



# BUNCOMBE COUNTY



## COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN, 2013 UPDATE

September 17, 2013



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# Plan **INTRODUCTION**

# SECTION I: INTRODUCTION



Initially referred to as the “State of Buncombe” due to its vastness, Buncombe County was established in 1792 by the North Carolina House of Commons. Over time, the boundaries of the County have been modified, eventually encompassing the 646 square miles along the Blue Ridge Mountains that make up Buncombe County today. Already an established crossroads for the region at the turn of the Twentieth Century, Buncombe County has undergone tremendous development and transformation since its inception. Regular updates to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan are integral to our ongoing efforts to define and shape our constantly changing community to reflect our diverse heritage and values and engender a high quality of life for all of our citizens.

As a regional center for Western North Carolina, Buncombe County is defined not only by its mountainous beauty but also by the cultural and economic diversity of its inhabitants. Within the 646 square miles fall a variety of tightly knit unincorporated communities as well as six distinct municipalities: Asheville, Biltmore Forest, Black Mountain, Montreat, Weaverville, and Woodfin. These incorporated areas have expanded greatly in size and population since the County adopted its first Comprehensive Land Use Plan in 1998.

As we work to update the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, we must re-examine the issues our greater community faces, including changes in our local and

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**“Buncombe County is a leader in sustainable practices through the collaboration of citizens, institutions, businesses and government.**

**We promote a sense of community through public engagement. We celebrate a healthy, safe, well-educated, and thriving community with a sustainable quality of life. We are stewards of the environment who advocate the conservation, preservation, and restoration of resources.**

**We are part of a community and environmentally-conscious economy that is stable and diverse. We have a strong sense of place, and continue to work to preserve our distinctive landscape and culture. We are committed to continually improving our community for the betterment of future generations.”**

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national economy, our population size and makeup, and shifting jurisdictional boundaries. While this Plan Update will in many ways examine the County as a whole, it is important to note that each municipality has a plan of their own which serves to guide development and regulation within each incorporated area. This Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update will specifically address the unincorporated areas of the County, eventually providing recommendations which align with the vision statement recently adopted by the Board of Commissioners as part of our Strategic Plan<sup>1</sup>.

Overall, the intent of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update provided here is to account for the changes which have occurred within land use policies and patterns since the 2006 Update to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. In addition, this document provides a snapshot of key demographic information which reflects development

trends and growth within the County. As we have observed changes within Buncombe County’s land use contexts, we have provided recommendations which attempt to address those changes in a manner which best meets the needs of Buncombe County’s citizens.



<sup>1</sup> The Buncombe County Sustainability Plan was adopted as the Buncombe County Strategic Plan in 2012.



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# Plan FRAMEWORK

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# SECTION 2: PLAN FRAMEWORK



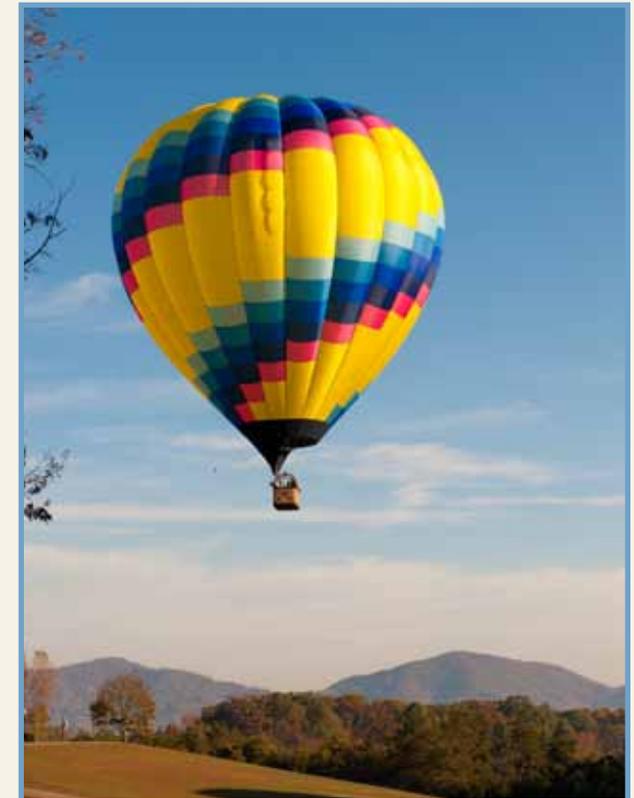
Buncombe County began work on the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update in 2012. A review of the existing Comprehensive Land Use Plan was undertaken by County staff in collaboration with professional planning consultants. Strategies were developed to ensure that this Plan Update would be both relevant and informative to citizens and policy makers. As part of this initial stage, current issues and opportunities were identified and brought to the public Planning Board meetings for discussion and direction. The Board of Commissioners reviewed and adopted the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update September 17, 2013 after a series of public meetings.

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update is in many ways a reflection of the process undertaken to develop it. A demographic analysis of Buncombe County, the review of past plans, and examination of strategies recommended in the 2006 Plan Update form the basis for plan development. A review of current issues and opportunities by topic presents both the current state of affairs as well as potential implementation strategies for both the short- and long-term. The Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update serves to account for changes in Buncombe County's growth patterns, development scenarios, land use demands, and demographic composition. This document will allow citizens to understand the current status of the County in a variety of land use contexts in order to enable their decision-making. In addition, the information provided within this document gives guidance which will be used by staff and policy makers in future land use planning efforts.

While the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update provides an assessment of the County as it stands, it also provides an outlook for future land use patterns and potential strategies to address the needs of Buncombe County's citizens. In an effort to advance land use planning in Buncombe County, the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update pursues recommendations which enable us to achieve the following objectives:

- Establish land use regulations which allow for a flexible range of development options while still accounting for the needs of Buncombe County.
- Create tools which enable staff and appointed boards to make land use decisions based on the context of each proposal.
- Adjust land use policies to account for changes within the regulatory environment.
- Streamline existing regulations and policies in a manner that accounts for lessons learned since the last Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update.
- Clarify existing ambiguities in land use policies and regulations.
- Expand existing land use policies and regulations to adjust for changes in land use patterns and demands.
- Implement new policies that address land use in an integrated and comprehensive manner.

**The Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update serves to account for changes in Buncombe County's growth patterns, development scenarios, land use demands, and demographic composition.**





The following areas are addressed with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update:

- **General Direction of Growth and Development** presents an assessment of demographic trends and land use patterns within Buncombe County.
- **Other Planning Efforts** provides an examination of other County efforts related to land use planning concepts.
- **Directing Growth and Development / Topographic Constraints** details a contextual approach to decision making which will be implemented throughout Buncombe County's legislative and quasi-judicial land use decision-making processes.
- **Commercial and Institution Uses** clarifies districts recommendations presented in the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update.
- **Current Constraints and Limitations, Zoning Enhancements, and Connectivity** address the objectives presented by this Plan Update through specific recommendations which can be made within standing land use policies and regulations.





3

**General Direction  
of Growth &  
DEVELOPMENT**

# SECTION 3: GENERAL DIRECTION OF GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT



In this section, we have compiled relevant trends and demographic information, recognizing the need to create a snapshot of Buncombe County and to enable more informed decision-making. Changes in population, the economy, and the provision of facilities and infrastructure can greatly impact the way an area develops and the types of services that a local government provides. While estimates and projections do contain a margin of error, those made using accepted methods provide invaluable insight into both the current and future state of affairs.

Though with every Plan Update we expect to identify noticeable demographic changes, the downturn in the national economy since 2006 has been a major factor for many of the changing trends in Buncombe County that are identified below. The burst of the housing bubble resulted in a shift in employment and land use trends in Buncombe County, which had become a popular second home and retirement destination.

## Population

From 2000 to 2010, North Carolina had the sixth highest growth rate in the United States<sup>2</sup>, and as of the 2010 Census, was the tenth most populous state in the United States<sup>3</sup>. Buncombe County has continued to experience an above average rate of growth despite the economic downturn, and now contains the seventh largest county population in the State<sup>4</sup>. Figure 1 shows the projected population growth for Buncombe County through 2030.

YEAR	BUNCOMBE COUNTY POPULATION	POPULATION GROWTH	% GROWTH
2010	238,870	—	—
2015	258,706	19,836	8.30%
2020	276,994	18,288	7.07%
2025	294,881	17,887	6.46%
2030	312,373	17,492	5.93%

Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1. Population Growth



<sup>2</sup> North Carolina grew at a rate of 18.5% over the ten year period. Population Distribution and Change: 2000 to 2010, 2010 Census Briefs, US Census Bureau, March 2011.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management, State Demographics Branch, County/State Population Projections, Population Overview: [http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncoosbm/facts\\_and\\_figures/socioeconomic\\_data/population\\_estimates/demog/countytotals\\_populationoverview.html](http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncoosbm/facts_and_figures/socioeconomic_data/population_estimates/demog/countytotals_populationoverview.html)

<sup>5</sup> Projections for July of each listed year, *ibid.*



Buncombe County, as shown in Figure 2, is projected to remain the seventh most populous County in the State through 2030, expanding at an overall growth rate of almost 31% from 2010 to 2030.

Buncombe County’s population is aging. The median age for County residents is estimated at 41.37 years (39.82 for males and 42.89 for females)<sup>7</sup>. Figure 3 illustrates the County population distribution by age. As County residents continue to age, and with increases in average life span, the County must plan to accommodate this growing segment of the population.

The population centers within Buncombe County continue to be located within long-standing and more densely developed areas. Rural areas, though developed during the housing boom, still do not represent larger population clusters. This is likely due to both the prevalence of second home and retirement home/land purchases that occurred during the boom, as well as the larger-lot development that occurs in more rural areas. Figure 4 identifies the population distribution by Census Tract as gathered in the 2010 Census.



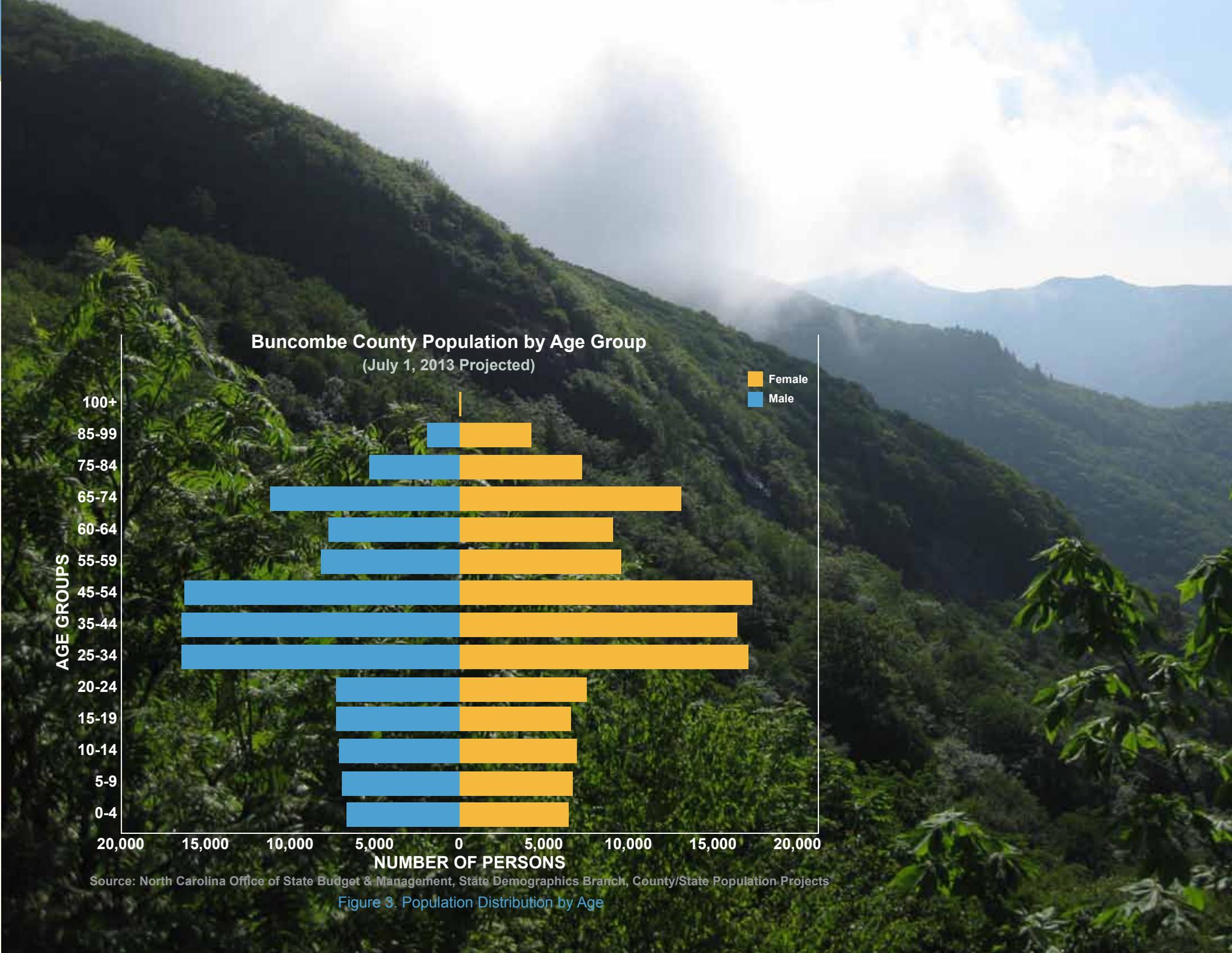
		2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>9,575,674</b>	<b>10,096,810</b>	<b>10,614,863</b>	<b>11,124,477</b>	<b>11,629,559</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Mecklenburg</b>	<b>923,145</b>	<b>1,009,227</b>	<b>1,094,997</b>	<b>1,180,767</b>	<b>1,266,537</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Wake</b>	<b>906,788</b>	<b>1,001,545</b>	<b>1,096,426</b>	<b>1,191,306</b>	<b>1,286,185</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Guilford</b>	<b>489,671</b>	<b>517,581</b>	<b>545,706</b>	<b>573,827</b>	<b>601,951</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Forsyth</b>	<b>351,378</b>	<b>366,814</b>	<b>380,495</b>	<b>392,785</b>	<b>403,826</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Cumberland</b>	<b>327,348</b>	<b>336,263</b>	<b>340,638</b>	<b>342,375</b>	<b>343,065</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Durham</b>	<b>268,412</b>	<b>286,379</b>	<b>304,081</b>	<b>321,782</b>	<b>339,482</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Buncombe</b>	<b>238,870</b>	<b>258,706</b>	<b>276,994</b>	<b>294,881</b>	<b>312,373</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Gaston</b>	<b>206,186</b>	<b>213,530</b>	<b>220,188</b>	<b>226,845</b>	<b>233,499</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>New Hanover</b>	<b>203,254</b>	<b>220,287</b>	<b>237,255</b>	<b>254,223</b>	<b>271,192</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Union</b>	<b>202,200</b>	<b>219,527</b>	<b>236,786</b>	<b>254,049</b>	<b>271,309</b>

Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management <sup>6</sup>

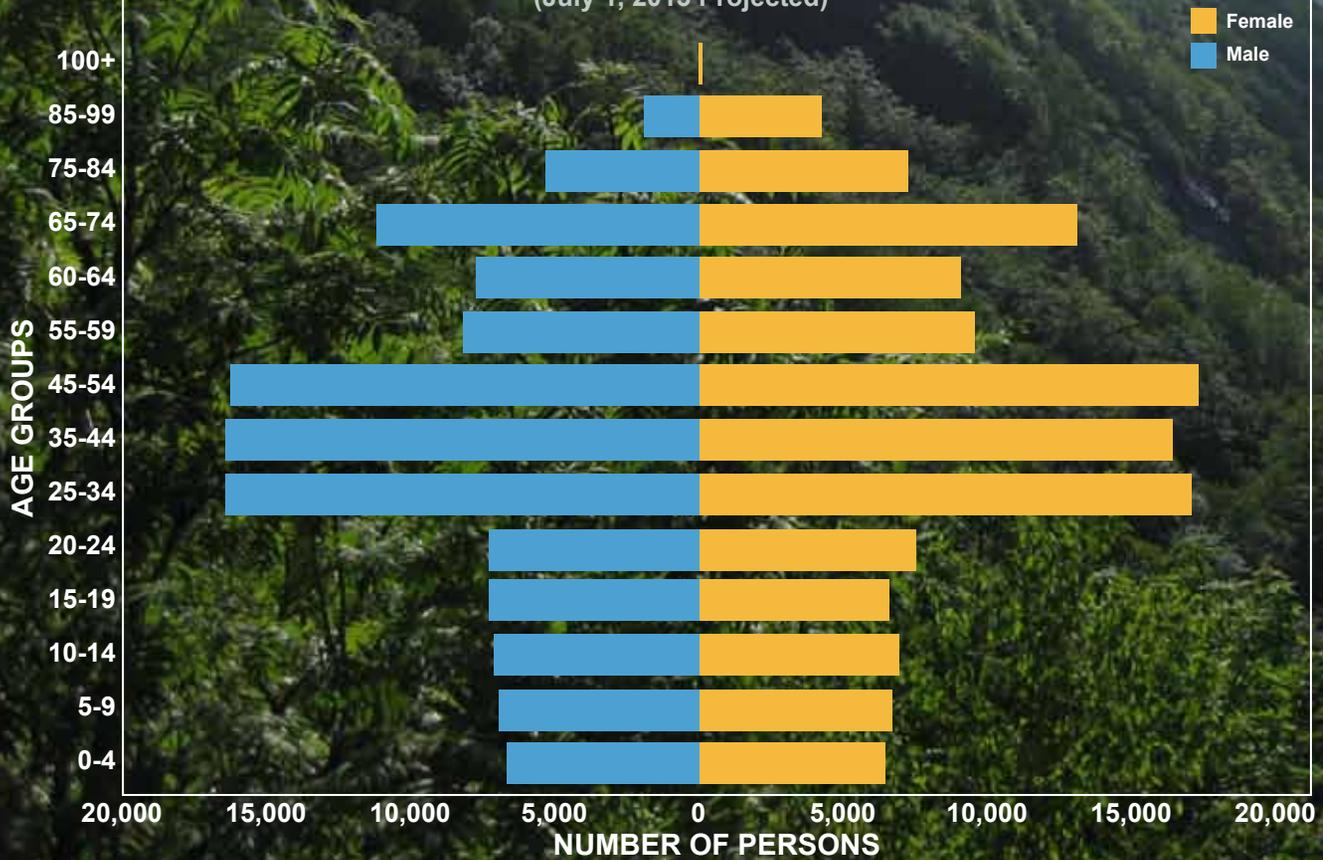
Figure 2. Population Projection for Ten Most Populous Counties

