-square represented by the typical Neighborhood Center catchment, the pedestrian shed includes 70% of the developable area. Because a substantial proportion of the inhabitants are within walking distance of the center, transit will tend to work, even at relatively low densities.

NEIGHBORHOOD
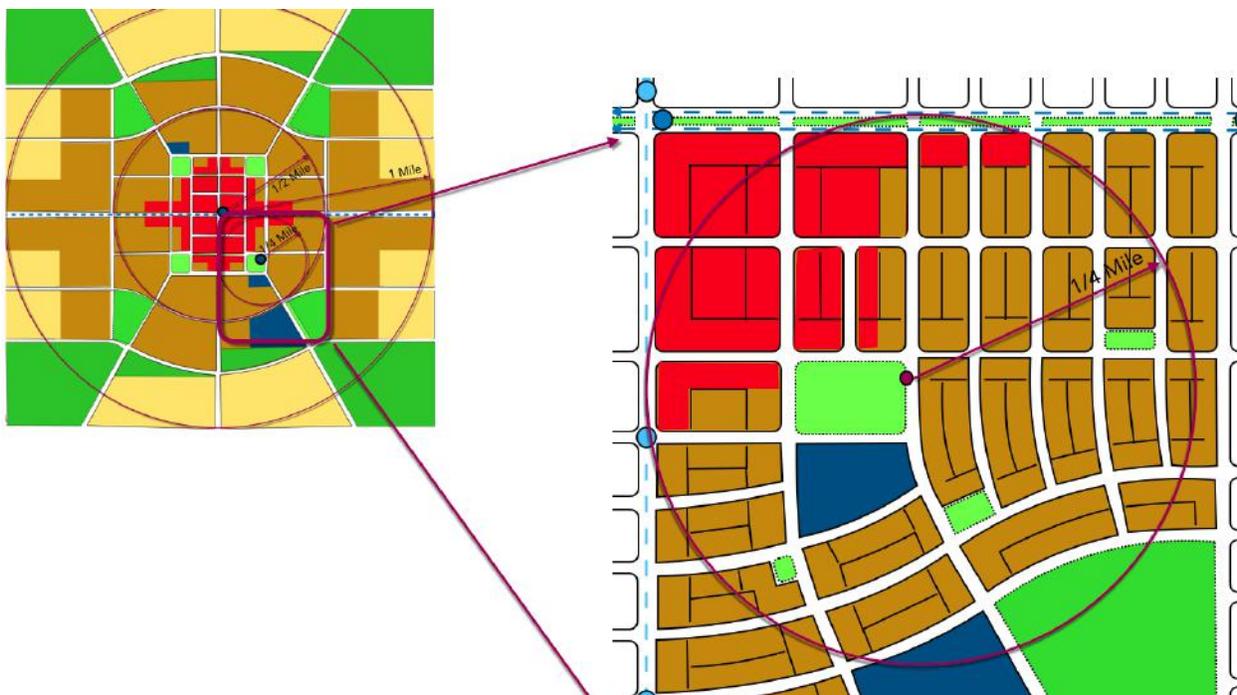
NEIGHBORHOOD

The fundamental human habitat; a community sustaining a full range of ordinary human needs. In its ideal form, the Neighborhood is a compact walkable urban pattern with a balanced range of living, working, shopping, recreational, and educational program within a five minute walk from its center to its edge or approximately 1/4 mile.

GASTONIA'S PLACE-BASED STRUCTURE

The Place-Based Structure is used to:

1. **Guide development and development approval decisions** by identifying locations for various Place Types.

2. **Ensure Complete Neighborhood developments** through the promotion of Residential Place Types of varying scales and densities

3. **Promote Economic Development** by identifying locations for commercial and industrial growth, ensuring land is available for businesses and employment centers.

4. **Preserve Natural Resources** by designating areas for recreation and conservation, such as stream and river corridors, and agricultural lands.

5. **Encourage Investment Concurrency** by aligning the Future Place-Based Map with infrastructure improvements, such as roads, utilities, public transportation systems, parks, schools and community facilities.

6. **Provide Legal and Policy Frameworks** that form the foundation for zoning ordinances, development codes, and other regulatory tools.

Dallas

Ranlo

Lowell

Bessemer City

McAdenville

Cramerton
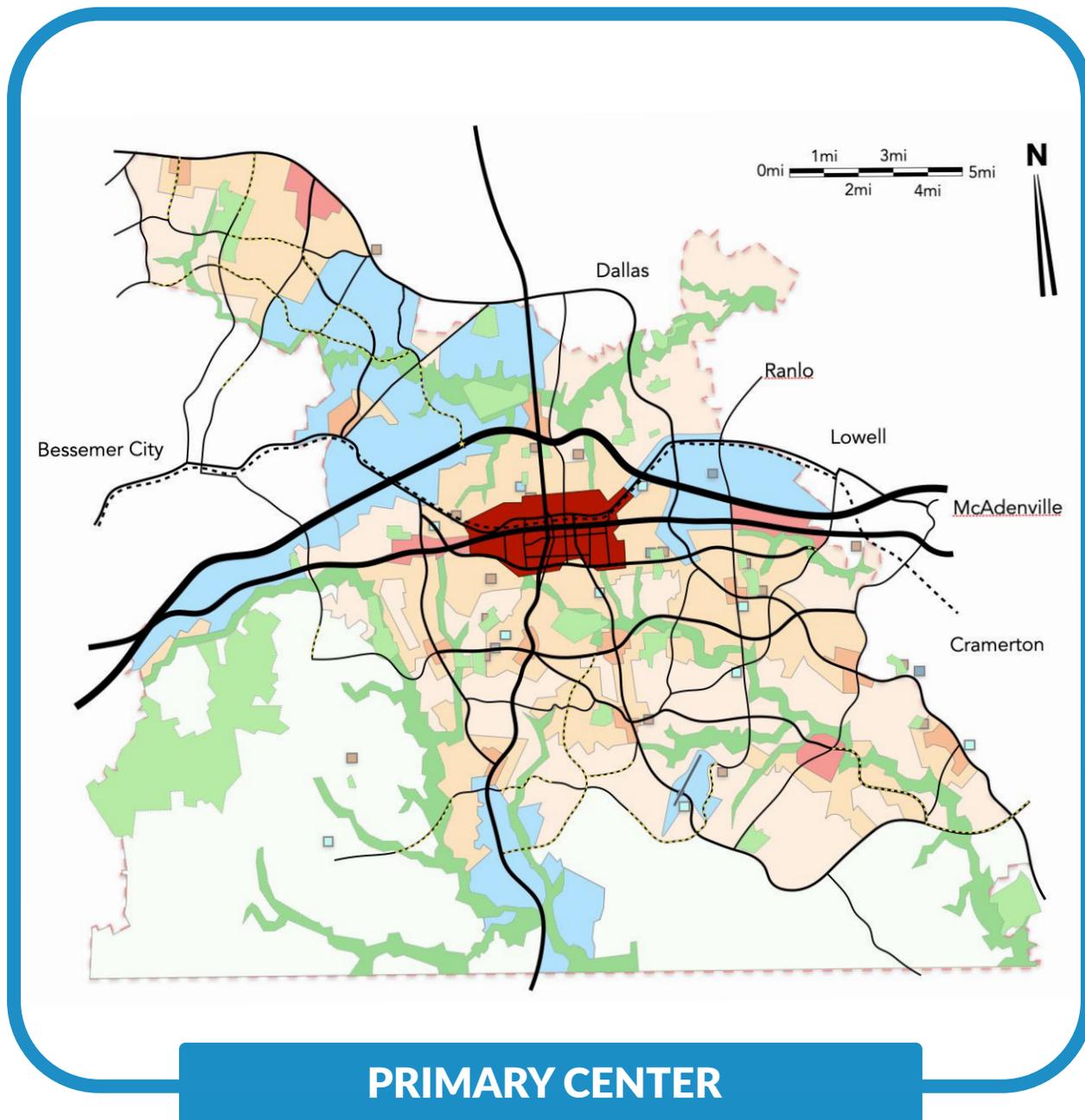
PRIMARY CENTER

The Primary Center of any community is the original Downtown Core. The Primary Center supports the highest levels of mixed-use, greatest population densities, and best connectivity to transportation and infrastructure. Downtowns also are the location for unique regional uses such as arenas and entertainment facilities, and government offices not found in other Centers. The catchment for a Downtown is regional.
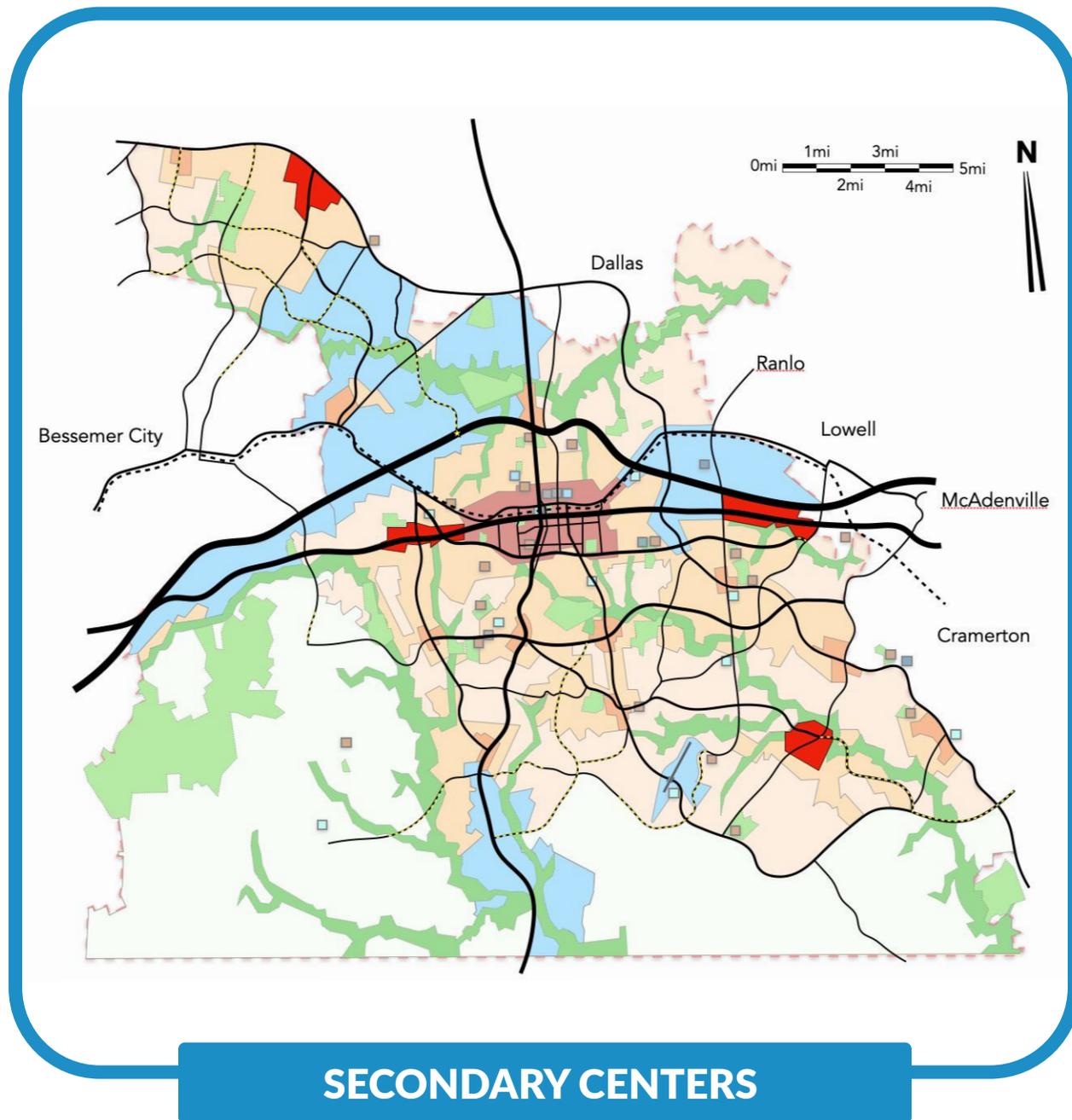
SECONDARY CENTERS

Secondary Centers are agglomerations of similar uses to Primary Centers, but located proximate to specific sectors of a City's residential base. This allows for shorter commute times for many daily needs such as shopping, and employment. Secondary Centers are less dense and cover less area than the Primary Center. The typical catchment of a Secondary Center is approximately five miles, however, they can be closer together, or even abut a Primary Center based on transportation systems and geographical conditions.

Dallas

Ranlo

Bessemer City

Lowell

McAdenville

Cramerton
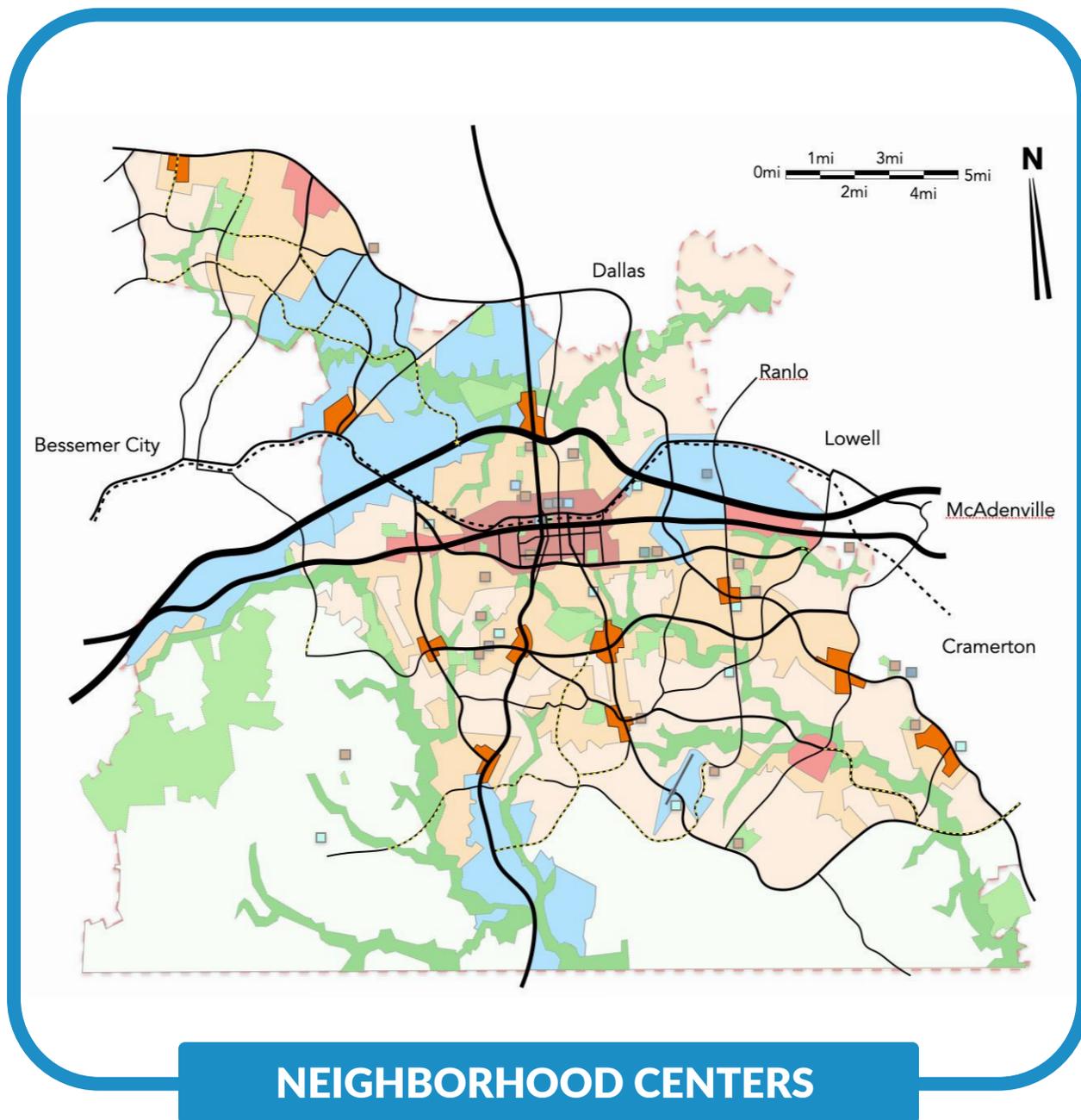
NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Neighborhood Centers serve immediate clusters of neighborhoods. They are the least dense of the Centers, but still include a high degree of mixed-use and higher population densities than the adjoining neighborhoods. The catchment area of Neighborhood Centers is approximately 2 miles.

