



**"It's Better In Burke"**

**2022-2030**

Blueprint Burke Strategic Land Use Plan is for residents, developers and the business community interested in the future of Burke County. Use this document to consider land uses, trends and growth strategies in Burke County covering the next eight years.



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Blueprint Burke Plan is a plan for growth in our county, including growth in the population of permanent residents and economic expansion. Burke represents the 'good life' by providing a high quality of life through meaningful diversified employment opportunities, vibrant small-town living, stunning rural communities, and many attractions to make living here special and unique.

The Blueprint Burke Plan reviews the current demographics of the county and makes comparisons to past years. We have looked at population, age of residents, community trends and have followed things like construction permits issued by the county. Burke County is experiencing the same types of things that other areas of North Carolina are facing; changing demographics among our residents who have high expectations for a healthy work-life balance located within a vibrant and safe community.

Staff have considered these elements, weighed the many positive attributes and taken into account many local resources. Our conclusion is that there is every reason to expect that Burke County can grow and thrive in the coming decades. What it will take to achieve these goals, is cooperation among the communities of Burke County to work together to maintain our community, expand meaningful employment opportunities and engaging quality of life experiences. This collaboration will set Burke County apart from our peer counties in North Carolina who are trying to develop opportunities in their communities. In Burke County we hope to retain our young people with educational opportunities along with providing meaningful careers in new and traditional industries. We also have a unique opportunity to attract new residents from larger neighboring metropolitan areas with more affordable housing, abundant natural beauty, a thriving local economy and a high standard of living. Burke County is a great place to live, raise a family and retire in our diverse and welcoming community.



## **Section 1 Introduction Background and General History**

### **History**

Burke County is located in western North Carolina and is bordered by McDowell County to the west, Caldwell County to the northeast, Avery County to the north, Catawba County to the east, and Rutherford and Cleveland Counties to the south. Burke County was formed in 1777 when it was cut off from Rowan County. Originally, Burke County included all of the territory now occupied by Alexander, Buncombe, Caldwell, Haywood, Lincoln, McDowell, Madison, Mitchell, Swain, Watauga, and Yancey counties. Burke County was named for Thomas Burke, an Irish settler who later became the third governor of the state of North Carolina (1781-1782).

In the pre-contact era, the area of Burke County was home to Joara, the largest Mississippian-culture settlement in North Carolina, established around 1000 CE. In 1567, Spanish conquistador, Juan Pardo established Fort San Juan near Joara, 40 years before the English settled Jamestown. The fort stood for about a year until it was razed to the ground after an attack by the neighboring native community. Since the actual site of the fort has been rediscovered it has become an active archaeological site for research in the period of first contact between Native Peoples and Europeans. Further exploration and settlement by the British into the area of Burke County would remain slow and sporadic until the mid -1700's. Around that time small communities sprang up along the fertile Catawba River valley. The European settlers of Burke County were largely Scottish, Irish, English, and Moravian, coming from Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the eastern part of the Carolinas Colony. Prior to the end of the Civil War in 1865, very limited numbers of landowners held enslaved African Americans to work on their farms but over time, a vibrant community grew up and thrived in Burke County. Growth and commerce in the region was slow after the Civil War as North Carolina entered a period of stagnation. The development of the county was rapidly increased by the construction of the Norfolk-Southern Railroad in the 1880s. The railroad encouraged the development of industry and various small towns and villages along the corridor. The railroad also linked Burke County to areas in the east and west within the state and to further connections north and south along the Eastern Seaboard. Around 1890 immigrants from the Waldensian Valley of the Italian Alps settled in the eastern part of the county founding Valdese. In more recent decades immigrants from Central America, especially Guatemala and Mexico and east Asian communities including people



from Vietnam and the Hmong community and others have made Burke County their new home.

Overall, the topography of the county is rugged with more level areas in the central section following the Catawba River Valley. The topography of central Burke County is shaped by the Piedmont Plateau, in the northern part of county the landforms are shaped by the Appalachian Mountain Region, and the southern part of the county they are a result of the formation of the South Mountains. About a quarter of the land in Burke County is in conservation through a combination of Federal, State, and local entities. The Pisgah National Forest extends into the northwest section of the county while the majority of the South Mountains are under State ownership.

The Catawba River is the main water way in the county and has several major tributaries including the Linville and Johns Rivers. The County is home to Lake Rhodhiss and Lake James which are humanmade impoundments along the Catawba River. The lakes are primarily used for hydro power generation operations but also serve as water supply reservoirs and recreation destinations.

### **Location**

The major interstate highway in Burke County is I-40, which runs east-west. Other major roads in the county include U.S. 70, U.S. 64, N.C. 181, and N.C. 18. Municipalities within Burke County include Morganton, the largest municipality and county seat, Glen Alpine, Drexel, Valdese, Rutherford College, Connelly Springs, and Hildebran; as well as portions of Rhodhiss, Hickory, and Longview.

The total land area of the County is 505 square miles. The current population is 87,570 based on the 2020 Census.

## **Section 2 Past Planning Efforts**

This plan revision is an update of the Blueprint Burke Plan to incorporate relevant and more recent community data and to update the future land use map to satisfy the 2019 requirements of the State Legislature of the 160-D Local Planning and Development Regulation. The future land use map is considered when changes to the current zoning map and other ordinances are proposed. In the past Burke County planned by way of nine separate small area plans developed for separate areas of the county. Later the conceptual nine small



area plans were consolidated into a comprehensive plan document. By 2015 the Blueprint Burke, A Strategic Land Use Plan was underway and it was adopted in 2016.

Since the original adoption of the Blueprint Burke plan, the North Carolina State Legislature undertook a major overhaul of the state's zoning Laws. The chapter 160-D regulations consolidated the then separate City and County statutes into a single, unified chapter. The new chapter sought to better organize the statutes, clarify existing rules, and made minor policy shifts that required action from cities and counties. Burke County made the necessary changes to bring its Zoning Ordinance into compliance prior to 160-D officially taking effect on July 1, 2021. The last step for the County is to update its Future Land Use Map as part of the Blueprint Burke Strategic Land Use Plan (Blueprint Burke Plan).

### **Section 3 Plan Purpose**



Future land use plans provide a foundation and guide for local governments to use when deciding land use matters. Desired land use characteristics may influence zoning and special use decisions as well as economic development efforts. These plans are important in providing for the current and future needs of Burke County.

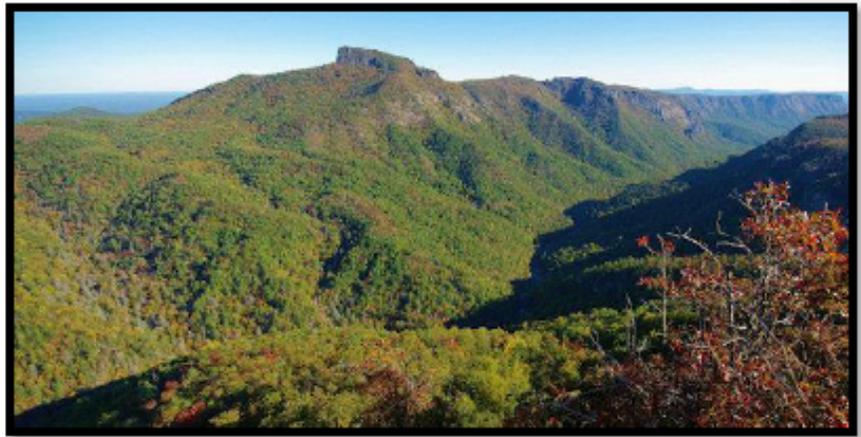
County planners and policy makers such as the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment, and Board of Commissioners use the plan to develop land use regulations such as the zoning ordinance and subdivision ordinance. Additionally, land use plans offer guidance when deciding land use cases such as re-zonings, ordinance amendments, and special use permits. In fact when the North Carolina State Legislature adopted the 160-D legislation they explicitly stated that governing boards must reference a future land use map when considering a rezoning application. The board must adopt a consistency



statement regarding the rezoning request and may approve a rezoning request even if the future land use map is not in agreement so long as they state how conditions have changed since the adoption of the plan and map.

Good plans form a basis for how a community envisions their future. Areas of concern or special need are identified, and resources may be allocated to those areas as needed. In addition, areas of opportunity are identified, and the building blocks of development established in order to bring new life and interest in a community.

It is vital to involve citizens in the planning process. This is done through public meetings with committees and interest groups. Citizens provide insights that are not always apparent to staff members and county officials.



Linville Gorge

Thoughts and ideas are then prioritized and categorized in a manner so that a general set of goals and policies for future development can be established.

## **Section 4 Plan Process and Implementation**

Process - The planning process for the Blueprint Burke Plan began with the establishment of a steering committee comprised of citizens, business owners, and staff members. In order to develop a strategic land use plan the committee was tasked with identifying important growth and development issues present in the county. From there a series of meetings were held in order to approve a vision for Burke County, develop principles to achieve this vision, and review existing and future land use maps. After the steering committee met and developed goals and policies, staff were tasked with writing the document. The plan was eventually adopted in May of 2016.



The 2022 effort to update the Blueprint Burke Plan is focused on the future land use map as a final component of 160-D requirements. In the six years since the plan was adopted there have been changes in the economy, the arrival of a global Covid pandemic and the completion of the 2020 census. This update also provides an opportunity to complete a review of current trends relevant to the local community and include that data in the plan.

Implementation - Land use plans are the basis for land development regulations. These plans must be consulted and statements of consistency must be adopted when changes are made to county land use ordinances. In addition, the land use plan identifies the county's perspective on other matters of development such as the local economy, transportation, and the environment. The plan should be current and readily available for consultation regarding land use matters. In the past, most comprehensive land use plans were considered static documents that were complete once adopted. A more recent approach to planning is to provide more periodic updates to the plans or portions of plans. When major themes appear to be working those remain in place and are relevant. When plan components appear to no longer reflect current conditions, then those portions can be amended. That is the approach taken for the update to this plan. The Section 9 Land Use Policies and Action Steps are felt to be relevant and still useful with some minor additions and changes. The Section 6 Population, Development, and Employment Trends are out of date and need a major rewrite. As already noted, the Section 10 Future Land Uses and Map, future map needs refinement as well.

The Land Use Policies in Section 9 represent general principles that affect all development within the county. Specific policies should be identified to support proposed development and amendments to land use maps and regulations. These policies should be used in conjunction with the Future Land Use Map in Section 10 to determine if the proposed development is desired in the identified location. Statements of consistency in support of or against proposed development should contain references to these two sections.