<sup>6</sup> Projections for July of each listed year, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management, State Demographics Branch, County/State Population Projections, Age and Sex Projections for July 1, 2013. [http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts\\_and\\_figures/socioeconomic\\_data/population\\_estimates/county\\_projections.shtm](http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts_and_figures/socioeconomic_data/population_estimates/county_projections.shtm)



### Buncombe County Population by Age Group (July 1, 2013 Projected)



Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget & Management, State Demographics Branch, County/State Population Projects

Figure 3. Population Distribution by Age

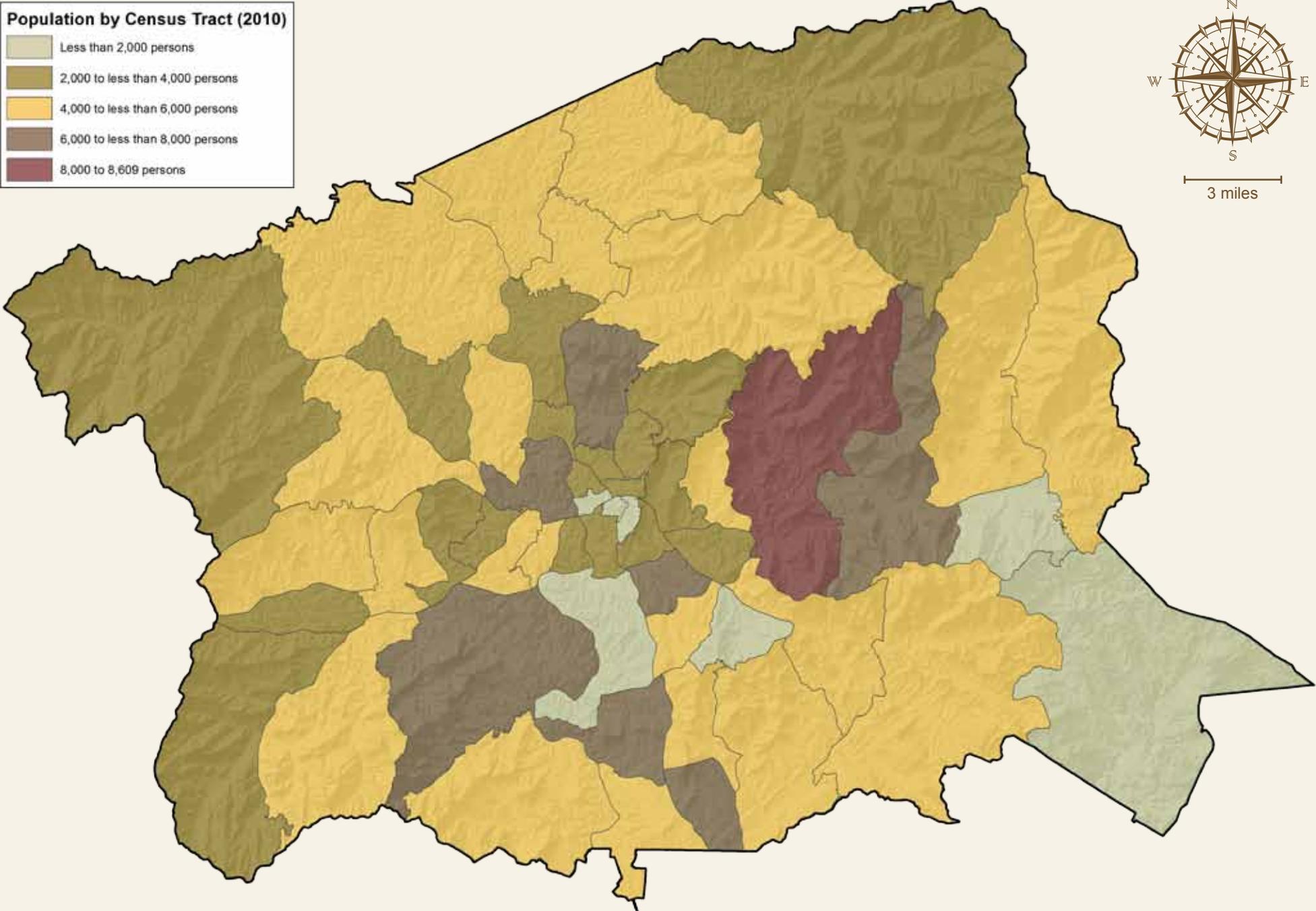
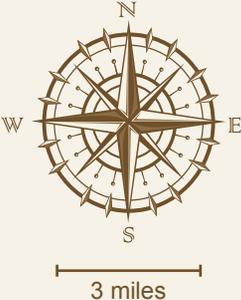
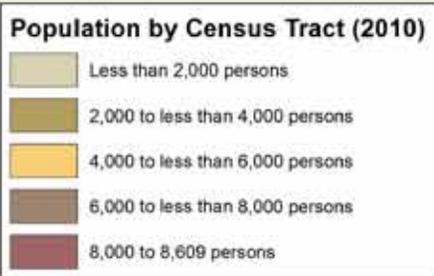


Figure 4. Population Distribution by Census Tract

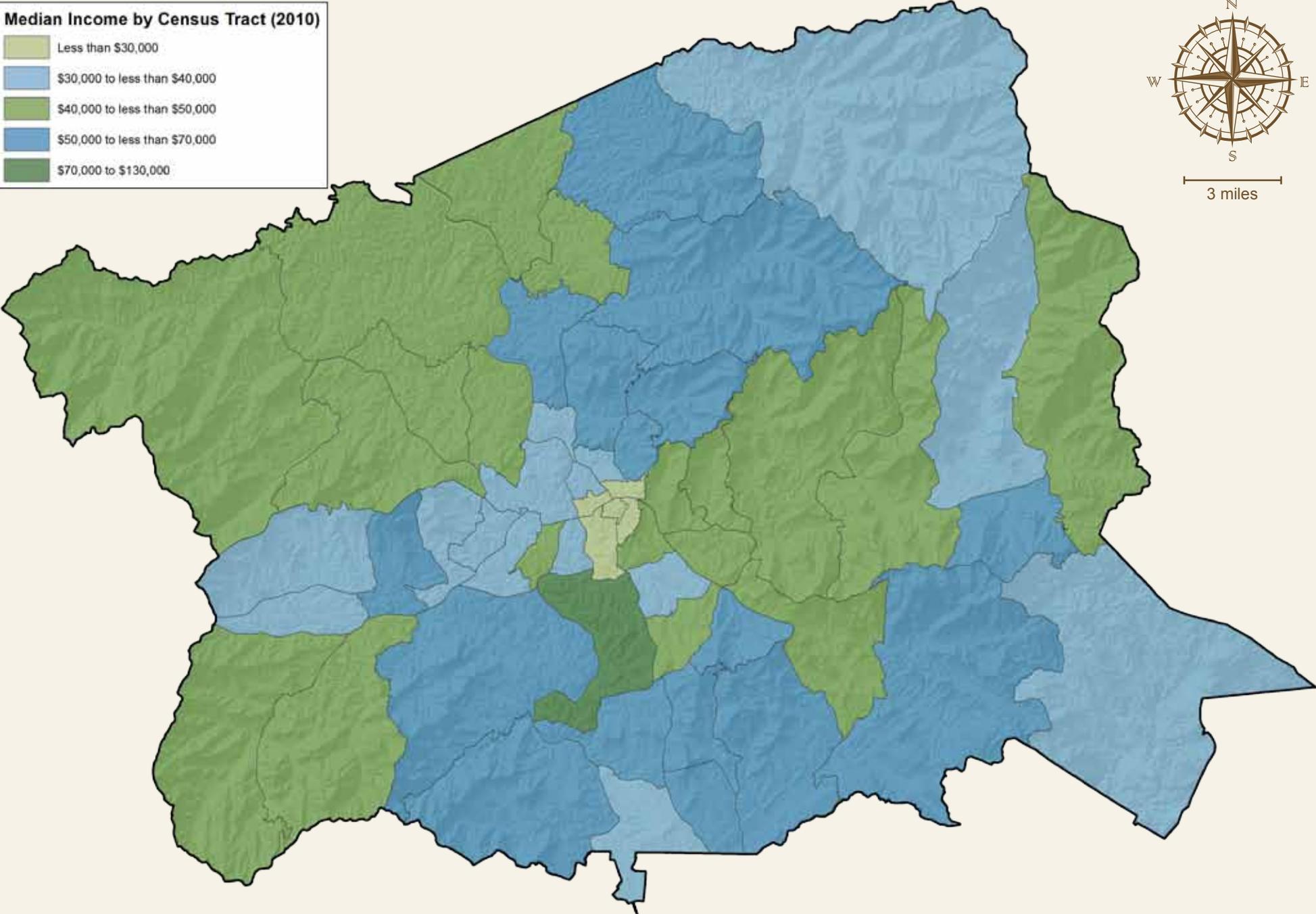
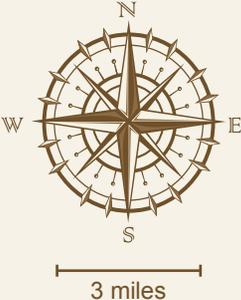
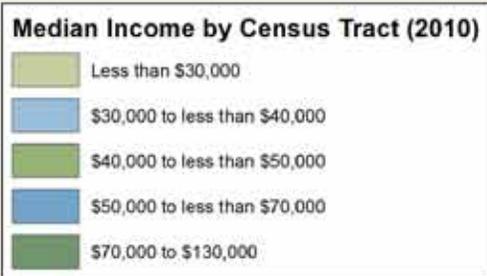


Figure 5. Median Income by Census Tract

### Economy

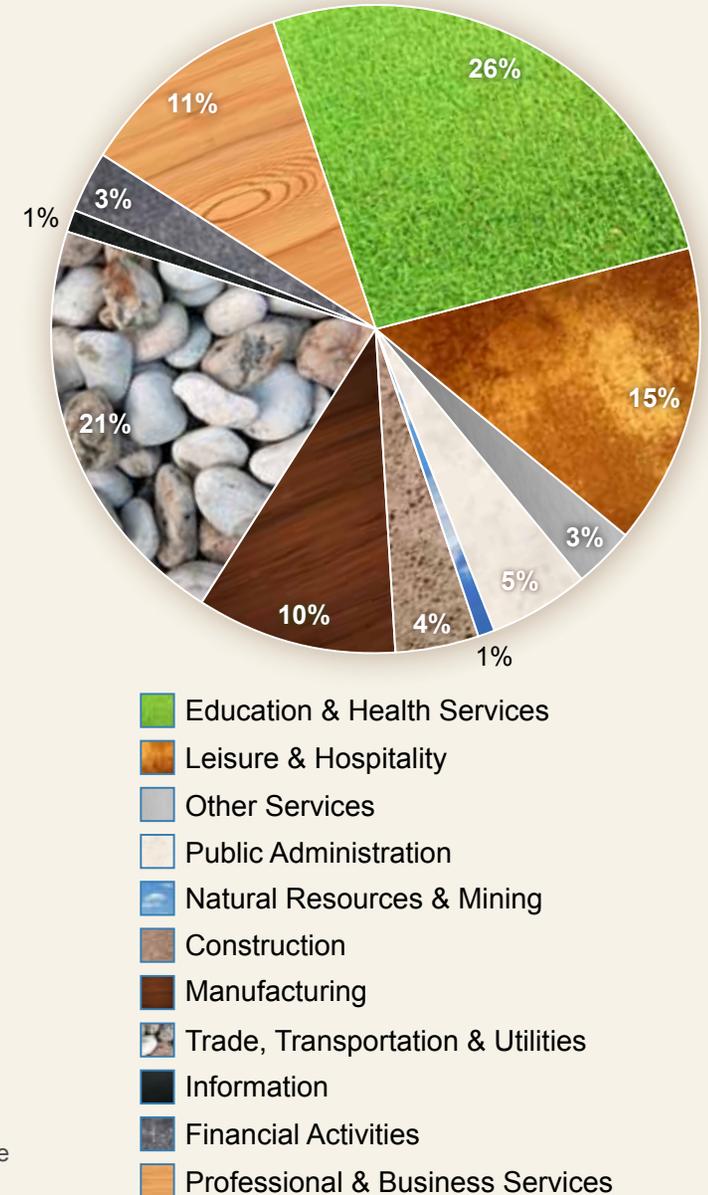
The Median Household Income from 2007-2011 in Buncombe County was \$44,321<sup>8</sup>. As shown in Figure 5, the lowest median incomes are located within the central areas of the City of Asheville, followed by the outlying areas of the County. This income distribution is indicative of the concentration of wealth and higher end development in the Arden, Avery’s Creek, North Asheville/Beaverdam, and Reems Creek areas. The more rural and agricultural townships also show a lower concentration of wealth. Nevertheless, Buncombe County remains a regional hub for activity; the 2006-2010 American Community Survey found that though 99,102 persons both lived and worked in the County, an additional 24,716 residents of other North Carolina counties were employed within Buncombe County<sup>9</sup>.

Since 2006, Buncombe County has seen a decrease in employment within the construction industry. As shown in Figure 6, the County’s main industries continue to be Education & Health Services; Trade, Transportation & Utilities; and Leisure & Hospitality. These account for 62% of the current industry structure<sup>10</sup>.

The current top employers in Buncombe County are as follows<sup>11</sup>:

1. Memorial Mission Hospital, Inc.
2. Buncombe County Board of Education
3. Ingles Markets, Inc.
4. Veterans’ Administration
5. County of Buncombe
6. Wal-Mart Associates, Inc.
7. City of Asheville
8. The Biltmore Company
9. AB Tech
10. Eaton Corporation
11. Community CarePartners, Inc.
12. Asheville City Schools
13. The Grove Park Inn
14. NC Department of Health & Human Services
15. UNC Asheville
16. Kendro Laboratory Products
17. BorgWarner Turbo Systems
18. US Postal Service
19. Sitel Operating Corporation
20. General Mills Restaurants, Inc.

**Buncombe County Current Industry Structure**



Source: Workforce In-Depth Buncombe County Summary, Employment Security Commission of NC Labor Market Information Division, April 8, 2013

<sup>8</sup> Compared with \$46,291 in North Carolina and \$52,762 nationwide (Buncombe County Quick Facts, www.census.gov)  
<sup>9</sup> US Census, Commuting & Employment Data, County-to-County worker flow data, Table 4. Residence MCD/County to Workplace MCD/County Flows for the United States and Puerto Rico Sorted by Workplace Geography: 2006-2010, <http://www.census.gov/population/metro/data/other.html>  
<sup>10</sup> Workforce In-Depth Buncombe County Summary, Employment Security Commission of NC Labor Market Division, April 8, 2013.  
<sup>11</sup> Workforce In-Depth Buncombe County Summary, Employment Security Commission of NC Labor Market Division, April 8, 2013.

Figure 6. Industry Structure

## Target Clusters

The Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce has identified five industry clusters that have potential for growth through the Asheville 5 X 5 Plan, a five-year strategic plan for the creation of 5,000 jobs for our community. Each cluster was chosen for its competitive advantages as well as the potential to create significant job growth in both rural and urban areas of Western North Carolina.



### Advanced Manufacturing

Western North Carolina has long been known for its craftsmanship and this tradition continues with a thriving advanced manufacturing industry. This creative, quality-driven culture is evident in Asheville's manufacturing community today where well-over 300 companies manufacture products in the four-county Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).



### Health Care

Still a destination for rejuvenation and nationally recognized for delivering exceptional care, healthcare is a driving force in Buncombe County's business landscape. It is the largest industry in terms of employment with a diverse range of organizations, from traditional to alternative to commercial, all of which add strength to the region's economy.



### Science and Technology

The frontier ethic of innovation and collaboration that accompanied early pioneers to the Asheville area is alive today in the region's burgeoning science and high tech sector, making the city a top choice for companies involved in cloud computing, data management, geo-spatial visualization, and climate science. Continuing improvements in broadband infrastructure, colleges, and business-friendly technical schools have proven key elements for new or expanding companies that require a highly trained and nimble workforce.



### Knowledge-based Entrepreneurship

Knowledge-based entrepreneurs complement all other industry clusters by offering a range of services from finance and insurance to professional and technical services. These high growth companies comprise approximately 6.3 percent of all industry employment in the Asheville MSA.



### Arts and Culture

One of Asheville's most distinct and deeply-rooted assets is the arts. With an arts culture comes a creative independence and a desire to share and collaborate that not only nurtures the arts community, but can be beneficial for business of all types.



The challenges to economic development and opportunities for growth that are relevant today<sup>12</sup> are listed below:

### CHALLENGES

- Lack of inventory of industrial buildings and inventory of developable industrial sites (sites of a certain size that could be graded and utility served).
- Cost of existing buildings and developable sites.
- Workforce Skills Gap: Next generation careers from industry to technology and services demand higher volumes of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) graduates and higher proficiency of STEM skills in the workforce.
- Cost of Living is a relative threat to attracting both workforce and new economic development. Although while unemployment continues to drop, housing is still lagging.
- While the Economic Development Coalition (EDC) maintains a quality working relationship with the Department of Commerce, there are still unknown variables as the new government leadership takes place.