Dallas

Ranlo

Lowell

Bessemer City

McAdenville

Cramerton

0mi 1mi 2mi 3mi 4mi 5mi

N
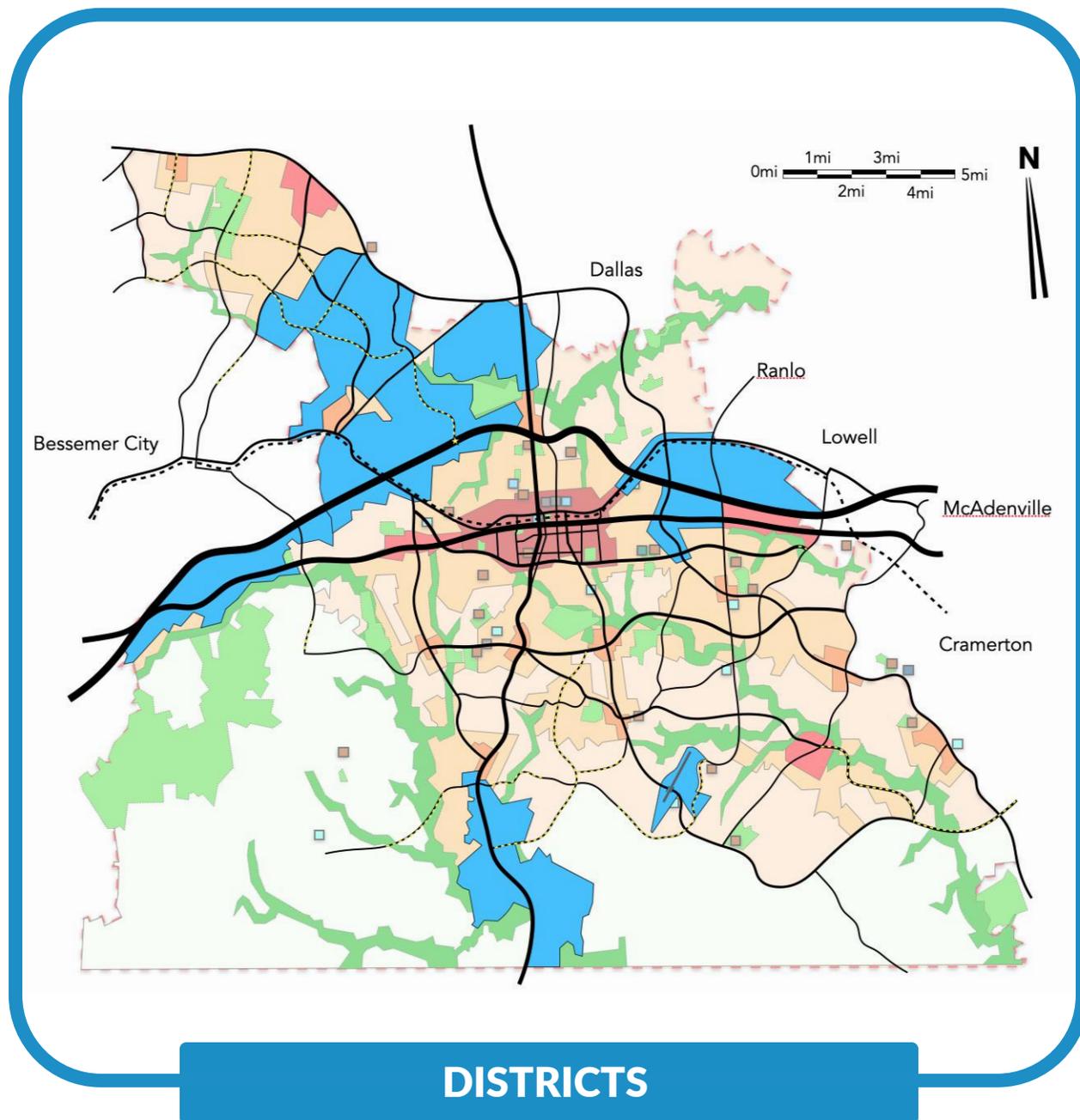
DISTRICTS

A District is an area of land consisting of primarily one type of use. Examples of Districts are, Industrial, Office, Medical, Shopping, Airports, and Seaports. Districts contain uses such as limited residential and employment that support the primary use.
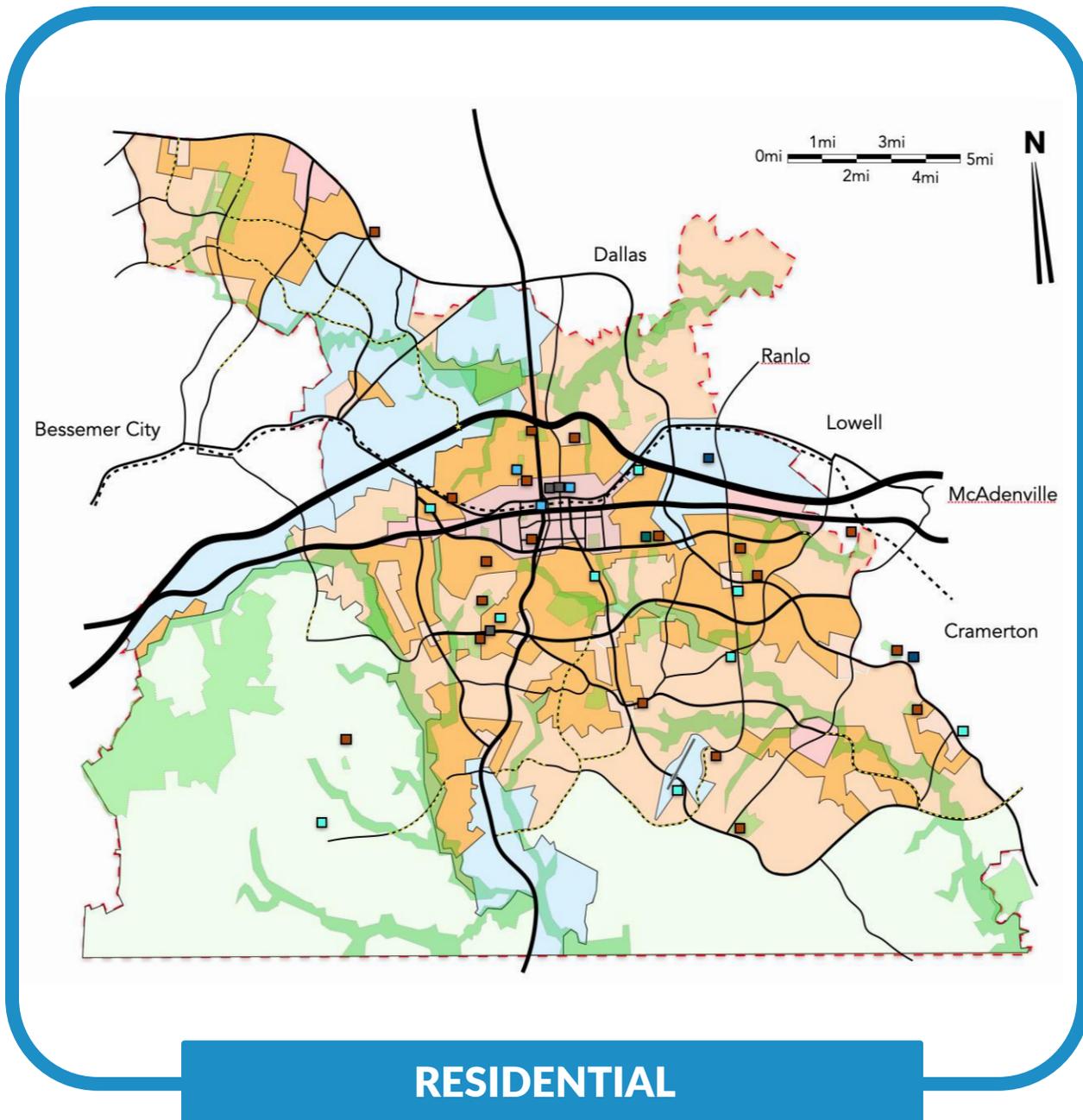
RESIDENTIAL

Residential Place Types illustrate the location and character of existing and future residential neighborhoods outside of the Centers and Districts, and across the Study Area.

Dallas

Ranlo

Bessemer City

Lowell

McAdenville

Cramerton

PARKS, GREENWAYS & TRAILS
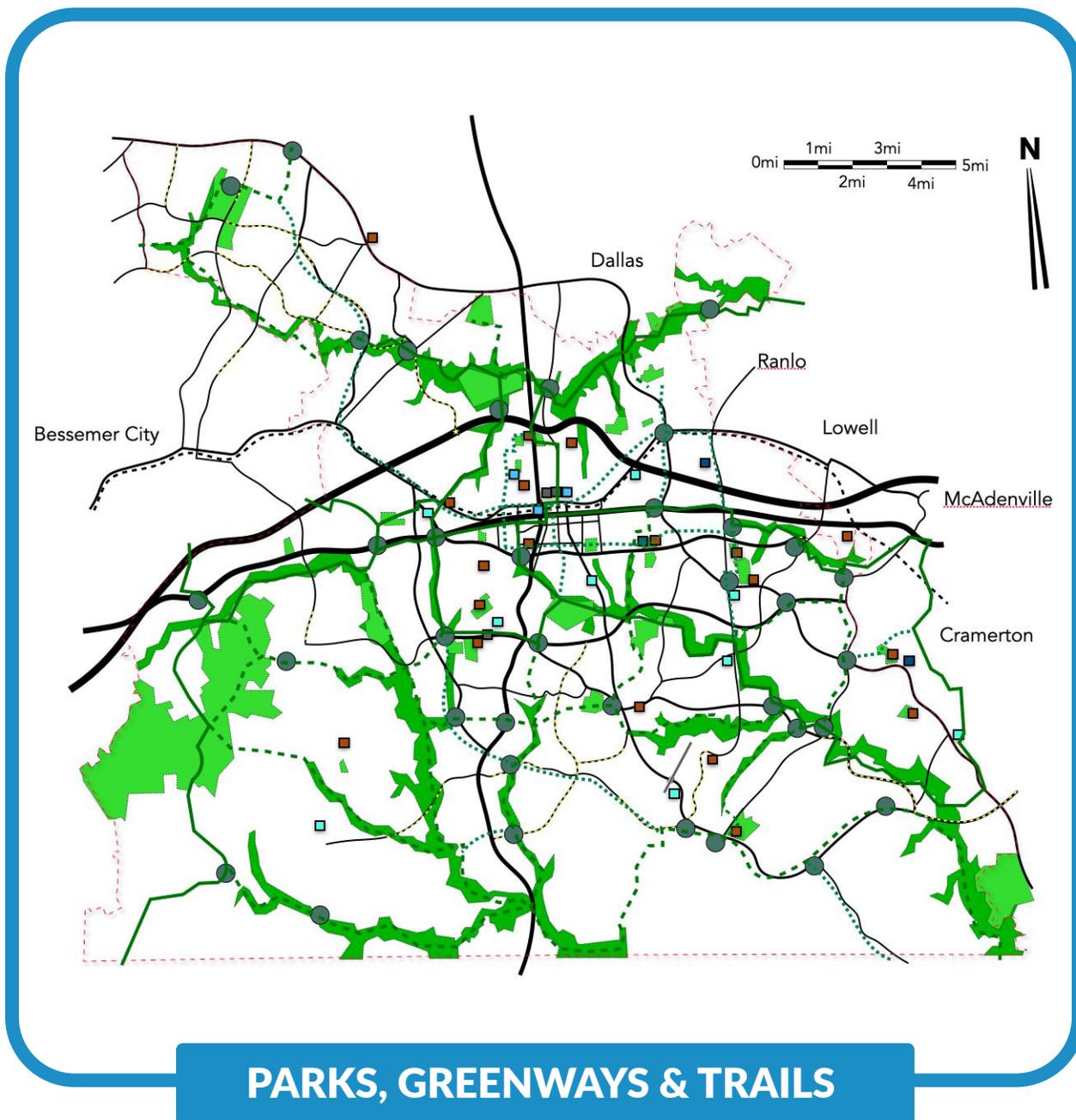
Parks are places set aside for passive or active recreational uses. Natural Open Spaces include Rivers, Creeks, Floodways, Ravines, and other areas of environmental sensitivity that require preservation.

COMPOSITE MAP OF PLACE TYPES
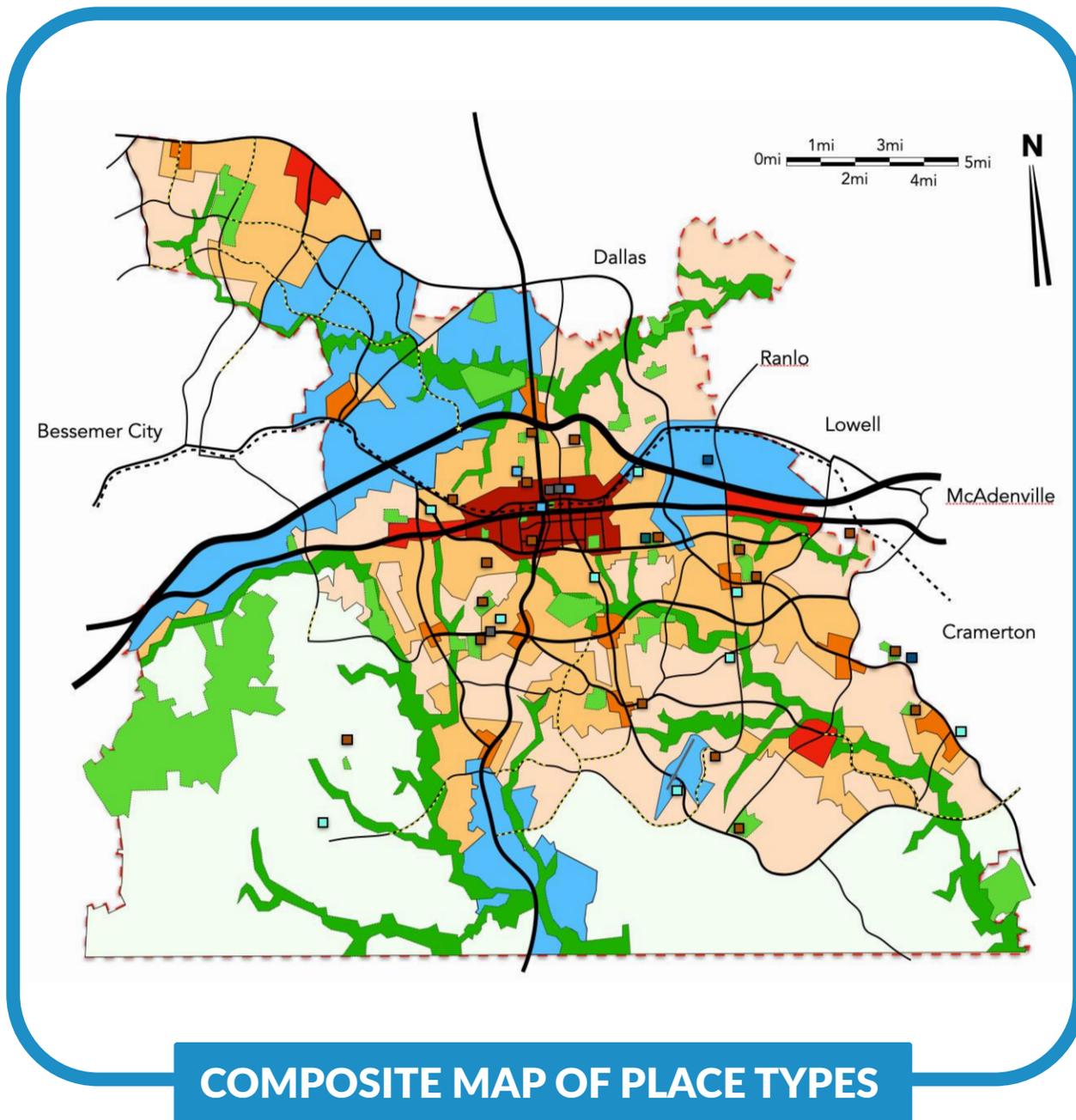
The Composite Map of Place Types illustrates the location and character of future Place Types across the Study Area.
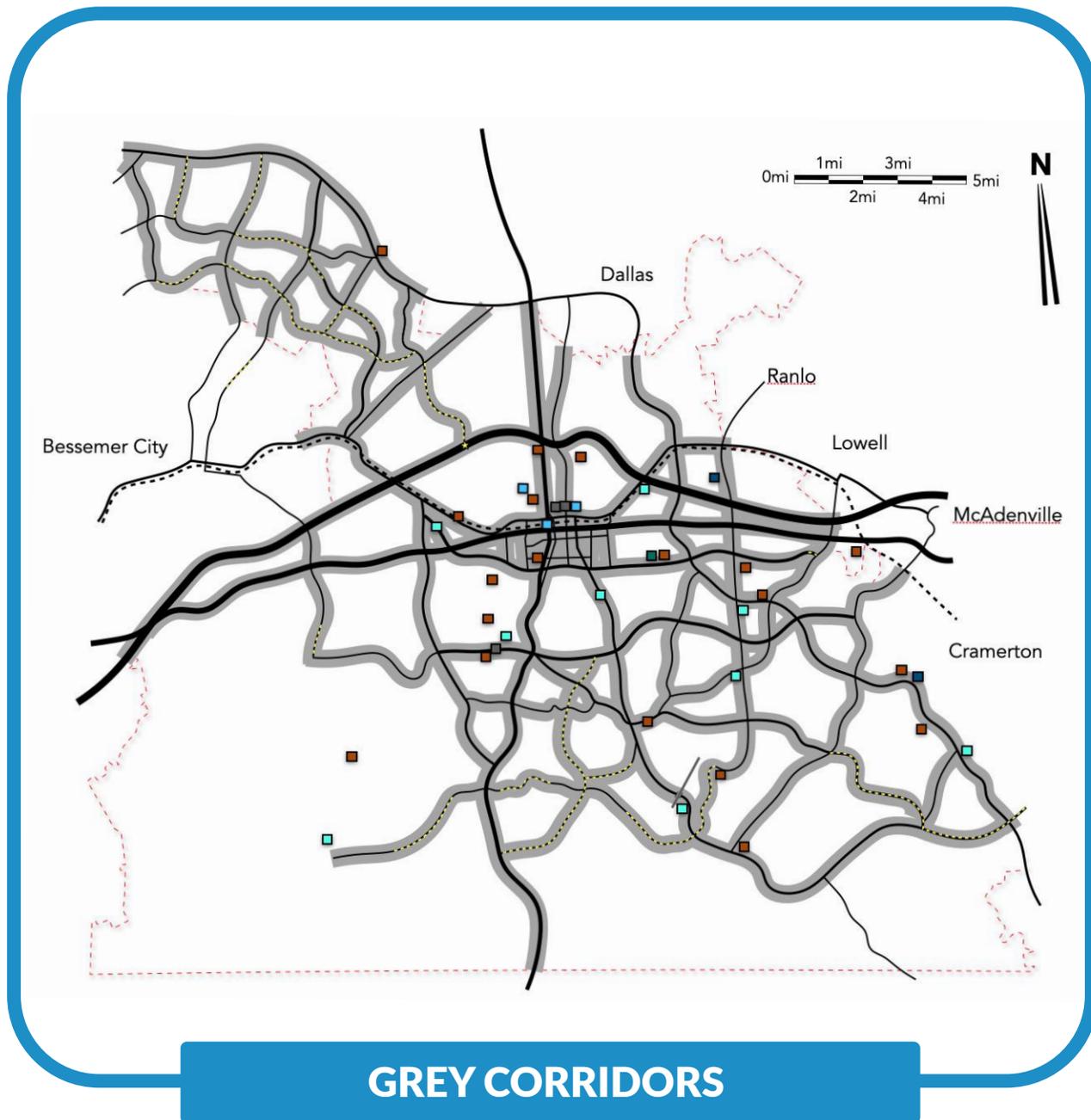
GREY CORRIDORS