County staff will primarily use the Blueprint Burke Plan to generate reports for the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners when citizens make a development request. Staff may also use the plan when consulting with outside agencies such as the council of government or various state agencies to identify county positions on land use issues. The Board of Adjustment may also consult



the plan when they are asked to consider Special Use Permits for specific properties within the county.

The Planning Board will use the plan to support their recommendations on land use matters. The Planning Board reviews all land use proposals and map amendments and provides a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners. The plan provides background, trends and recommendations on a broad variety of topics.

As the legislative body, the Board of Commissioners makes the final decision on land use matters. The board will review the recommendation of the planning board and staff reports to make a decision. Like the Planning Board, the Board of Commissioners may ask for more information or further review. Once a decision is made a statement of consistency is adopted and specific areas of the plan identified in support of the decision.

Citizens and developers will find it helpful to consult the plan before making development requests. This will increase the chances for a successful development request and reduce staff work and time.

## **Section 5 Vision and Goals Statement**

*“The Blueprint Burke Strategic Land Use Plan seeks to promote planned economic, recreational, and residential growth in harmony with areas most suitable for development while preserving community character and protecting the county’s rural and natural areas.”*

The policies and Future Land Use Map set forth in this plan communicate an overall growth strategy for Burke County. General guiding principles include:

- Open dialogue and communication between all stakeholders to encourage public input and support for all planning efforts.
- Economic and residential growth along key transportation corridors including NC 70, Interstate 40, NC 18, and NC 64.
- Preservation of rural open spaces for agricultural uses and scenic character.
- Promotion of outdoor recreation areas to include Lake James, Lake Rhodhiss,



Lake Hickory, the Catawba River, John's River, Linville Gorge, Pisgah National Forest, Lake James State Park, and South Mountain State Park.

- Upgrading existing transportation infrastructure while expanding multi-modal transportation alternatives.
- Coordination between rural and urban entities to promote joint development ventures and recreational opportunities This will be implemented by the completion of the Fonta Flora State Trail, the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, the new Burke River Trail, Wilderness Gateway State Trail and other recreation projects with a goal of linking together all communities and special places in Burke County.
- Expansion of water and sewer utilities and internet capabilities to underserved regions of the county while identifying and highlighting areas suitable for denser residential growth where infrastructure is in place to support the growth.
- Creation of a partnership with private service providers to develop a plan for county-wide Broadband access
- Enhancing the health and well-being of the citizens of Burke County to include an aggressive parks, recreation, and trails strategy through the creation and maintenance of recreation experiences, outdoor recreation facilities, and special destinations.
- Identification of additional industrial and manufacturing sites that can be ready to serve new or existing industrial users.
- Seeking partnerships with other communities in Burke County and with neighboring counties, especially for efforts with other Unifour Region Counties (Alexander, Caldwell and Catawba Counties).

These general policies illustrate the overall intentions of this land use plan and should be utilized in conjunction with the appropriate Land Use Policy and the Future Land Use Map to determine specific policy decisions for Burke County.



## **Section 6 Population, Development, and Employment Trends**

A component of a land use plan is an update of the current trends occurring in the This plan will examine construction trends over the past five ten years as well as population and employment data based on information from the 2020 census and other sources. Since the time when the plan was last adopted in 2016, new development is trending upward year after year, and new data is available from the completed 2020 decennial census. Employment numbers have also adjusted during the past five years and the plan will attempt to capture the major issues with employment.

### **Population Trends**

Burke County has been officially reported to have lost population during the last census period. Burke County's population contracted by about 3.7%. between 2010 and 2020 currently noted as 87,570. Not everyone agrees with the population numbers from the 2020 US Census but there does appear to be some loss of population. Burke County has a slightly older population compared to North Carolina as a whole and some of the reduction in population is related to residents aging out and the arrival of smaller retiree households as new residents. There is also a smaller group of people here in their family formation years (typically Millennials) so the usual growth in younger age groups is also falling behind. This situation is not unique to Burke County as millennials on average have been slower to form households, often delaying marriage, and having fewer if any, children. Millennials have now surpassed

### **Population Groups**

The population is commonly divided up within specific age groups. There are generalizations that people in the same age group have behaviours or interests that are similar to one another. This is an idea that is open for debate but can help in understanding the dynamics in a community.

**Baby Boomers:** This is the population group between approximately 1946 and 1964. The parents of Boomers are the folks who came home from World War II and started families. This group of workers are now leaving the workforce and retiring.

**Gen X:** This is the population group born between approximately 1964 and 1981.

**Millennials:** This is the population group born between approximately 1982 and 1996. This group now makes up the largest age group in the workforce.



Baby Boomers and Gen X as the single largest group of working age adults.

Gen Z: This is the population group between 1997 and after. People in this group grew up with the iPhone and constant connectivity. This population group is entering the workforce and completing college.

For Burke County and the other 'Unifour Counties' (Caldwell, Catawba and Alexander) the economic downturn called the Great Recession in the mid-2000s affected a broad range of manufacturing uses in the region. As a result of the economic downturn, a percentage of the Gen X population base as well as Baby Boomers left the area for other places. In addition to being a loss for Burke County of people in their prime working years, the lingering effects include fewer younger people. When Gen X individuals moved away, they started their families in other communities. This has led to reduced school-age populations as well. This statistic is demonstrated in the 2020 census where, the under 18 age group in Burke County dropped by over 13% from 2010.

With current research and policy proposed by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments in discussion with communities in the Unifour Region, a region-wide goal has been identified to approve and expand by 2% each year the number of housing units by county. At that level of growth, our communities can support and maintain the current population and levels of employment. Currently, Burke County is not seeing that level of growth in the county.

While the census information appears to suggest that Burke County is experiencing a reduction in population, that may not in fact be the case. New development is occurring in Burke County and the growth is spread out county-wide. Much of this growth is new single family home construction. Some of these homes are expected to be second homes for recreation users based on lake locations or mountain resort areas and some may be replacements for older housing stock. It is clear however that a large number of the homes are for families here Burke County.



## Development Trends

### Single-family

By far the largest number of permits issued in the county are for new single-family permits and for renovations to single-family homes. Construction permits for the period of 2016-2021 have been up in almost all categories. Single family permits which include site constructed and modular units have been up 78% during this period. In 2021, 221 single-family homes were permitted by Burke County. While this is a welcome trend, the county can use more housing starts to compensate for the population changes already noted. The real estate market has been strong and demand available residential units has been high. The median home price is at or near historic highs, and houses are on the market for less than a month on average.

The County also issues permits for repairs, additions, and replacements for components of single-family homes. These are called residential trade permits because they require one or more permits for electrical, mechanical, plumbing, framing, or other related building inspections. Those permits have also increased year over year. Since 2016 residential trade permits are up 31% to almost 1,300 permits issued in 2021. This is a trend worth noting because it means that property owners are keeping up with maintenance on their properties or they are making new investments in them. In Burke County half of the residential structures were constructed in 1978 or earlier, so the maintenance of older homes keeps the housing stock in good condition and supports the tax base.

### Single Family:

Single family housing is commonly referred to as 'stick-built' or modular housing built to the standards of the NC Building Code.

### Multi-family:

Multi-family housing is a broad category of housing usually defined by multiple residential units on a single parcel of land and includes apartments which share one or more walls, roofs, and other building systems.

### Multi-family dwelling:

A building or portion thereof used for or designed as a residence for three (3) or more families living independently of each other and doing their own cooking therein including condos, townhouses and apartments.



## Multi-family

Multi-family housing construction has occurred in at least two locations in Burke County providing some growth in multi-family units over the past few years. Townhome developments, which have been successful in Burke County and nearby counties, are often categorized for zoning purposes as multi-family housing. The development of townhomes should be promoted as a viable alternative to a single-family home to both retirees and millennials. Residents of townhomes like the ease of care and flexible living that townhomes provide.

Multi-family housing is underway or recently permitted in both Morganton and Valdese. The former Drexel Furniture site in Morganton has been completed as apartments and new apartments are near completion at a site adjacent to Western Piedmont Community College, known as the Murphy Farm Apartments. A new multi-family project is planned for downtown Valdese at a former mill site.

Multi-family development typically relies on public water and sewer infrastructure to serve the community. It takes a lot of land and infrastructure to serve a large development with a single septic system making it impractical. Sewer is generally limited in Burke County and are in more locations north of I-40. The major providers are the City of Morganton and the Town of Valdese. Burke County is also a service provider with limited water and sewer service mostly in eastern areas of the county. There are

### Manufactured Home:

Manufactured home: A dwelling unit, constructed after July 1, 1976, that meets or exceeds the construction standards of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



some locations where multi-family will be a possibility and these locations should be considered for additional density because of their unique access to infrastructure.

Multi-family residential units are an important component of the rental housing supply because it provides flexible housing and more options for residents. Newly arrived residents can find a quick place to live while they become familiar with the area and get settled into the community. Multi-family housing options are also needed for folks who are unable or uninterested in buying a home. The higher unit density of multi-family housing projects has the added benefit of expanding the housing stock while decreasing the pressure on converting rural/agricultural lands into low-density housing developments.