### OPPORTUNITIES

- The reputation of Buncombe County and the Asheville area garners national attention translating to continued above-average in-migration rates and economic development opportunity.
- Migration trends for Buncombe and the Asheville MSA continue to suggest Buncombe is a magnet for highly educated professionals. This workforce presents an opportunity to attract much needed professional and technical employment opportunities.
- Specific development opportunities are available at Enka Commerce Park (100 acres), Roberts Farm (145 acres), Black Mountain Commerce Park (57 acres) and Reynolds Village (160 acres).
- Riverfront redevelopment for the benefit of a creative economy and light industry along the French Broad and Swannanoa Rivers: Redevelopment along the French Broad River, especially within the River Arts District, supports both light industry and a creative economy, often through brownfields redevelopment. The 30-county western region has the highest rate of creative self-employed persons in the state, and the River Arts District acts as the hub for this region.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin P. Teague, Executive Director, Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County

## Land Use

This analysis of the general direction of growth and development highlights several key issues including the location and scope of residential and commercial building permits and parcel ownership. Trend analysis can help us better understand land use on a geographic basis, and can provide valuable insight during the planning process.

The location and scope of building permits provides an important visual for trends in development. Buncombe County issues permits for the unincorporated areas, and also for the towns of Biltmore Forest, Montreat, Weaverville, and Woodfin. The number<sup>13</sup> and value of these permits has been tabulated in Figures 7 and 8 to the right.

Figure 9 on the following page shows the distribution of new residential<sup>14</sup> and commercial building permits in the jurisdictional areas of Buncombe County. Though development has slowed due to the economic downturn, it remains clear that development continues to be concentrated in lower-lying areas in closer proximity to transportation corridors. Furthermore, the concentrations of development in Candler, Leicester, Swannanoa, Reems Creek, South Asheville and

Fairview are near areas comprised of a variety of uses and denser residential development.

**Though development has slowed due to the economic downturn, it remains clear that development continues to be concentrated in lower-lying areas in closer proximity to transportation corridors.**

Over 116,600 acres<sup>15</sup> in Buncombe County are classified as vacant land<sup>16</sup>. Vacant privately held property is shown in Figure 10 and represents over 38% of the privately held acreage in the unincorporated portion of the County.

While the development of rural areas greatly increased during the housing boom, these developments often sold to those intending to retire or build second homes in the area. As Figure 11 shows, a sizable percentage of privately held property in Buncombe County is owned by non-resident landowners. The over 11,900 parcels represent approximately 78,000 acres<sup>17</sup> or 25.5% of the privately held acreage in the unincorporated areas in the County. These areas include a number of large-scale developments, several resort/retreat centers, and approximately 48,000 acres of vacant property<sup>18</sup>.

## Residential New Construction Permits

Number and Median Cost of Construction



Figure 7. Residential New Construction

## Commercial New Construction

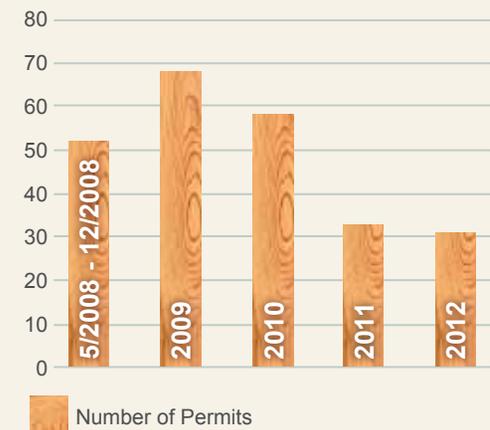


Figure 8. Commercial New Construction

<sup>13</sup> The number of permits per year was calculated based upon the date of permit issuance. Permits for HUD labeled manufactured homes are not included in the Residential New Construction chart.

<sup>14</sup> The map includes HUD labeled manufactured homes within the new residential permits dataset.

<sup>15</sup> Acreages listed in this section are based upon assessed acres.

<sup>16</sup> Vacant parcels are classified in the 300 series of the tax classification system by Buncombe County. A re-assessment of property values for tax purposes was completed in early 2013, which included the verification of property classification

<sup>17</sup> Acreages listed in this section are based upon assessed acres.

<sup>18</sup> Vacant parcels are classified in the 300 series of the tax classification system by Buncombe County. A re-assessment of property values for tax purposes was completed in early 2013, which included the verification of property classification.

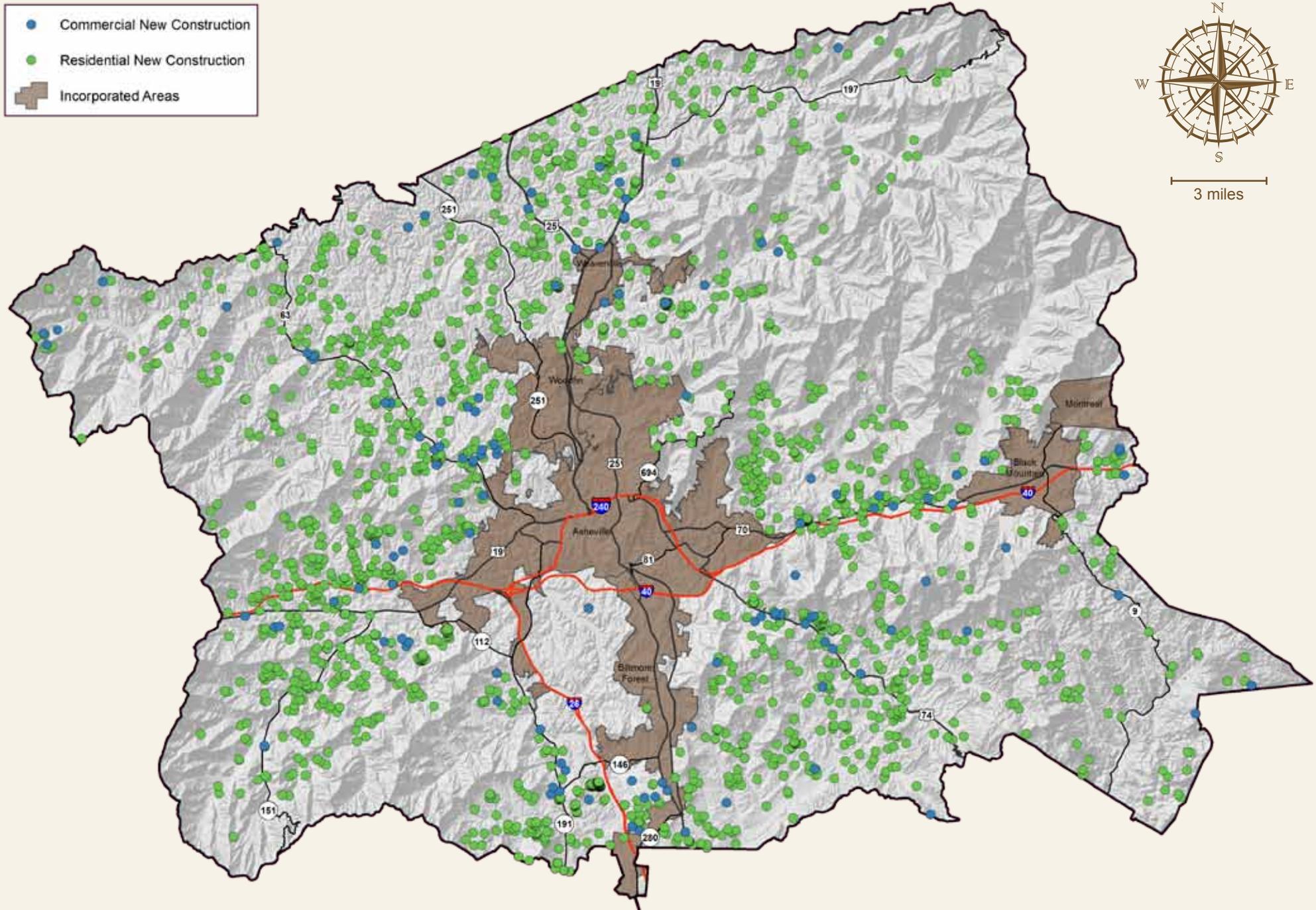


Figure 9. Distribution of New Construction Permits

 Vacant Private Property

 Incorporated Areas

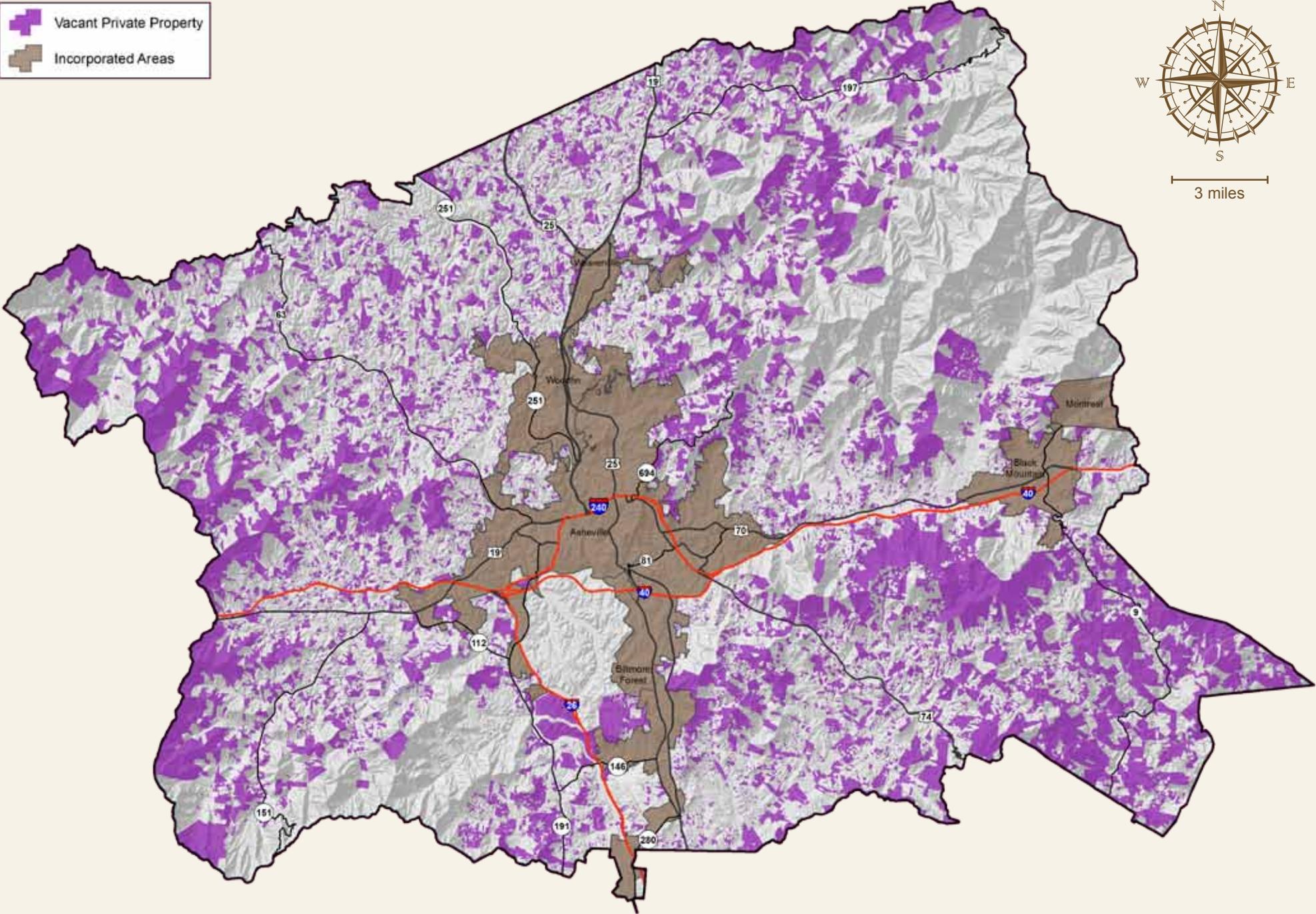
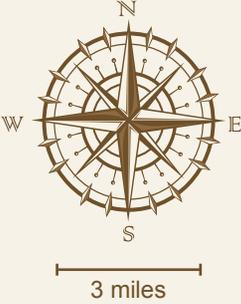


Figure 10. Vacant Private Property

Property Held by Out-of-County Residents  
Incorporated Areas

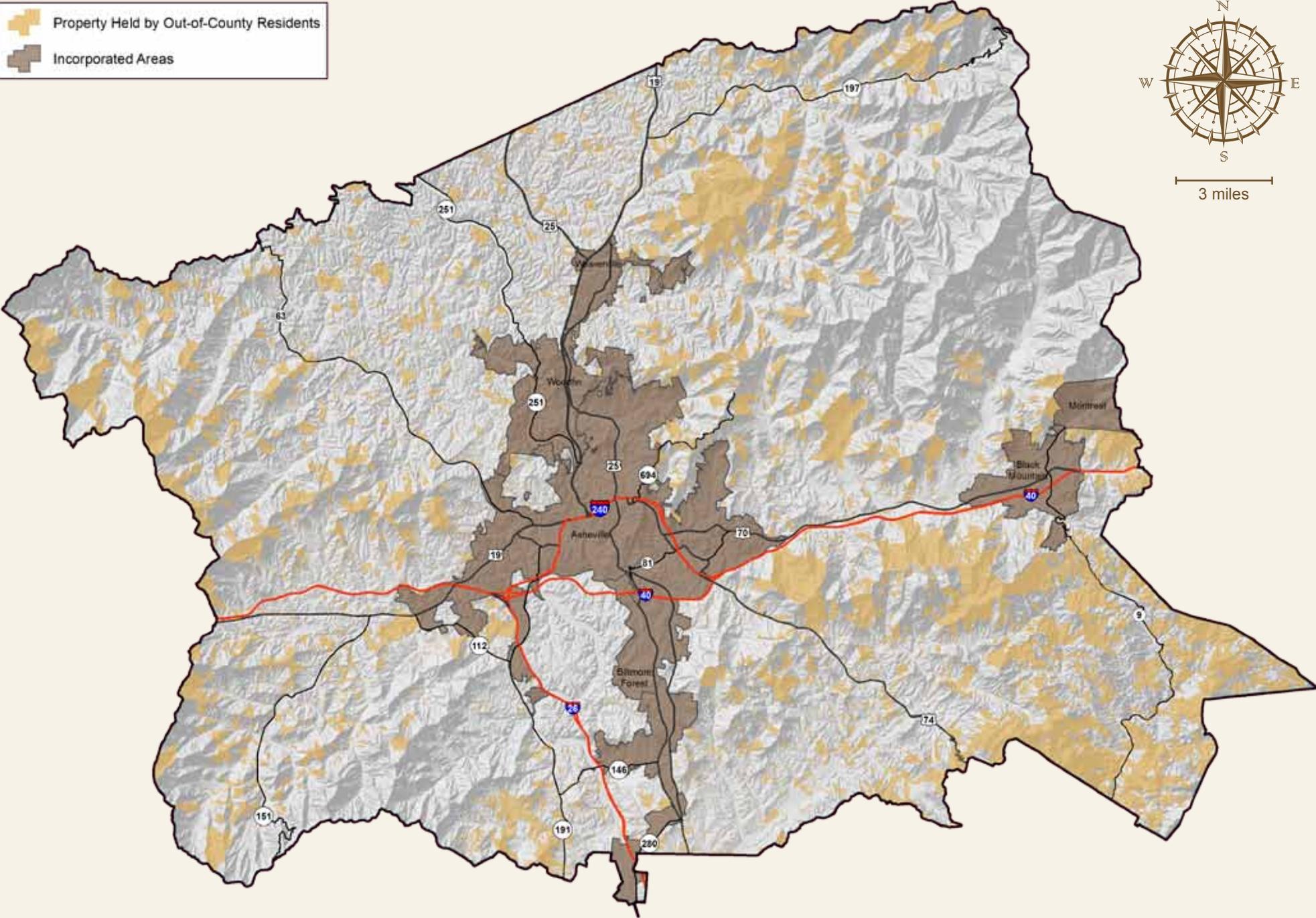
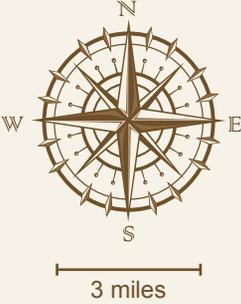


Figure 11. Property Held by Out-of-County Residents

**Residential Lot Sales**

2006 to Present



Figure 12. Median Price of Vacant Residential Lot Sales

**Residential Lot Sales**

2006 to Present



Figure 13. Number of Vacant Residential Lot Sales

**The second home market has decreased, and with it the size of new homes.**

**Residential Real Estate Market**

The housing market in Buncombe County (and nationwide) has undergone significant changes since the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update. The second home market has decreased, and with it the size of new homes. The availability of affordable housing remains a struggle in Buncombe County, though substantial efforts have been undertaken to address this need. The County has seen increased infill development, especially within the incorporated and more densely developed unincorporated areas. Vacant residential lot sales are illustrated in Figures 12 and 13 and residential homes sales are shown in Figures 14 and 15.

Buncombe County remains one of the least affordable metropolitan areas in the nation, ranking 186 out of 226 in the National Association of Home Builders / Wells Fargo Housing Opportunity Index for the fourth quarter of 2012<sup>19</sup>. The housing status and needs of Buncombe County residents are discussed in more detail in Section 5, Housing Status and Needs.