Grey Corridors reflect the existing and proposed transportation system of a community, connecting Districts and Centers to one another. Grey Corridors also connect a community with the immediate region. Because of the High Degree of connectivity, access to population centers, and presence of utilities, land along Grey Corridors is prime for residential densification depending on surrounding conditions.
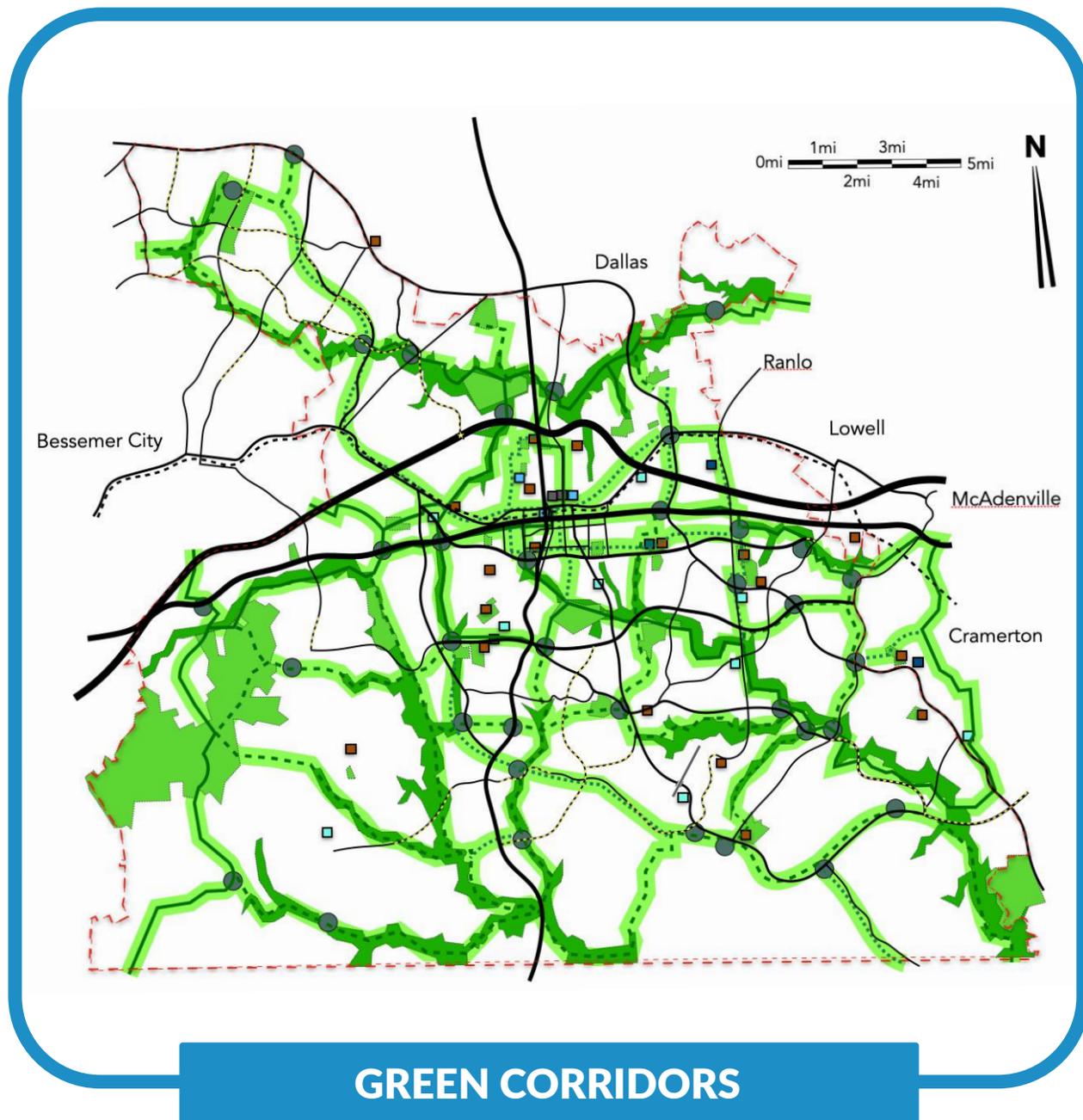
GREEN CORRIDORS

Green Corridors include greenways, trails, and trailheads that compliment grey corridors by providing an alternative means of access for residents to Green Spaces. They are a framework that, along with Grey Corridors, support the locations for Centers. (See Corridors and Wedges page 45).

COMPOSITE CORRIDOR MAP
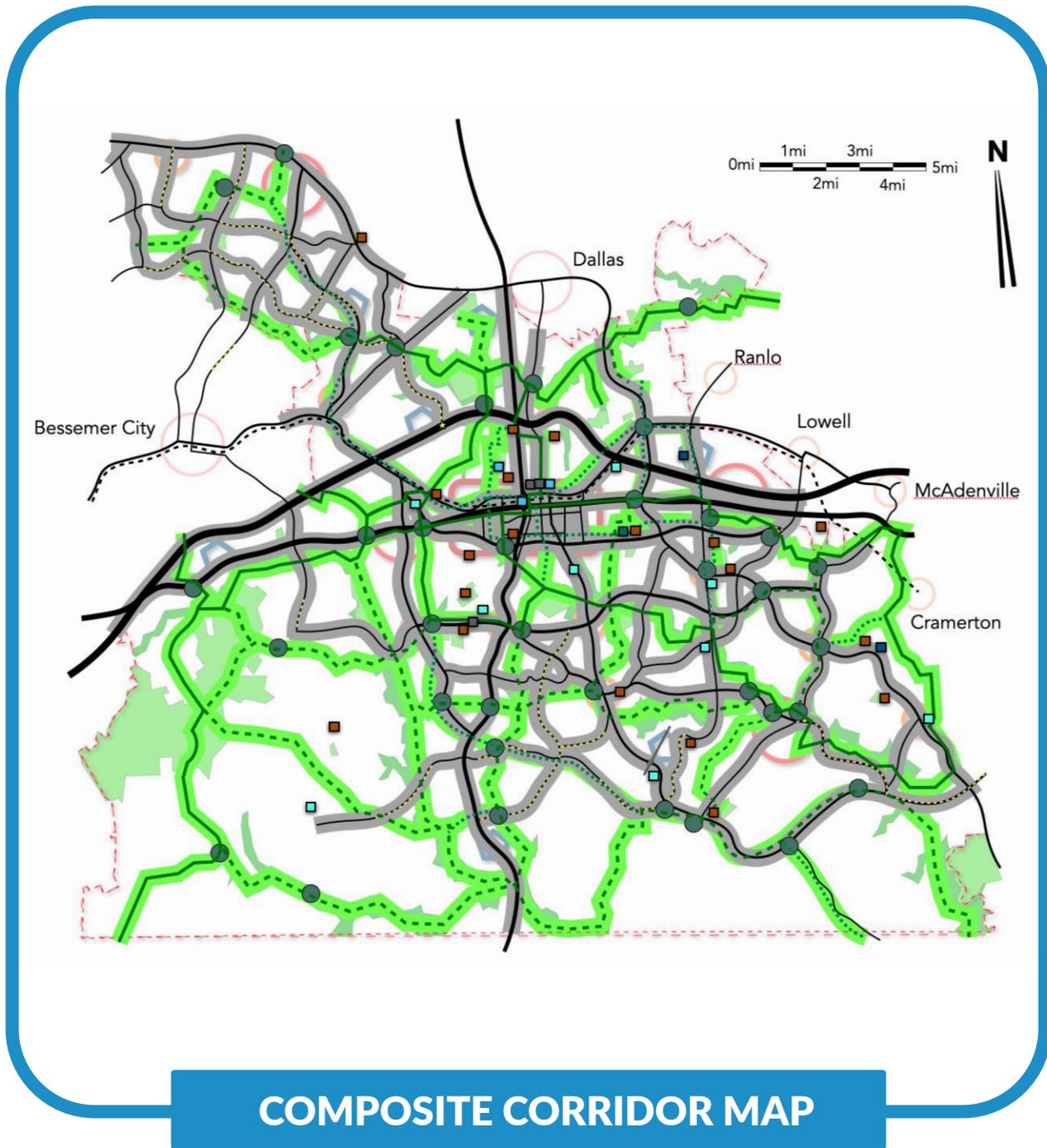
Together, the planning frameworks guide development to support multi-modal connectivity, preserve neighborhood character, ensure efficient and concurrent infrastructure, promote environmental stewardship, and foster economic growth.

"A Place-Based approach will support a structured and forward-thinking framework for managing growth and development that reflects the unique characteristics and aspirations of the community, while encouraging economic development and fiscal responsibility."

WHAT ARE PLACE TYPES?

Place Types represent the aspirational character of development within a designated area by organizing the patterns of land-uses, densities, and open spaces within it. Place Types are assigned the following categories: Rural, General, Neighborhood, & Urban Residential; Primary, Secondary, & Neighborhood Centers; Innovation Mixed-Use, Campus / Institutional, Warehouse / Distribution, and Industrial Districts. Within or adjacent to Place Type Areas are: Protected Areas (such as Rivers, Streams and Floodways), Open Spaces (Private and Public), and Parks (Active and Passive).

LIVING PLACES

Rural Residential

Natural lands for preservation, agricultural lands, and low density rural residential development associated with limited, or no utility services, and minimal transportation infrastructure. Housing densities should be 1 unit (single family detached) per acre max, or up to 4 units (single family detached) per acre max for cluster developments not to exceed 15 acres gross in area.

	Protected	Agriculture	Open Space	Parks	Single - Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed - Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/ Institution	Industrial
Primary	●	●	●		●									
Secondary				●					●	●				
Not Applicable						●	●	●			●	●	●	●

General Residential:

Predominantly large lot single-family detached homes with ADU's. Housing densities range from 4 units per acre to 12 units per acre and may include duplex units. Density may reach up to 18 units per acre on properties not exceeding 30 acres gross in order to protect environmentally sensitive areas or if located within a quarter mile of a transit corridor or stop.

	Protected	Agriculture	Open Space	Parks	Single - Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed - Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/ Institution	Industrial
Primary	●		●	●	●									
Secondary										●				
Not Applicable		●				●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●

Neighborhood Residential:

A mix of single-family detached homes, attached townhomes, small multi-family buildings of up to 12 units, and ADU's. Housing densities range from 12 units to 24 units per acre.

	Protected	Agriculture	Public Open Space	Parks	Single - Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed - Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/ Institution	Industrial
Primary	●		●	●	●									
Secondary						●	●	●		●				
Not Applicable		●							●		●	●	●	●
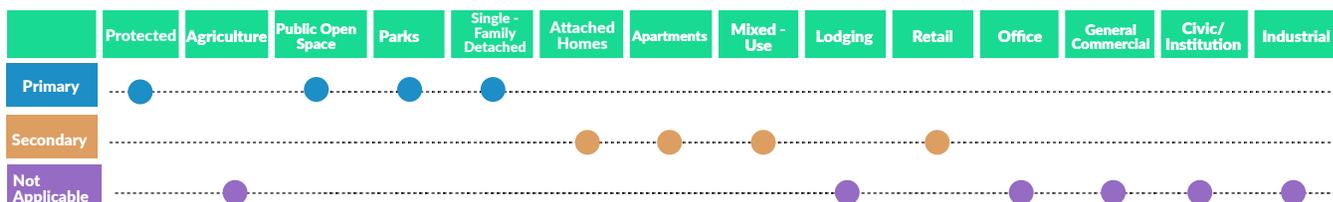
MIXED USE CENTERS

Lands set aside predominantly for the development of service uses in support of surrounding residential population catchments. The type of Center reflects the size of the residential catchment it services. Depending on their type, Mixed Use Centers will include appropriately designed residential building types, and resource protection and open space lands, set aside for active and passive recreation, and environmental buffers to mitigate storm water runoff, and preservation of important natural habitat and tree cover. The size and catchment of Mixed-Use Centers are listed below from smallest to largest.

Neighborhood Center:

Walkable hubs servicing convenience oriented uses within an immediate walkable catchment of residential development. A mix of predominantly attached townhomes, multi-family buildings (including buildings greater than 12 units), some single family detached homes, and ADU's. Urban Residential development may include mixed-use commercial servicing the immediate population.

Land Use	Primary	Secondary	Not Applicable
Protected	●		
Agriculture			●
Open Space	●		
Parks	●		
Single-Family Detached	●		
Attached Homes	●		
Apartments		●	
Mixed-Use		●	
Lodging			●
Retail			●
Office		●	
General Commercial			●
Civic/Institution	●		
Industrial			●

Secondary Center:

Medium sized node, providing goods, services, and entertainment to a group of surrounding Neighborhoods and Districts. A mix of predominantly attached townhomes, multi-family buildings (including buildings greater than 12 units), some single family detached homes, and ADU's. Urban Residential development may include mixed-use commercial servicing the immediate population. Centers may include medium to high density housing opportunities. Housing density will be determined based on the cap of 12 stories for multi-family buildings.

Land Use	Primary	Secondary	Not Applicable
Protected	●		
Agriculture			●
Open Space	●		
Parks	●		
Single-Family Detached			●
Attached Homes	●		
Apartments	●		
Mixed-Use	●		
Lodging	●		
Retail	●		
Office	●		
General Commercial		●	
Civic/Institution	●		
Industrial			●
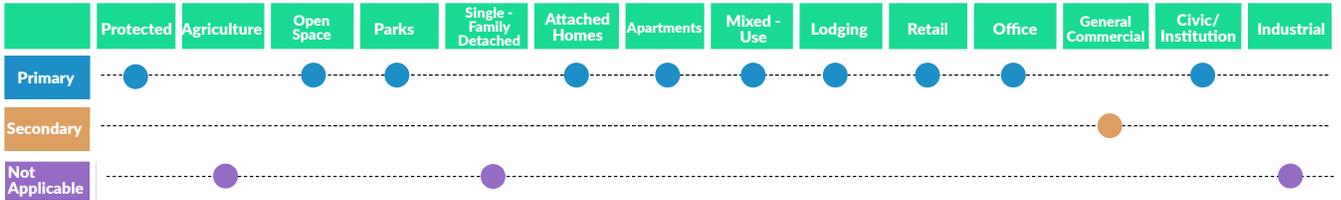
Primary Center (Downtown):

Land set aside for servicing multiple Neighborhoods and Districts, located along major thoroughfare and transit corridors with direct connections to the surrounding region. A mix of predominantly attached townhomes, multi-family buildings (including buildings greater than 12 units), some single family detached homes, and ADU's. Urban Residential development may include mixed-use commercial servicing the immediate population. Primary Centers may also include entertainment uses. Housing density will be based on the number of floors for multi-family buildings.

	Protected	Agriculture	Open Space	Parks	Single-Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed-Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/Institution	Industrial
Primary	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Secondary														
Not Applicable		●												●

EMPLOYMENT DISTRICTS

Lands set aside for predominantly non-residential uses. Employment Districts may require environmental set asides to buffer adjoining Residential Neighborhoods, as well as to help mitigate storm water runoff, and/or the preservation of natural habitat and tree cover deemed important by the Community.

Innovation Mixed-Use:

Lands set aside for developments requiring flexible collaboration and close proximities between work, research, and creative industries. Limited housing and retail may be provided to support employment and visitor populations. Residential use is permitted on up to 35% of the total land area of a District, or up to 40% of the gross square footage of any individual mixed-use building within the District.

	Protected	Agriculture	Open Space	Parks	Single-Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed-Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/Institution	Industrial
Primary	●		●								●			●
Secondary				●		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	
Not Applicable		●			●	●								

Campus Institutional:

Lands set aside predominantly for universities, colleges, hospitals, and corporate office parks that are arranged as cohesive master planned developments. Residential use is permitted on up to 35% of the total land area of a District, or up to 40% of the gross square footage of any individual mixed-use building within the District.

	Protected	Agriculture	Open Space	Parks	Single-Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed-Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/Institution	Industrial
Primary	●		●	●				●		●			●	
Secondary									●		●			
Not Applicable		●				●	●					●		●

Warehouse / Distribution:

Lands set aside for a diverse range of users involved in large scale warehousing and distribution centers.

	Protected	Agriculture	Open Space	Parks	Single-Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed-Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/Institution	Industrial
Primary	●		●											
Secondary												●		●
Not Applicable		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	

Industrial:

Lands set aside for a diverse range of users involved in production, logistics, and research.

	Protected	Agriculture	Open Space	Parks	Single-Family Detached	Attached Homes	Apartments	Mixed-Use	Lodging	Retail	Office	General Commercial	Civic/Institution	Industrial
Primary	●		●											●
Secondary								●		●	●	●		
Not Applicable		●		●			●		●				●	

RELATIONSHIP TO ZONING

PLACE TYPES

NEIGHBORHOOD
Rural Residential RR
General Residential GR
Neighborhood Residential NR

MIXED USE CENTERS
Neighborhood Center NC
Secondary Center SC
Primary Center PC

EMPLOYMENT
Innovation - INV-D
Campus/Institutional - CI-D
Warehouse / Distribution - WD-D
Industrial IND-D

CONSERVATION
Nature N-CV
Agriculture A-CV

ZONING DISTRICT

RESIDENTIAL
RLD - Residential Low Density
RS-12 - 12,000 sq.ft. lots
RS-8 - 8,0000 sq.ft. lots
RMF - Multifamily
PD-R - Planned DVP. Residential
PD-MX - Planned DVP. Multifamily

COMMERCIAL
C-1 - Neighborhood Business
C-2 - Highway Business
C-3 - General Business
CBD - Central Business
TMU - Transitional Mixed Use
UMU - Urban Mixed Use

OFFICE
O-I - Office
O-LC - Office Light
O-M - Medical Office

INDUSTRIAL
I-U - Urban Industrial
I-1 - Light Industrial
I-2 - General Industrial
I-3 - Exclusive Industrial

OTHER ZONES
SP - State Park
AP - Airport

URBAN PATTERNS AND FORM

Private Realm Components
1. Buildings that engage the street
2. Entrances that front the street
3. First floor transparency
4. Pedestrian oriented first floor uses (e.g. restaurant)
5. Upper floor residential and office uses
6. Articulated building facades
7. Parking at the side or rear of buildings

Public Realm Components
A. Street trees
B. Sidewalks (5'-12')
C. Bike lanes or sharrows
D. Street furniture (e.g. benches)
E. Pedestrian level lighting
F. On-street parking
G. Public Art

Urban form is fundamental to the growth framework in Gastonia.

For Gastonia to achieve its goals, it must embrace a physical form that extends beyond Downtown. Today, much of the city is shaped by auto-centric suburban design—separated land uses, strip centers, and buildings pushed back behind parking lots—making it difficult to get around without a car. If this pattern continues, growth and progress will stall. Gastonia must instead look, feel, and function like a true urban place, with streets, parking, and buildings designed to engage people and the public realm.