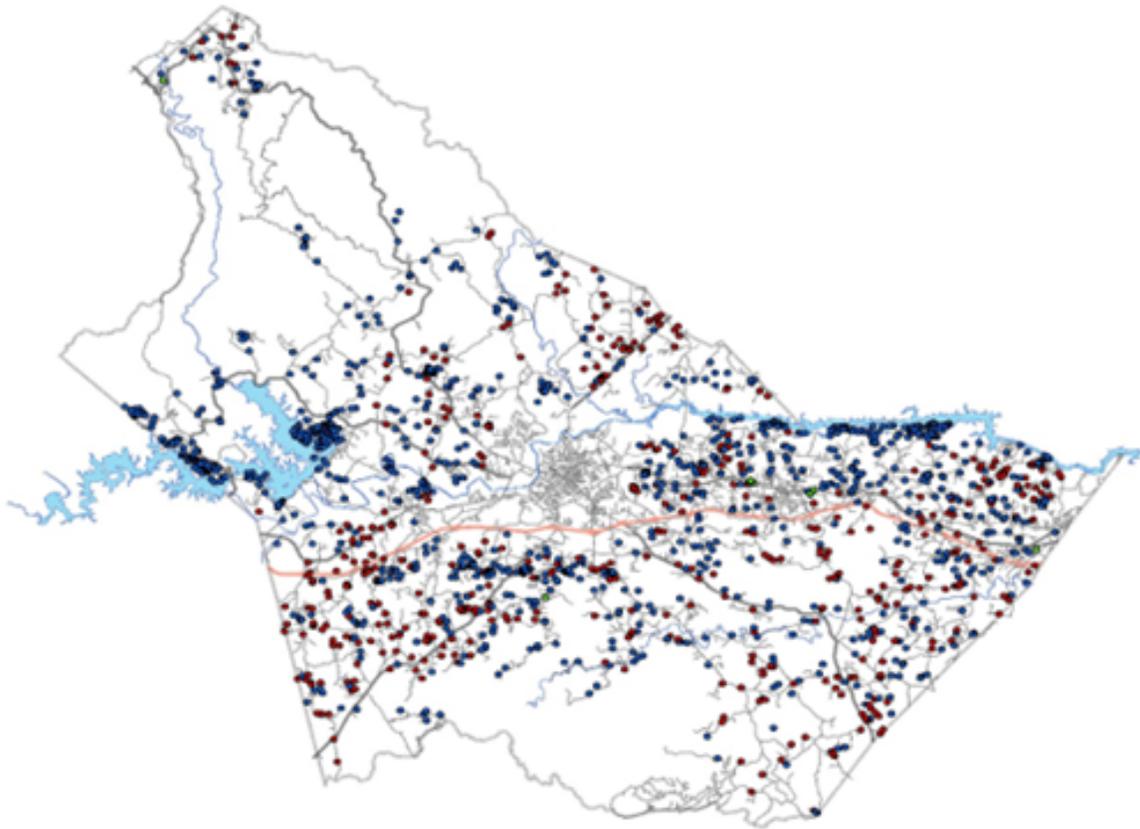
#### Manufactured Home

Manufactured housing is an important part of the housing mix in Burke County. It provides a more affordable option for many residents compared to a stick-built or modular home. Permits for manufactured homes increased 46% between 2016 and 2021. Many of the more rural areas of the county allow manufactured housing units. The county maintains a reasonable list of requirements for setting up a manufactured home including property line setbacks and underpinning a home similar to regulations for single-family homes in order to maintain the quality and character of the Burke County community.

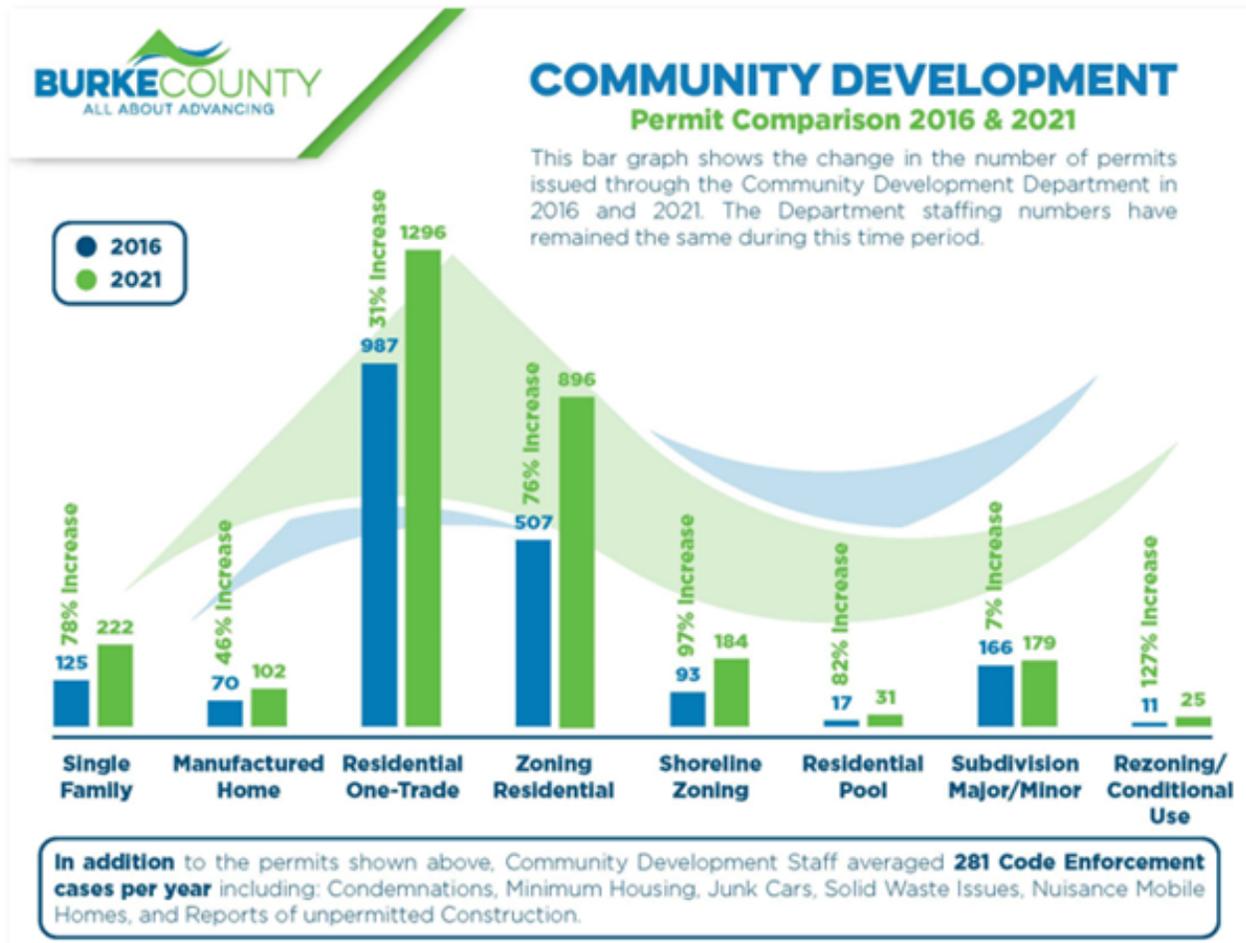


## New Housing Permits 2014-2021

- Single-Family
- Multi-Family
- Mobile Home



## Recent Burke County Permit Trends Chart 2016-2021



### Non-residential Development

There has been a strong upward trend in non-residential permits. New construction has been active in almost all sectors of the economy and throughout the county. The Valdese Hospital is expanding, and the Grace Center in Morganton is renovating. The NCSSM – Morganton Campus has recently completed their new campus. Broughton Hospital has also completed many renovations.

There has been successful retail expansion at the Morganton Heights shopping area with a Walmart Center along with a large number of restaurants and retail shops utilizing the former Henredon Furniture property. Downtown Morganton has also seen business expansion, streetscape improvements and additional renovation of the Old Burke County Courthouse and Square. In Valdese, Main Street is seeing continuing improvements with a new bakery, taproom and restaurants.



Industrial and manufacturing uses have also grown. Parker Industries in the south end of the county rebuilt their facility and expanded on site after a fire. A new manufacturing expansion was approved for Unix Packaging for the Burke Development Incorporated site in western Burke County. The JE Ekornes Furniture facility expansion was recently completed and put in operation in Morganton.

An Industrial Use is an activity including resource extraction, manufacturing, warehousing, storage, distribution, shipping, and other related uses. According to figures from the American Community Survey, 24% of the workforce in Burke County is engaged in manufacturing, industrial, shipping and warehouse uses. Very close to this same percentage of the workforce is health care and social assistance. Burke County continues to be a place that is strong for manufacturing in western North Carolina.

Burke County is working hard to maintain and strengthen its industrial base.

There are several successful manufacturers of automobile and electronic components within Burke County and the furniture industry is again expanding. A newer manufacturing model is also operating in Burke County since 2015. The Industrial Commons is a place to manufacture products and goods in a refurbished factory facility with a goal to foster entrepreneurship, build up and support the manufacturing sector, and activate a worker-owner management framework. The Industrial Commons is also working to solve other problems with the manufacturing supply chain with a circular materials and waste cycling service, capacity and process training and coaching workers to be business owners. Since the industrial and manufacturing base is strong within the Burke County region, the Industrial Commons is discovering ways to reinvest in the manufacturing sector.

An important and more recent focus of the Burke County Commission is the expansion of the recreation based tourism industry. Recreation tourism serves residents and visitors alike with accommodations for active people especially families, younger people and retirees. Recreation tourism is also an avenue to bring new residents to our area since many people seeking to relocate experience a potential community as a tourist first. They then evaluate many factors including housing availability, employment opportunities, schools and quality of life aspects to make a decision based on their specific criteria. Outdoor recreation options, walking and mountain biking trails are popular as



well as water-based recreation and organized sports activities. Burke County is making important inroads in this area. Over the past eight years, approximately 20 miles of trails have been constructed for the Fonta Flora State Trail (FFST) with its focus around Lake James. The county has successfully leveraged XX dollars of grant funding to complete this work. Part of the FFST also shares the route with the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail (OVT) and plans are to continue the trail to its approach to the City of Morganton which will also have a section of both the OVT and the FFST. Within the City of Morganton, most sections of the trail network are completed except for some sidewalk sections.

There are other county trail efforts that seek to link the communities east and west along the Catawba River with a recreation feature that supports all communities along the watershed. Planning and implementation of the Burke River Trail is underway for these communities. Another new trail to the south of I-40 is the Wilderness Gateway State Trail which is also in the planning stages. It will seek to link the South Mountains and areas to the west with rural areas east into Catawba County. This trail will also include a connection to the Town of Valdese.

The private sector supports recreation tourism through businesses patronized by residents and tourists. The Fonta Flora Brewery opened a second production facility adjacent to the FFST and the OVT at the Whippoorwill Farm. Near the South Mountains State Park permits for a new equestrian camping facility has been issued to construct a stable and camping cabins for horse owners to camp near the South Mountains State Park equestrian trails. In downtown Morganton, a bike shop has opened and caters to road and trail riders in the area. The Foothills Conservancy has purchased a large vacant track of land and plans to develop a mountain-bike themed facility on the property along with a meeting space and other attractions. The Lake James Camping Resort and Marina has operated on Lake James for decades and has recently expanded its operations to a neighboring tract to take advantage of the growth and popularity of Lake James and the FFST. Silver Fork Winery opened in a rural setting and welcomes visitors focused on special events at the winery. A Fairfield Inn and Suites has recently opened in downtown Morganton and there are a large number of residential homes rented for tourists through sites like AirBNB and VRBO. Recreation tourism is a strong part of the economy in our region.