**Residential Home Sales**

2006 to Present

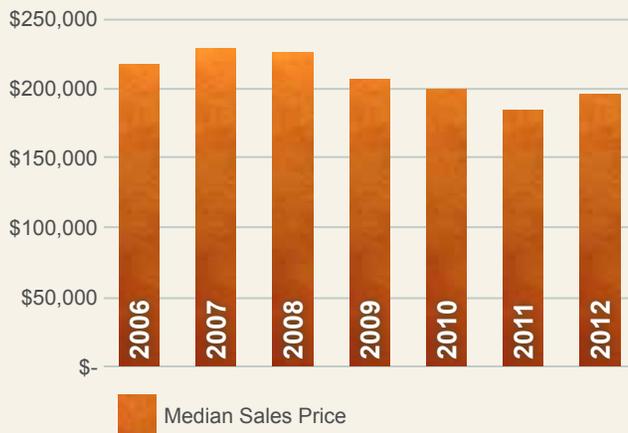


Figure 14. Median Price of Residential Home Sales

**Residential Home Sales**

2006 to Present



Figure 15. Number of Residential Home Sales

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.nahb.org/reference\\_list.aspx?sectionID=135](http://www.nahb.org/reference_list.aspx?sectionID=135)



**Facilities**

As an important element of land use planning, Buncombe County must examine not only private land development trends, but also examine the state and capacity of existing public facilities and infrastructure. Many planning efforts are undertaken which address the expansion of public utilities, parks and greenways, and schools, and review of these plans offers insight into potential short- and long-term development patterns.

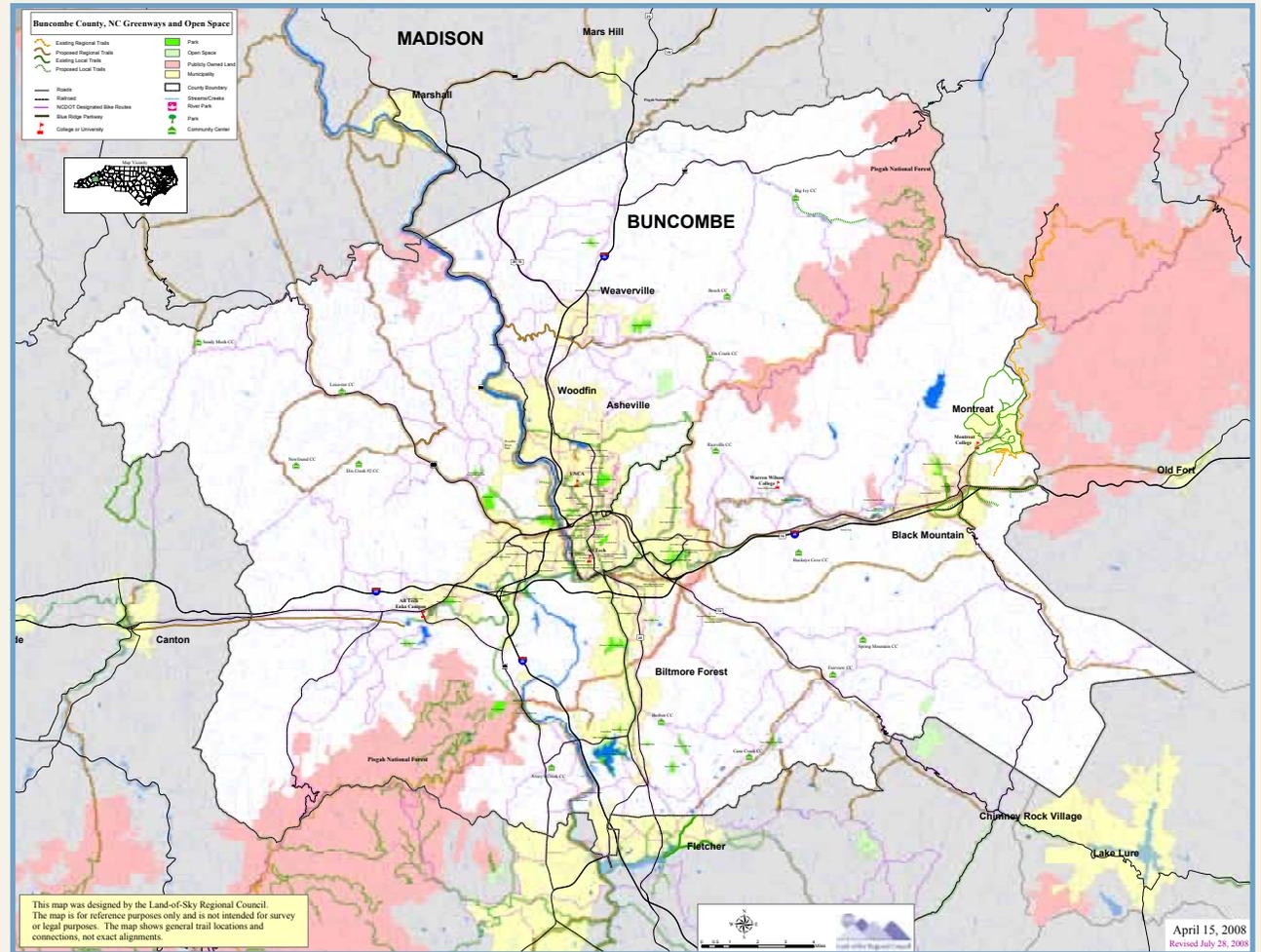
**Public Utilities**

This Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update comes at a time of transition for public utilities in Buncombe County. The North Carolina General Assembly has recently adopted legislation requiring the merger of the City of Asheville Water Authority with the Metropolitan Sewerage District (MSD). This will result in modified planning for the expansion of water and sewer infrastructure with the County, and we expect that a modified water/sewerage district boundary may be adopted by MSD as a result of this merger.



### Parks and Greenways

Buncombe County is an active community and the number and variety of parks and greenways within the County reflect this trend. All forms of government have a presence in park operations in Buncombe County. In addition to County operated parks, there are federal, state, and municipal parks. Several parks are also operated through partnerships between Buncombe County and municipalities or community organizations. In addition, a number of community and private organizations operate parks with varying levels of public accessibility. Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Facilities are shown in Figure 16 on the following page and a list of parks is included in the Appendix. It should also be noted that the County has recently adopted a Greenways Master Plan, which identifies current and prospective greenway locations and connections. There is also an effort underway to integrate greenways into regional transportation networks and multi-modal options.



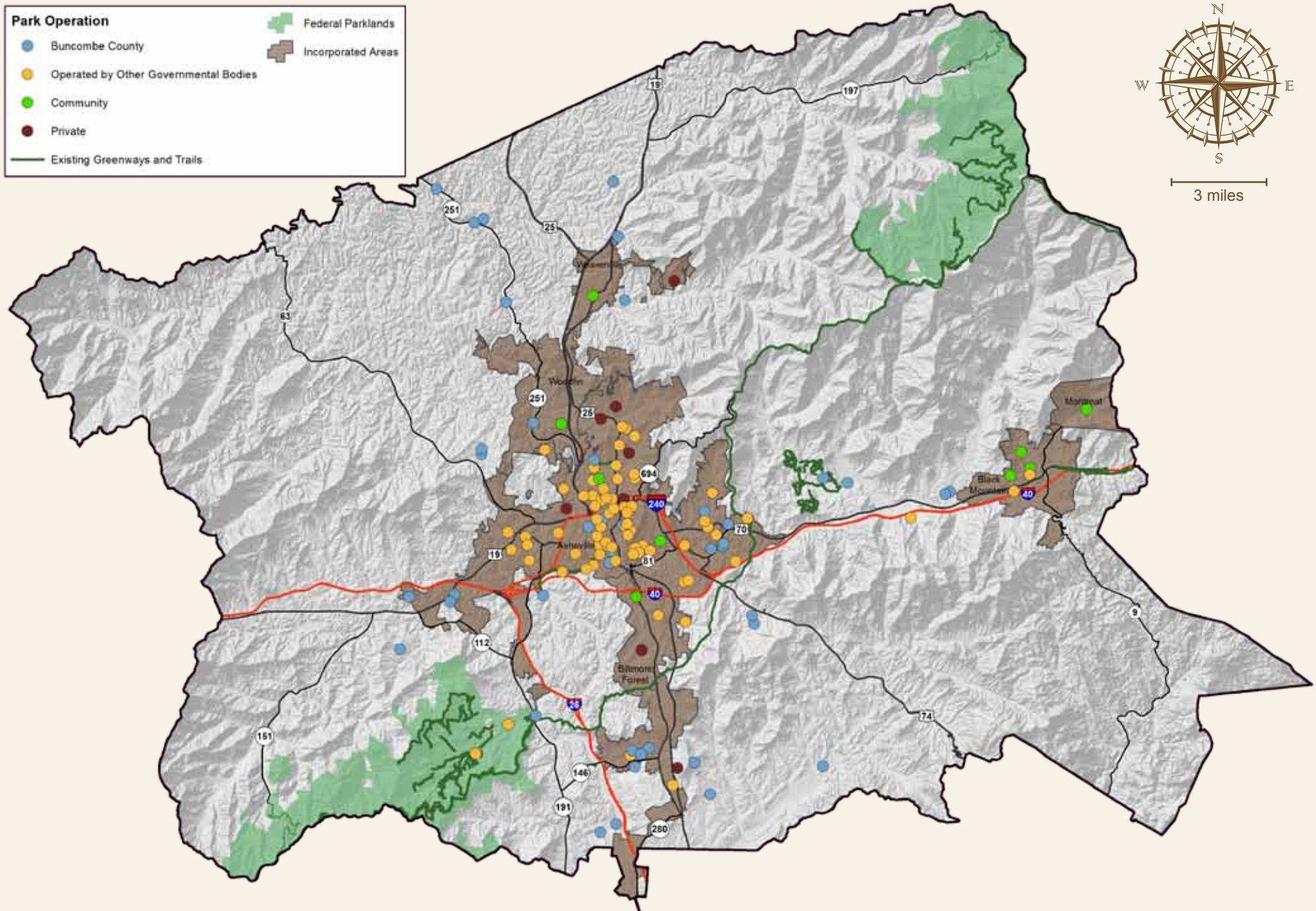


Figure 16. Parks, Greenways, and Recreation Facilities

**Schools**

The Buncombe County School District is the eleventh largest in North Carolina and is the largest district in Western North Carolina.<sup>20</sup> The District is the County’s second largest employer with nearly 4,000 employees, and serves approximately 25,500 students.

The District conducts a demographic analysis to identify current facility needs and project future student enrollment. The District weights projections for grade cohorts based upon potential changes associated with housing development, demographic shifts, employment opportunities, home/charter schooling and dropout/dropout prevention<sup>21</sup>. This analysis helps identify needed and available classrooms.

**Agricultural Land and Conservation Efforts**

Buncombe County has administered the Farmland Preservation Ordinance since its adoption in 1989. This Ordinance established the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) Program which provides benefits to enrolled farmers. As of April 2013, 358 farms were enrolled in the VAD program, encompassing 26,401 acres. The participating farms are shown in Figure 17. In 2011 the Ordinance was amended to include an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District (EVAD) Program which requires a ten-year irrevocable conservation agreement in return for additional benefits<sup>22</sup>.

Type of School	Number of Schools	Number of Students
Elementary School	23	10,582
Intermediate School	3	2,200
Middle School	7	4,873
High School	6	7,339
Alternative High School	1	161
Middle/Early College	2	308



<sup>20</sup> Buncombe County Schools Annual Report, 2011-2012

<sup>21</sup> Presentation by Buncombe County Schools, “2012-2013 Enrollments & Facility Needs Report,” May 2, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> As of April 2013, 2 farms totaling 294.58 acres were enrolled in the EVAD program. EVAD members are a subset of the VAD program members, and as such are included in Figure 17.

Voluntary Agricultural Districts  
Incorporated Areas

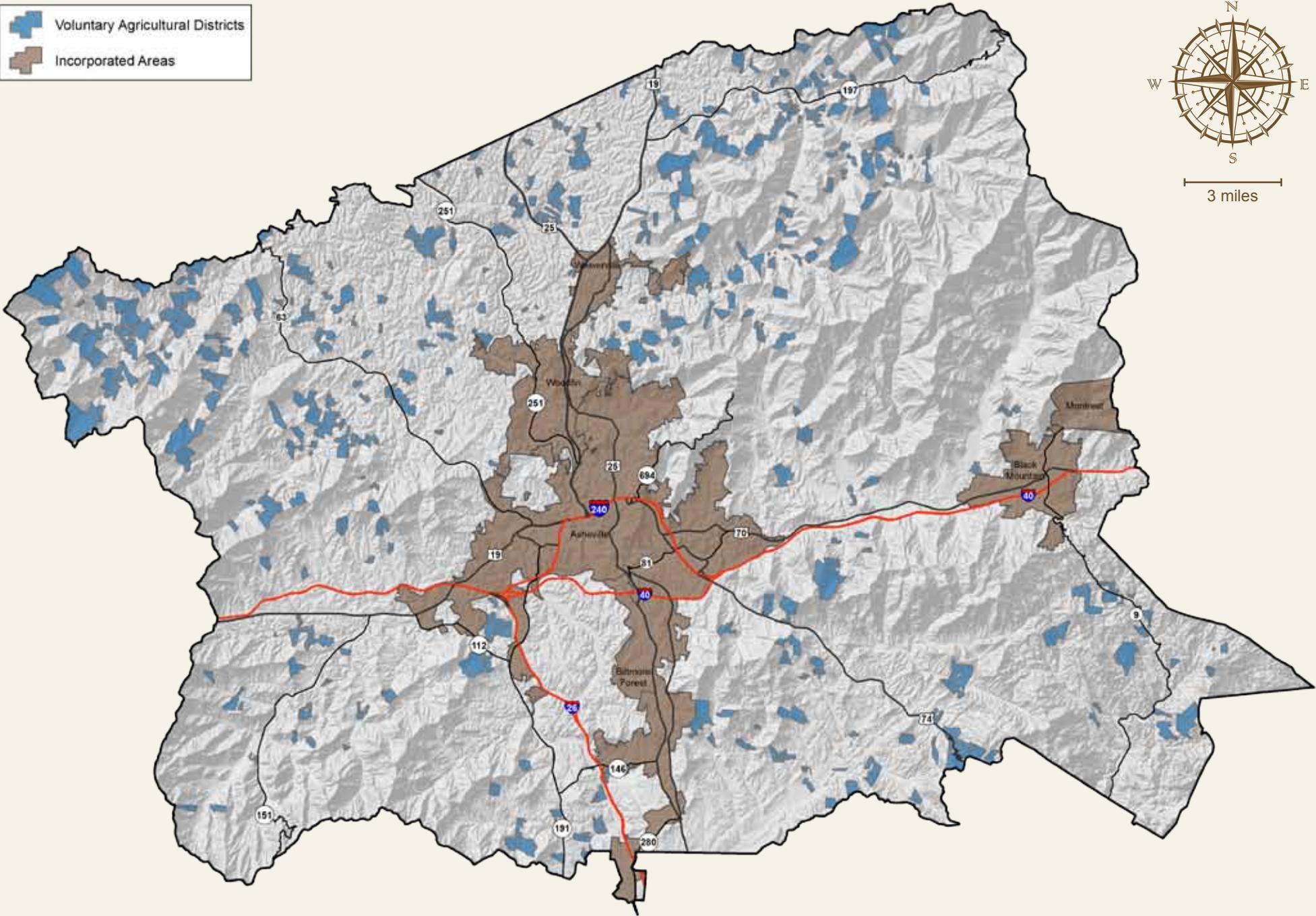
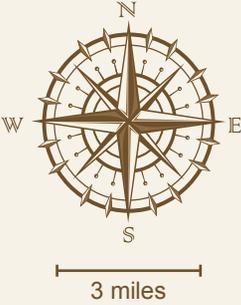


Figure 17. Voluntary Agricultural Districts



**Buncombe County has made the protection of working farmland and the conservation of open space a priority.**



Buncombe County has made the protection of working farmland and the conservation of open space a priority with the creation of both the Agricultural Advisory Board<sup>23</sup> and the Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB)<sup>24</sup>. Since 2006, the partnership of both Boards with local agricultural and conservation agencies and the dedication of County dollars have resulted in the preservation of 4,632 acres. Properties protected by conservation easements are shown in Figure 18.

In spite of educational and conservation efforts, Buncombe County continues to struggle to stem the tide of agricultural land loss. From 2002-2007, 22,127 acres of agricultural land were lost in Buncombe County<sup>25</sup>. Though the 2007 Census of Agriculture found overall growth in farm numbers nationwide, North Carolina was one of eleven states which saw declines in the number of farms<sup>26</sup>. However, nationwide farm acreage dropped during the same period, from 938,279,056 acres in 2002 to 922,095,840 acres in 2007<sup>27</sup>. An update to the USDA Census of Agriculture will occur within the coming year, which will provide the County with more current numbers and likely help spur more targeted preservation efforts by the Agricultural Advisory Board and LCAB.

<sup>23</sup> Established in 1989

<sup>24</sup> Established in 2004

<sup>25</sup> In 2002 there were 94,934 acres of agricultural land. In 2007 there were 72,807 acres remaining. (USDA Census of Agriculture 2002, 2007 <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>)

<sup>26</sup> 2007 Census of Agriculture, Farm Numbers: [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online\\_Highlights/Fact\\_Sheets/Farm\\_Numbers/farm\\_numbers.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Online_Highlights/Fact_Sheets/Farm_Numbers/farm_numbers.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_US/st99\\_1\\_008\\_008.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2007/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_US/st99_1_008_008.pdf)

### Changing Jurisdictional Boundaries

Since the adoption of the last Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, both the City of Asheville and the Town of Woodfin have significantly expanded their boundaries through involuntary annexation. Involuntary annexation by municipalities has long been relevant to county land use planning, and was mentioned in the initial 1998 Plan. However, the North Carolina General Assembly adopted a series of bills in the 2011-2012 session which have effectively ceased involuntary annexation by municipalities. Bills regarding the influence of municipalities on land use planning outside their territorial jurisdictions have been recently introduced and adopted as well. This Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update will include within its scope of planning those areas previously regulated as part of the Extraterritorial Jurisdictions (ETJ) of local municipalities. These areas have been zoned for a number of years and some fall outside of the primary Metropolitan Sewerage District boundary. To ensure continuity with existing levels of regulation within these areas, the adoption of detailed zoning, as has been applied within the MSD boundary, will be considered.