Private Realm | Public Realm
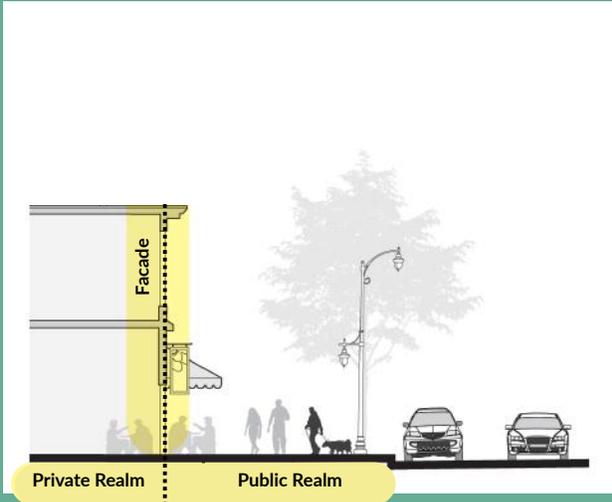
For a City to have vibrancy and sense of place, it is crucial that it has great streets. Great streets depend on the seamless integration of the public realm (streets and public spaces) and the private realm (buildings and private spaces). The way these two meet—the "interface"—is critical in every context, from commercial and mixed-use corridors to neighborhood streets, whether suburban or urban.

Private Realm Components

① Entrances and porches that front the street

② Garage entrance located behind building entrance (or side loaded)

③ Common open space and/or trails

Public Realm Components

Ⓐ Street trees

Ⓑ Sidewalks (5'-6') on both sides of street

Ⓒ Shared use lanes for bikes

Ⓓ Pedestrian level lighting

Ⓔ On-street parking

Designing the public and private realms is just as vital in neighborhoods as in mixed-use areas. Streets with sidewalks, trees, lighting, and landscaping create safety and comfort, while diverse architecture and housing types give new neighborhoods the sense of place and authenticity often found only in cherished older ones.

SUMMARY:

1. List of Investment Priorities based on:
 a) The Vision
 **b) Community Values & Principles**

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

- **Development & Redevelopment of Prioritized Corridors**

- **Complete Neighborhoods**

- **Transportation Connectivity**

- **Nature Preserves, Open Spaces, Parks, & Greenway Networks**

- **Concurrency of Infrastructure & Community Services**

Illustrative Diagram

LEGEND

- Primary Center
- Secondary Center
- Neighborhood Center
- District
- Neighborhood Residential
- General Residential
- Rural Residential
- Park
- New Park
- School Park
- Natural Preserve
- Primary Road Connection
- New Road Connection
- Railroad
- Corridor
- School
- Fire
- Police
- Hospital
- Government Building
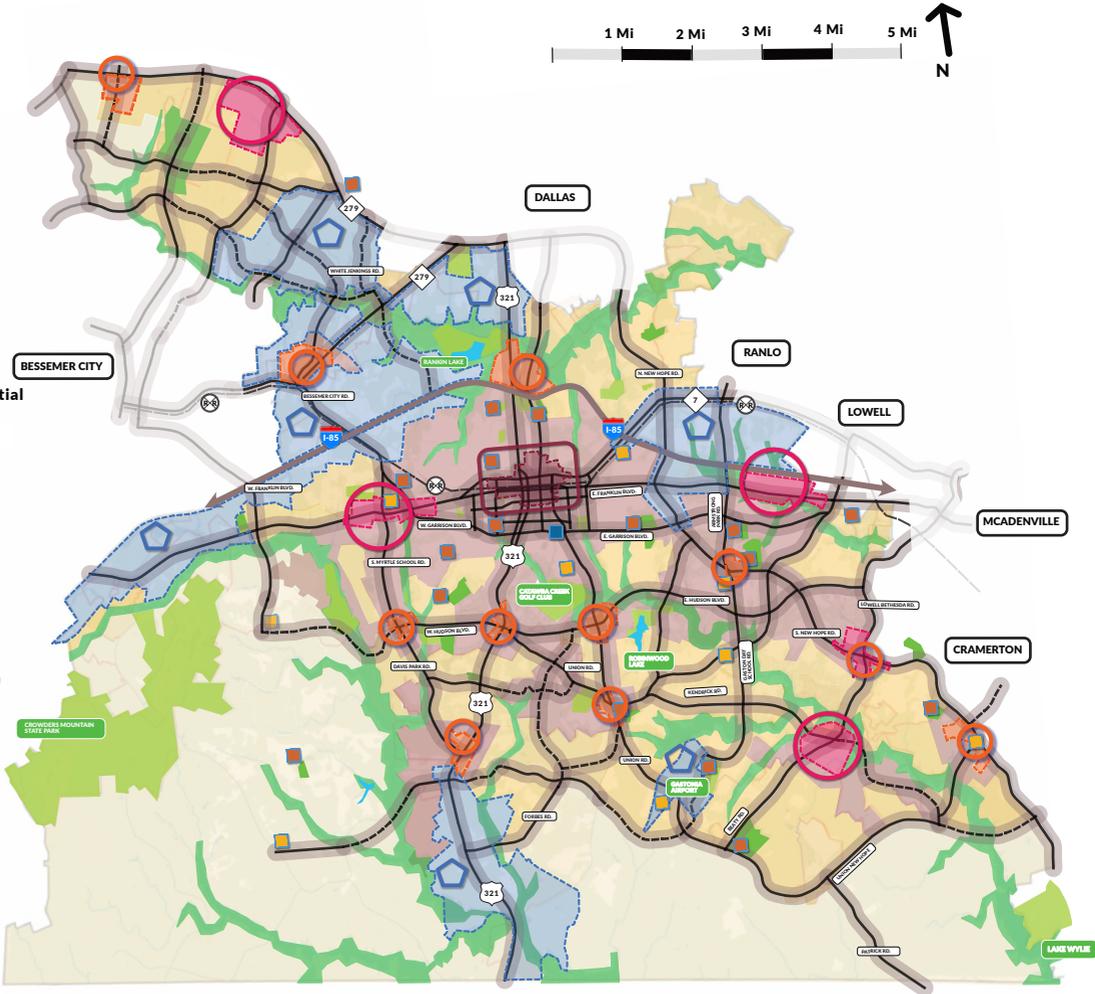
Various "Place Types" are overlaid on key transportation networks and land areas to organize growth into walkable Neighborhoods, Centers, and Districts that support a mix of land uses of various scales and densities.

DEVELOPMENT & REDEVELOPMENT of PRIORITIZED CORRIDORS

Goal:

Establish an economic and environmental development strategy using Place-Based Planning techniques and principles to allocate employment, housing, and City services within and/or proximate to each Corridor identified within the Comprehensive Plan.

The distribution of employment, housing and services should be guided by parameters established through zoning, trip capture rates, housing unit needs of projected populations, municipal infrastructure costs, and future tax revenue generation.

A Place-Based Development Strategy will require cross agency coordination and protocols. Downtown Gastonia's outsized importance to municipal revenue generation, existing infrastructure investments, connectivity to the region, and history make it the highest priority when initiating the Development Strategy approach.

Context:

Tax incentives, public/private partnerships, zoning & small area plans, utility extension & upgrades, and road improvements guide the location, size, and program for all projects permitted in the Comprehensive Plan study area.

Participants in this arena include Gastonia's Economic Development Department, the Gaston County Economic Development Commission, the Gastonia Planning Department, the Gaston County Planning Department, Two Rivers Utilities, and the Gastonia Public Works Department. Each represent an independent authority, individually engaged in aspects relating to the development and redevelopment of the City.

While cross agency coordination does currently exist, it is not procedurally institutionalized within a policy framework that promotes optimal development reviews and concurrency with any agreed upon Municipal goals. Interagency protocols for the design and approval of developments should be strengthened and expanded, and goals for outcomes agreed upon.

Downtown Gastonia represents the largest concentration of existing infrastructure investment in Gaston County, offering the greatest opportunity to leverage increased value from improved tax revenue, and population growth through redevelopment.

As such, Downtown represents the City's "core" node, located at the intersecting point of almost all the selected Corridors, and should be given special consideration within the City's development strategy.

Strategies & Actions:

1. **Establish a Strategic Development Plan for the Comprehensive Plan Study Area that includes the following items categorized by participant authority:**

   Economic Development:

   - Create an existing business outreach strategy.
   - Create a new marketing brand and web presence for the office of economic development.
   - Conduct outbound marketing efforts to attract new business investment.
   - Identify and support available real estate assets for lease, sale, development, and/or redevelopment for Commercial/Mixed Use, Parking, limited Workplace, and Residential uses.
   - Engage with state, regional and local entrepreneurial development organizations to provide resources and programming to local entrepreneurs.
   - Strengthen partnerships and programming with local, regional, and state workforce partners to provide opportunities for employment and skills advancement.
   - Identify opportunities to support talent attraction efforts to Gastonia.
   - Become a partner and resource for local, regional, and state tourism organizations.
   - Utilize Economic Development analysis and resources to evaluate future opportunities and marketing efforts related to business recruitment, tourism and hospitality.
   - Strengthen the partnership with the Gaston County EDC.
   - Provide regular opportunities to share best practices with City leadership related to accomplishing the goals of the strategic plan.
   - Consider the creation of measurable goals or metrics to maintain jobs to housing balance, housing affordability, and cost of living affordability.

Planning, Zoning, Pubic Works & Utilities:

- Prepare a unified Master Plan for downtown to include the Gastonia Reimagined Plan, the NC-7 Corridor Study adjacent to Downtown, and the Gastonia Downtown East Small Area Plan.
- Prepare a comprehensive streetscape and open space plan that combines elements of the City's Parks and Recreation Plan to ensure that street improvements prioritize pedestrian mobility and provision of future transit.
- Undertake a Parking Plan with assistance from Economic Development to locate public garage facilities to spur adjacent redevelopment and generate City revenue. Introduce paid on street parking on Downtown streets.
- Create incentives for redevelopment through streamlining permitting, reducing or eliminating fees associated with certain utility charges, and permit reviews, and implementing density bonuses for projects that include affordable housing, and employment projection thresholds to be determined.
- Work to strengthen Code Enforcement policies and adherence.

2. Create a Downtown Gastonia Task Force:

- The Task Force should consist of community representatives charged with overseeing the implementation of the Downtown Gastonia Master Plan.
- Provide physical space for local entrepreneurs to cultivate their businesses, exchange ideas, and provide access to resources.

3. Update the Strategic Plan every 5 years to ensure economic development goals are being met and new opportunities and challenges are responded to promptly.

4. Continue with efforts that best position Gastonia's workforce for current and future employment opportunities.

Strategies & Actions:

- Appoint a Task Force to survey adults in Gastonia regarding their educational needs.
- Assess the need for improved adult job training and develop a plan to meet those needs.
- Develop a program for comprehensive job training including workforce credentialing.
- Promote additional collaboration with Gaston College, UNC-Charlotte, Belmont Abbey, and other providers to connect Adult Basic Education provided by the school system to programs for job training.
- Identify funding sources (state, federal, private) available to provide for computer access to residents in need.

Illustrative Diagram
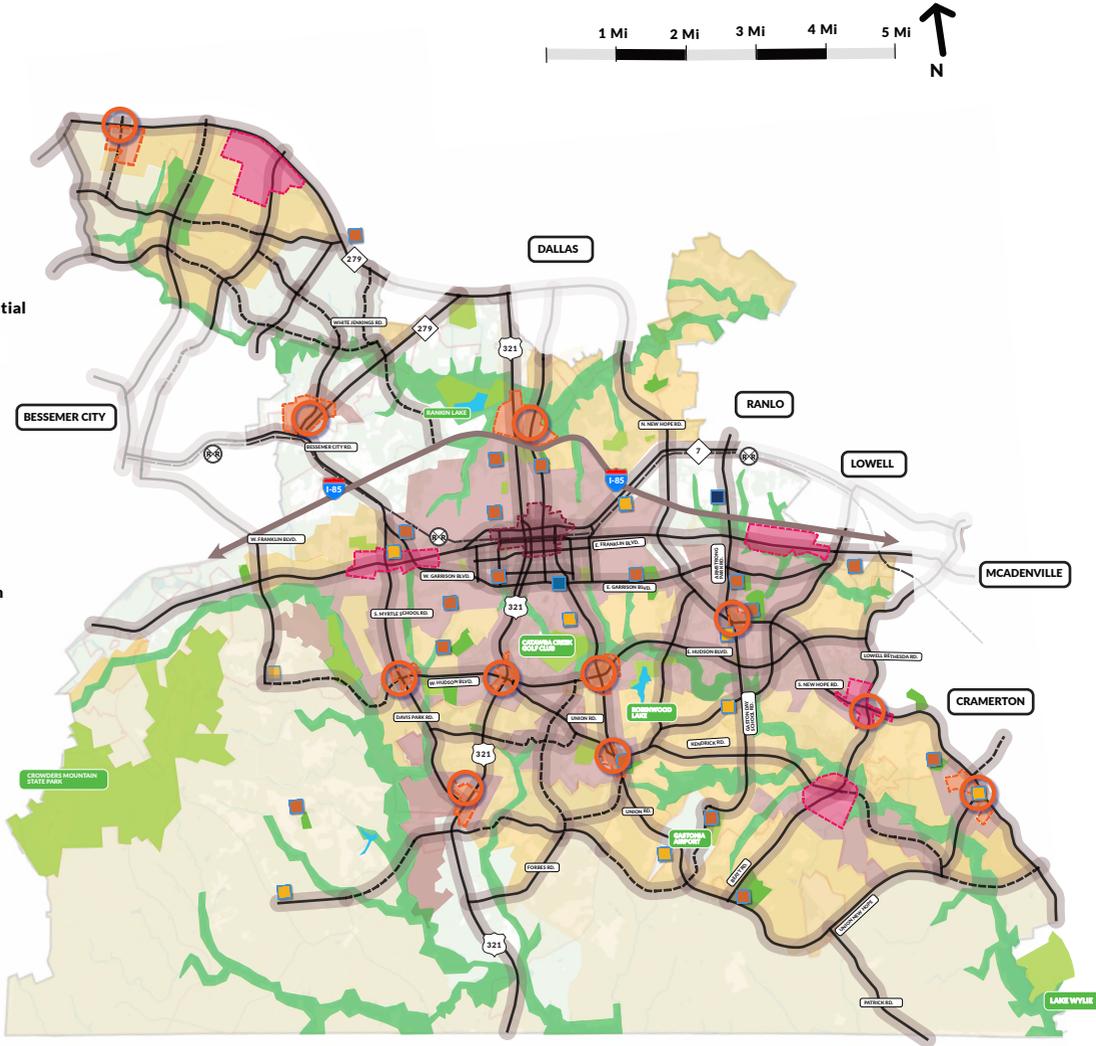
Complete Neighborhoods are walkable, mixed-use areas of varying density where residents can meet most of their daily needs within a short distance from home—typically within a 15 to 20-minute walk, bike ride, or transit trip.

COMPLETE NEIGHBORHOODS

Goal:

Within designated Corridors development should be encouraged using Place-Based Planning techniques and principles to minimize commuting times & trip generation rates per household, increase available housing stock variety, decrease impervious surfaces helping to mitigate cost of storm water infrastructure & water quality measures, provide easier access to open space and recreational amenities, maximize use of existing and improved utility and roading infrastructure, and help to balance municipal expenditures with tax revenue generation.

Context:

Corridors should be proactively planned to avoid becoming single use in their land allocation. A community wide market analysis should be conducted every 5 years at a minimum to determine the land areas assigned to uses for the greater study area.

Once determined, target goals should be assigned to each corridor and node listing the uses and their amounts to guide ongoing permitting, and infrastructure investments.

The disposition of uses and their design should align with the principles and techniques of Complete Neighborhoods and Districts of Place-Based Planning to promote the following strategies and actions:

Strategies & Actions:

1. **Establish and maintain connectivity (including walking/cycling/ transit), sense of place, character, and quality of life through opportunities offered by neighborhood developments that mix shopping, recreation, living within five, ten, and fifteen minute travel times via walking, cycling, transit and automotive trips.**

2. **Encourage growth that enhances return on investment**

   - Promote growth where there is an existing, planned, or funded roadway and utility infrastructure to reduce costs to the City.

3. **Create the tools needed to realize Place-Based Planning outcomes**

   - Continue to prepare Small Area Plans for key areas to guide their development vision.
   - Complete the UDO zoning update.
   - Simplify the permitting process for development that aligns with Place-Based planning.

4. **Align transportation and utility investments with growth model promoted by Place-Based Planning.**

   - Require infrastructure service concurrency for new developments and adequate road, cycle, and pedestrian connectivity between adjacent community developments.

5. Better assess and integrate flood risk and water quality measures as they relate to climate change into existing ordinances.

- Align zoning policies, building and engineering standards, transportation plans, housing plans, and park plans with updated flood and watershed mapping, and incorporate measures and create policies to negate or minimize effects on public infrastructure associated with enhanced flooding.