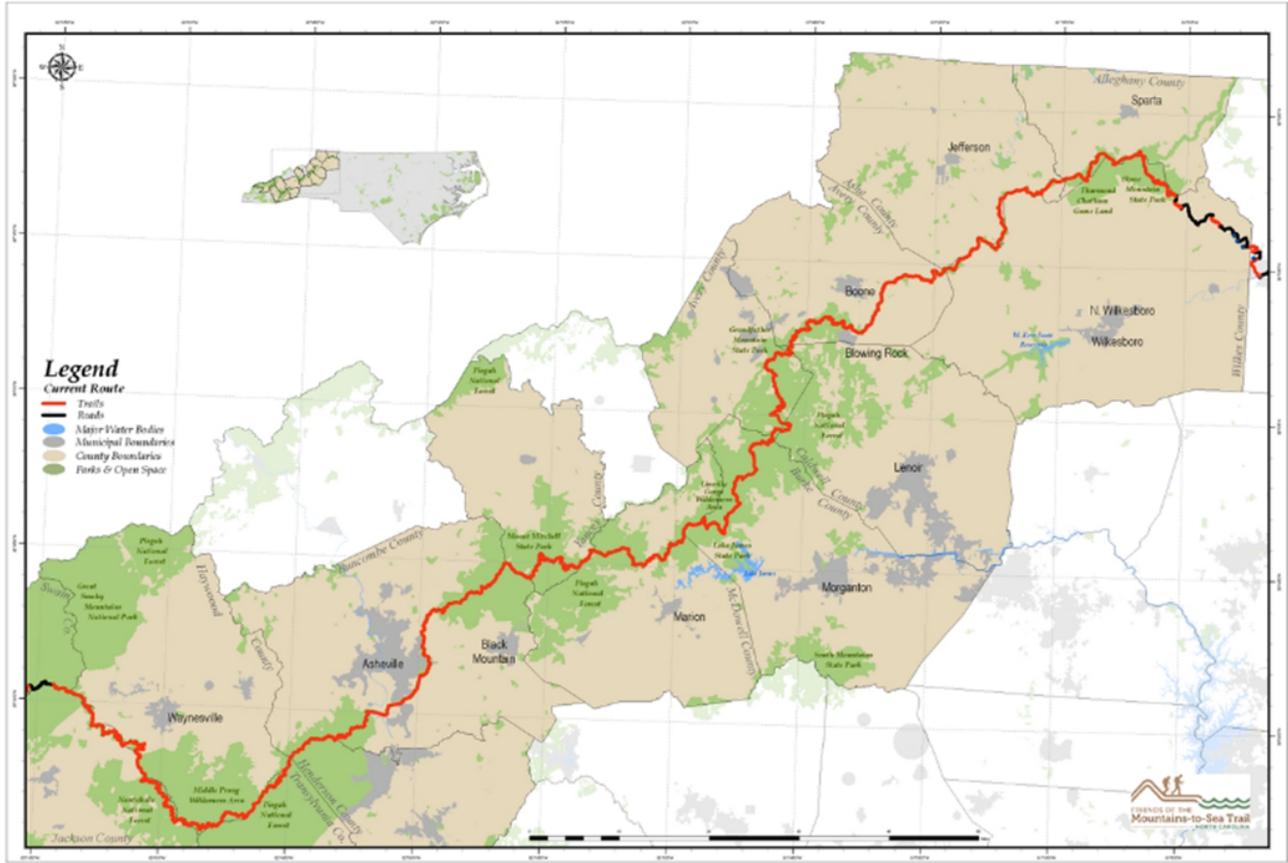


**The Fonta Flora State Trail originates in Burke County and will continue from Morganton to Asheville.**



# Mountains-to-Sea Trail

*Eastern Mountains; March 28, 2020*



**The Mountains-to-Sea Trail as a statewide trail across North Carolina**



Burke County has always had a large population of state institutions so much so that it earned the nickname of the Western State Capital. These have included the J Iverson Riddle Facility, Broughton Hospital and the North Carolina School for the Deaf. These facilities are being joined by a new campus for the Math and Science High School known as the NCSSM – Morganton Campus.

The NCSSM – Morganton Campus will be opening for students in the fall of 2022. The school will be a premier residential facility for high school students excelling in the STEM curriculum. There has been a lot of excitement in the community about the school because it will provide an excellent education for students and provide an economic boost to Burke County. At full capacity over 300 students are expected to live on the campus of the NCSSM – Morganton Campus.



**An architect's rendering of the NCSSM – Morganton Campus**



## Employment Trends

According to the North Carolina Office of the State Budget and Management the labor force in Burke County is made up of 40,349 people. The unemployment rate is approximately 3.8% which is usually considered to be full employment. One of the outcomes of the Covid pandemic is that workers are in short supply and wages are up. Companies are having to offer improved benefits, sign-on bonuses and better wages to attract workers. The employment mix in Burke County is more diverse and distributed among different sectors now than in decades past.

Looking back, the Great Recession had a big impact on Burke County which had already experienced the closure of large furniture factories prior to that time. Employment numbers in Burke County have dropped from 37,211 in 2000 to 27,503 in 2010. Along with a loss of jobs, there was a 71% drop in new housing permits between 2006 and 2014. Though current employment figures are not close to pre-recession numbers, Burke County has seen an overall increase in employment since 2010. Burke County has been adding new jobs for each of the years since 2010 with the exception of the labor market contraction associated with the Covid Pandemic. Numbers today are picking up with some changes up and down based on industry sector although we are not back up to numbers from the year 2000.

The Covid Pandemic which began in 2020, hastened the departure of people from the workforce. The workforce has been slow to

## Employment Terminology

### Labor Force

The labor force is the total civilian population over the age of 16 who are working or who are eligible to work, are actively looking for work or are laid off but awaiting recall and does not include those who are incarcerated or in institutions, active military personnel or those who are retired. The term labor force and workforce are used interchangeably

### Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate represents the number of unemployed people as a percentage of the labor force



recover to pre-pandemic numbers for a variety of reasons, including a lack of available childcare and concerns about personal health. While many workers have returned, there is evidence that some additional people have retired out early. In a normal year approximately 2 million Baby Boomers retire out of the workforce in the United States. In 2021, data shows that approximately 1 million additional workers retired from the workforce. Some of these people may return to work, but it appears that there will be a worker shortage for some time to come. Employers are responding to the need for workers by offering stronger benefits, higher wages and salaries, and flexible work schedules. Strategies to reverse the worker shortage in Burke County are on-going with job training programs, internships, and strong recruitment drives.



The current division of labor is as follows:

### Current Employment Statistics Snapshot

Industry	Jobs 2021 Q3	<u>5 year</u> history; 2016 to 2021
Construction	1166	33
Manufacturing	6961	-878
Wholesale Trade	501	14
Retail Trade	3191	178
Transportation and Warehousing	481	-12
Information	94	-29
Finance and Insurance	359	-25
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	219	-25
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	568	-29
Management of Companies and Enterprises	56	12
Administrative and Waste Management and Remediation Services	2448	1098
Educational Services	2179	-310
Health Care and Social Assistance	6946	-314
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	202	-11
Accommodation and Food Services	2477	-68
Other Services Ex. Public Admin	1273	-73
Public Administration	2253	-16
Mining, Quarrying and Oil Extraction	18	-2
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting	269	-22
Totals	31,716	-480

## Snapshot from the Economy in Burke County in 1990

An employment snapshot from Burke County in 1990 is provided below based on information kept by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The county workforce was over 40,000 and was larger than it is today. While employment numbers were good, and the county appeared to thrive, it was heavily focused in the manufacturing sector which employed 52% of workers. This turned out to be a structural weakness when manufacturing shifted overseas, and local plants were shuttered. The County is still recovering from the loss of population from that time with ripples still felt in our community today. One good aspect about our current economy is that it is more diverse than it was in 1990.

Manufacturing is still strong but now other sectors are balancing out the employment mix including health care, retail, general services, and public administration. Having a diverse economy will help the county be more sustainable and resilient if or when there are future changes and shifts in the economy.

## Data from 2021

Recent employment numbers for Burke County are comprised of about 31,716 workers. Manufacturing and the related services of shipping and warehousing employ about 24% of the workforce in Burke County. The health care and social assistance sector employs 22% of the workforce. Retail services employ about 10% and accommodation and food service employ 8% of the workforce. In many ways the workforce is diversified in Burke County which will help the local economy weather expansions and declines. This is different from the economy of decades past when it was heavily tied to the manufacturing sector and suffered severely when some key sectors, especially furniture factories closed down. Since then, manufacturing has retooled with new investments in automation and modernization to meet current demands while employing fewer workers. Workers in modern factories are often highly skilled technicians who manage specialized automated equipment. The manufacturing sector is also facing a worker shortage which is being addressed by Western Piedmont Community College and Catawba Valley Community College both of whom have robust programs to train workers for skilled trades and in support of the manufacturing sector. The broader workforce has positive things going for it including newer sectors like recreation tourism, retail and professional services which are all growing.