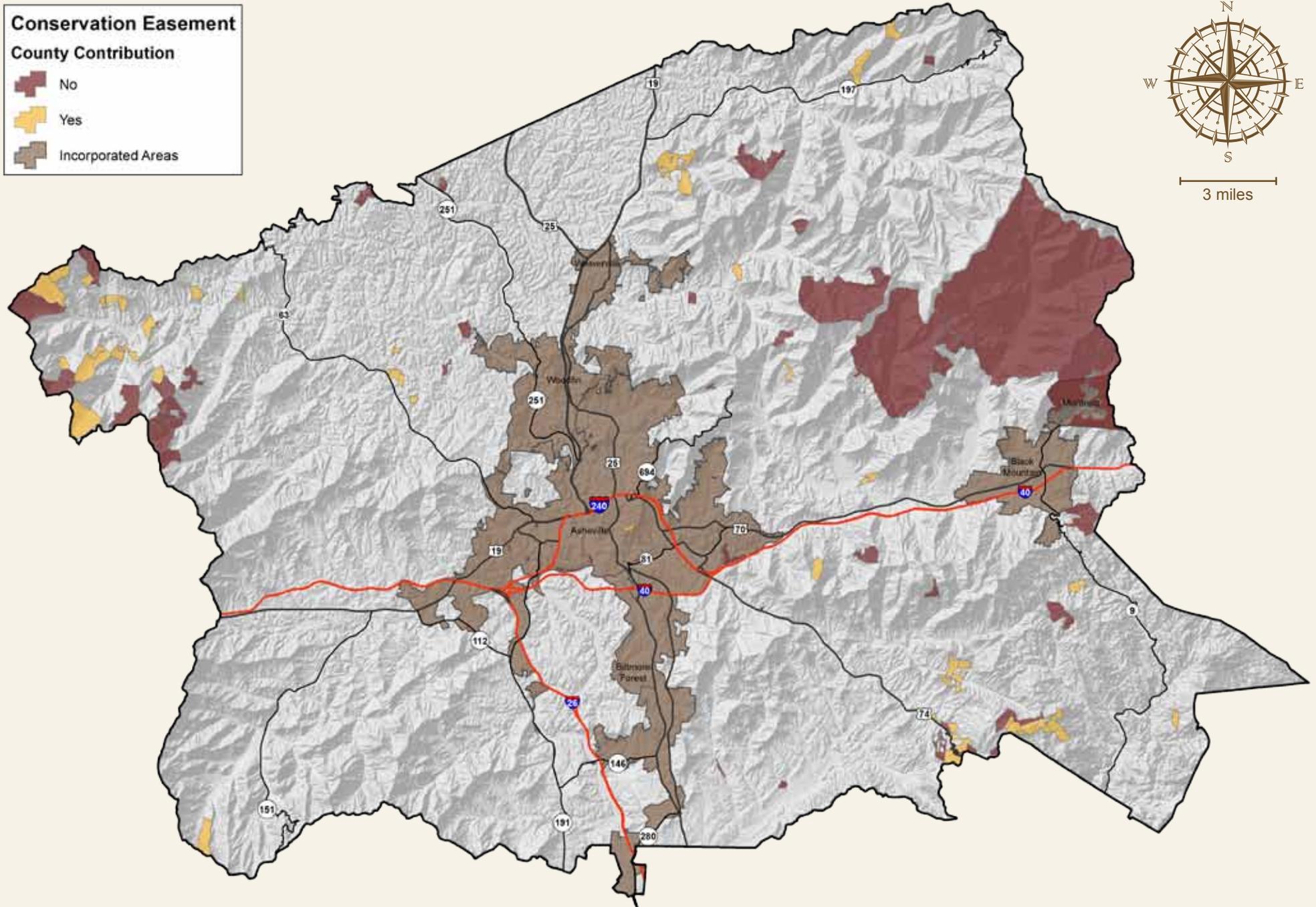


Figure 18. Land under Conservation Easements

## Transportation

Buncombe County has a number of highly traveled transportation corridors. These corridors are utilized not only by local residents but also by major interstate users such as long-haul truckers and tourists. As a regional hub, Buncombe County is quartered by I-40 and future I-26. The County contains approximately 50 miles of the 469-mile long Blue Ridge Parkway, which is in itself a popular destination drive. With the exception of the interstates, a number of the roadways in Buncombe County also serve to support multi-modal transportation and recreation activities. The primary roads are shown in Figure 19.

In North Carolina, counties do not install or maintain road infrastructure. However, Buncombe County is actively involved in the review of federal and state highway projects as well as the provision of rural transit through the French Broad River Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Land-of-Sky Regional Planning Organization (RPO). The County has worked with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Land-of-Sky Regional Council and local government members of the MPO and RPO to review the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan and the NCDOT Complete Streets Policy, among other initiatives. The MPO and RPO work to prioritize projects in need of funding and identify current issues and opportunities within the three-county<sup>28</sup> region.

While each regional transportation improvement project carries the potential to affect land use patterns in Buncombe County, the yet-to-be-determined direction of the I-26 corridor project has the greatest potential for impact on transportation and land use patterns, as well as on local communities. This project has been under discussion for a number of years, and there is no clear indication that a final plan for implementation will be adopted in the near future. However, it is important to note the potential impact of this project, which will need to be addressed in future Comprehensive Land Use Plan Updates.



<sup>28</sup> Buncombe, Haywood, and Henderson County make up the area covered by the French Broad River MPO.

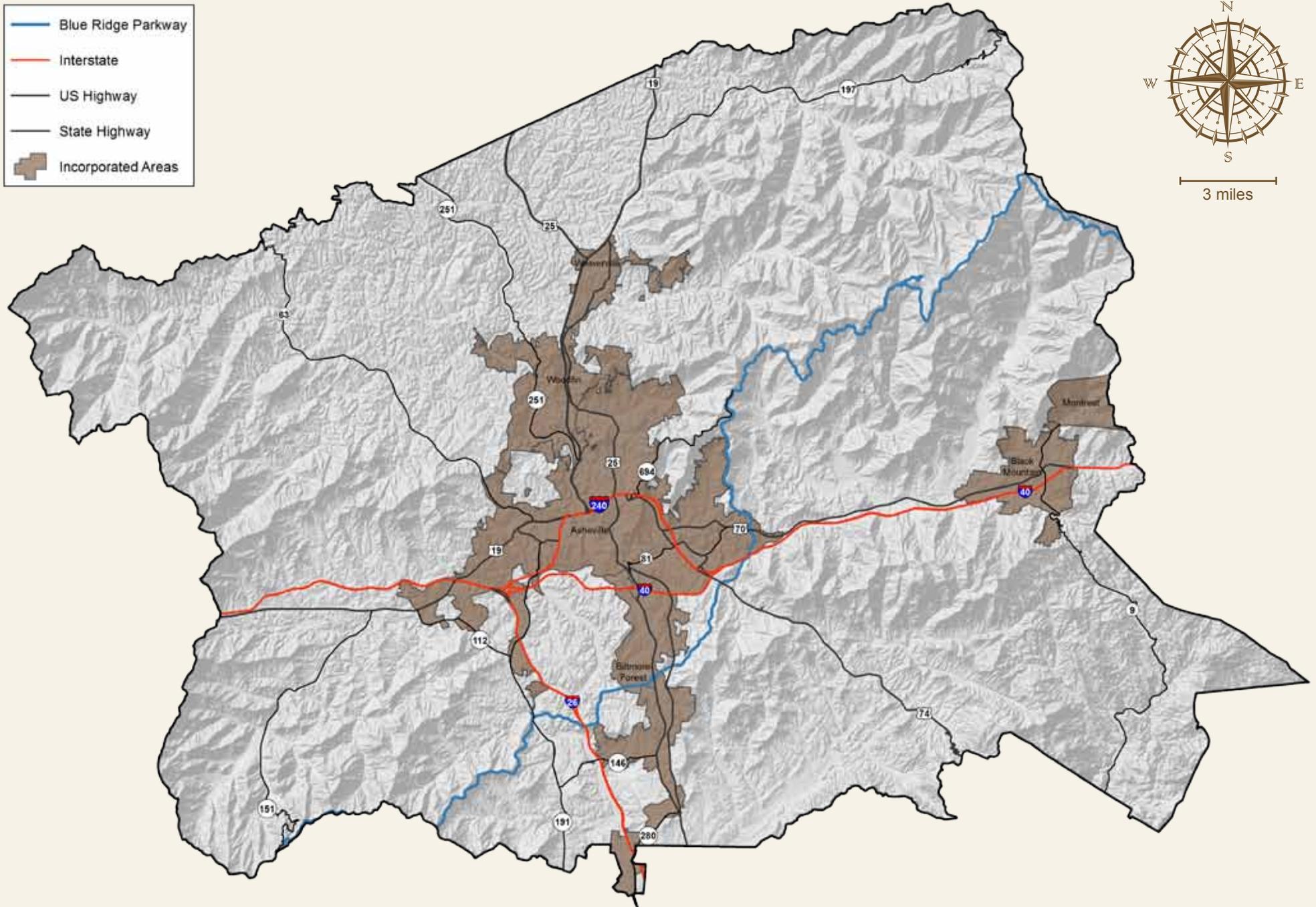


Figure 19. Primary Roads



4

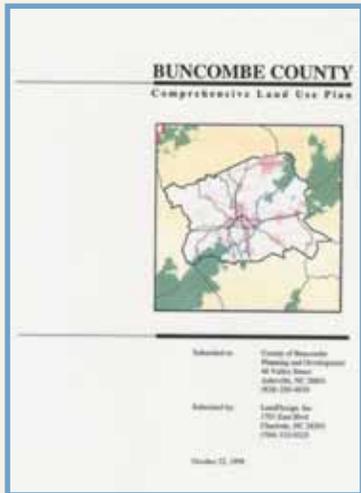
Past  
**PLANS**

# SECTION 4: PAST PLANS



## Comprehensive Land Use Planning in Buncombe County

Buncombe County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan was originally developed in 1998, and was subsequently adopted by the Board of Commissioners. The 1998



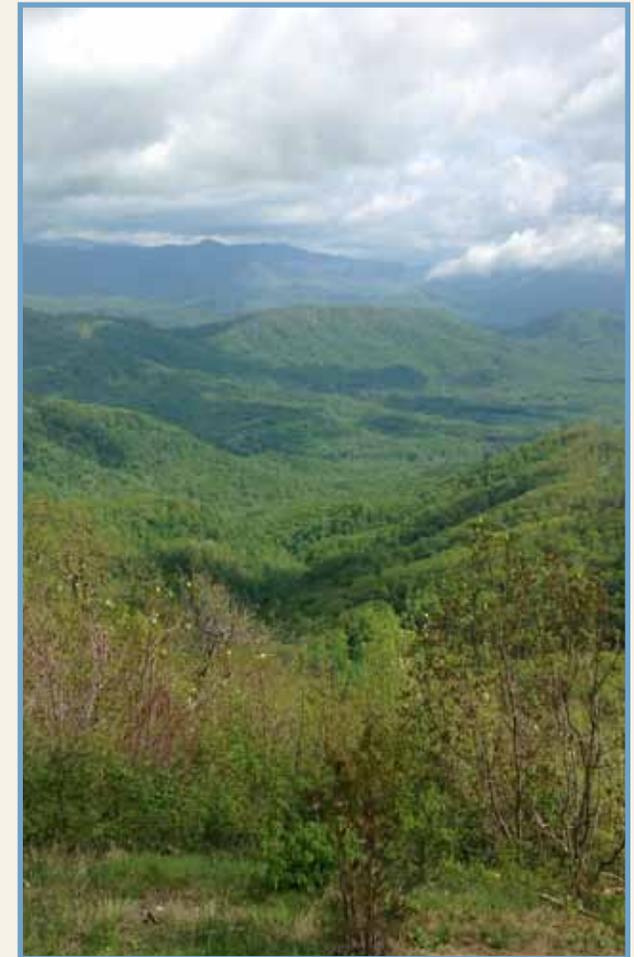
Plan focused on the directed expansion of public infrastructure (roads, water, and sewer) in order to provide an incentive for hub-focused growth while also protecting scenic ridges and steep terrain from more dense development. The 1998 Plan recommended that

the County work with "groups and landowners to establish voluntary programs and incentives encouraging preferred development patterns"<sup>29</sup>.

In 2005, Buncombe County undertook a substantial effort to update the 1998 Comprehensive Land Use Plan in order to better reflect the dramatic changes

that had occurred within the County since the initial plan was adopted. This Plan Update, adopted by the Board of Commissioners in 2006, set forth specific land use recommendations regarding rapidly urbanizing areas, environmentally sensitive portions of the County, and a number of strategies for future planning. The recommendations and implementation strategies identified in the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update are reviewed in the following section.

In 2009, an update to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan specific to the Beaverdam community was developed and subsequently adopted. This Plan Update recommended that the previously adopted Beaverdam Community Land Use Ordinance standards be incorporated into County-wide zoning as a unique zoning district. The Beaverdam Ordinance had been in effect since 1982, and had undergone a series of community-planned changes which the County felt should continue to be applied to the area.



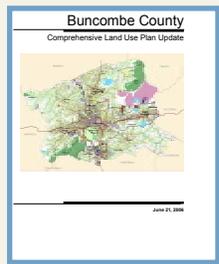
<sup>29</sup> Buncombe County Comprehensive Land Use Plan Executive Summary, page 4.

## Progress on Comprehensive Land Use Plan Implementation

### Where Are We Now?

Since the adoption of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, a number of new plans and policies have been developed both for the County and the region. These plans are listed in the below timeline.

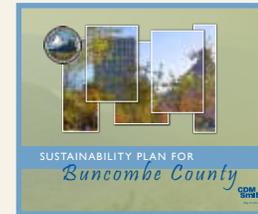
Through review of these plans, we gain a better understanding of the state of the County and the region. These plans represent a significant amount of public input, and will help further guide the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update into a Plan which accurately represents the current priorities of our community as a whole.



2006 - Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update



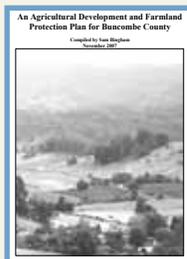
2008 - Buncombe County Parks, Greenways and Recreation Services Master Plan



2012 - Buncombe County Sustainability Plan, subsequently adopted as the County's Strategic Plan

2006 - Buncombe County Economic Development Incentive Policy Update

2007 - Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan



2009 - Transit Master Plan

2010 - 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan



2010 - Consolidated Affordable Housing Plan

2011 - Asheville 5x5 Job Creation Initiative

2011 - Buncombe County All Hazards Mitigation Plan Update

2012 - Parks Master Plans for Lake Julian Park and the Buncombe County Sports Park



2013 - Long-Range Transportation Demand Management Plan

2013 - Airport Master Plan

Pending Adoption - GroWNC Regional Sustainability Plan, undertaken by Land-of-Sky Regional Council

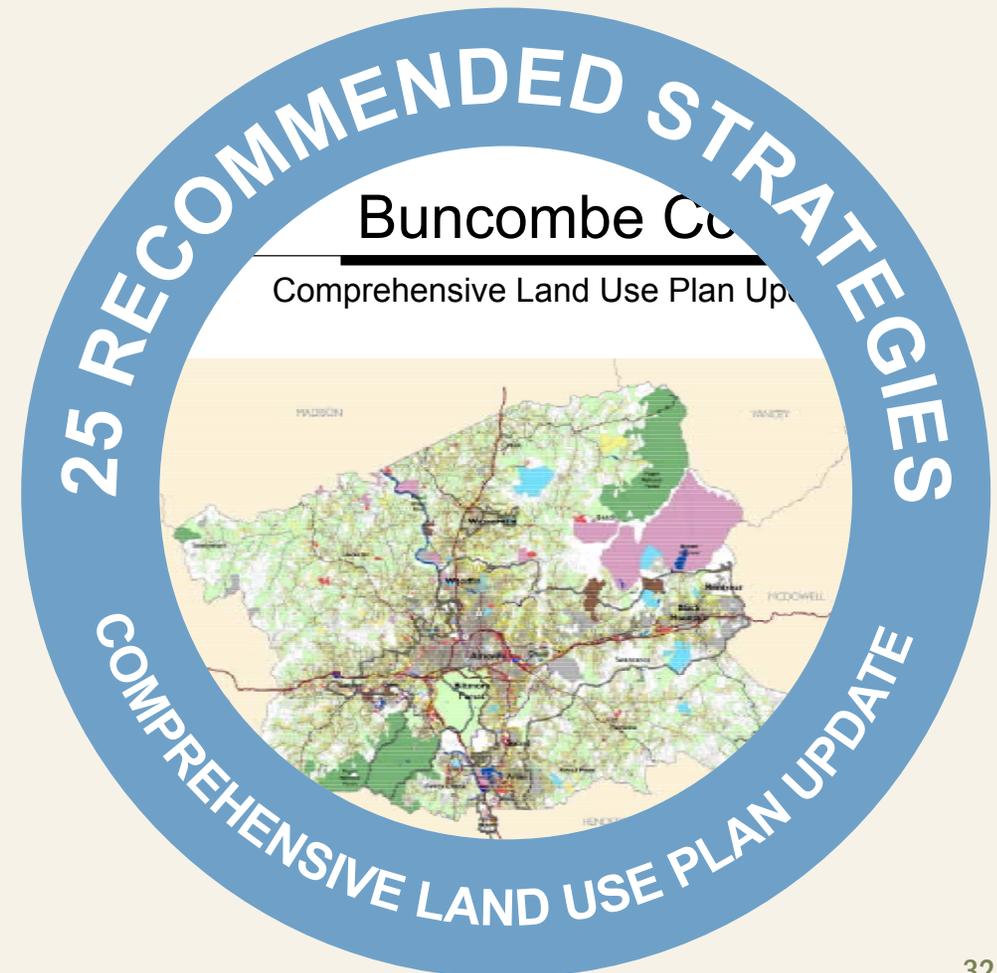
### How Does the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Apply Today?