Illustrative Diagram
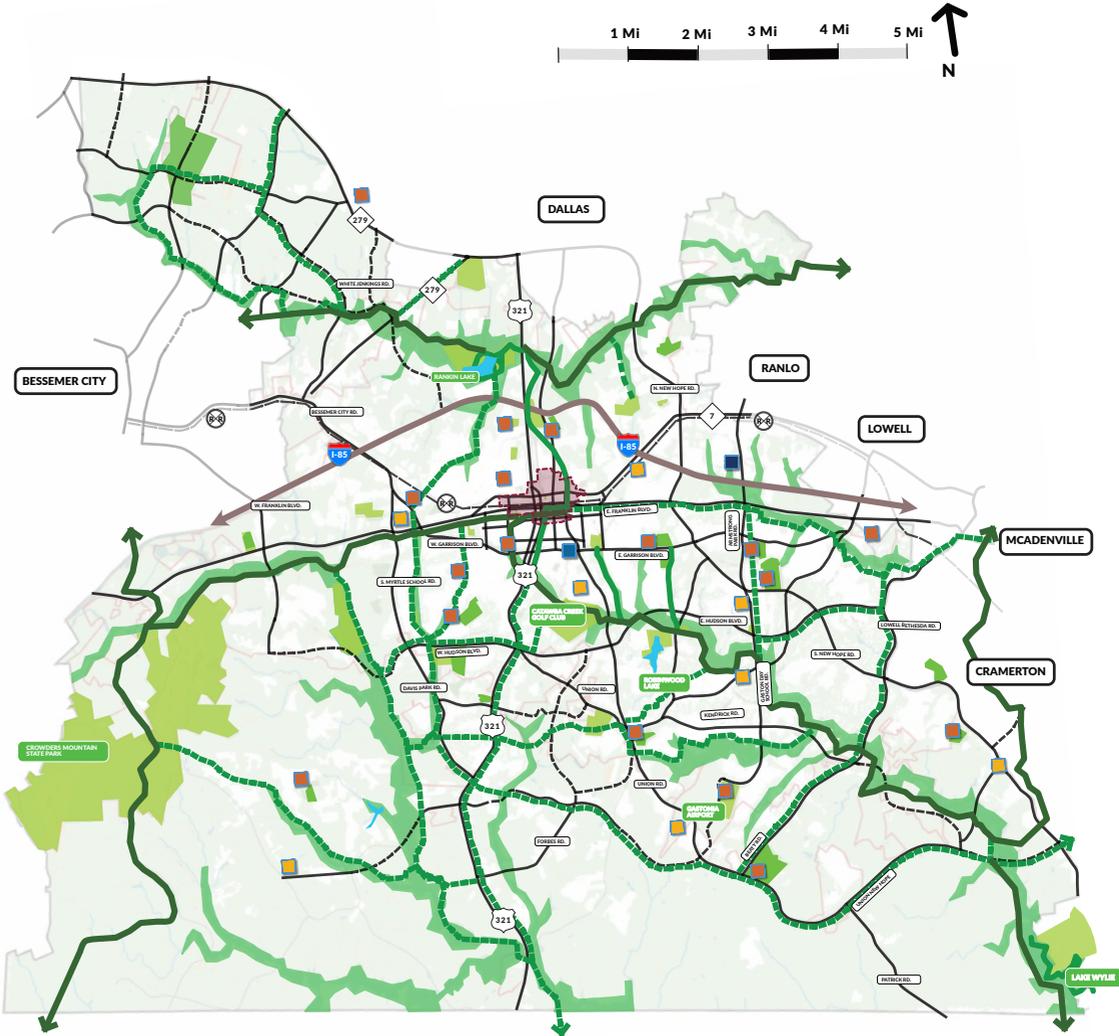
Enhancements to the City's transportation connectivity, including roadways, major trails networks, and various levels of transit (that includes ride share, bus, BRT, and Light Rail over time) will expand connectivity and reduce automobile traffic.

TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIVITY

Goal:

Advance Gastonia's transportation connectivity through multi-modal roadways, new roadway links, enhanced pedestrian and bicycle safety, and improved public transportation in order to anticipate new growth, shift to less car centric ways of travel, reduce congestion and reduce travel times.

Context:

As Gastonia experiences increasing congestion and longer commutes, traditional roadway expansions alone cannot address these challenges or align with place-based planning principles. A holistic approach—focusing on expanded transit, new connections, and multi-modal options—is essential to improve mobility and quality of life.

This will include the implementation of Complete Streets, which is a design and policy framework aimed at creating roadways that are safe, accessible, and convenient for all users, regardless of their mode of transportation, age, or ability.

It will also include the expansion of transit services over time that will reintroduce bus service as population and densities increase. Additionally, the opportunities of Bus Rapid Transit, and Light Rail will enhance mobility as Gastonia becomes more urbanized.

Strategies & Actions:

Grey Connections: Enhancing Transportation Infrastructure

1. **Update and Revise the 2014 Metropolitan Areas: The Way Forward – 2040 Plan to maximize multi-modal connectivity and integrate Place-Based approaches:**

   - Complete Streets.
   - Accessible and attractive multimodal facilities.
   - Expansion of transit services.
   - Access management techniques.
   - Context-sensitive design.
   - Environmental stewardship.

2. **Plan Context-Sensitive Roadway Connections and street cross sections for key roadways, including:**

   - The Garden Parkway.
   - East-West corridor (south of Hudson).
   - Bessemer City North-South corridor.

3. **Implement Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Recommendations**
   - Regularly update plans to reflect this comprehensive vision.
   - Ensure safe sidewalks and bikeways connect schools to neighborhoods.
   - Coordinate future planning in Target Growth Areas.

4. **Continuously update the 2023 City of Gastonia Comprehensive Bicycle Plan to connect Neighborhoods and City assets:**

   - Downtown
   - Parks (existing and proposed)
   - Crowders Mountain, Lake Wylie, Stowe Botanical Gardens, greenways
   - Integrate Corridor and Node planning efforts.

5. Expand Sidewalk and Trail Networks

- Update the 2014 Comprehensive Pedestrian Plan to connect developments and Neighborhoods to City assets.
- Focus on safe, school-connected sidewalks and trail networks.

6. Develop Place-Specific Complete Streets Standards

- Create distinct design standards for rural and urban Complete Streets to meet community character needs.

7. Evolve Transit Services

- Collaborate with metro partners to expand options, including bus, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and rail.
- Design transit-ready corridors, such as Highway 321, for seamless integration with future transit options.

8. Integrate Place-Based Transportation Planning

- Conduct detailed transportation planning around proposed corridors to match land use with context-sensitive mobility options.

9. Plan Orderly and Attractive Transit BRT and Rail Line Locations

- Identify and secure rail line corridors within the Planning Area for long-term transit integration.

10. Expand Airport Infrastructure

- Pursue airport expansion to unlock greater market potential and connectivity.

Strategies & Actions:

## Green Connections: Integrating Natural and Recreational Corridors

11. **Advance key greenway and trail projects identified in the Parks & Recreation Master Plan, Greenways Master Plan Map, and the Carolina Thread Trail system including but not limited to:**

   - Connect Dallas Park to Gaston College, Rankin Lake, and Downtown Gastonia.
   - Extend the Catawba Creek Greenway to Martha Rivers Park.
   - Gastonia to Crowders Mountain State Park (8–12 miles).
   - Gastonia to Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens (7–10 miles).

12. **Conserve floodways, floodplains, and forested slopes; integrate them as connected natural corridors that support biodiversity, recreation, and citywide connectivity.**

13. **Develop visible, welcoming trailheads at key intersections with major corridors and centers to strengthen neighborhood connections to the greenway network.**

14. **Use context-sensitive trail types—such as paved multi-use paths, natural surface hiking trails, and boardwalks in wetlands—to balance recreation with environmental stewardship.**

15. **Include recreational features, seating areas, places to view nature, interpretive elements when designing trail segments.**

Illustrative Diagram
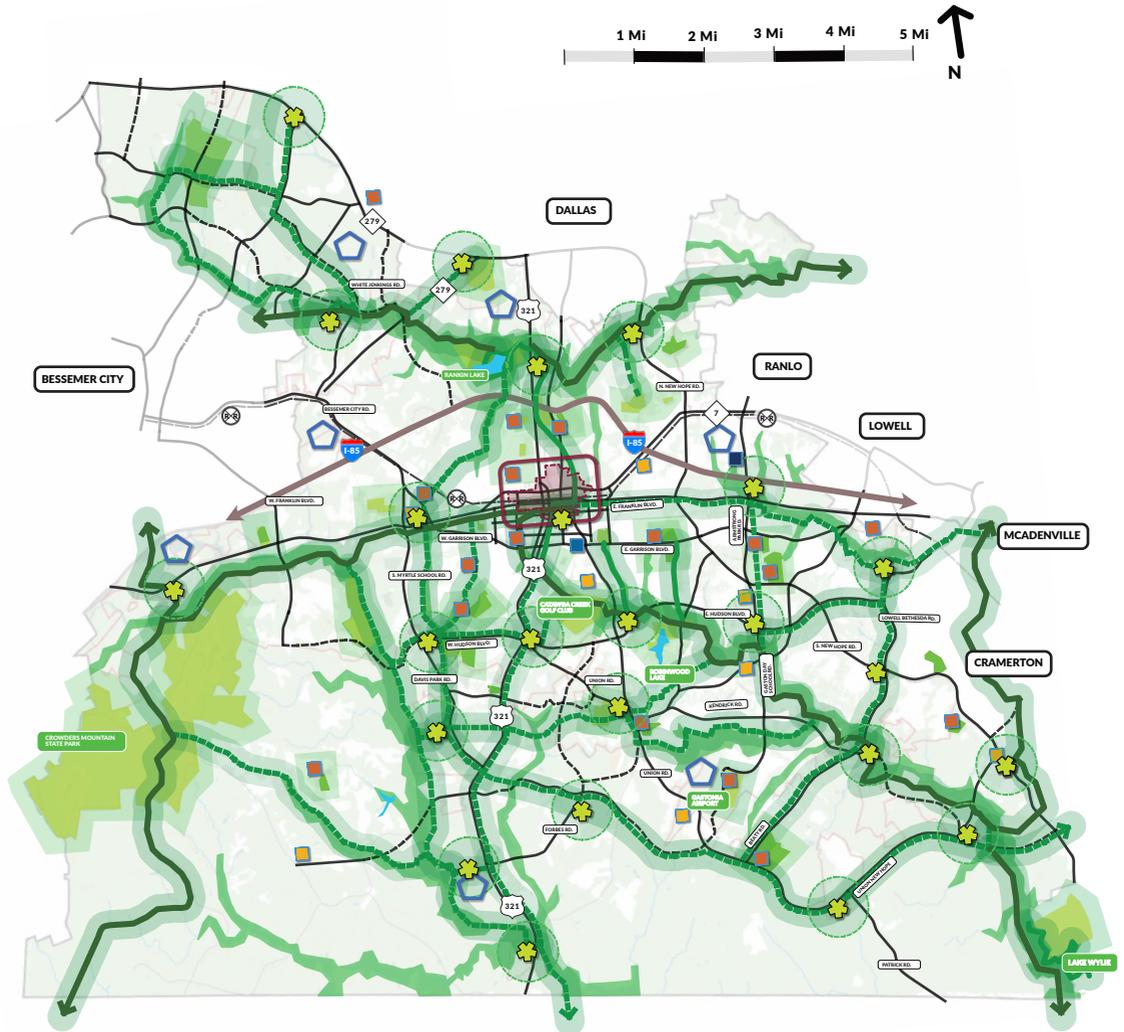
Natural areas, greenways, trails, and green infrastructure link across the City and Planning Area. Areas on the edges of the planning area will retain more of a rural character in cooperation with the County.

NATURE, OPEN SPACES, PARKS, & GREENWAY NETWORKS

Goal:

Define future open space corridors, open spaces, greenways, bikeways, and trails that protect the natural environment and link Neighborhoods and Districts across the City to ensure environmental stewardship and quality of life.

Context:

Building on Gastonia's existing investments in parks, recreation, biking, and pedestrian infrastructure, the city can position itself as a premier destination for outdoor recreation.

By enhancing its identity as a scenic and active city, Gastonia can attract tourists, new residents, and businesses while creating economic opportunities and improving residents' quality of life.

Strategies & Actions:

1. **By 2028, fund and pursue an update to the "Stepping Ahead to a Healthier Tomorrow a parks and recreation masterplan" which was created for the period of 2019 – 2029.**

   - When doing so, consider the benefit or challenges of parks provided by private developers within their developments versus parks that are accessible to all citizens.
   - Consider the entire planning area and plan for adequate park spaces within those based on land use and populations potential.

2. **Continue to audit the priorities and projects highlighted within the parks and recreation masterplan have been completed or are no longer relevant.**

3. **Create a long term, holistic strategy to develop or upgrade City parks, especially in areas that currently don't have them, to increase access and enhance the balance between active parks and less programmed parks:**

   - Provide a variety of parks, including small pocket parks and playgrounds that are equitably located cross the City and easily within walking distances (1/4 mile) of homes.
   - Develop accessible and affordable solutions to accommodate and capture the needs of younger folks (elementary/middle school-aged) through built-environment design and/or programming.
   - Ensure that adequate park space is provided within each new development focus area by proactively planning spatial and program needs.

4. **Explore mechanisms to enhance the funding available to finance park, open space, and greenway creation, development, and maintenance as described in the Parks and Recreation Masterplan.**

- Consider waving parks requirements for new developments and replace with a fee in lieu of so that City can build parks that are open to the community and not locked within private communities.

5. **Ensure that community and park system needs are supported and fulfilled by regularly monitoring and exploring:**

- Parks that are open to the community versus parks that are within private developments.
- An appropriate balance between organized sports complexes, passive parks, neighborhood parks, and small pocket parks.
- Consideration around a regionalized athletic complex that can serve a region of schools to free up land for future on existing properties for future building renovations, additions, or replacement. There could be a possibility of partnership with shared maintenance and revenue.
- Staffing requirements as park system expands.
- Facilities maintenance planning.
- Appropriate revenue generation to support continued funding of high-quality parks experiences.
- Accessibility to open space and within programmed parks for all age groups and demographics to promote environmental equity.
- Combining program elements with Schools to create efficiency.

6. **Enhance Active Greenway Features to include features like exercise stations, play equipment, benches, bird blinds, art, and other amenities in greenway development.**

7. **Create a compelling signage and wayfinding system design that elevates the visibility of bikeways, greenways, and trails that connect to the City's greenway and park system.**

Strategies & Actions:

8. Integrate environmental design principles into the design of parks, open spaces, to expand the impacts and benefits of having "nature in the City".

- Highlight/advertise existing City initiatives to celebrate and inform residents about ongoing sustainability projects.
- Integrate best practice storm water management techniques.

- Design and implement landscapes within City parks and open spaces that do not require heavy maintenance and high-water usage.

- Explore floodplain enhancement strategies that can either help reclaim property from existing floodplain boundaries and/or reduce flood insurance rates.

Illustrative Diagram

LEGEND

- ■ Park
- ■ New Park
- ■ School Park
- ■ Natural Preserve
- ▬ Corridor
- — Primary Road Connection
- --- New Road Connection
- –·– Railroad
- ■ School
- ■ Fire
- ■ Police
- ■ Hospital
- ■ Government Building
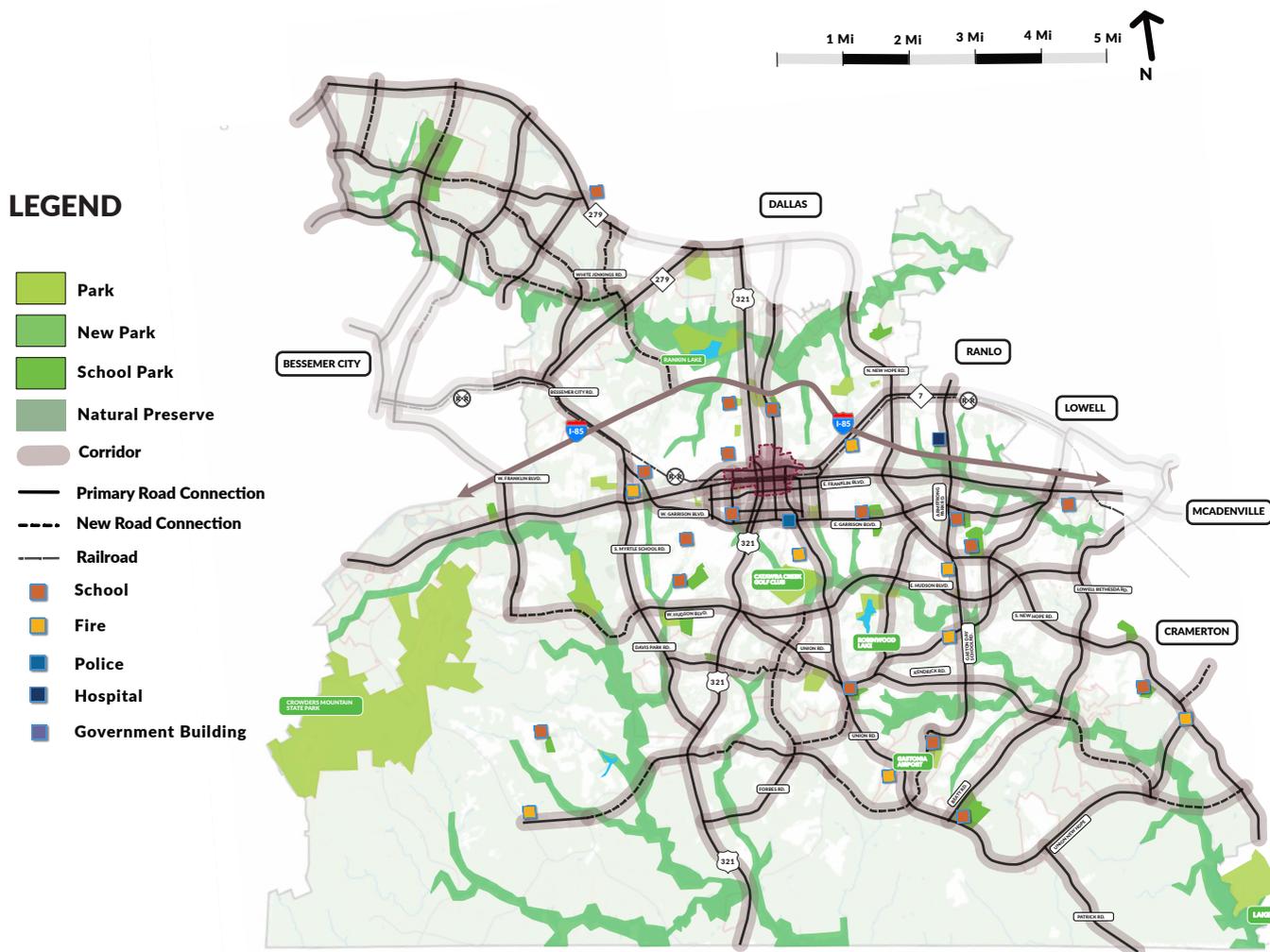
This map shows the locations of existing police, fire, hospital and schools sites relative to proposed growth and development Corridors. Community Services should be forward planned to support Growth Corridors.

CONCURRENCY OF INFRASTRUCTURE & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Goal:

Address the challenges associated with Gastonia's rapid growth, by establishing coordinated planning between state, county, and City agencies to ensure new developments are supported by necessary infrastructure and services, fostering sustainable growth while maximizing efficiency and fiscal responsibility.

Context:

Gastonia is experiencing growth that is sometimes ahead of or inconsistent with its ability to ensure and or provide that those important elements such as water and sewer utilities, schools, police, fire EMT, social services, adequate transportation capacity are in place or planned for to time with and support new developments.

In some cases, investment in infrastructure didn't align with the development suitability of the land or road networks. Committing to coordinated planning between departments will help organize the location, direction and capacity of new developments, which will create efficiency in investments and fiscal responsibility. It will also contribute to placed-based planning.

Strategies & Actions:

1. **Align long-range targeted growth area planning within the City and Planning Area between affected city and state departments so that each can best plan for investment and implementation.**

   - Coordinate water and sewer capacity and line extension plans with the future land use plan shown within this comprehensive plan and future small area planning.
   - Coordinate long range transportation planning with the future land use plan shown within this comprehensive plan and future small area planning.
   - Work with school system to better anticipate future student populations and needs for schools within targeted growth areas.
   - Include future growth areas within future parks and recreation master planning.
   - Include environmental resource planning as a component to ensure that planning and design coordinates with environmental constraints and opportunities.