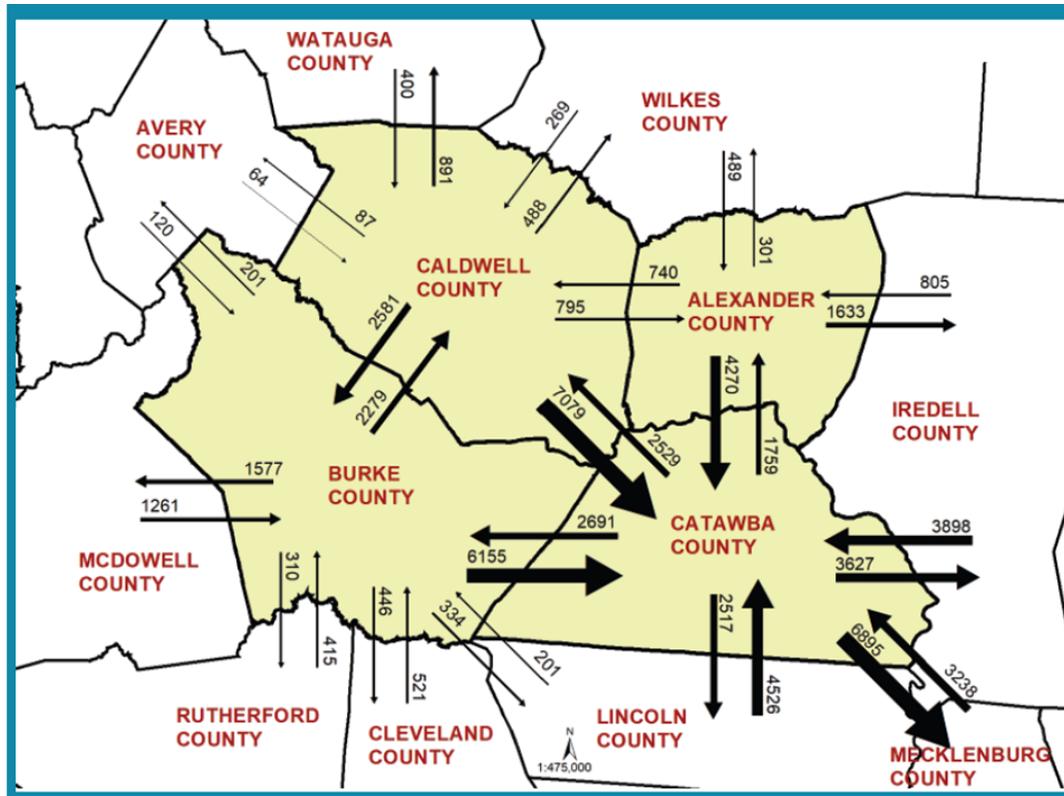
New homes are needed in the region since the supply is constricted but demand is high. Due to these shortages, the region needs more construction workers and home builders to support housing demand. With the county's older housing stock, there is also the need for workers to renovate and repair homes. Burke County has tracked the permit trends for new single family homes and manufactured homes and the numbers are up for the past decade. Permits to repair and renovate existing homes have increased each year since the recession. This is all good for the county and is an important part of the local economy.

The current workforce is smaller than in more recent years leading up to 2020 which is due to the lingering effects of the Covid Pandemic. During the pandemic, the workforce was reduced because more workers left the workforce for retirement, business closures, and issues and concerns about childcare and personal health. There have also been a significant number of deaths that have occurred from the virus. As of July 2022, the Burke County Health Department reported that over 356 Burke County residents have died from illnesses associated with Covid.

According to information based on research from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments from the Winter 2021 edition of the EIN, show the commuting patterns within the Unifour Region. Burke County residents commute out of the county for work to neighboring counties by a number of 11,302 workers. There are also 7,790 workers from other counties commuting into Burke County for work. The net outflow of workers is 3,512 people. In the 1990's Burke County had a job surplus with the flow of workers into the county being greater than the number commuting out. On a positive note, as Burke County develops new employment opportunities, there are potentially over 11,000 workers within the county who may not need to move or commute long distances to take these new jobs.



# Community Patterns for the 4-County "Unifour" Region



## Section 7 Burke County's Strengths

The future is positive for Burke County. The county's many strengths have generated an informal slogan from this planning effort, "Its Better in Burke". The list of our positive characteristics is long and worth stating here as a summary of the many aspects of the community. Taken together this list shows the variety of elements working for the benefit of Burke County:

### Economic Strength and Diversity:

The economy here in Burke County is diverse with a broad range of employment sectors. Compared with other metro areas, the economy here is more diverse than many communities in North Carolina.

The unemployment rate is at historically low levels which represents full employment. In addition, about 11,000 workers who reside in Burke County commute to other counties for work. As employment opportunities grow and expand in Burke County, those same workers would have an incentive to stay



and work closer to home. This might be thought of as a built-in business recruitment strategy.

Burke Development Incorporated (BDI) has been making regular improvements to the Burke Industrial Park with a new water tower and grants to extend sewer service to the site. A local business has also been recruited to expand at the site with parcels available for additional development.

The population of Burke County has expanded in educational attainment at all levels since 2015 reflecting the concerted efforts of the local school districts, Western Piedmont Community College and other partners.

To maintain competitiveness Western Piedmont Community College has a broad array of training programs for workers interested in changing fields for new opportunities and to further their careers, helping Burke County residents remain competitive in the workforce.

Burke County is within easy travel distance to larger metropolitan areas including Asheville, Charlotte and Winston Salem. I-40 and Hwy 321 offer convenient north to south and east to west travel. This proximity can provide access to employment opportunities and leisure time activities.

Burke County has space to grow and develop with land suitable for many uses to meet the future needs of the county.

Burke County has many natural resources including a large supply of water and the Catawba River provides an important drinking water source for thousands of residents.

Electric power generation in the Catawba Valley is unmatched and the power grid is crisscrossed with redundancies making electric power safe and secure for the benefit of residents and business entities operating here.

Manufacturing and warehousing, long a staple of the employment mix in Burke County are growing with modern facilities.

Burke County is served by two community hospitals offering quality health care



to Burke County residents. Grace Hospital and Valdese Hospital are improving and expanding local services with new health care investments.

Artisans and artists working in Burke County are a growing component of the local economy. This is an economic sector that should be supported so that it can grow and add to the economic wellbeing of the community. Art focused tourism has been a successful economic strategy for communities in other regions.

### **Recreation Assets at Work:**

Recreation tourism is one of the focus areas for economic development efforts by Burke County. There is potential for strong growth in this sector via unique activities and special venues along with the public's interest in outdoor places and experiences.

Four state trails cross Burke County. The Fonta Flora State Trail and the Wilderness Gateway State Trail originate in Burke County. The Mountains to the Sea Trail and the Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail passes through Burke County. These assets are an important tourism venue in the area and enhances the community's quality of life.

Lake James and Lake Rhodhiss are important features for Burke County and the focus of active residential development. These areas also contain recreation elements that are available for public use.

Over 25% of the land area of Burke County is protected as State Park land, National Forest Land, State Game Lands and privately protected lands. These special areas will ensure that Burke County will always retain rural vistas and open spaces.

Burke County, the City of Morganton, Town of Valdese and other communities offer a wide range of local parks and recreation programming to serve the needs of county residents and visitors.

The county boasts two state parks and other National Forest Land and other preservation land, Lakes James and Lake Rhodhiss ensuring that public access



to open space will always be a part of life in the county.

The public has access through State, County and other public entities to Lake James, Lake Rhodhiss and the Catawba River. These public access areas provide public enjoyment for water-based recreation, boating, camping and other outdoor amenities.

### **Housing Growth:**

Burke County offers many options for residential homes; including lakefront homes, rural cabins, farms, community living in a neighborhood setting. Apartments and townhomes have also been constructed in recent years adding options for residents.

Housing values are trending upwards, and Burke County real estate is recognized as a solid investment. Home prices are at or near historic highs in this region.

Burke County has a developer-friendly attitude for infill housing and new developments. Maintaining our rural community character continues to be a parallel goal.

Burke County has a number of high-quality home builders working in our community and more are welcome and needed here. Over time the permit process will become more streamlined and convenient for the development community with a complete system of permit submittal, payment and inspection services available online.

Residential permit numbers have been growing year over year for the past 8 years. Recent building permit activity shows additional regional developers are working in our community. Additional marketing of the Burke County community would expand our exposure in the region.

Burke County has the benefit of being a great place in the middle of three larger metropolitan areas: the Charlotte metro area, the Asheville metro area and the Winston-Salem metro area. People tired of the high cost of living the and hustle and bustle of these larger communities would find a welcoming respite here.



Burke County as a part of the Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton area has recently been recognized by the US News and World Report's 2022-2023 rankings:

#31 Best Place to Live

#45 Best Place to Retire

#1 Cheapest Places to Live

#3 Best Places to Live in North Carolina

This sort of attention brings awareness to our region from across the nation.

Many people search for the right community to call home and these rankings help them to hone their search based on what is important to them. North Carolina already has a good reputation nationally and these types of rankings puts us in the spotlight.

### **Quality of Life Elements:**

Burke County offers a retreat from the busier areas of the state with convenient rural living and vibrant small towns. We offer a chance to know your neighbors and build community connections.

The Burke County community is ethnically and culturally diverse adding to its rich quality of life.

Burke County is home to the new western campus of NCSSM – Morganton Campus which will bring another level of learning to our community.

The City of Morganton offers the charm of small town living along with enough activities in the downtown area to provide a vibrant eclectic and hip urban environment.

The Town of Valdese offers a unique recent immigration story which today is centered along a traditional main street. Small businesses including food and beverage and retail have opened at a number of downtown locations over the past few years.

The zoning regulations in Burke County encourage entrepreneurship and development while balancing community character and protections for residential areas.



The history of our region is rich and is still being researched. The frontier of the New World crisscrossed our county with the exploration of Juan Pardo in 1567 from Spanish Florida to a community of native peoples at Joara. In the following decades, England established communities in this area as a part of the Province of North Carolina. This history is abundant and is available for exploration and learning.

Art and craft have long been a part of this region originally as handmade articles for use at the home and farm and continuing as a legacy of art and culture to the present day. Artists in our county enhance the quality of life of the entire community.

## Section 8 Existing Zoning Districts and Mapping

Existing land uses in the county were identified and mapped by staff. These uses were divided into the categories shown below:

Land use	Total Acres	Percentage of County
Agriculture	19960	6.0%
Commercial	764	0.2%
City	27197	8.2%
Double-wide Manufactured	2985	0.9%
Extra Territorial Jurisdiction	9466	2.9%
Industrial	1297	0.4%
Multi-family Residential	88	0.0%
Office / Institutional	1305	0.4%
Parks / State Land	76316	23.1%
Single-family Residential	15850	4.8%
Single-wide Mobile Home	3505	1.1%
Vacant Land	172092	52.0%

Primary land uses tend to be located in specific areas of the county. For example, agricultural land is primarily located in the eastern part of the county. Industrial and commercial land uses are most likely to be found along the I-40 Corridor. National Forest land is primarily located in the northern, southern, areas of the county and State Park land is located in the western section of the county.



Burke County strongly supports economic development, and to that end, has created a Rural Mixed Use (R-MU) zoning district (Page 20). The R-MU district comprises approximately 60 percent of the land area within the county and as the name implies, allows a mixture of all land uses. Within this use district, anything from residential homes to auto repair garages to state facilities and institutions to mining quarries can be found.

The existing county land use map shows the current state of land uses in the county. This map helps to develop the future land use map in Section 10. The results are documented on the following maps.