While able to anticipate many of the trends and changes in our community during the 2006 Plan Update process, it is necessary to re-examine the main goals and recommendations set forth in the prior Plan Update. As a result of this process, we are better equipped to develop a framework for the 2013 Plan Update which accounts for the changes that have occurred in the past seven years as well as anticipates future trends specific to Buncombe County.

The following goals were initially set forth in the 1998 Comprehensive Land Use Plan, were re-affirmed in 2006, and remain relevant today:

- Establish a Land Use Plan that serves as a foundation for continued land planning and future development.
- Develop a strategic approach to coordinated infrastructure development, land development and resource conservation.
- Mobilize the community through a consensus building process to gain critical input and agreement on the plan.
- Represent Buncombe County government positively to the community.
- Provide an enhanced database for the long term management and analysis of land use.
- Identify and conserve critical environmental resources.
- Build understanding of the importance of land use planning among citizens and owners.

The 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update set forth 25 recommended strategies. By reflecting on the efforts to implement these recommended items, we understand our current situation better. Recommendations for the 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update can be modified to account for changes in the built environment, the economy, and in our vision for our community. The 25 strategies recommended in the 2006 Plan Update have been reviewed. Strategies which have been implemented or have been evaluated are denoted below with a green background.



## 1 Expand the Metropolitan Sewerage District (MSD) and adopt sewer service extension policies that support the direction and pattern of development recommended in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

- A Expand the MSD boundary to encompass a larger geographic area that includes sub-basins that, over the next twenty years, are likely to develop at a higher intensity than surrounding areas.
- B Adopt a policy of extending sewer service in accordance with established priorities, incorporating Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Service Areas.
- C Adopt a policy of not extending sewer service beyond the proposed MSD boundary (Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary) except under unique circumstances that warrant an extension.

The MSD Board adopted the recommendations of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, creating Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Service Areas. While these concepts have been adopted by the Board, the policy of refusing extension outside of the boundary areas has not been established as a priority by the Board.

## 2 Adopt Zoning for the County that coincides with the land use areas depicted on the Proposed Comprehensive Land Use Plan (Map 12 of the 2006 Plan Update).

- A Outside of the MSD Primary Service Area, consider applying a mixed-use zoning district that regulates only those land uses which are often necessary but typically considered undesirable.
- B The 1998 Plan identified 2,500' in elevation as the threshold above which development density should be limited based on the steepness of slopes. This area tends to be highly visible and comprised of the steepest slopes (40% and over). The 2006 Plan Update specifically recommended the adoption of two overlay districts, one which applied to land greater than 2,500' elevation, and one which applied to land greater than 3,000' elevation.
- C Apply detailed zoning to the area that lies within the MSD Primary Service Area, to include Limestone Township-type zoning districts.
- D Evaluate the Limestone Township Zoning Ordinance standards for each zoning district to determine appropriateness.
- E Consider the creation of additional zoning districts.

The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners adopted County-wide Zoning in 2009, which set forth detailed zoning within the MSD Primary Service Area and a mixed-use zoning district (Open Use District) outside of this area. The detailed zoning was developed using the Limestone Township Zoning Ordinance as its basis. Some changes in the County-wide Ordinance include a revision of the permitted uses and dimensional requirements for each district. An update to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan was adopted in 2009 which also recommended the incorporation of the Beaverdam Community as a Beaverdam Low-Density Residential District.

Once zoning had been adopted, community members, County staff, the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners conducted a study of steep slope and ridge top regulation. As a result of the recommendations of the 1998 Comprehensive Land Use Plan and 2006 Plan Update, and the publication of the North Carolina Landslide Hazard Maps, Zoning Overlay Districts were adopted. These Overlay Districts provide increased regulation including the requirement for geotechnical involvement for design and limiting the amount of disturbed and impervious surfaces allowed in these areas. The Protected Ridge Overlay District encompasses a 500' buffer of ridges protected by the State, and the Steep Slope/High Elevation Overlay District addresses those areas that are 2,500' in elevation or greater, and 35% slope or greater .

- 3** **Modify the Land Development and Subdivision Ordinance to include hillside development standards aimed at minimizing the impact of development by preserving trees and other vegetation that are critical to the protection of views and the stabilization of steep slopes, and reducing the amount of stormwater runoff and its effects from development. Setting limits on disturbed and impervious area per site and increasing minimum lot size in hillside areas is recommended.**

Concurrent with the discussion and adoption of the Steep Slope/High Elevation and Protected Ridge Zoning Overlay Districts mentioned above, revisions to the Land Development and Subdivision Ordinance were adopted in October of 2010. These changes included increasing minimum lot sizes above 35% slope; requiring slope analysis for certain subdivisions plans; promoting conservation and cluster subdivisions; and setting limits for impervious and disturbed surfaces and road corridors.

- 4** **Conduct a visual impact analysis to identify areas where the preservation of views is critical for maintaining economic health of the region, and create maps to provide as an educational resource to property owners in these areas.**

The Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB) has completed an analysis that focuses on priority viewsheds targeted for conservation in the County. In addition, the Blue Ridge Parkway<sup>31</sup>, Steep Slope/ High Elevation, and Protected Ridge Overlay Districts contain height and screening requirements, as well as limits on impervious and disturbed surfaces, which help to preserve these views. The National Park Service has also created both visual sensitivity and view area maps for the Blue Ridge Parkway, and provides educational materials to landowners within targeted viewsheds<sup>32</sup>.

- 5** **Attract development to “hubs” by locating community facilities such as parks, schools, and libraries within them.**

In reflecting on the hub model, the County has found that development constraints within the County’s jurisdiction such as steep slopes, floodplains, and availability of public utilities, do not support this type of development pattern. In addition, the economic downturn has served to refocus development pressures in the County. This strategy was not implemented, and will be revised within the recommendations of this Plan Update. Without more stringent and elaborate land use controls, it is not feasible to constrain development patterns within the previously identified hubs. Further, overreliance on the hub concept neglects existing infrastructure and transportation corridors and diverts attention from land more suitable for development.

<sup>31</sup> Buncombe County Comprehensive Land Use Plan Executive Summary, page 4.

<sup>32</sup> Blue Ridge Parkway Tool Box, June 2010.

## 6 Coordinate with other County departments and agencies to ensure long range plans of each acknowledge the County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan (i.e. MPO 2030 and Schools Facilities Master Plan).

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan was made readily available to County and regional agencies during both the development process and after adoption. Most notably, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Regional Planning Organization (RPO) utilize the Comprehensive Land Use Plan when developing plans for the region.

## 7 Study options to maintain or improve water quality, including amending the Soil Erosion & Sedimentation Control Ordinance as needed and adopting a Stormwater Management Ordinance.

The County has State-delegated programs in Stormwater Management and Erosion Control through the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (NCDENR). The County adopted a Stormwater Management Ordinance in 2006 which regulates impervious areas and stormwater retention and discharge. The Ordinance also encourages the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and Low Impact Development (LID). With the adoption of the Stormwater Management Ordinance, changes initially slated for the Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance to further protect water quality became redundant. The Stormwater Management Ordinance applies the State standards for Phase II Municipal Spheres of Influence (MSI) to the entire unincorporated area of the County. In addition, the Stormwater Management Ordinance is administered by the County within the municipal boundaries of Biltmore Forest, Montreat, Weaverville, and Woodfin through interlocal agreement.

## 8 Access to Water (Private and Public)

- A Consider adjusting well location regulations to minimize well density in areas where the volume of groundwater is low, thereby encouraging commercial and some residential development to be located where municipal water is available.
- B Consider addressing the number of units/persons that can be served by a shared private well.
- C Consider establishing an independent authority that can provide water service to areas of the County not currently served by the City of Asheville.

Based upon the recommendations of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, both the Planning Board and the Environmental Advisory Board began in depth discussions of water availability. Based upon discussion with local and regional experts, the County understood that the recommendation regarding groundwater levels is not applicable due to the hydrogeology of Buncombe County. Groundwater is not stored in an aquifer, but is instead found within fractures in the bedrock. Thus, it is extremely difficult to determine the groundwater capacity of a geographic area.

In addition, the revision of regulations related to the installation and use of private wells falls under the purview of the State, and may not be amended at the local level. Public water is currently provided by the City of Asheville, the Town of Black Mountain, the Town of Montreat, the Town of Weaverville, and the Town of Woodfin. These municipal water systems, for the most part, provide access to public water within the MSD Primary Service Area which the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update recommends be more densely developed. The potential consolidation of these services is under discussion at the State level.

**9 Consider revising septic requirements that allow developers to avoid the more stringent NCDENR review for permits for developments that generate wastewater flows in excess of 3,000 Gallons per Day (GPD).**

Permitting requirements for septic systems which are administered locally by the County's Environmental Health Department are delegated by the State and may not be amended at the local level.

**10 Investigate the possibility of using Project Development Financing, North Carolina's form of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to spur economic development activity in certain areas that are ripe for development.**

The County has explored this concept, however in recent years, due to the economic downturn, development at this scale has not been proposed or occurred in the County.

**11 Study and evaluate options for shifting the cost of providing infrastructure and services to serve new development to developers, including through the possible adoption of an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO) or the collection of Fees-In-Lieu-Of.**

An evaluation of available options was made shortly after the adoption of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, and has been discussed several times since. While Fees-In-Lieu-Of (exactions) are authorized by NC General Statutes, they can most easily be used to develop infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, etc) with which counties are not often involved or do not have the authority by which to participate. Exactions cannot provide wider-range planning, as they are only meant to focus on facilities that serve a particular planned development. APFOs are set up to ensure that the services (schools, emergency services, recreation, etc) required by the community are in place and have the capacity to serve any proposed development. They may also be used to place moratoria on development. However, APFOs that have charged fees have received legal challenges, and are not expressly enabled by the NC General Statutes. The power to levy impact fees is not specifically granted to counties in North Carolina. Thus, while the study was conducted as recommended, it has been determined that utilizing such strategies is not feasible at this time.

**12 Seek opportunities to establish a land transfer tax to generate revenues that could be used by the County for Land Acquisition.**

While the NC General Assembly did enable this ability through legislation as anticipated at the time of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, the subsequent economic downturn greatly affected the viability of such a program. Given the current real estate market, such a tax may also no longer be prudent.

**13 Develop a Parks and Recreation Master Plan to identify County-wide needs, identify priority park projects, and define funding mechanisms to implement the plan.**

Parks Master Plans have been completed for Lake Julian Park and the Buncombe County Sports Park. In addition, the County has developed and adopted a Greenways Master Plan.

**14 Study and evaluate options for sharing the burden of providing open space and recreational areas with private developers, including the consideration of adding open space requirements to the Land Development and Subdivision Ordinance.**

The 2010 revision of the Land Development and Subdivision Ordinance provided incentives for the preservation of open space through cluster and conservation design options, density bonuses, and allowing areas preserved through an established land conservancy to be taken out of the development area for the purpose of average slope calculation. The aforementioned Zoning Overlay Districts also work to protect open space and natural areas. As such, while open space is not required, a number of options are provided to encourage the preservation of open space, especially in steep slope and ridge top areas.

**15 Allow a cluster development option as a means to promote compact development while preserving open space, particularly in areas where the physical conditions of the site warrant a concentration of development on a portion of the site. Offer a density bonus as an incentive to developers to utilize this option.**

Both cluster development and density bonuses have been provided for through the 2010 revisions to the Land Development and Subdivision Ordinance.

**16 Create economic development incentives to encourage industrial and other major employers to locate in Buncombe County. Provide incentives that encourage the recycling of existing industrial sites.**

The County continues to enter into successful economic development agreements with both local employers and those relocating to Buncombe County. Brownfield sites have been targeted by a number of industrial employers as their needs and corporate goals evolve. Employers have been able to take advantage of incentives provided by the State for brownfield redevelopment, in addition to local incentives provided for economic development.

### 17 Participate in and/or promote programs to maximize other opportunities for economic development in the County.

Buncombe County has continued to be an active partner in community initiatives, such as the Small Business Service Center and Incubator at the Enka Campus of Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College and the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP).

### 18 Continue the voluntary Farmland Preservation Program administered by the County Soil and Water Conservation District, and encourage the following improvements:

- A The scoring system should reflect the goals of the plan.
- B The point system should be adjusted to eliminate the maximum and to allocate more points to larger tracts of land.
- C Utilize the French Broad Training Center to educate landowners, concerned citizens and public officials about farmland preservation and agricultural conservation easements.
- D Consider new ways to earn points based on recent changes in agricultural activities.

The scoring system has been revised since the adoption of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update to reflect the goals of the plan. The system now allocates more points to larger tracts of land. Additional points are also allocated for specialty crops, which include organic farming practices. The French Broad Training Center is no longer active, however the Soil and Water Conservation District has worked in partnership with the local Cooperative Extension Office to provide outreach and education regarding farmland preservation and agricultural conservation easements.

### 19 Establish a short-term tax deferral program for large parcel owners of prime agricultural and natural lands. This property tax incentive would be awarded to program participants who elect to temporarily keep their land in an undeveloped state for a predetermined number of years. Special legislation may be required; this program would be subject to approval by the NC General Assembly.

The Present Use Value Program enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly allows reduced tax assessments for individually owned property used for agriculture, horticulture, or forestry. The difference between the market value and the present use value is deferred until the property or a portion of it is removed from the program. The North Carolina General Assembly has not shown interest in expanding this program or adding another program which would meet the recommendations above.

Buncombe County has also instituted an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District (EVAD) Program, which was recommended by the 2007 Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan for Buncombe County. This program does not offer tax incentives, but does provide for larger cost-share funds under the Agricultural Cost Share Program with a ten-year term easement.

**20 Continue and seek ways to improve/expand the Conservation Agreement Program. Offer educational programs to inform the public of the benefits, and utilize the French Broad Training Center to educate landowners, concerned citizens, and public officials about conservation easements.**

The County's Soil and Water Conservation District Office has an extensive outreach program. The office organizes the quarterly Friends of Agriculture breakfast, as well as a number of presentations to civic groups and interested parties both out in the County and through the Cooperative Extension and Soil and Water Conservation District offices. In addition, the County's Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB) has developed educational presentations which they provide to interested groups throughout the County.

**21 Use the County's website as a means to better communicate with County residents, builders, developers, business owners, and others affected by growth and development.**

The County's website is continually reviewed and revised to ensure that it provides pertinent and streamlined information to citizens. Changes made since the adoption of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update have included the provision of more detailed information about Planning Department programs, services, requirements, application documents, and meetings. Pages are dedicated to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Zoning, and Subdivision Ordinances, among others. Meeting deadlines and agenda are available online, as are supporting maps for public hearings.

The County's Public Relations Team has launched a successful internet and social media campaign, receiving national recognition for the design of the Buncombe County Website. As of February 2013, Buncombe County had 1,474 Facebook friends, 1,053 Twitter followers, and 3,599 e-zine subscribers.

**22 Continue the use of BCTV as a means of raising awareness of current issues regarding growth and development in the County.**

BCTV has continued to provide relevant information to residents regarding growth and development in the County. Spotlight segments on the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Zoning Ordinance, and Subdivision Ordinance changes have helped to better educate and inform the County's citizens. The County established a BCTV YouTube Channel, expanding the reach of programming from only cable subscribers to include all residents and interested parties with internet access.

**23** When appropriate, appoint a task force and/or organize meetings to ensure that critical information and County decisions are communicated to appropriate/affected groups, and to get feedback from individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic(s).

With the discussion of major changes to policies or regulations, the Planning Department has continued to involve the public (including stakeholders, experts, and interested parties) in each discussion. Notable efforts include the discussions leading up to the adoption of the changes to the Land Development and Subdivision and Zoning Ordinances in 2010, as well as the development and adoption of the Sustainability Plan in 2012.

**24** Increase County staff resources. An evaluation of current staff resources is required to determine needs for additional staff to sufficiently follow through with implementation activities, administer existing and future ordinances, etc.

Since the adoption of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, the Planning Department staff has experienced growth and change. Staffing has been modified to adapt to changing needs within the Department. The Department continues to make customer service a priority, ensuring that staffing is adequate to respond promptly to the needs of County citizens.

**25** Establish methods for regular intergovernmental coordination and communication. Consider establishing regular meetings of planners within the region, as well as regular meetings of elected and appointed officials interested in coordination and communication.

At this time, though the County does not sponsor intergovernmental meetings, County planners actively participate in a number of intergovernmental and regional groups. Staff and elected and appointed officials actively participate in collaborative efforts sponsored by Land-of-Sky Regional Council, such as the MPO, RPO, Brownfield Redevelopment Program, and GroWNC regional planning process. In addition, Planning Department staff serve on the Housing Consortium, which helps to allocate federal funding for affordable housing in a four county region.



5

# Other Planning EFFORTS

# SECTION 5: OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS



## Housing Status and Needs

Buncombe County has long struggled with a lack of affordable housing. The aesthetic desirability and livability of this region has attracted an influx of tourists and new residents. While this has certainly supported the tourism- and service-based economy of the region, it has done less to diversify and strengthen the local economy and wage rate. Where land and housing has become a desirable commodity, the market has driven sales and rental prices beyond what many local earners can afford.

The Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan, and the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice, are documents that include data on housing demographics, need, and our housing economy. Each document provides recommendations that the County has supported to move us closer to realizing safe, decent, affordable housing for all our residents. In addition, there have been recent reports completed on the importance of locating affordable and workforce housing along transit corridors and close to jobs and services. This correlation between affordable housing and access to transportation is also supported by the Sustainability Plan.