2. **Create a GIS based growth model as a cross departmental management tool, and to show prospective developers, the overlap of concurrency elements. Include anticipated land use and population elements, timing, investment, location, and responsibility.**

   - Infrastructure Capacity Monitoring: Use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other tools to track the status and capacity of roads, utilities, and other infrastructure.
   - Demand Forecasting Models: Analyze population growth, economic trends, and land use changes to predict infrastructure needs.

3. **Consider Concurrency Ordinances requiring that infrastructure be available at the time of development approval. Examples include:**

   - Adequate public facilities ordinances (APFOs).
   - Level-of-service (LOS) standards for roads, schools, water, and sewer systems.

- Development Approval Conditions: Require developers to ensure infrastructure improvements, such as road expansions or utility upgrades, as a condition for project approval.
- Issue certificates verifying adequate infrastructure before granting development permits.

Summary:

1. The Actions derived from the Investment Priorities, who is responsible, timing, and level of investment.

FROM PLAN TO REALITY

- **IMPLEMENTATION AND INVESTMENT**

  - Funding Priority Investment
  - Actions to Accommodate Growth and Development

- **ACTION PLAN**

ACTION PLAN PLAYBOOK

IMPLEMENTATION AND INVESTMENT

Gastonia2050 conveys a vision, goals, strategies and actions derived through a collaborative "community based" planning process to ensure Gastonia moves forward into the future prepared to take on its opportunities for prosperity and growth.

To realize this vision, implementation should be viewed as a shared opportunity and commitment for the City's departments, leadership, private sector interests, and citizens to hold each other accountable to act on the Comprehensive Plan and provide the capital investment, human capacity, collaboration and shared commitment that is needed for the City to realize its vision and manage its growth toward an even more viable and sustainable future.

Each of the strategies and actions included in this document has been determined to be important to accomplish if the City wants to

achieve its aspirations and visions. In that sense, this Comprehensive Plan is a living document that needs to be worked with regularly. It describes actions to be taken by local government to implement policies that meet the requirements of North Carolina State law regarding Comprehensive Planning.

The first steps include prioritizing the most critical items and creating work plans, identifying responsibilities, identifying partnerships, determining the time frame for completion, and establishing funding. It is also helpful to consider actions in terms of immediate activities that begin with the adoption of the plan, typically completed or realized within the first year, short-term activities that start within one to three years of the plan's adoption, mid-term activities that begin three to 10 years after the plan's adoption and long-term activities that extend beyond ten years and may overlap into the next Comprehensive Plan update.

Finally, the Comprehensive Plan should be a reference tool referred to often and regularly and should be the impetus for the ongoing decisions and focus of the City's internal interactions and interactions with its citizens.

FUNDING PRIORITY INVESTMENTS

Gastonia, like other local governments, generates revenue through a combination of taxes, fees, and other financial mechanisms.

1. **Property Taxes**: Property taxes are a significant revenue source, particularly for Gaston County, which allocates these funds for various purposes, including public safety, education, and infrastructure improvements. These taxes account for a substantial portion of the General Fund, which is the primary operating fund for the City and county.

2. **Service Fees and Utilities**: The City of Gastonia collects fees for utilities like water, sewer, and solid waste services. Recent adjustments include rate increases for water and solid waste to support infrastructure and operational costs. For instance, the water and sewer rates rose by 7.5%, and solid waste fees increased by $3 per month for residents in FY 2025.

3. **State and Federal Grants**: Gastonia receives significant funding through state and federal grants. For example, the City is investing over $15 million from the American Rescue Plan Act in public safety, infrastructure, and community engagement projects. The County also uses grants for programs such as the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program and housing repair initiatives.

4. **Sales and Occupancy Taxes**: Additional revenue comes from sales taxes and specific levies like occupancy taxes, supporting economic development and tourism efforts.

5. **Strategic and Capital Planning**: Gaston County employs long-term strategic and capital improvement plans to guide financial priorities, ensuring sustainable growth and efficient use of resources. These plans include infrastructure projects and funding for cultural and recreational opportunities.

ACTIONS TO ACCOMMODATE GROWTH & DELIVERY OF SERVICES:

1. Consider the use of development agreements, tax increment financing, and similar instruments to finance necessary infrastructure improvements that accommodate acceptable growth while limiting the financial impact on the City.

2. Seek innovative and creative funding sources (federal and state) to support investment in needed infrastructure.

3. Collaboratively work with property owners and interested developers within key growth

areas to develop plans for public/private partnerships for investing in infrastructure to facilitate development.

4. Annually review, revise, and adopt a capital improvement plan as part of the City's budget to ensure that both municipal infrastructure and major departmental equipment needs are identified, planned for, and funded each fiscal year.

5. Utilize regular, recurring sources of funding to finance anticipated infrastructure maintenance and capital investment needs.

6. Prepare regular assessments of municipal infrastructure to utilize in adjusting the capital improvement plan.

7. Seek partnerships with community groups, educational institutions, governmental agencies and commercial ventures to leverage the planned investments by outside groups to support the City's infrastructure needs, such as recreational facilities.

8. Provide funding support at a level that is requisite with the departments' needs for continuing to provide high quality and efficient services to the City.

9. Actively participate in regional planning and financing initiatives to ensure that regionally-funded projects reflect the needs of Gastonia.

ACTION PLAN MATRICES

The Action Plan Matrices on the following pages outline specific actions to be undertaken based on Priority Investments. Each Action is categorized by the level of investment required, projected timing, and the responsible entity or entities tasked with implementation. For a more comprehensive understanding, it is important to also review the accompanying Priority Investments section, which provides detailed descriptions of each Action.

Timing classifications are as follows:
- **Near Term**: 0–5 years
- **Mid Term**: 5–10 years
- **Long Term**: Over 10 years
- **Ongoing**: Indicates a continuous, long-term effort

Investment levels are defined as:
- **Low Investment**: Typically involves coordination efforts and smaller-scale planning activities
- **Medium Investment**: Includes more substantial planning and design initiatives
- **High Investment**: Encompasses major design, engineering, and construction projects

Entities include relevant City departments, as well as collaborative partners necessary to achieve the successful completion of each action.

ACTION PLAN MATRICES

Development and Redevelopment of Prioritized Corridors

ACTION	ACTION	ACTION
Establish a Strategic Development Plan for the Comprehensive Plan Study Area	**Create a Downtown Gastonia Task Force**	**Update the Strategic Plan every 5 years to ensure economic development goals are being met and new opportunities and challenges are responded to promptly**
INVESTMENT	**INVESTMENT**	**INVESTMENT**
MED	**LOW**	**LOW**
TIMING	**TIMING**	**TIMING**
NEAR TERM	**NEAR TERM**	**ONGOING**
ENTITY	**ENTITY**	**ENTITY**
PLANNING / PUBLIC WORKS	**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**	**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

ACTION

Continue with efforts that best position Gastonia's workforce for current and future employment opportunities.

INVESTMENT

MED

TIMING

ONGOING

ENTITY

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT / SCHOOLS

Complete Neighborhoods, & Identifiable Districts

ACTION	ACTION	ACTION
Establish and maintain connectivity (including walking/ cycling/transit), sense of place, character, and quality of life through opportunities offered by neighborhood developments	**Encourage growth that enhances return on investment**	**Create the tools needed to realize Place Based Planning outcomes**
INVESTMENT	**INVESTMENT**	**INVESTMENT**
MED	**LOW**	**MED**
TIMING	**TIMING**	**TIMING**
LONG TERM	**ONGOING**	**NEAR TERM**
ENTITY	**ENTITY**	**ENTITY**
PLANNING / ENGINEERING	**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**	**PLANNING**

ACTION

Align transportation and utility investments with growth model promoted by Place Based Planning

INVESTMENT

MED

TIMING

ONGOING

ENTITY

PLANNING / ENGINEERING / TRANSPORTATION

ACTION

Better assess and integrate flood risk and water quality measures as they relate to climate change into existing ordinance.

INVESTMENT

LOW

TIMING

NEAR TERM

ENTITY

PLANNING / ENGINEERING

Transportation Connectivity

ACTION	ACTION	ACTION
Establish and maintain connectivity (including walking/cycling/transit), sense of place, character, and quality of life through opportunities offered by neighborhood developments	Plan Context-Sensitive roadway connections and street cross sections for key roadways	Implement Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Recommendations
INVESTMENT	**INVESTMENT**	**INVESTMENT**
HIGH	MED	HIGH
TIMING	**TIMING**	**TIMING**
ONGOING	NEAR TERM	ONGOING
ENTITY	**ENTITY**	**ENTITY**
PLANNING / TRANSPORTATION / ENGINEERING	PLANNING / TRANSPORTATION / ENGINEERING	ENGINEERING

ACTION

Continuously update the 2023 City of Gastonia Comprehensive Bicycle Plan to connect neighborhoods and City assets

INVESTMENT

MED

TIMING

ONGOING

ENTITY

PLANNING / ENGINEERING

Transportation Connectivity Continued

ACTION	ACTION	ACTION
Evolve Transit Services	**Integrate Place-Based Transportation Planning**	**Plan Orderly and Attractive Transit BRT and Rail Line Locations**
INVESTMENT	**INVESTMENT**	**INVESTMENT**
HIGH	MED	MED
TIMING	**TIMING**	**TIMING**
LONG TERM	ONGOING	LONG TERM
ENTITY	**ENTITY**	**ENTITY**
PLANNING / ENGINEERING	PLANNING / ENGINEERING / TRANSPORTATION	PLANNING / ENGINEERING / TRANSPORTATION

ACTION

Expand Airport Infrastructure

INVESTMENT

HIGH

TIMING

LONG TERM

ENTITY

AIRPORT

ACTION

Prioritize Greenway and Trail Projects and act on key projects

INVESTMENT

HIGH

TIMING

ONGOING

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION / ENGINEERING

Nature Preserves, Open Spaces, Parks, & Greenway Networks

ACTION

By 2028, fund and pursue an update to the "Stepping Ahead to a Healthier Tomorrow a parks and recreation masterplan" which was created for the period of 2019 – 2029

INVESTMENT

HIGH

TIMING

NEAR TERM

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION

ACTION

Evaluate whether the priorities and projects highlighted within the parks and recreation masterplan have been completed or are no longer relevant

INVESTMENT

LOW

TIMING

NEAR TERM

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION

ACTION

Create a long term, holistic strategy to develop or refurbish city parks, especially in areas that currently don't have them, to increase equity and enhance the balance between active parks and less programmed park

INVESTMENT

HIGH

TIMING

LONG TERM

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION

ACTION

Explore mechanisms to enhance the funding available to finance park, open space, and greenway creation, development, and maintenance as described in the Parks and Recreation Masterplan.

INVESTMENT

LOW

TIMING

NEAR TERM

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION / ENGINEERING

ACTION

Ensure that community and park system needs are supported and fulfilled by regularly monitoring

INVESTMENT

LOW

TIMING

ONGOING

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION

ACTION

Enhance active Greenway features to include features like exercise stations, play equipment, benches, bird blinds, art, and other amenities in greenway development

INVESTMENT

HIGH

TIMING

LONG TERM

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION / ENGINEERING / TRANSPORTATION

Nature Preserves, Open Spaces, Parks, & Greenway Networks

ACTION

Create a compelling signage and wayfinding system design that elevates the visibility of bikeways, greenways, and trails that connect to the City's greenway and park system

INVESTMENT

HIGH

TIMING

MID TERM

ENTITY

PLANNING / PARKS AND RECREATION / ENGINEERING / MARKETING

ACTION

Integrate environmental design principles into the design of parks, open spaces, to expand the impacts and benefits of having "nature in the city"

INVESTMENT

MED

TIMING

ONGOING

ENTITY

PARKS AND RECREATION / ENGINEERING

Concurrency of Infrastructure & Community Services

ACTION

Align long-range targeted growth area planning within the City and Planning Area between affected City and State departments so that each can best plan for investment and implementation

INVESTMENT

LOW

TIMING

NEAR TERM

ENTITY

PLANNING / ENGINEERING / TRANSPORTATION

ACTION

Create a GIS based growth model as a cross departmental management tool, and to show prospective developers, the overlap of concurrency elements

INVESTMENT

MED

TIMING

NEAR TERM

ENTITY

PLANNING / ENGINEERING

ACTION

Consider Concurrency Ordinances requiring that infrastructure be available at the time of development approval
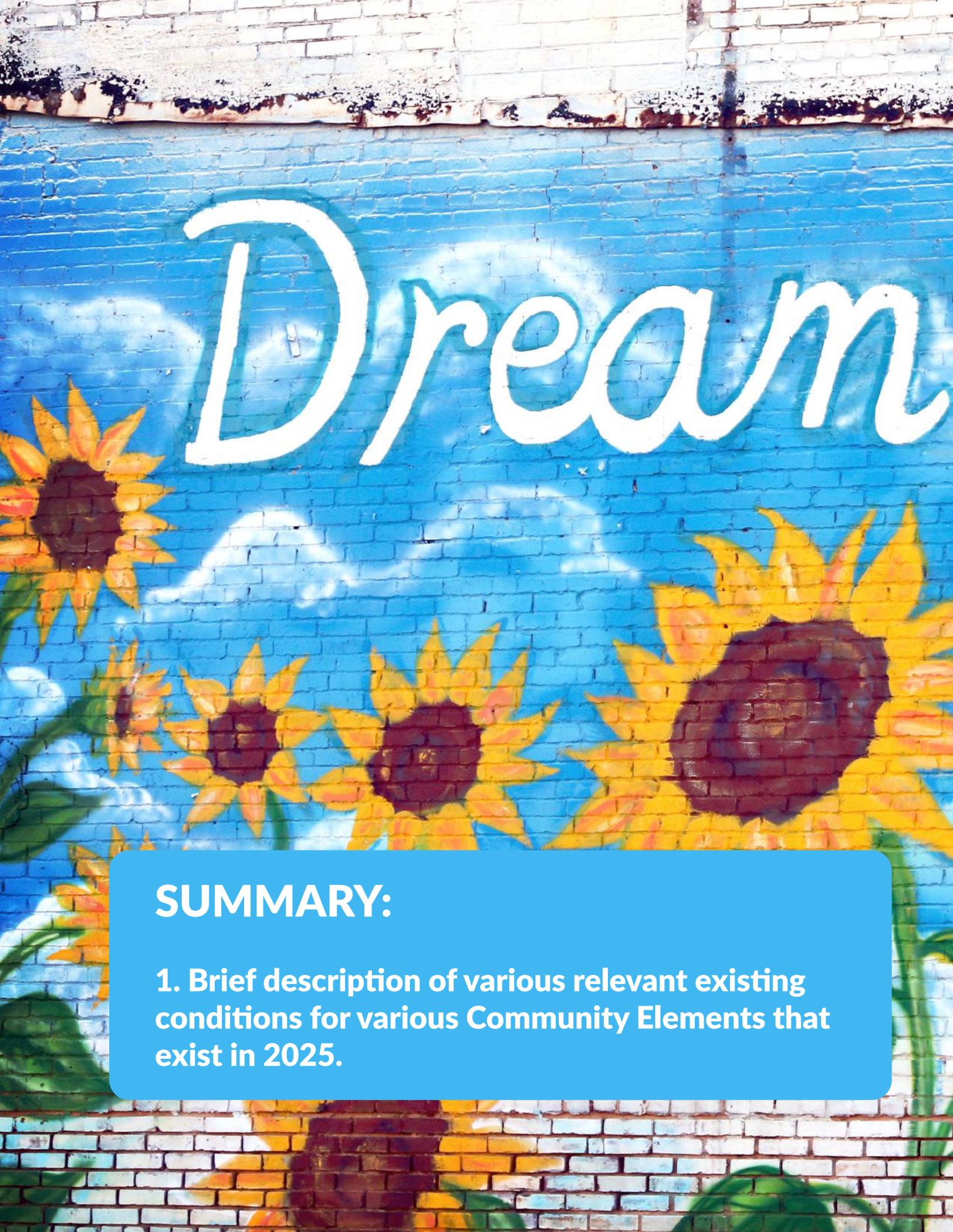
INVESTMENT

LOW

TIMING

NEAR TERM

ENTITY

PLANNING / ENGINEERING / TRANSPORTATION

SUMMARY:

1. Brief description of various relevant existing conditions for various Community Elements that exist in 2025.

CITY AUDIT

- **History and Culture**
- **Demographics**
- **Economy**
- **Housing**
- **Community Services**
- **Connectivity**
- **Natural Resources**
- **Regional Resources**

GASTONIA NC

Great Place. Great People. Great Promise.

QUICK FACTS

- Gastonia is the second-largest City in the Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), as identified by the United States Census Bureau.

- 20 minutes from the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport
- No. 3 health care system (CaroMont Health) in North Carolina
- 5 NCAA Division I and Division II higher education institutions within a 35-mile radius
- Is home to Crowders Mountain State Park
- Experiencing accelerated growth and change as metro Charlotte continues to fuel the economy.

HISTORY & CULTURE

In recent years, Gastonia has undergone efforts to revitalize its downtown and promote new economic development, focusing on healthcare, retail, and professional services. The City has worked to preserve its historical landmarks while embracing modern growth. Gastonia has also worked to improve its parks, greenways, and community amenities, enhancing the quality of life for residents.

Textile Heritage and Community

The history of Gastonia's textile industry remains a significant part of the city's identity. Many residents' families worked in the mills, and this history is honored in local museums, such as the **Gastonia's Schiele Museum of Natural History**, which offers exhibits on the region's industrial past and its connection to the broader textile industry.

The **Loray Mill**, once the center of the 1929 strike, is now a historical site and has been preserved as part of the city's cultural landscape.

Arts and Music

Gastonia's Arts Scene: Gastonia is home to various cultural institutions, including **The Gaston County Art Guild** and the **Schiele Museum of Natural History**. The museum offers not only natural history exhibits but also educational programs that explore the cultural and historical aspects of the region.

Performing Arts: The City hosts live performances and community events throughout the year, and the **Little Theater of Gastonia** provides opportunities for local artists to perform and engage with the community. Gastonia also celebrates local music, with a growing number of venues supporting live performances, especially in genres like country, blues, and rock.

Annual Events and Festivals

Gastonia's Christmas Parade: An annual event that brings together residents of all ages to celebrate the holiday season with floats, bands, and community participation.

Other Community Festivals: Gastonia hosts a variety of other festivals and cultural events throughout the year, including food festivals, arts and crafts shows, and seasonal

celebrations, fostering a strong sense of community.