## **Current Zoning Districts**

The current zoning districts are listed here as a way of providing information of what is currently mapped. Although a zoning map may be changed from time to time by application, it does show the expectations and focus of land use in Burke County. The zoning is focused on the rural land characteristics found in Burke County. These uses are dominated by residential uses with occasional commercial and institutional activities. Properties along the I-40 corridor and the towns north of I-40 have the most unique classifications and ‘fine-tuning’ of zoning because of the proximity to developed areas around our towns. The residentially zoned areas are made up of the broader neighborhoods that surround the towns and cities of Burke County. Outside of the towns and residential areas, the broad category of Rural Mixed-use has been applied. Many activities are available in this zoning district as residential and other non-residential uses are spread broadly across the county. The current zoning districts for Burke County are as follows:

### **R-1 Residential District**

The R-1 Residential District is composed of high to medium density single-family site built and modular homes in areas that have now, or are likely to have in the future both water and sewer availability. The R-1 district may also be located in areas without these services, but at reduced density levels. The characteristics of the district, and the uses allowed there, are primarily residential in nature. The regulations of this district are intended to discourage any use that, because of its character, would substantially interfere with the



development of single-family residences which would be detrimental to the quiet residential nature of the areas included in this district.

### **R-2 Residential District**

The R-2 Residential District is very similar to the R-1 district, however this district also allows multi-section mobile homes and multi-family housing options. These areas should also be served by public water systems and, in most cases, by private on-site septic systems. Allowable uses in this district are also sensitive to the residential character of the area and non-residential uses are limited.

### **R-3 Residential**

The R-3 Residential District is a less restrictive medium density residential district that allows a broader range of residential uses including single and multi-section mobile homes and a greater variety of compatible non-residential uses in areas that may be less suburban in nature. Public water should be available to most areas within this district.

### **Office and Institutional District**

The Office and Institutional District (O-I) is designed to provide a wide range of professional and economic office space, as well as space for public and quasi-public uses. The regulations are intended to provide for adequate traffic access and parking facilities in addition to prohibiting any use which, because of its character, would interfere with the office/institutional nature of this district. The Office Institutional District is eligible for voluntary parallel conditional rezoning process set forth in Article IX-A.

### **Neighborhood Business District**

The Neighborhood Business District (NB) is intended for the use of those businesses and other uses which are properly located near rural service centers.

### **General Business District**

The General Business District (GB) is established to provide suitable locations for those commercial activities which serve the general public, including those which function rather independently of each other. The General Business District is eligible for voluntary parallel conditional rezoning process set forth in Article IX-A.



## **Industrial District**

The Industrial District (IND) is established as a district in which the principal use of land is for industrial, and warehousing uses which normally seek large tracts of land where the operations involved do not detract from the development potential of nearby undeveloped properties. The Industrial District is eligible for voluntary parallel conditional rezoning process set forth in Article IX-A.

## **Rural Mixed-Use District**

The Rural Mixed Use (RMU) district occurs in more rural areas of the county where the availability of public services such as water and sewer may not be available in the foreseeable future. Such a district allows low-density residential and non-residential development to occur in greater variety, and with fewer restrictions, than in more urbanized portions of the county. Lower density development will result in fewer conflicts between adjacent landowners and can contribute to maintaining the rural appearance of the area.

## **Light Industrial District**

The Light Industrial District (LI) is established for uses that would not have significant negative environmental or land use impact on surrounding residential or business districts. Permitted uses will not create any substantial noise, smoke, vibration, odor, or traffic that may endanger the health and safety of the surrounding area. This district will have a minimal impact on the surrounding properties and area with the follow restrictions:

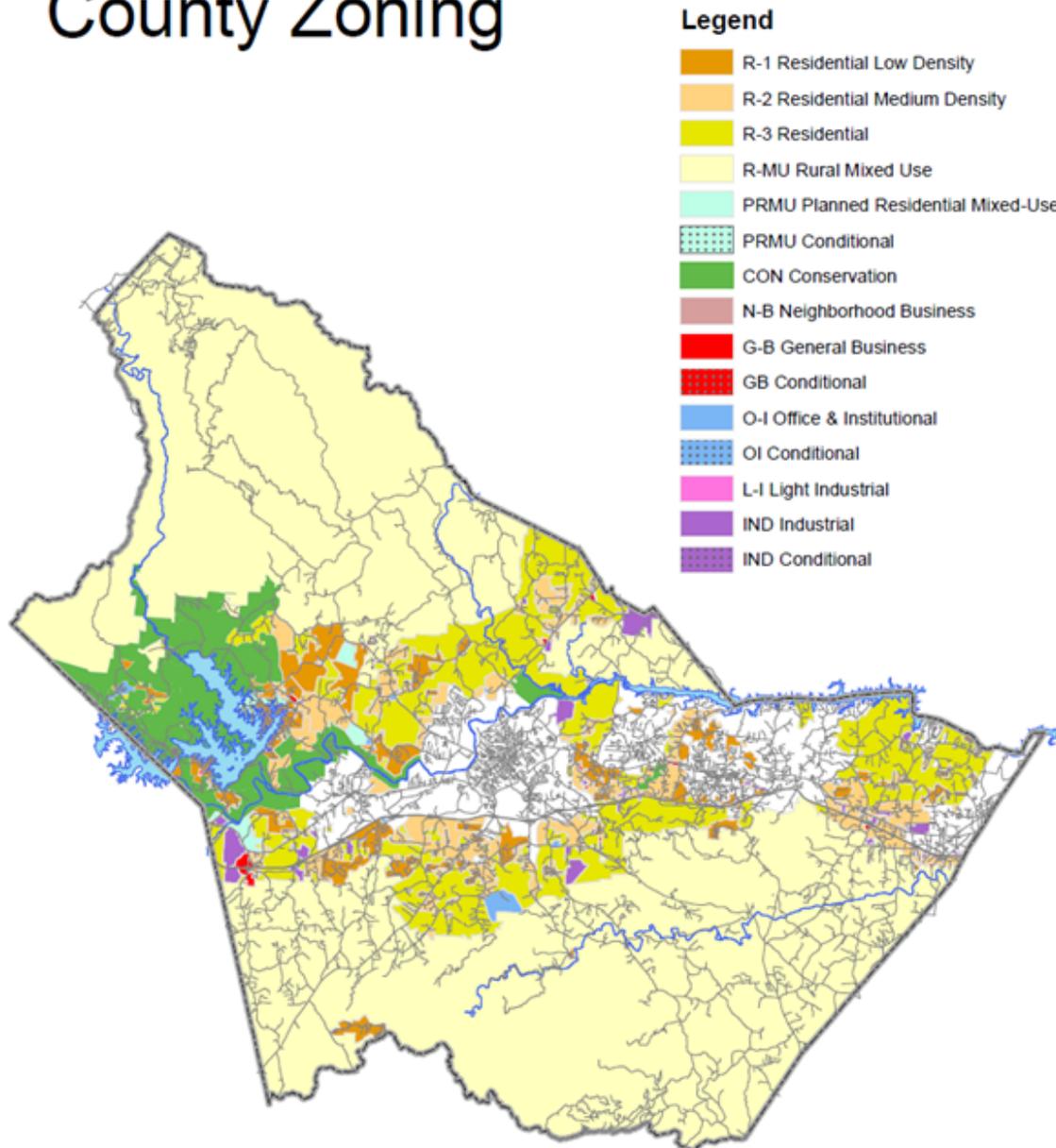
## **Conservation Districts**

The Conservation (CON) Districts allow a limited amount of low-density residential development and associated uses in order to provide adequate protection for environmental areas and wildlife habitat, protect viable working farms, maintain the integrity or rural viewsheds, and limit the amount of potential property damage associated with existing natural hazards. Subdivisions in either Conservation District are required to set aside a minimum of 25% of the total project area as permanent open space and no more than 50% of this open space may be dedicated for public or private recreational use. If dedicated for private recreational use, the property must be maintained by the property owners association or other county approved entity. If the property is dedicated for public use, then it shall be maintained by the County or other county approved entity. No more than 50% of this open space may be dedicated



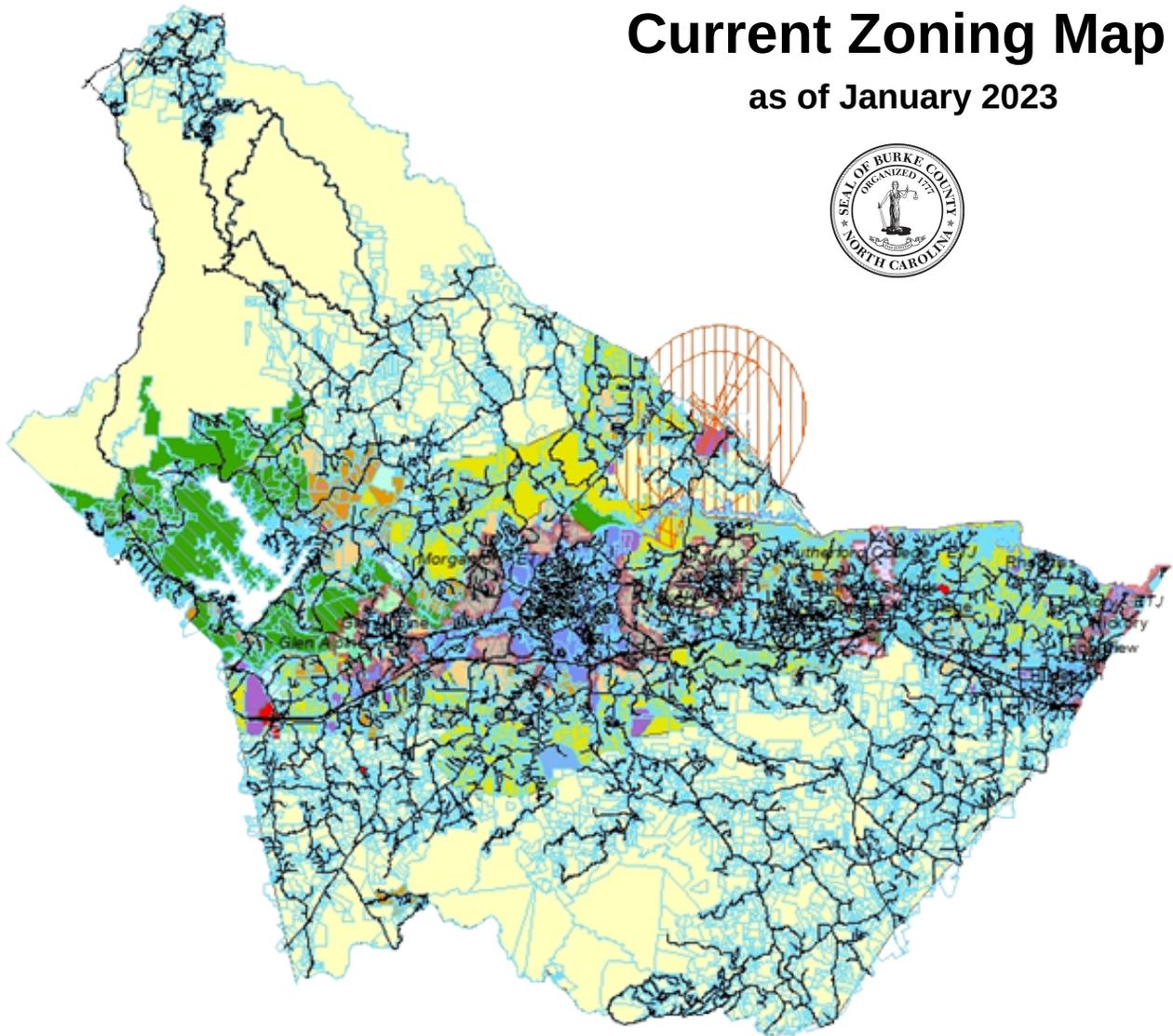
for public use, then it shall be maintained by the County or other county approved entity. No more than 50% of this open space may be dedicated for public or private recreational use. The balance of the open space must be protected in its natural state to preserve the environmental integrity of the overall project area as much as possible. Structures sited on parcels within conservation districts must be located within a designated building envelope which may not include flood areas, buffer strips, slopes in excess of 25%, or wetlands. Major proposed developments of this type having over 50 lots are strongly encouraged to rezone to a Conservation Parallel Conditional District.