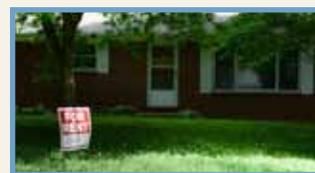
The most recent Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan is dated April 2010, and projects need through 2015, and in some cases,

through 2020. The Consolidated Plan is updated through a regional effort, and includes information specific to Buncombe County as well as the City of Asheville and

other counties in our region. The Consolidated Plan identifies the priorities for federal funding in meeting the needs of our community<sup>33</sup>.



**25% of owner-occupied homeowners have housing costs that are 30% or more of their household income (i.e., cost-burdened).**



**41% of renters are cost-burdened, and for renter households earning below \$20,000, 88% were cost-burdened.**



**About 17% (16,000) of all residential units in the County are manufactured homes. One-half of these are in manufactured home parks.**



**Non-profit developers report that their capacity is limited by funding, construction financing, construction costs, reliability of grant funding, etc.**



**For-profit developers report that their capacity is limited by bank financing for land purchase and construction, mortgage financing for the homebuyer, shortage of downpayment assistance, high cost of land with water and sewer, cost of fees and permits, etc.**



**The number of affordable homes on the market has declined steadily, indicating shrinking choices for low to moderate income homebuyers.**

<sup>33</sup> Per the Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan (p. 19-53)



The priorities that were identified through the Consolidated Plan, in ranked order, include the following:<sup>34</sup>

- Provide affordable rental housing, particularly for households earning 60% of median income or less.
- Coordinate housing development with transportation, jobs, and services and make efficient use of available land and infrastructure by exploring strategies including encouraging higher density construction near transit corridors; exploring redevelopment potential of underutilized grayfield commercial sites; encouraging collaboration with transit, employment, and services agencies in the planning stage of developments; re-evaluating zoning that effectively excludes affordable housing; and exploring density bonuses as a use-by-right for affordable housing development, as well as other land-use incentives.
- Help those with special needs: the homeless, the frail elderly, persons with mental illness and people with disabilities, and help people succeed through support services coordinated with housing development.
- Emphasize high quality, energy efficient, environmentally friendly designs.
- Target low wealth neighborhoods for assistance that will improve housing conditions and create stronger communities.

- Preserve existing housing and focus preservation efforts to make both rental and ownership housing affordable and preserve long-term affordability of rental housing.
- Promote homeownership.

The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice is a standalone document that identifies the actions needed across the region to ensure that all individuals have equal and free access to housing choices. The Analysis of Impediments was updated and accepted through Resolution by the Board of Commissioners in March 2013, and includes demographic, employment, economic, and housing market information, which primarily comes from the 2010 Decennial Census and 5 year estimates included in the 2009 American Community Survey data<sup>35</sup>. Buncombe has 113,365 total housing units, with 100,412 being occupied. Our housing density is 172 units per square mile, and our units per capita is 0.48. We have the highest median value home in the region of nearly \$180,000, and the highest median gross rental rate of \$711. We have 68% owner occupied units and 32% rental units.

The Analysis of Impediments identified three major impediments: regional coordination and public awareness; discrimination in lending practices; and general accessibility to housing for persons with a handicapping condition. However, the indirect impediments and strategies identified may be more germane to land use planning:

- Continue to encourage, plan for, and promote the construction of new affordable housing options and the redevelopment of properties in areas of greatest need. Where appropriate,

<sup>34</sup> Per the Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan (p. 47-48)

<sup>35</sup> GroWNC Region: Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice, 2011, p.5

jurisdictions should investigate policies and program opportunities that encourage denser development through infill and adaptive re-use of vacant and underutilized properties.

- Promote high density affordable housing as an alternative to manufactured home parks.
- Incentivize affordable housing.
- Continue the housing trust fund.
- HOME Consortium should use HOME funds to provide affordable rental housing for extremely low income families.
- Assess the impact of seasonal employment on existing housing to ensure sufficient housing choices are available.
- Increase access to housing in areas of high opportunity.
- Review land use policy and zoning as potential barriers for affordable and special needs housing.
- Expand access to affordable transportation.

In May 2010, a report was issued that assessed the need for additional workforce housing in our area, and documented the environmental, economic, and quality of life impacts that commuting causes due to a shortage of such housing. A Long Way from Home, prepared by William Rohe and others of UNC-CH Center for Urban and Regional Studies, estimated that for some working families, transportation costs may even exceed housing costs (at 30% of most families' incomes) in areas such as ours. The report cited a study that indicated that working families spend about \$0.77 in transportation for every dollar saved

on housing located further away from where they work<sup>36</sup>. Households may find it slightly more financially advantageous, on the surface, to move further out to live in affordable housing, even if they pay more to commute. However, this equation does not factor in personal costs, such as time spent commuting at the expense of time with family, and social costs including poor air quality, increased congestion, increased road maintenance costs, and increased auto accidents. From the survey respondents in Rohe's study, it was estimated that for every 100 commuters that relocated closer to the employment center, 40,000 gallons of gasoline could be saved every year, or almost \$1,000 per year for each commuter.

The general recommendations that were made included continuing the housing trust funds, more cooperation between developers and local leaders, and joint planning efforts. Specifically relevant to land use, the recommendations were:

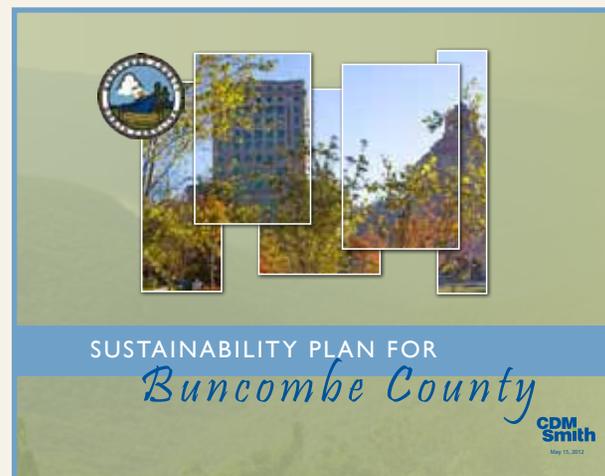
- Look for opportunities to redevelop areas close to major activity areas and along major transit corridors that would include workforce housing.
- Increase the allowable development densities close to major employment and activity centers and along transportation corridors to reduce housing costs.
- Consider implementing a conditional or special use zoning process, where the affordable housing goals in the comprehensive plan can be used to evaluate projects during the special use review process.
- Consider density bonuses, fee reductions, and expedited review.



**Working families spend about \$0.77 in transportation for every dollar saved on housing located further away from where they work.**



<sup>36</sup> A Long Way from Home, William Rohe, UNC Chapel Hill Center for Urban and Regional Studies, 2010, p. 21



Most recently, Buncombe County’s Sustainability Plan identified affordable, green and liveable housing as one of the fourteen goals. Specific objectives include the following:

- Promote healthy buildings and homes.
- Ensure that information reaches citizens.
- Work in partnership with outside organizations to assist families in finding safe, affordable housing.
- Promote home ownership while also supporting quality rental developments that are required to remain affordable and safe.
- Ensure the availability of a diverse housing stock.
- Provide educational opportunities in financial planning and homebuyer education.
- Provide affordable and workforce housing funding for new developments on existing infrastructure.
- Expand housing rehabilitation and repair programs.

The recommendations and strategies from these plans guide our policies and our funding decisions. The primary funding sources we use to support affordable and workforce housing are Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds; Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME) funds; and Buncombe County funds, including the Affordable Housing Services Program, Workforce Housing Program, and Community Development funding. Buncombe County has been an important resource and partner in assisting several affordable housing developments over the past twenty years. There remains a much greater demand than available funding.

## Preservation and Conservation

Multiple prior and current plans identify preservation and conservation of the environment as key issues for the future of Buncombe County. The 1998 Comprehensive Land Use Plan identified the environment and loss of agricultural lands as key areas of concern. The 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update reaffirmed that fertile farmland, open space, and scenic mountain vistas are important and valuable natural resources that warrant protection. Additionally, the Buncombe County Sustainability Plan has identified sustainable local food systems and partnerships for conservation/preservation/restoration of natural resources as two of its fourteen goals. Several programs and organizations are addressing these issues.

The Farmland Preservation Ordinance, adopted in 1989, established the Voluntary Agricultural District Program (VAD). The VAD program recognizes the importance of agriculture to the economic and social wellbeing of North Carolina by encouraging the voluntary preservation and protection of farmland from non-farm development. Some of the benefits of the program are increased protection from nuisance lawsuits, public hearings for proposed condemnation of enrolled land, and greater public awareness of the local agricultural community and increased pride in its way of life. As of April 2013, 358 farms were in the Buncombe County VAD program totaling 26,401 acres, an increase of 25 farms but a decrease of 547 acres since the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update. This reflects the continued fragmentation of larger tracts as farms are passed to heirs and/or converted to non-farm use.

The Farmland Preservation Ordinance was amended in 2011 to establish the Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District Program (EVAD). The EVAD program requires a 10-year irrevocable conservation

agreement and provides additional benefits to the VAD program. The 10-year irrevocable agreement allows landowners time to stabilize the use of their land while considering longer-term options, such as permanent conservation easements. The primary benefits of EVAD are eligibility to receive a higher percentage of cost-share funds (90%) under the Agricultural Cost Share Program and priority when State agencies award grants. As of April 2013, 2 farms were in the EVAD program totaling 294 acres.

The Farmland Preservation Ordinance was amended in 2001 to establish the Conservation Agreement Program. To date, 11 easements have permanently protected 806 acres, an increase of 10 easements and 721 acres since the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update. The \$467,150 County dollars leveraged \$5,661,202 in State and Federal grants, private money, and owner donations.

The Land Conservation Advisory Board (LCAB) was established in 2004 to promote the use of voluntary land conservation easements to preserve the beauty and ecology of Buncombe County. In 2004, the Board conducted an inventory of already conserved lands and established priority areas for future conservation:

- Parcels of 100 acres or more on largely undeveloped mountain ranges,
- Parcels along the French Broad and Swannanoa Rivers,
- Parcels along the Blue Ridge Parkway,
- Working farms,
- Parcels adjacent to protected areas, and
- Ecologically sensitive areas.

**As of April 2013, 358 farms were in the Buncombe County VAD program totaling 26,401 acres.**





**To date, 19 easements have permanently protected 3,911 acres, all since the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update.**

LCAB promotes conservation easements through public education programs, outreach, and annual awards dinners. To date, 19 easements have permanently protected 3,911 acres, all since the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update. The \$5,726,988 County dollars leveraged \$24,240,466 in state and federal grants, private money, and owner donations.

Several local land trusts, Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy, Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, and Riverlink, work closely with the LCAB and Agricultural Advisory Board to locate funding sources and complete easements, often using no County funding. These land trusts have protected over 10,000 additional acres since 2004 using no County dollars. In 2004, when the LCAB conducted its inventory, 57,023 acres were protected by conservation easements or were publicly held. By the end of 2012, a total of 72,079 acres were permanently protected or publicly held lands.

These programs provide many benefits to the general public such as providing a voluntary way to support the conservation of rural communities; supporting each community's rural heritage and economy, and providing local jobs and tax income; maintaining scenic views and tourism-based economic activity; providing fresh food and other local farm products for residents and visitors; supporting clean air and water; providing wildlife habitat; maintaining lower levels of traffic and noise; and minimizing the infrastructure burden on county and local government.



## Hazards

The County updated its All Hazards Mitigation Plan in June 2011. The preparation and adoption of a local Hazard Mitigation Plan is a requirement for receiving many types of mitigation and post-disaster recovery funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the state of North Carolina. The Hazard Mitigation Plan provides general information to the public regarding natural hazards and mitigation practices. In addition, the Plan provides specific risk information for properties in areas throughout the County as well as tools and resources available for reducing these risks.

Hazard mitigation activities are designed to reduce or eliminate risk to people and their property. Activities include not only preparing for the disasters that we all face living in Western North Carolina, but also decreasing or even alleviating the impacts of hazards to avert the potential disaster that is inevitable when there is conflict between the built environment and natural hazards.

In Buncombe County, the hazards that we face, listed in order of their “hazard analysis” (combined index scoring the likelihood, widespread location, and potential impacts) include:

- **Severe winter storms,**
- **Utility failure,**
- **Flooding,**
- **Drought,**
- **Hazardous materials,**

- **Landslides,**
- **Earthquakes,**
- **Wildfire,**
- **Dam failure, and**
- **Tornadoes.**

Within the “vulnerability analysis”, the number of parcels within the County was identified for each of the listed hazards. For the most part, parcels considered the most vulnerable were<sup>37</sup>:

- **Parcels above 3,000 feet in elevation (5,141),**
- **Parcels within the designated 100-year floodplain (6,842), and**
- **Parcels with unstable soils (estimated 7,618).**

The main regulations the County employs to mitigate these risks for new or additional development include the Steep Slope/High Elevation Overlay District and the Protected Ridge Overlay District in our Zoning Ordinance, and the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance.

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### **Hazard mitigation and awareness of the natural characteristics of land throughout our County is integral to our land use planning process, and the development and refinement of our regulations.**

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The first two strategies from the Hazard Mitigation Plan include incorporating hazard mitigation into the planning process, and evaluating and strengthening existing ordinances as needed. Hazard mitigation and awareness of the natural characteristics of



<sup>37</sup> Buncombe County All Hazards Mitigation Plan Update, June 2011, p. 13, 22-25



land throughout our County is integral to our land use planning process, and the development and refinement of our regulations.

In addition to our Hazard Mitigation Plan, other policies and programs have helped reduce the incidence and severity of natural hazards. For instance, floodplains in their natural state can help reduce the number and severity of floods. Throughout the County's floodplains, however, development and farming have sometimes led to the need for mitigation and the re-establishment of floodplain areas. Cost-share programs that help property owners re-establish stream banks and mitigate damage are available on a limited basis through the Soil and Water Conservation District through the State's Eco-Enhancement Program (EEP).

The County's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance regulates development within the 100-year floodplain. The County first adopted the Ordinance in August of 1980 when the County agreed to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). By joining the NFIP, flood insurance and federal assistance became available to the County and its residents.

The Ordinance regulates development within the 100-year floodplain with the purpose of promoting public health, safety, and general welfare and to minimize public and private losses due to flood conditions within flood prone areas. As a condition of continued eligibility in the NFIP, the County must maintain floodplain management regulations that meet the standards of the NFIP regulations. In conjunction with adopting the revised floodplain

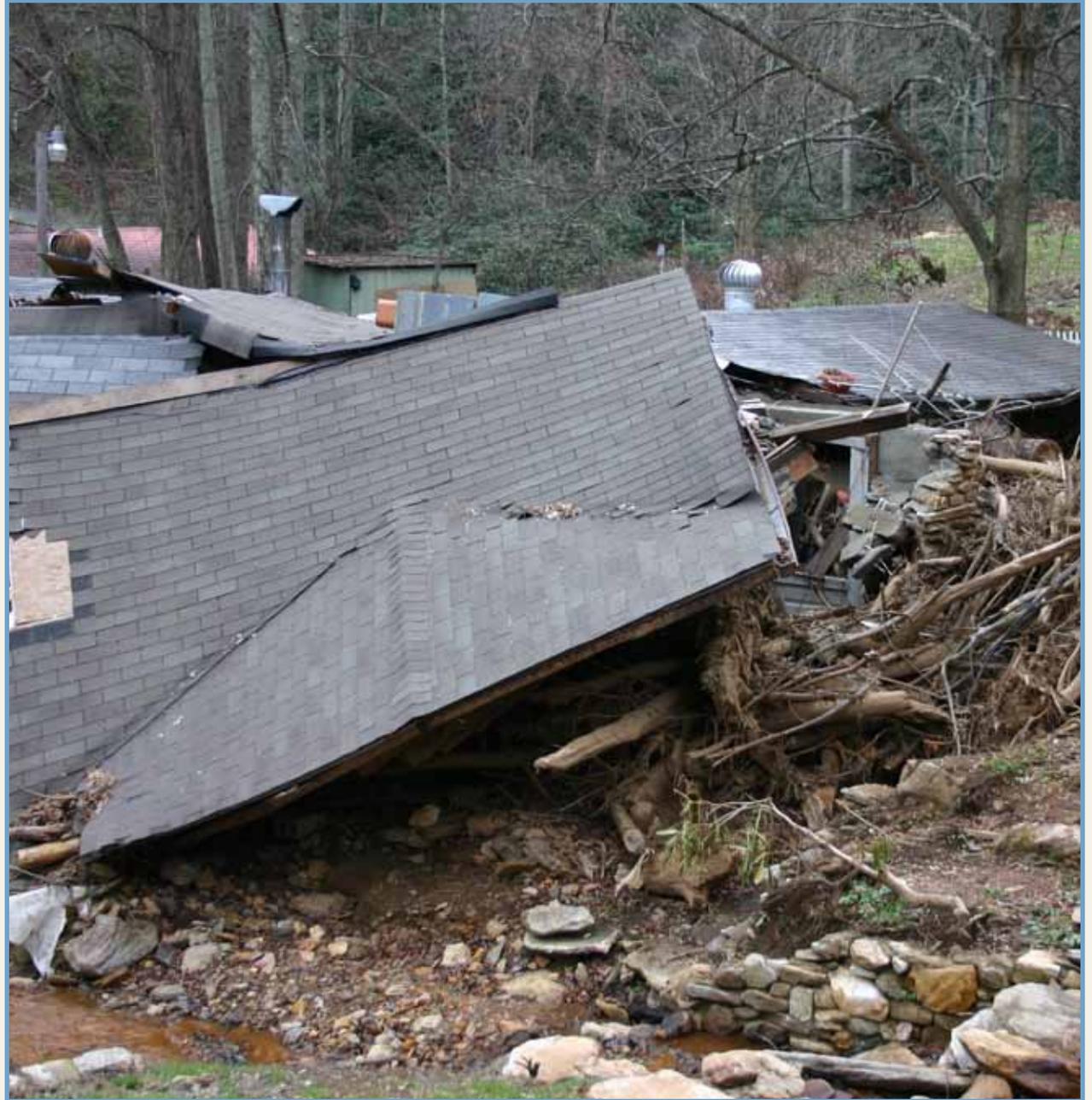
maps that became effective in January, 2010, the County adopted revisions to the Ordinance aimed at improving safety of residents and businesses within and surrounding the 100-year floodplain. Revisions included requiring an additional foot of freeboard (i.e., requiring elevations 2 feet above the base flood elevation) for new structures and utilities within the 100-year floodplain; prohibiting new habitable structures within the floodway; and requiring submission of an elevation certificate for new structures constructed in the 100-year floodplain. Procedurally, when the new maps and revised ordinance were adopted, the Planning Board and subsequently the Board of Commissioners found that these revisions and updates were reasonable, in the public interest, and consistent with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan because they furthered the principles of managing sensitive environmental areas and conservation of critical environmental resources by restricting activities within the 100-year floodplain.