Diverse Demographics and Growing Community

Cultural Diversity: Gastonia is becoming increasingly diverse, with a growing population of Hispanic, African American, and other immigrant communities. This diversity is reflected in the city's food, festivals, and cultural organizations, which bring together various cultural traditions and cuisines.

Community Spirit: Despite its historical connection to industrial labor, Gastonia has a strong sense of community pride. Neighborhoods and civic groups frequently organize events, volunteer programs, and local initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life and maintaining the city's small-town charm.

Historical Landmarks and Preservation

Gastonia is home to several historic landmarks, such as the **Gastonia City Hall**

and the **Loray Mill**, which has been designated a historical site due to its importance in the region's labor history. The City has made efforts to preserve these buildings while modernizing its infrastructure.

Local Historic Districts:

- **York–Chester Historic District** (established 1988): Gastonia's oldest residential district, featuring over 540 homes in styles including Bungalow, Queen Anne, Italianate, Colonial Revival, and Gothic Revival.

- **Brookwood Historic District** (established 1997): Home to approximately 106 structures from the mid-1930s to late 1940s, showing Craftsman, Tudor, Colonial Revival, and Minimal Traditional architectural styles.
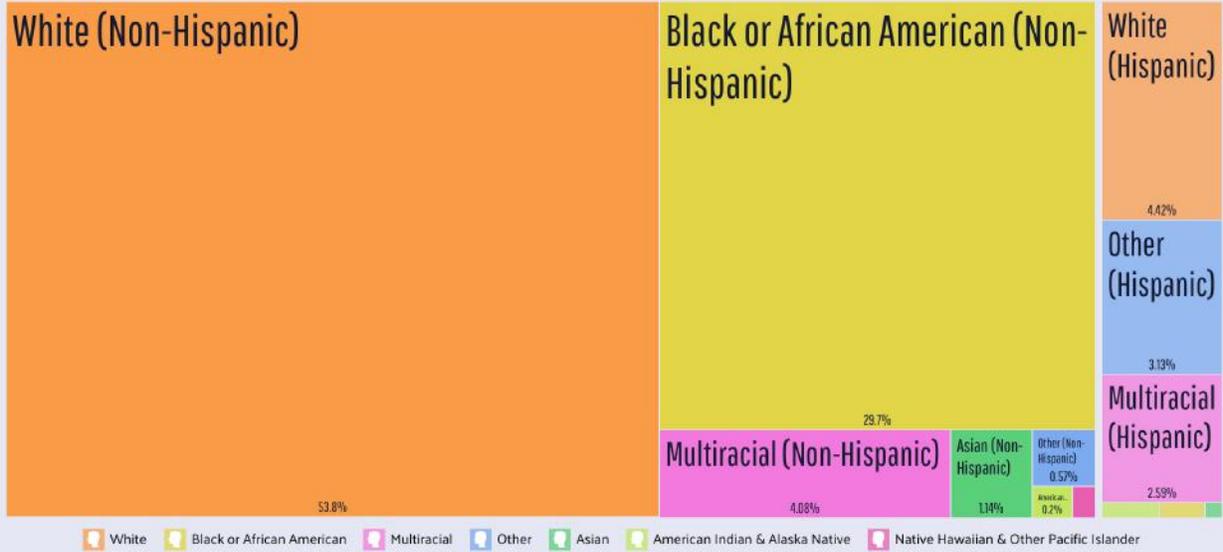
THE 3 LARGEST ETHNIC GROUPS IN GASTONIA, NC:

- **White (Non-Hispanic): 43.3k ± 1.26k**
- **Black or African American: (Non-Hispanic) 23.9k ± 1.22k**
- **White (Hispanic): 3.56k ± 762**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gastonia, North Carolina, is a City with a diverse population of approximately 83,639 as of 2024.

Population:

- Approximately 80,000 to 85,000 people.

Race and Ethnicity:

- White: Around 60-65%

- Black or African American: Approximately 25-30%

- Hispanic or Latino: About 10-15%

- Asian: Around 1-2%

- Other races and ethnicities make up the remaining percentage.

Age Distribution:

- Median age: Approximately 38-40 years

- A significant portion of the population is between 25 and 54 years old.

Gender:

- Has a slight female majority at 51%

Education:

- High school graduate or higher: About 80-85%

- Bachelor's degree or higher: Around 20%

Income:

- Median household income: Approximately $40,000 to $50,000

- Per capita income: Around $25,000 to $30,000

14.7% of the population for whom poverty status is determined in Gastonia, NC (11.6k out of 78.6k people) live below the poverty line, a number that is higher than the national average of 12.5%.

The economy of Gastonia, NC employs 38k people. The largest industries in Gastonia, NC are Manufacturing (5,505 people), Health Care & Social Assistance (5,311 people), and Retail Trade (4,819 people), and the highest paying industries are Utilities ($77,857), Information ($67,733), and Finance & Insurance ($66,925).

ECONOMY

Gastonia, North Carolina, has experienced notable growth in recent years, driven by its proximity to Charlotte, economic development initiatives, and efforts to enhance the quality of life for residents. Here's an overview of the factors contributing to Gastonia's growth and how it's shaping the City:

Population Growth

Steady Increase: Gastonia has seen a steady increase in population, with growth driven by a mix of factors including affordable living costs, job opportunities, and its location near Charlotte. The city's population is currently estimated to be around 80,000 to 85,000, and it has been gradually increasing.

Diverse Demographics: The City is becoming more diverse, with growth in various demographic groups, including young professionals, families, and retirees, who are attracted by the city's amenities, employment opportunities, and overall quality of life.

Economic Development

Attracting Businesses: Gastonia has made efforts to attract new businesses and industries, contributing to economic growth and job creation. The city's strategic location along major highways and its proximity to Charlotte make it an appealing site for companies in manufacturing, logistics, and retail.

Downtown Revitalization: Gastonia has invested in revitalizing its downtown area, focusing on attracting businesses, restaurants, and cultural venues. This has led to an increase in tourism and local economic activity, with more events and public spaces drawing residents and visitors alike.

Diverse Economy: While historically reliant on manufacturing, Gastonia's economy has diversified to include healthcare, retail, education, and professional services. This diversification helps buffer the City against economic downturns and provides a broader range of employment opportunities.

Housing and Real Estate

Housing Development: With growing demand, there has been a boom in

residential development, including single-family homes, apartments, and mixed-use developments. New housing projects cater to a range of preferences, from affordable housing to more upscale neighborhoods.

Affordable Living: Compared to nearby Charlotte, Gastonia offers more affordable housing options, which has attracted many people seeking a lower cost of living while still being close to a major urban center. Challenges: Rapid growth has led to some challenges in maintaining affordable housing and ensuring that infrastructure keeps pace with the expanding population.

Economic Challenges and Opportunities

Balancing Growth: Managing the pace of growth is a challenge, as the City needs to ensure that infrastructure, services, and amenities keep up with the increasing population. This includes addressing traffic congestion, maintaining public services, and ensuring access to affordable housing.

Long-Term Planning: The city's leadership is focused on long-term planning to sustain growth while preserving the community's character. This includes strategic zoning, economic diversification, and investments in public infrastructure.

SOCIAL VULNERABILITY:

Gastonia, North Carolina, has a moderate level of social vulnerability according to various measures such as the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) and FEMA's National Risk Index. These indices assess factors like socioeconomic status, housing conditions, access to transportation, and more, which influence a community's ability to respond to and recover from natural hazards or public health emergencies.

For Gastonia, notable vulnerabilities include economic challenges, pockets of high unemployment, and limited access to healthcare in some areas. Additionally, certain demographic groups in Gastonia face higher risks due to factors like age, disability, or language barriers, which are common contributors to elevated social vulnerability scores.

Economic Challenges:

Poverty: Gastonia has a poverty rate above the national average. Households with limited income are more likely to struggle with emergency preparedness and recovery.

Unemployment: Employment opportunities and job access play a significant role in household stability.

Education Levels:

Lower levels of educational attainment can limit access to information, job opportunities, and resources during crises.

Healthcare Access:

Lack of access to affordable healthcare, compounded by high rates of chronic illnesses (e.g., diabetes, hypertension), increases the risk of vulnerability in emergencies.

Underserved populations might have limited access to healthcare facilities.

Housing Conditions:

A significant portion of the population lives in older or substandard housing, which is more susceptible to damage in natural disasters like floods or severe storms.

Rental households might lack resources to make necessary upgrades or repairs.

Demographic Factors:

Age: The elderly and very young are more vulnerable due to physical and medical needs.

Disabilities: People with physical or cognitive disabilities may face challenges during evacuations or accessing aid.

Language Barriers: Non-English-speaking communities may find it harder to access information or services.

Transportation Access:

Households without access to a vehicle are less mobile, particularly in evacuation scenarios.

Environmental Risks:

Proximity to floodplains or industrial zones can exacerbate vulnerabilities, especially in communities with limited resources to mitigate these risks.

Community Resources:

Insufficient community-level resources, like shelters, food banks, or outreach programs, can strain the ability to respond to crises effectively.

Efforts to Address Social Vulnerabilities:

Gastonia has initiatives and partnerships in place to address some of these vulnerabilities, such as:

Local Nonprofits: Organizations like Crisis Assistance Ministry and Salvation Army provide support for housing, food, and utilities.

Gaston County Health and Human Services: Works to improve healthcare access and provide social services.

Community Development Programs: Aim to improve housing conditions and promote economic stability.

HOUSING

Growth and Development:

Gastonia is part of the Charlotte metropolitan area, and its housing market benefits from the region's growth. New housing developments and revitalization projects are ongoing, with a focus on modern amenities and mixed-use spaces.Many residents work in Charlotte, about a 30-minute drive, which influences housing demand near main highways like I-85.

Median Home Prices:

The median listing price for homes in Gastonia was approximately $314,900 in October 2024, reflecting a year-over-year increase of 5%. Sale prices averaged around $299,000, indicating competitive pricing.

Market Dynamics:

Homes are selling close to their listing prices, with a sale-to-list price ratio of 97.6%. This suggests sellers are achieving near their asking prices, although the ratio dipped slightly compared to last year .
The average time on the market for properties is increasing, with homes typically

Housing in Gastonia, North Carolina, is diverse, offering options that cater to various preferences and budgets. The housing market in Gastonia, North Carolina, continues to show moderate activity and price growth as of late 2024. Here's a snapshot of recent trends:

As of July 2023, Gastonia, North Carolina, had approximately 34,593 housing units. This includes a mix of owner-occupied and renter-occupied units, along with a small percentage of vacant homes. The city's housing market reflects a growing population and diverse residential options.

Homeownership Rate:
About **55.8%** of housing units are owner-occupied, reflecting a slight majority of residents who own their homes.

Rental Rate:
Approximately **45.7%** of housing units are rented, showing a significant portion of the population prefers or needs to rent.

staying listed for 27 to 70 days, depending on the neighborhood and price point.

Rental Market:

Average rents in Gastonia are around $1,166 per month, which is significantly below the national average of $1,559. This makes the City appealing for renters looking for affordability.

Inventory and Sales:

Inventory levels show variability by home size, with larger homes (4+ bedrooms) experiencing higher availability compared to smaller units. Overall inventory trends reflect modest growth.

Neighborhoods

Downtown Gastonia: Features revitalized areas with historic homes and loft apartments. It's becoming popular due to its proximity to shops, dining, and cultural activities.

South Gastonia: Offers suburban-style developments with larger homes and yards, ideal for families.

North Gastonia: Includes rural areas and more spacious properties, often appealing to those seeking quieter settings.
New Hope Road Area: Known for its accessibility to amenities and a mix of residential options.

National Housing Trends:

A few national housing trends may be relevant for Gastonia as it continues to grow:

- **Smaller Homes:** The average size of newly built homes is decreasing, driven by affordability concerns and a preference for sustainability.

- **Shift Toward Renting:** High mortgage rates and escalating home prices have made renting a more viable option for many. Renting is currently about one-third cheaper than buying in numerous markets.

- **Millennials and Gen Z:** These generations are delaying homeownership due to financial constraints, leading to prolonged renting periods. There's a notable demand for rentals that offer modern amenities and flexibility.

- **Aging Population:** Older adults are increasingly opting for smaller, low-maintenance homes or rental options that provide community support and accessibility features.

- **Co-Living Spaces:** Shared housing arrangements are gaining popularity, especially among younger renters and professionals seeking affordability and community living.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Gastonia, NC offers a wide range of community services aimed at supporting residents across various needs, including housing, healthcare, and social welfare.

SOCIAL SERVICES:

Housing and Community Support:

The City of Gastonia's Division of Housing & Community Engagement offers services like housing repairs, down payment assistance for first-time homebuyers, and grant programs for housing improvements. This division also helps with rehabilitation and homeownership programs.

Healthcare Services:

Gastonia is served by CaroMont Regional Medical Center, which provides a broad spectrum of medical care, including emergency services, maternity care, psychiatry, and pediatric care . Additionally, Kintegra Family Medicine operates local healthcare centers providing general health services, preventive care, and educational resources.

Mental Health and Social Services:

Gaston County's Social Services Division offers various programs focusing on child welfare, adult protective services, and self-sufficiency initiatives. It also manages programs like crisis intervention and support for individuals with disabilities . For mental health, resources such as Partners Behavioral Health Management provide 24/7 services, and organizations like Phoenix Counseling Center support individuals with trauma, substance abuse, and mental health needs .

Disaster and Emergency Services:

The American Red Cross in Gastonia supports the community with disaster services, blood donation drives, and emergency preparedness programs .

Education and Workforce Development:

Educational Investments:
Gastonia has focused on enhancing educational opportunities, with investments

in schools, higher education, and workforce development programs. Gaston College and other institutions offer training and education to support the needs of the growing economy.

Workforce Readiness:

Workforce development initiatives aim to ensure that residents have the skills needed for jobs in emerging industries, including healthcare, technology, and advanced manufacturing.

Schools:

Gastonia's schools are part of a dynamic district that offers a broad range of educational opportunities, from early education to college preparation. The Gaston County Schools system is committed to providing quality education to all students and ensuring they have the resources to succeed academically and personally.

The **Gaston County Schools (GCS)** system serves the City of Gastonia, North Carolina, and the surrounding areas in Gaston County. It is a public school district that provides educational opportunities for students from kindergarten through 12th grade

Charter Schools and Private Schools:

In addition to public schools, there are also a few **charter schools** and **private schools** in

the Gastonia area, offering alternatives to the traditional public school system. These schools may have specific educational philosophies, such as Montessori or STEM-focused curriculum.

INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES:

Water and Sewer:

In Gastonia, North Carolina, water and sewer services are provided by the Two Rivers Utilities. This department is responsible for managing the city's water treatment and distribution systems, as well as wastewater collection and treatment.

Water Supply:

Gastonia sources its water from a variety of reservoirs and surface water sources, including Mountain Island Lake. The City operates water treatment plants to ensure that water meets quality standards before it is distributed to residents and businesses.

Sewer Services:

For sewer services, Gastonia maintains a network of sanitary sewer lines that collect wastewater from homes and businesses, which is then transported to wastewater treatment plants. The city's wastewater treatment facilities treat the water before it is

released into the environment, typically into nearby rivers.

Electricity:

Electricity is provided by Duke Energy and City of Gastonia two Rivers Utilities. Duke Energy is one of the largest utility companies in the southeastern United States and serves the area with electric power. They are responsible for generating, transmitting, and distributing electricity to residents and businesses in Gastonia and the surrounding areas.

PARKS AND RECREATION:

The City has made investments in parks, greenways, and recreational facilities to improve residents' quality of life. These amenities attract new residents and contribute to a sense of community.

Gastonia, North Carolina, offers a variety of parks and recreational facilities through its Gastonia Parks and Recreation Department. The City is home to a number of parks, greenways, and recreational programs for residents and visitors to enjoy. Here's an overview of the parks system in Gastonia:

- **All American Park** (8.5 acres): Features open space, a small playground, and a picnic shelter. Open daily from dawn to dusk.

- **East Park** (7 acres): Offers open space, a small playground, and two picnic tables. Open daily from dawn to dusk.

- **I.C. Falls Park** (5 acres): Includes a 175-foot ball field, lighted concrete basketball court, 0.2 mi granite dust walking track, playground, and small picnic shelter. Lighting operates on a schedule. Open from dawn to dusk.

- **Optimist Club Park** (6 acres developed): Features a playground, open space, picnic area, walking trail, and a butterfly garden.

- **Smyre Millennium Park** (1.9 acres): Has a paved walking trail, open space, play apparatus, horseshoe court, and a small picnic shelter. Open daily from dawn to dusk.

- **Walker E. Reid III Park:** Named in honor of the late Mayor Walker E. Reid III (who passed away November 30, 2023), this park is designed for large-scale events and sports. It includes two regulation multipurpose fields, one youth field, two rentable shelters (available starting 2025), an all-inclusive playground, a 0.29-mile walking loop, concession stand, and restrooms.

- **Ferguson Park (80 acres)**: A softball complex with four ball fields (three at 275', one at 250'), concessions/restroom building, playground, four lighted asphalt tennis courts, and a trail connector to the Avon–Catawba Creek Greenway.

- **Lineberger Park** (18.5 acres): Gastonia's first public park, dating back to the 1920s, with mature trees and open lawns. It contains picnic shelters (large and small), a gazebo, playground, basketball court, miniature train ride, a sprayground, swimming pool with slide and lazy river, restroom facilities, and paved walking trails connecting to the greenway. Also includes a Vietnam War Memorial on a paved trail extension.

- **Martha Rivers Park** (57.95 acres): Developed as a Youth Sports Complex, it includes four lighted soccer fields, three youth baseball fields, one softball field, two batting cages, playground, walking trails looping around the fields, two large picnic shelters, sand volleyball court, two horseshoe courts, and restrooms with concessions. A standout feature is a one-acre playground ("the castle") designed by kids and built through community volunteer efforts. Open daily from dawn to dusk, with lighting operating as scheduled.

- **Rankin Lake Park** (242 acres): Features an 80-acre lake with boat rentals (jon boats, canoes, kayaks, pedal boats), fishing piers, a 1.5-mile paved trail around the lake, picnic shelters (large and small), an 18-hole disc golf course, playground, clubhouse, boardwalks, and connections to the greenway. Open daily, generally 7 AM to dusk.

- **Sims Legion Park**: Historic baseball stadium and recreation complex, home to American Legion baseball and other events. Includes a lighted ballpark with grandstand seating, press box, concession areas, and additional baseball/softball fields. Hosts local, regional, and tournament-level play.