# County Zoning

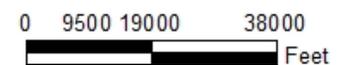
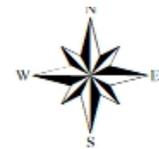


# Current Zoning Map

as of January 2023



- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Connelly Springs   |  R-1 Residential Low Density        |
|  Drexel             |  R-2 Residential Medium Density     |
|  Glen Alpine        |  R-3 Residential                    |
|  Hickory            |  R-MU Rural Mixed Use               |
|  Hildebran          |  Conservation                       |
|  Long View          |  PRMU Planned Residential Mixed-Use |
|  Morganton          |  PRMU Conditional                   |
|  Rhodhiss           |  N-B Neighborhood Business          |
|  Rutherford College |  G-B General Business               |
|  Valdese            |  O-I Office & Institutional         |
|  |  L-I Light Industrial               |
|  |  IND Industrial                     |
|  |  IND Conditional                    |



## **Section 9 Land Use Policies and Action Steps**

### **Economic Development**

Goal: To provide a positive economic climate that encourages business to prosper, provides citizens with good paying full-time jobs, supports entrepreneurship, and helps business to succeed, promotes growth in a flexible fair and efficient manner.

Economic development will occur where there is a sufficient population and infrastructure (road access, water, sewer and power) to support it. In Burke County most of the economic growth will occur following the I-40 corridor and close to our towns. Other corridors will receive some growth but it will be more scattered. Retail uses, for example have been adjusting operations recently by responding to the many facets of on-line shopping and home delivery. Drop-in retail will require good access and high visibility from major roads. Specialty businesses which rely on the location of the business owner or a special attribute about the site may occur in almost any location in Burke County. Rural businesses rely heavily on good access and wayfinding. These types of businesses include professional services, repair businesses or destination type of businesses (wedding venues, brewery or spas). Occasionally manufacturing uses will locate out of the primary corridor of I-40 but this may have some historical precedence tied to the family or the owner. Over time the economy of Burke County has become more diverse with employment spread over a broader range of sectors.

Housing development is economic growth too. Besides the new home industry, there are all of the items required to fill a home and related services that homeowners need to live in and operate their home. New homes also translate to more people who may join our workforce, enroll their children in schools, and become members of the community. The following strategies also support the expansion of housing in Burke County.

Burke County should map where development can take place and where utilities are present along with their characteristics. These types of maps are helpful for developers and are a useful tool as we try to market the area to developers through our official County website, direct outreach and community partners.



## Actions

- 1.1- Encourage and promote the tourism industry with the designation of special places, the development of destinations and enhancement of existing natural and historic locations such as Lake James, Catawba River, Pisgah National Forest, Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail and Quaker Meadows. Work with the Burke County Tourism Board and municipalities to expand recreation tourism, special event tourism and agri-tourism opportunities throughout the county.
- 1.2- Develop policies and plans to encourage infrastructure expansion such as water and sewer lines, broadband services and networks and transportation facilities.
- 1.3- Work with Burke Development Inc. to identify opportunities to retain and encourage expansion of existing industries and businesses and relocation of new ones. Seek development sites and funding mechanisms to construct spec manufacturing buildings ready for final customer upfitting.
- 1.4- Coordinate and support Western Piedmont Community College in providing classes for advanced worker training in critical technical areas.



- 1.5- Promote existing and develop future pre-certified industrial Park projects within Burke County and Burke County's municipalities and adjoining counties.
- 1.6- Maintain an inventory of underutilized and vacant structures and properties for re-use and redevelopment opportunities.

- 1.7- Promote the quality of life benefits to businesses and residents considering relocating to Burke County; natural beauty, access to the outdoors, vibrant



small towns, low crime, excellent schools, and outstanding health care. High quality of life issues will draw new residents, visitors and businesses and help retain existing ones.

- 1.8- Ensure that the zoning code is up to date and responsive to the needs of the community allowing for diverse land uses within each geographic region of the county where there is sufficient infrastructure to support the development.
- 1.9- Consider adding conditional zoning as an option for parcels within Burke County. Conditional zoning allows customized conditions between a developer and the County Commission to manage specific uses and minimize impacts on neighbors utilizing a site-specific plan and development conditions.

## Housing

Goal: Encourage a variety of residential development to meet the needs of a diverse county population and to grow the population. Options for higher density housing are limited in Burke County but where there is sufficient infrastructure, it should be encouraged.

## Actions

- 2.1- Develop policies that allow for higher density development in the primary growth areas near municipalities and along the I-40 and US 70 urban corridor and at locations where water and sewer infrastructure is in place to support the development. This could include single family, multi-family and townhomes.



2.2- Promote mixed use development near more urbanized areas and at selected nodes throughout the county. Additional buffers and setbacks are recommended to protect adjacent residential uses from higher impact uses.

2.3- Promote additional single family development where existing infrastructure is located along NC 126, NC 18, NC 64 and other secondary growth areas and state-maintained transportation corridors.

2.4- Continue to evaluate options for accessory dwelling units, multigenerational homes, granny flats, in-law units, etc., throughout the county.



2.5- Actively seek to phase out non-conforming housing structures as they become dilapidated or vacant in areas where specific types of housing are desirable to encourage redevelopment.

2.6- Actively seek the removal or repair of uninhabitable structures, both stick-built and manufactured housing units to maintain community safety, character and property values.

2.7- Support the creation of housing options within Burke County to appeal to a wide range of new and existing residents. People with families may be attracted to single family developments; Millennials and retirees may prefer the convenience of townhomes or apartments; new arrivals may seek out rental options while they settle into and learn about the community. The Western Piedmont Council of Governments has recommended a 2% growth rate in new housing to maintain our population and workforce at a minimum.

2.8 Explore housing ownership models that would stabilize additional housing with goals that may include: affordable housing, cooperative ownership models,



alternative housing units to appeal to varied segments of the community.

### **Rural Character and Traditional Land Uses**

Goal: Support and maintain a viable traditional agricultural base while encouraging specialty farm and agritourism businesses. In Burke County there is a balance between rural character with the slow growth and transition of suburban housing. The rural areas of Burke County have always been a mixture of agriculture activities including forestry, farming, grazing activities, residential uses and generally a variety of scattered small businesses. This rural character in Burke County is appreciated by residents and visitors alike and these strategies were developed to enhance this region.

### **Actions**

3.1- Develop a Voluntary Agricultural District Program through the Agriculture Extension Office. This program can reduce the number of potential conflicts for property owners that purchase property near agricultural land uses. The program can help preserve agricultural lands and increase the identity and pride in the agriculture community.



3.2- Work with the Agricultural Extension Office to ensure that “best practices” are used for agricultural activities. This will minimize negative impacts on the environment and surrounding property owners.

3.3- Identify Voluntary Agricultural Districts and bona fide farms on the county’s Geographic Information System (GIS) so that county staff and developers will be aware of them and plan accordingly.

3.4- Encourage initiatives that will promote the “local food movement.” The



average age of farmers is increasing and the number of farms is declining. The local food movement is another option that encourages younger farmers and smaller farms to remain in agriculture production.

3.5- Develop a program in conjunction with local non-profit land conservancies and the Agricultural Extension Office to educate farmers and large property owners about the financial benefits of establishing permanent conservation easements for the purpose of preserving farmland and other natural resources.



## Transportation

Goal: Provide the citizens of Burke County with an efficient, safe, and reliable multimodal transportation system. Burke County partners with the Western Piedmont Council of Governments as a member and partner of the Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Most of the initiatives that involve the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and their planning and grants programs are coordinated through the MPO.

## Actions

4.1- Work with NCDOT and the MPO to secure funding to bring all I-40 interchanges up to current USDOT engineering standards.

4.2- Actively seek grant opportunities for funding for multi-modal transportation projects. Work with other local government agencies such as the municipalities, Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development



Corporation to develop priorities.

4.3- Support the expansion of passenger rail service to Western North Carolina via the Salisbury to Asheville rail corridor. Rail service investments should also include opportunities for shipping materials and finished products as a component of economic development growth.

4.4- Work with the Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (Greenway Transit) to offer fixed route public transit services in areas of Burke County that could support such service.

4.5- Provide a pedestrian and bicycle system that allows greater access and linkage between public transit, schools, parks and other major activity centers. Work with NCDOT to establish a bicycle lane designation along NC 181 & 126. Coordinate plans with municipalities and existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities to create links.



4.6- Work to provide multi-use trails for alternative modes of access such as the Fonta Flora State Trail and complete the connector trail from Lake James to Morganton. The newer Burke River Trail is an effort to link other communities in Burke County along the Catawba River.

4.7- Work with NCDOT to evaluate improvements to the US 70 corridor.

4.8- Work with NCDOT to prioritize bridge replacement, particularly one-lane bridges. Ensure that new bridge replacement planning includes pedestrian access and considers bicycle needs.

4.9- Work with the NC DOT to manage traffic flow and safety and pedestrian crossings on Benfield Landing Road.



4.10- Develop access management guidelines for inclusion in the county's zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations. In order to encourage additional residential development there needs to be additional options and more flexibility on the construction of roads in minor subdivisions such as utilizing gravel while maintaining emergency management response along with other improvements.

4.11- Support efforts to promote air service, economic development initiatives, and transportation access to Foothills Regional Airport.

4.12- Develop transportation patterns that are consistent with and mutually reinforce land-use efforts in general.



Greenway Public Transportation provides FLEX Route Service within Morganton. The route begins at Grace Hospital, the Burke County Health Department and Department of Social Services. From there it runs into downtown and reaches the many grocery stores and shopping centers within Morganton circling back to the point of beginning. Riders may request flex service to destinations close to the main route.



## Infrastructure

Goal: Modernizing and managing infrastructure in Burke County is a priority. The county needs sufficient and appropriate infrastructure in order to maintain the community services, enhance the quality of life and to grow. Community infrastructure is not evenly dispersed throughout Burke County due to topography, land ownership and varying jurisdictional boundaries but this needs to be reevaluated and in places connected for the good of Burke County.

### Actions

5.1- Encourage expansion of broadband services and networks (both wireless and fiber) by reducing construction costs in the following areas: right of ways, permitting, pole access, building access, build out requirements and requiring conduit or fiber installation during road and other types of construction.



5.2- Work with cable and satellite providers to expand services throughout Burke County.

5.3- Work with water and sewer providers to identify underserved areas and areas with growth potential to expand services. The Burke Cooperative Water Board, the County, and area municipalities should work together to continue evaluating regional water and sewer needs through planning and proposals to expand service to more communities in Burke County.

5.4- Promote sustainable development practices to ensure good water quality throughout areas designated as water supply watersheds especially in “critical areas.”

5.5- Require connections to water and sewer utilities when a connection is available or when failures or expansions occur.





5.6- Develop policies that promote higher density development where adequate infrastructure already exists with 'by right' approvals.

5.7- Evaluate and maintain relevant and current utility ordinances.

5.8- Ensure the library system is supported as a critical community infrastructure asset in Burke County.

5.9- Map and seeks grants and loans to strengthen and where possible expand community infrastructure. Maintain data about existing resources for planning and management.



## Recreation

Goal: Provide recreational opportunities for citizens of all ages and abilities in Burke County. Recognize that recreation assets that serve residents are also a draw for the recreation tourism industry, a growing and important sector of the local economy.

### White Creek Covered Bridge, Fonta Flora State Trail



## Actions

- 6.1- Expansion of existing and future trails and greenways should be evaluated for interconnectivity potential with other local, state and federal jurisdictions.
- 6.2- Encourage multi-use facilities and resources that will appeal to a wide range of age groups serving all residents and visitors throughout the county.





6.3- Cooperate with other local, state and federal jurisdictions in their long-range recreation plans so that mutual benefits can be realized.

6.4- Coordinate the implementation of policies in this Plan with the Burke County Recreation Plan.

6.5- Promote existing recreation options throughout the county.

6.7- Explore and promote inter-local recreation and community foundation program expansion opportunities.

6.6- Maintain and improve resources and infrastructure in existing recreation areas.

6.8- Support local festivals such as events at Lake James and other areas of the county.

6.9- Work with the private sector and the Burke County Chamber of Commerce to expand lodging opportunities in the county.



6.10- Support the development of recreation tourism focused commercial enterprises where these uses are supported by necessary infrastructure and the development will complement and enhance the character of the county.



## Natural Environment

Goal: To protect, support and enjoy Burke County's natural environment, through stewardship of its natural resources, managing forest resources, and expanding recreational opportunities. Burke County has an amazing natural environment which is one of the primary assets of the county. The goal of this section is to maintain the health of the environment through the work of the county and partner agencies. Many environmental regulations are in place to protect and maintain these sensitive natural resources.

### Actions

7.1- Work closely with other county and state departments to ensure that land use activities have a minimal negative impact on the natural environment.



**Linville Gorge  
Table Rock**

7.2- Identify natural conservation areas on the county's Geographic Information System (GIS) whose main purpose is for conservation activities. These lands could be used to expand parks, open space, historic sites, etc.

7.3- Review existing land use ordinances to ensure that appropriate areas are identified for large lot development and potential cluster development so that regulations are in place to guide these types of development.

7.4- Explore land use voluntary density exchanges and flexible options in the



zoning ordinance as a means to protect open space and natural conservation areas in the county.



7.5- Work closely with the state to identify impaired waters and develop and implement strategies for restoring them and to prevent future degradation of water quality.

7.6- Work with the county health department to identify areas where private septic systems are failing and implement corrective measures. Older recreational vehicle and mobile home parks in the Lake James and other area waterways should especially be monitored.

## Section 10 Future Land Uses and Map

The Future Land Use Map included in this plan is a visual representation of the general land use patterns identified for Burke County for the next 15 to 20 years. The Future Land Use Map is used to evaluate growth strategies for Burke County over the next 10 years. The Future Land Use Map must be consulted by staff, the Planning Board and the Board of Commissioners when map amendment applications are received. The zoning request should be measured against the goals of the Blueprint Burke Plan and for consistency with the Future Land Use Map. If the request does not follow the plan, the Commissioners may vote to deny for that reason. If the request does not follow the plan but the Commissioners wish to support it anyway, then they must note how conditions have changed within the county, relative to the request supporting the map amendment.

The following future land use categories are assigned to a parcel based on their characteristics and location within Burke County.



## Rural Mixed Low Density (RMLD)

- Characteristics: low density development with access from a major road typically, with NC DOT maintenance; access to properties from improved driveways; buffers provided to residential areas from commercial uses
- Uses allowed: residential single family, modular homes and manufactured homes are typical with accessory uses; non-residential activities that are not typically focused on access as required for retail uses; business and services carried out because of the specific location of the owner; special venues and uses that need a rural location; places of worship, agriculture focused activities
- Uses requiring special approval: campgrounds, mobile home parks, outdoor motor sports
- Corresponding zoning: R-MU Rural Mixed Use

## Residential Low Density (RLD)

- Characteristics: low density development focused on a community and neighborhood setting. Properties may have access from NC DOT maintained roads or private roads built to county standards. This district is usually adjacent to and complementary to the zoning of a Burke County community.
- Uses allowed: residential single family and modular homes and home occupations and accessory uses;
- Uses requiring special approval:
- Corresponding zoning: R-1 Residential Low Density

## Residential Infill (RI)

- Characteristics: medium to high density development focused on rural or suburban neighborhood settings; sufficient access from a major road or road improved to county standards and connecting to major roads
- maintained by the NC DOT; access to infrastructure is typical and preferred including public water and/ or sewer services
- Uses allowed: higher density residential including single family, apartments and townhomes, small lot tiny homes constructed to NC Building Code standards, and manufactured homes; home occupations



and accessory uses

- Uses requiring special approval: mobile home parks, campgrounds
- Corresponding zoning: R-2 Residential Medium Density, R-3 Residential

### General Business (GB)

- Characteristics: major road access under NC DOT maintenance; access to properties from improved driveways; buffers provided to residential areas from commercial uses; access to necessary infrastructure including water and sewer depending on the development proposal
- Uses allowed: single-family, manufactured housing, residential multifamily, commercial activities, retail sales, offices schools, places of worship, grocery, distribution terminals, warehouses, manufacturing uses not exceeding 35,000 s.f.
- Uses requiring special approval: manufacturing uses, distribution terminals and warehouses exceeding 35,000 s.f.
- Corresponding zoning: typically N-B Neighborhood Business, G-B General Business, O-I Office institutional,

### Industrial (IND)

- Characteristics: access from major roadways under NC DOT maintenance; access to properties from improved driveways; buffers provided to surrounding residential areas; access to necessary infrastructure which may include water and sewer, electric and natural gas.
- Uses allowed: manufacturing and industrial uses, restaurants and convenience stores; distribution terminals, warehouses
- Uses requiring special approval: asphalt plants
- Corresponding zoning: L-I Light Industrial, IND Industrial

### Open Forest Land (OFL)

- Characteristics: these large tracts of land are a defining characteristic of Burke County and fall under a variety of management and ownership groups.
- Uses allowed: a wide range of activities can be expected in OFL areas including parks, trails, resorts, restaurants, conference centers, venues, outdoor recreation focused commercial activities, campgrounds, hotels and forest management activities. Sufficient infrastructure is required to be in place for the uses and activities proposed for the site.
- Uses requiring special approval: outdoor motor sports, campgrounds
- Corresponding zoning: typically R-MU Rural Mixed Use



## Lake James Scenic (LJS)

- Characteristics: This area includes Lake James and parts of the surrounding lake overlay and scenic overlay zoning districts as well as Lake James State Park and some lands belonging to North Carolina Wildlife. The natural and environmental resources in the area make it a center for multiple outdoor recreation uses as well as major residential subdivisions. In addition, watershed and shoreline protection regulations are important in this area as Lake James is the beginning of the Catawba River Basin which provides water and electricity to multiple cities and counties in North and South Carolina. It is necessary to balance development and recreational uses while maintaining the area's natural resources.
- Uses allowed: single family residential, lake focused commercial activities such as restaurants, resorts, agri-tourism, recreation tourism focused uses
- Uses requiring special approval: marinas, motorized sports tracks; multifamily residential, campgrounds, hotels
- Corresponding zoning: varies

## Lake Rhodhiss Scenic (LRS)

- Characteristics: This area includes Lake Rhodhiss and other areas surrounding of the Catawba River. The natural and environmental resources in the area make it a center for residential subdivisions and limited lake-focused recreation uses. In addition, watershed and shoreline protection regulations are important in the Catawba River Basin which provides water resources and electricity to multiple cities and counties in North and South Carolina. It is necessary to balance development and recreational uses while maintaining the area's natural resources.
- Uses allowed: single family residential, lake focused commercial activities such as restaurants, resorts, agri-tourism, recreation tourism focused uses
- Uses requiring special approval: marinas, motorized sports tracks, multifamily residential, campgrounds, hotels
- Corresponding zoning: varies

# The Future Land Use Map