Greenways and Trails:

- The Gastonia Greenway is a key component of the City's park system. This City Maintained multi-use trail network (currently 10.3 miles) offers safe, scenic routes for walking, running, and biking, helping connect residents to various parks and neighborhoods. It's designed to encourage outdoor recreation and provide transportation options.

CONNECTIVITY

Gastonia, North Carolina, has a well-connected transportation system that includes options for road travel, public transit, and access to regional and national transportation networks. Here's an overview of the key transportation features in the City:

1. Road Transportation

Interstate Highways:

Gastonia is strategically located near major highways, which makes it well-connected to the broader region. The key highways include:

- Interstate 85 (I-85): One of the primary routes running through Gastonia, I-85 provides direct access to cities like Charlotte (to the east) and Atlanta (to the southwest). This interstate plays a vital role in both local and regional travel, connecting Gastonia to other parts of North Carolina and beyond.

- Interstate 485 (I-485): This beltway around Charlotte is located just to the east of Gastonia and provides easier access to the City without entering the downtown area.

- U.S. Highway 74 (US 74): A major east-west route that runs through Gastonia and connects the City to neighboring towns like Shelby and Kings Mountain.

- North Carolina Highway 321: Running from Gastonia to Hickory, NC, this highway is another important regional connector.

Local Roads and Streets:

Gastonia is served by a network of local roads that provide access to neighborhoods, businesses, and parks. The city's road infrastructure includes urban streets, suburban roads, and commercial corridors that facilitate daily commuting and transportation.

2. Public Transit

Gaston County ACCESS:

The main public transportation provider in the Gastonia area is Gaston County ACCESS, which operates both local and regional bus

services. The service offers fixed routes within Gastonia and other parts of Gaston County, providing access to key locations such as shopping centers, medical facilities, schools, and employment centers.

Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS):

While Gastonia itself does not have its own light rail or extensive transit system, residents have access to CATS services in nearby Charlotte. CATS operates a light rail system, commuter rail, and bus network.

GOGastonia:

A micro transit service in Gastonia that offers rides on demand. The program was initiated in July 2024 and has been successful.

3. Rail Transportation

- Amtrak: Gastonia is served by an Amtrak station, providing passenger rail service along the Crescent Line, which connects New York City to New Orleans. The station is located at 201 N. Oakland St., offering travel opportunities to major cities in the Eastern U.S. and the Southeast.

- Freight Rail: Gastonia is also part of the freight rail network, with several major rail companies providing freight service through the area.

4. Air Transportation

- Charlotte Douglas International Airport (CLT): The closest major airport to Gastonia is Charlotte Douglas International Airport, located about 20 miles east of the City in Charlotte provides easy access for Gastonia residents to global destinations, as well as convenient connections to other parts of the country.

- Gastonia Municipal Airport: Primarily serves general aviation needs, including private and small commercial flights.
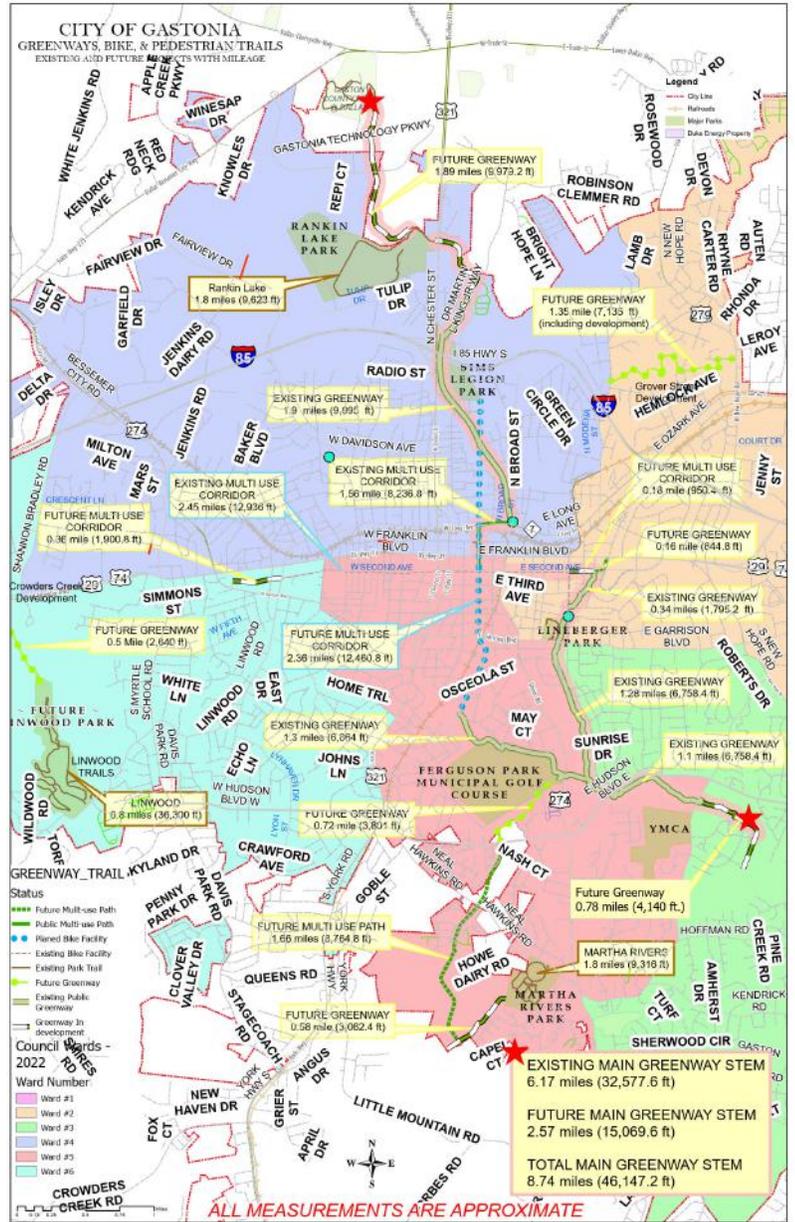
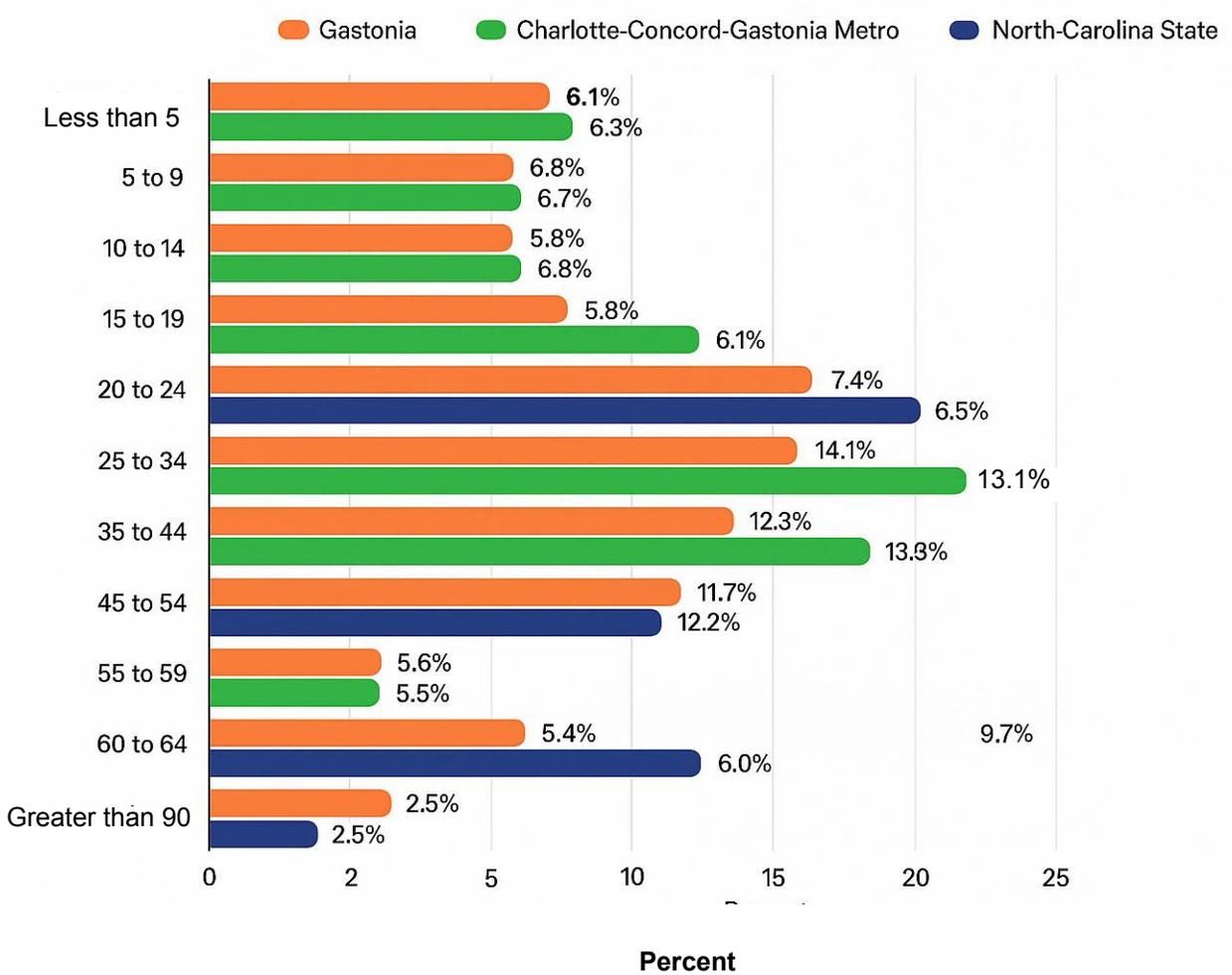## 5. Bicycle and Pedestrian Sidewalks and Trails:

The City has approximately 132 miles of existing sidewalks and 12.3 miles of greenway trails, including the Avon and Catawba Creeks Greenway and the Highland Rail Trail. Additionally, the City has adopted a Comprehensive Bicycle Plan aimed at expanding greenway networks, adding bike lanes, and enhancing connectivity between neighborhoods.

WALK SCORE / BIKE SCORE

Gastonia, North Carolina, has an average Walk Score of 23 and a Bike Score of 27, indicating that it is generally car-dependent with limited bike infrastructure. Downtown scores better than within the suburban neighborhoods south of downtown.

CITY OF GASTONIA
GREENWAYS, BIKE, & PEDESTRIAN TRAILS
EXISTING AND FUTURE PROJECTS WITH MILEAGE

GASTONIA COMMUTE TIMES

Legend: Gastonia (orange) · Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia Metro (green) · North-Carolina State (dark blue)

Time	Gastonia	Metro	NC State
Less than 5	6.1%	6.3%	
5 to 9	6.8%	6.7%	
10 to 14	5.8%	6.8%	
15 to 19	5.8%	6.1%	
20 to 24	7.4%	6.5%	
25 to 34	14.1%	13.1%	
35 to 44	12.3%	13.3%	
45 to 54	11.7%		12.2%
55 to 59	5.6%	5.5%	
60 to 64	5.4%	9.7%	6.0%
Greater than 90	2.5%		2.5%

Percent

Gastonia Average = 25.7 minutes
Charlotte Average = 24.1 minutes
USA Average = 25.6 minutes

NATURAL RESOURCES

Gastonia's natural resources are an essential part of its identity and economy. Gastonia's natural resources provide significant value to the community by supporting recreation, flood management, bio-diversity, environmental health, and economic development.
Gastonia's commitment to preserving green spaces enhances quality of life and helps attract visitors and businesses seeking a balance between rural and urban lifestyles.

1. Water Resources:

- **Surface Water:** Gastonia is located near the Catawba River, one of the most important waterways in the region. The Catawba River provides water for both municipal uses (drinking water and industrial use) and recreational activities like boating, fishing, and swimming. The river is also a crucial resource for hydropower generation.

- Lakes and Reservoirs: The City is also near Lake Wylie, a large reservoir created by the Catawba River that provides drinking water to the region, supports recreational boating, and serves as a habitat for local wildlife.

- Groundwater: Like many communities in the region, Gastonia relies on groundwater for irrigation and other local uses. Wells and groundwater recharge areas support agriculture and other industries in the surrounding areas.

2. Land and Soil Resources:

- **Forests:** Gastonia and Gaston County are located in a temperate zone that supports a diverse range of forest ecosystems. Deciduous hardwood forests are common, including species such as oak, hickory, and pine. The forests provide habitat for wildlife, opportunities for timber harvesting, and spaces for recreational activities like hiking.

- **Agricultural Land:** The fertile soils in Gaston County have supported agriculture for centuries. Although urban development has reduced the amount of available farmland, agriculture still plays a role in the local economy. Typical crops grown in the region include corn, soybeans, cotton, and tobacco.

- **Protected Land:** Several areas around Gastonia, including parts of Crowders Mountain State Park and the South Fork Catawba River area, are preserved as natural habitats for wildlife and for public recreation.

3. Mineral Resources:

- **Clay and Sand**: Historically, the region has had deposits of clay, which has been used for brick-making and ceramics. Sand and gravel resources are also found in the area and have been used in construction.

- **Granite:** Gaston County is part of the larger Piedmont region, which is known for its rich deposits of granite. While there are no active large-scale granite quarries directly in Gastonia, the surrounding region has historically been a source for this durable rock, which has been used in building and construction materials.

4. Wildlife and Biodiversity:

- **Natural Areas**: Gastonia's natural areas, especially the forested and riverine habitats, support a diverse range of wildlife species. Mammals such as deer, foxes, and squirrels are common, as are various bird species, including hawks, woodpeckers, and songbirds. The area also has a variety of reptiles, amphibians, and insects, contributing to the region's biodiversity.

- **Fishing and Hunting**: The rivers, lakes, and forests surrounding Gastonia are popular areas for fishing, with species such as bass, catfish, and trout abundant in local waterways. Hunting is also allowed in some areas of Gaston County, offering resources like deer and turkey.

5. Air and Climate:

- **Climate**: Gastonia experiences a humid subtropical climate, with hot, humid summers and mild winters. This climate supports diverse plant life and contributes to the region's agricultural productivity. The climate also provides favorable conditions for outdoor activities year-round, such as hiking, fishing, and camping.

- **Air Quality**: Being a growing urban area, Gastonia faces typical challenges with air quality, especially from vehicle emissions and industrial activities. However, the region also benefits from surrounding natural areas that help maintain air quality by providing vegetation that absorbs pollutants.

REGIONAL RESOURCES

Gastonia's growth is heavily influenced by its proximity to Charlotte, one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the country. This relationship provides economic and employment opportunities but also presents challenges in managing commuter traffic and regional development pressures.

The Charlotte metropolitan area and Gaston County offer numerous attractive resources, from cultural and recreational attractions to economic opportunities.
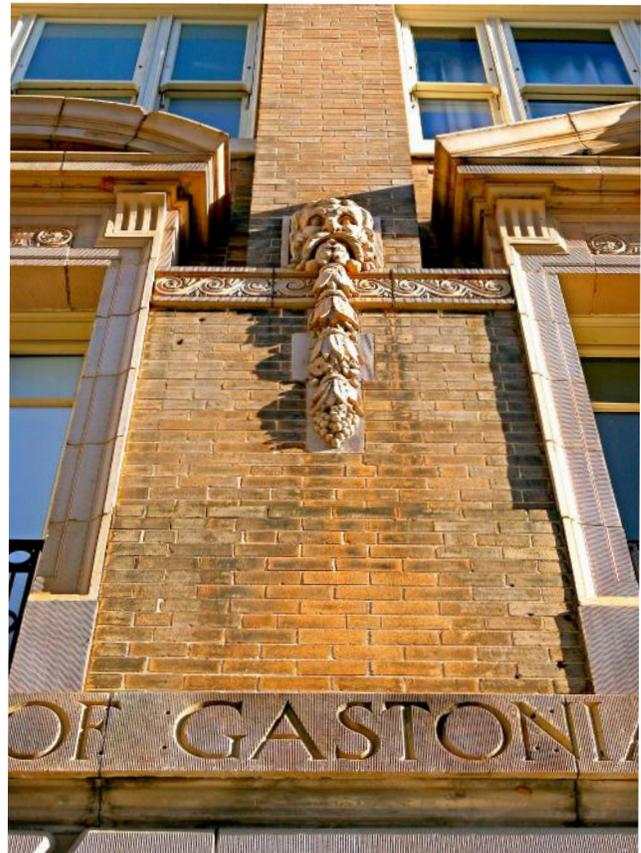
CHARLOTTE METRO AREA:

1. **Cultural and Arts Resources:** Charlotte is known for its vibrant arts and cultural scene. The Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, the Mint Museum, and the North Carolina Dance Theatre offer world-class art and performance experiences. Additionally, the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center hosts a wide range of performances from Broadway shows to local theater productions.

2. **Parks and Outdoor Activities:** Charlotte has an expansive network of parks and recreational facilities. The U.S. National Whitewater Center is a top outdoor destination, offering whitewater rafting, kayaking, and zip-lining. Freedom Park and McDowell Nature Preserve provide excellent hiking, biking, and picnic opportunities.

3. **Economic Opportunities:** Charlotte is a major business hub, particularly in finance, as the home of Bank of America and Wells Fargo's east coast operations. The City also boasts strong sectors in tech, energy, and healthcare, which contribute to its growing economy.

4. **Educational Institutions:** The University of North Carolina at Charlotte offers diverse academic programs and research opportunities. Additionally, Queens University and Johnson C. Smith University contribute to the educational landscape.

GASTON COUNTY:

1. **Historical Sites:** Gaston County has historical landmarks such as the Schiele Museum of Natural History, which offers exhibits on local history, culture, and the environment, and the Gaston County Museum, which explores the region's history from the 18th century onward .

2. **Outdoor and Recreational Areas:** The City is home to Crowders Mountain State Park, a popular spot for hiking, rock climbing, and birdwatching. Lake Wylie offers opportunities for boating, fishing, and water sports, making it a major draw for outdoor enthusiasts .

3. **Economic and Industrial Development:** Gaston County has seen economic growth in industries such as manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare. The presence of CaroMont Health provides medical services to the community, while nearby industrial hubs in Gastonia and surrounding areas provide employment opportunities .

4. **Community Events:** Gaston County supports various community-driven initiatives, including local fairs, festivals, and family events. Its growing network of parks and green spaces provide access to nature and recreational sports.

> Overall, both the Charlotte Metro area and Gaston County are rich in resources that cater to diverse interests, from business and education to outdoor activities and cultural enrichment.

GASTONIA**2050**
Comprehensive Plan