It is anticipated that within this Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update time period, the floodplain maps for Buncombe County will again be updated, and our Ordinance reviewed for compliance with the NFIP requirements and compared with the State's model ordinance for floodplain management. With each new remapping, opportunities become available for communicating risk to persons whose property borders our rivers and streams. Through our public meetings and our established communication channels (television, web, Twitter, e-zines, newspaper, etc.), we will reach many. For those properties within the 100-year floodplain, and especially for those properties that will be

newly placed in the 100-year floodplain through the remapping effort, direct mail notices will be sent, informing residents of the new maps and proposed changes.

The continued goals for floodplain management in the County include the following:

- Effectively communicate risk for persons who are considering buying or building on properties within the 100-year floodplain;
- Locate critical facilities and large scale development outside the 100-year floodplain;
- Protect water resources and ecological systems/ wildlife through the enforcement of the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance;
- Restore the natural resources and function of floodplains by promoting and working in collaboration with stream restoration and hazard mitigation grant programs; and
- Educate the public to help them reduce their environmental footprints by locating businesses and residences outside the 100-year floodplain when possible.





**The Sustainability Plan for Buncombe County is incorporated into this update of the County's Comprehensive Land Use Plan by reference, in an effort to support the government and citizens of Buncombe County in making the best-informed decisions.**



## Sustainability

Adopted in 2009, Buncombe County's first Sustainability Plan was crafted as a response to the environmental and economic imperatives for sustainability. In light of the widespread economic instability occurring around this time, Buncombe County officials sought to mitigate sharp increases in energy costs with the intention of limiting the potential negative impacts on local jobs and economic growth. This plan was primarily focused on achieving a more economical management of the County's resources through the sustainable operation of the County's fleet and facilities. Officials recognized sustainable decision making as "a balance of environmental stewardship, social responsibility and economic vitality."<sup>38</sup> This recognition of the interrelationships that support sustainable decision making was reinforced by the Board of Commissioners' adoption of a County-wide Sustainability Plan on May 15, 2012.

The following objectives, which specifically relate to land use, were adopted as part of the Sustainability Plan, and most directly reflect the mutual focus of the Sustainability and Comprehensive Land Use Plans for Buncombe County:

- Provide affordable and workforce housing funding for new developments in areas served with existing infrastructure.

- Promote an array of transportation options.
- Promote crime prevention through environmental design for residences and businesses.
- Locate critical facilities outside high hazard areas.
- Encourage sustainable land use.
- Encourage land development connected to existing transportation corridors.

Acknowledging that sustainable land use decisions must account for more than the environmental impact of development, however, the Sustainability Plan for Buncombe County was developed around the triple bottom line approach, wherein social, economic, and environmental impacts are given consideration. The plan is intended to guide the efforts of both the local government and the community toward sustainable development. Toward that purpose, the goals and objectives of the Sustainability Plan are made a part of this Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update. With this multifaceted perspective of sustainability in mind, the Board of Commissioners also adopted a Mission Statement to align the work of the County with implementation of the Plan.

### MISSION STATEMENT

**Buncombe County is dedicated to strengthening our quality of life for everyone by taking fiscally and socially responsible actions to ensure the prosperity of future generations. Our collective decisions as citizens, businesses, government, and organizations measurably enrich our environment, our community, and our economy.**

<sup>38</sup> Buncombe County Sustainability Plan (2009)



# Issues and **RECOMMENDATIONS**



# SECTION 6: ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS



## Directing Growth and Development / Topographic Constraints

Buncombe County is renowned for its natural beauty and resources. In order to maintain the quality of our natural environment it is imperative that these issues be studied and addressed. In addition to preserving Buncombe County's natural environment, efforts should be made to direct growth in a manner that maximizes public safety and accounts for the needs of our citizens. The below section discusses existing physical, economic, environmental and aesthetic factors that must be considered with regard to guiding development in Buncombe County.

As the maps within this section detail, a number of physical constraints exist within the mountainous terrain of Buncombe County. Scenic ridges sit atop steep slopes, which direct stormwater toward valley streams and rivers. The potential for the occurrence of natural hazards such as landslides, floods, and forest fires, detailed previously in Section 5, Hazards, must continue to be addressed through planning efforts.

The physical topography which increases the risk of natural hazards in Buncombe County also serves to direct development pressures. The valleys have become thoroughfares for transportation and the extension of public sewer and water infrastructure,

even as they remain those areas most threatened by flooding. Past development patterns have increased landslide risk while also affecting relatively undeveloped viewsheds. While the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update focused on the protection of these steeper areas, it also directed development (as had the previous Plan) toward mapped hubs. In reflecting on this hub model with regard to physical constraints, the modification of development pressures due to the economic downturn, as well as recommendations in other planning efforts, the below recommendations have been developed. As previously discussed in Housing Status and Needs and Sustainability, Section 5, it is recommended that denser development be directed to areas with existing infrastructure. Also, the All Hazards Mitigation Plan identifies parcels above 3,000 feet in elevation and parcels with unstable soils as some of the most vulnerable to hazards. Additionally, as discussed in Section 5, Preservation and Conservation, largely undeveloped mountain ranges have been established as priority areas for conservation.



**Issue:** Under the current land use development approval process (including conditional uses and map amendments), there are few tools available to the Planning Board, Board of Adjustment, and Board of Commissioners to make sound decisions based on the qualitative characteristics of the site. In addition, applicants are provided few tools to be able to effectively

**In addition to preserving Buncombe County's natural environment, efforts should be made to direct growth in a manner that maximizes public safety and accounts for the needs of our citizens.**





articulate the rationale for their application. Given the current application process, staff, applicants, and appointed boards are not given criteria on which to base decisions.



**Recommendation:** The Comprehensive Land Use Plan should create an opportunity to incorporate the concepts and suitability characteristics identified through the land use planning process into administrative approvals. Applicants should be offered an opportunity to present the specific merits of each project or rezoning request based on factors known to influence the suitability of a site for particular uses. The suitability characteristics developed should represent a “best case” scenario while still providing sufficient leeway for applicants to justify their case depending on the specific characteristics of each site. In addition, the characteristics should also allow appointed boards to understand how each site conforms with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update in an objective manner.

**Key Points and Elements:**

- Administrative approvals currently lack any specific connection with land use guidance.
- Applicants must attempt to justify their case on generic criteria which are not tied to specific, tangible characteristics of the land.
- The Board of Adjustment currently only considers community character as it pertains to land use patterns and does not have a mechanism to evaluate the compatibility of projects with land qualities.

- The subjective nature of applications creates situations where appointed boards lack any concrete information upon which to base their conclusions.

The following chart and maps are presented in order to evaluate appropriateness of various development types for specific sites. The chart shown in Figure 20 provides categories of development that can be used to generalize the type of development being proposed. In utilizing the chart, an applicant must understand the conditions found on the property and how those conditions align with the recommendations for the type of development proposed. The maps (Figures 21 - 27) give a broad overview of each of these conditions throughout the County; and more detailed information at a parcel level will be made available through GIS. While the chart makes recommendations for the types of conditions expected within each category of development, the applicant should articulate how their development conforms to those conditions. In cases where the on-site conditions deviate from the recommendations in the chart, the applicant should explain the unique factors of the site that make the proposed development compatible or provide reasonable mitigation for any circumstances where the recommendations cannot be achieved.

	Reasonable proximity to major transportation corridors	Reasonable proximity to infrastructure (combined water/ sewer service area)	Outside of steep slope areas (25% +)	Outside of high elevations (2500' +)	Outside of moderate and high slope stability hazards	Outside of flood hazard areas	Separation from low-density residential uses
— Not Required 👍 Suggested ★ Highly Suggested							
<b>RESIDENTIAL</b>							
Low-Density Residential	—	—	—	—	—	★	N/A
Single-Family/Duplex	👍	👍	👍	👍	★	★	N/A
Multi-Family	★	★	👍	👍	★	★	👍
<b>PLANNED COMMUNITY OR DEVELOPMENT</b>							
Mixed Use Development	★	★	★	★	★	👍	👍
Infill/ Higher Density	👍	★	★	★	★	★	—
Large Lot/Lower Density	👍	👍	👍	👍	★	★	N/A
Commercial/Industrial	★	★	★	★	★	★	★
<b>RECREATIONAL</b>							
Resort	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	★	—
Conference Centers	👍	👍	👍	👍	👍	★	—
Outdoor Recreation	—	—	—	—	—	👍	★
<b>OTHER</b>							
Institutional	★	★	★	★	★	👍	👍
Public Service	★	★	★	★	★	👍	👍
<b>COMMERCIAL</b>							
Neighborhood-Scale Commercial	👍	👍	★	★	★	👍	👍
Moderate Commercial	★	★	★	★	★	👍	★
Intense Commercial	★	★	★	★	★	👍	★
<b>INDUSTRIAL</b>							
Manufacturing	★	★	★	★	★	👍	👍
Mining/Extracting/Refining	★	★	★	★	★	👍	★
Other Intense Uses	👍	👍	★	★	★	👍	★

Figure 20. Appropriate Development Types

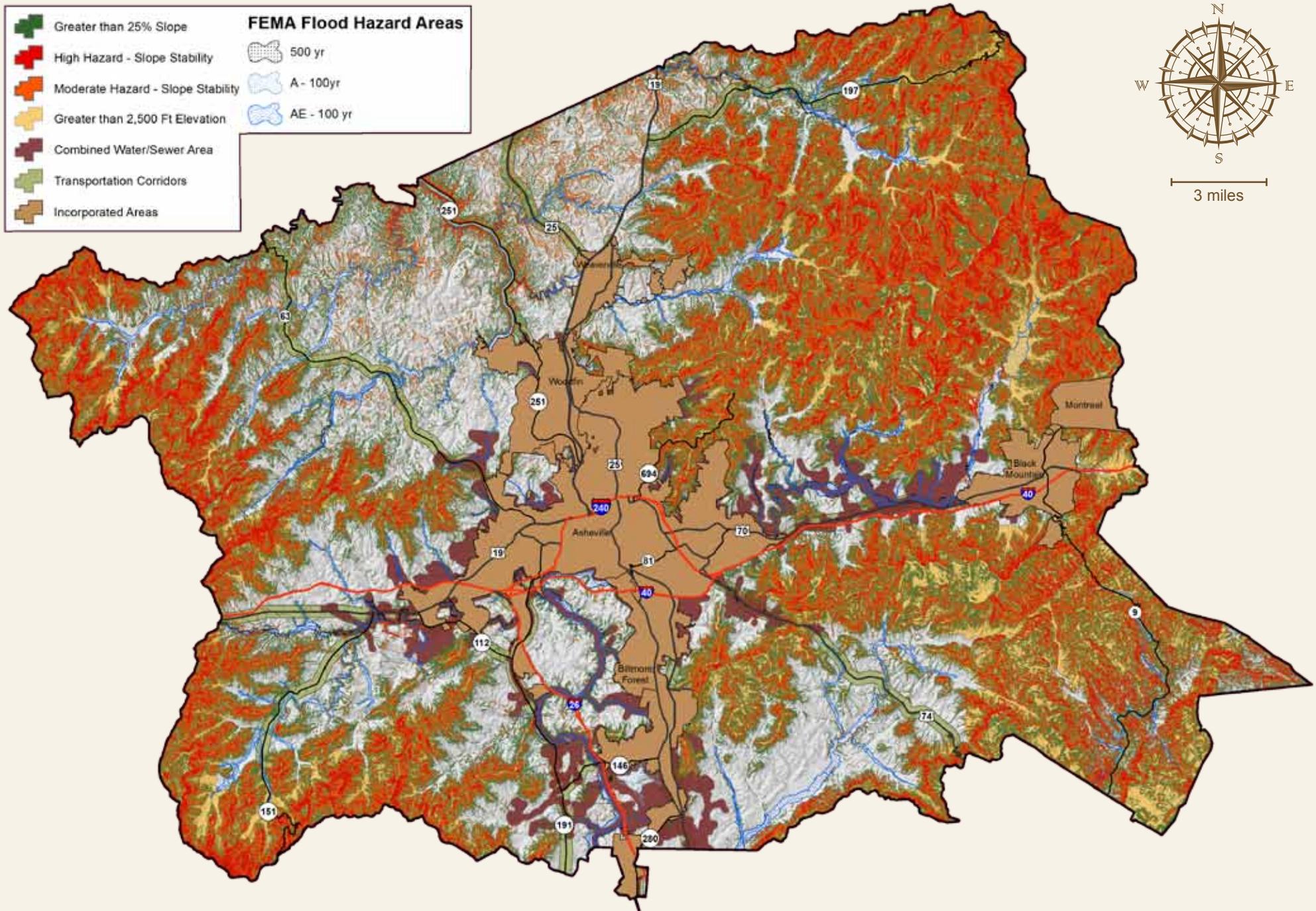


Figure 21. Land Use Constraints – Combined Map

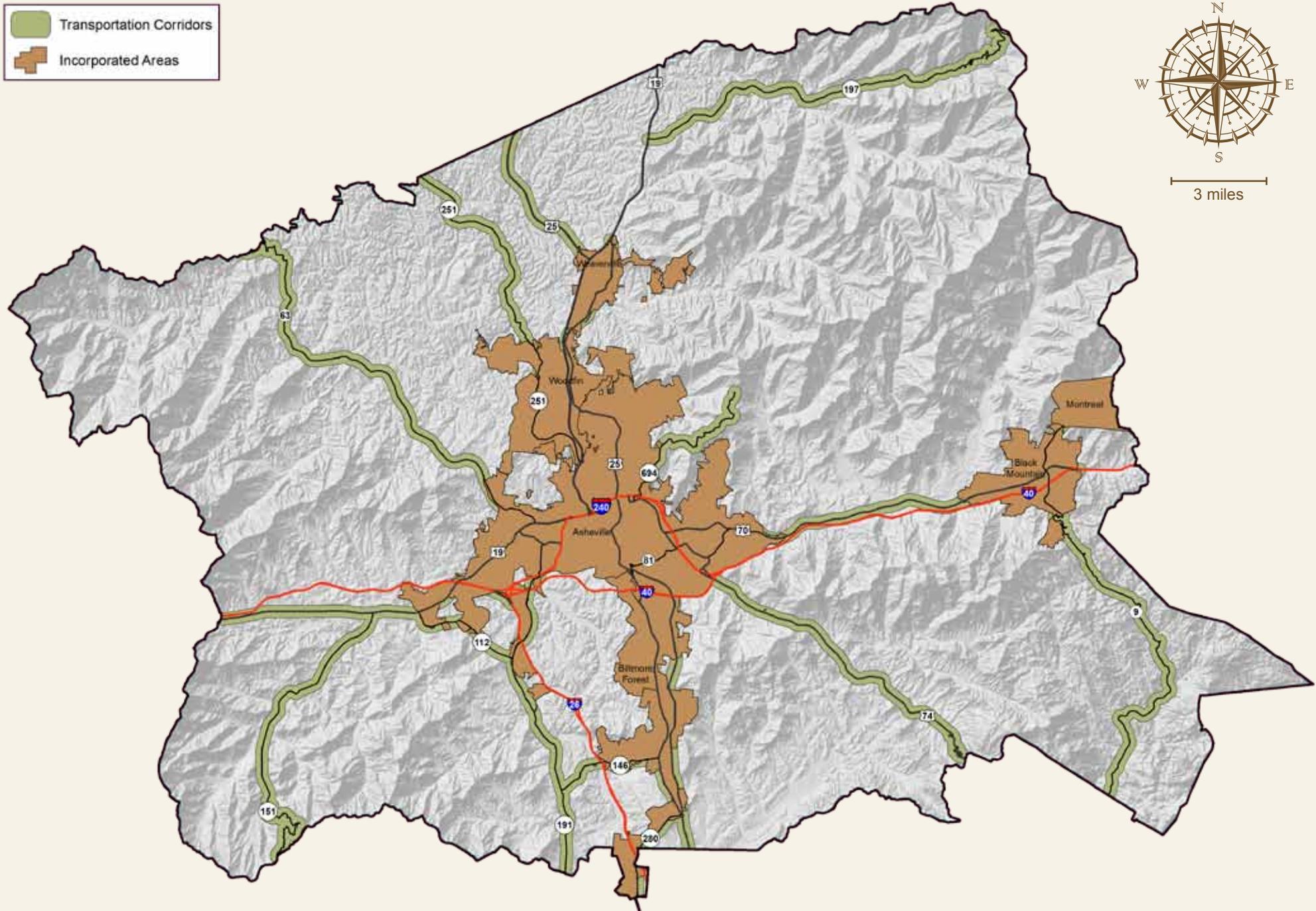


Figure 22. Land Use Constraints – Transportation Corridors

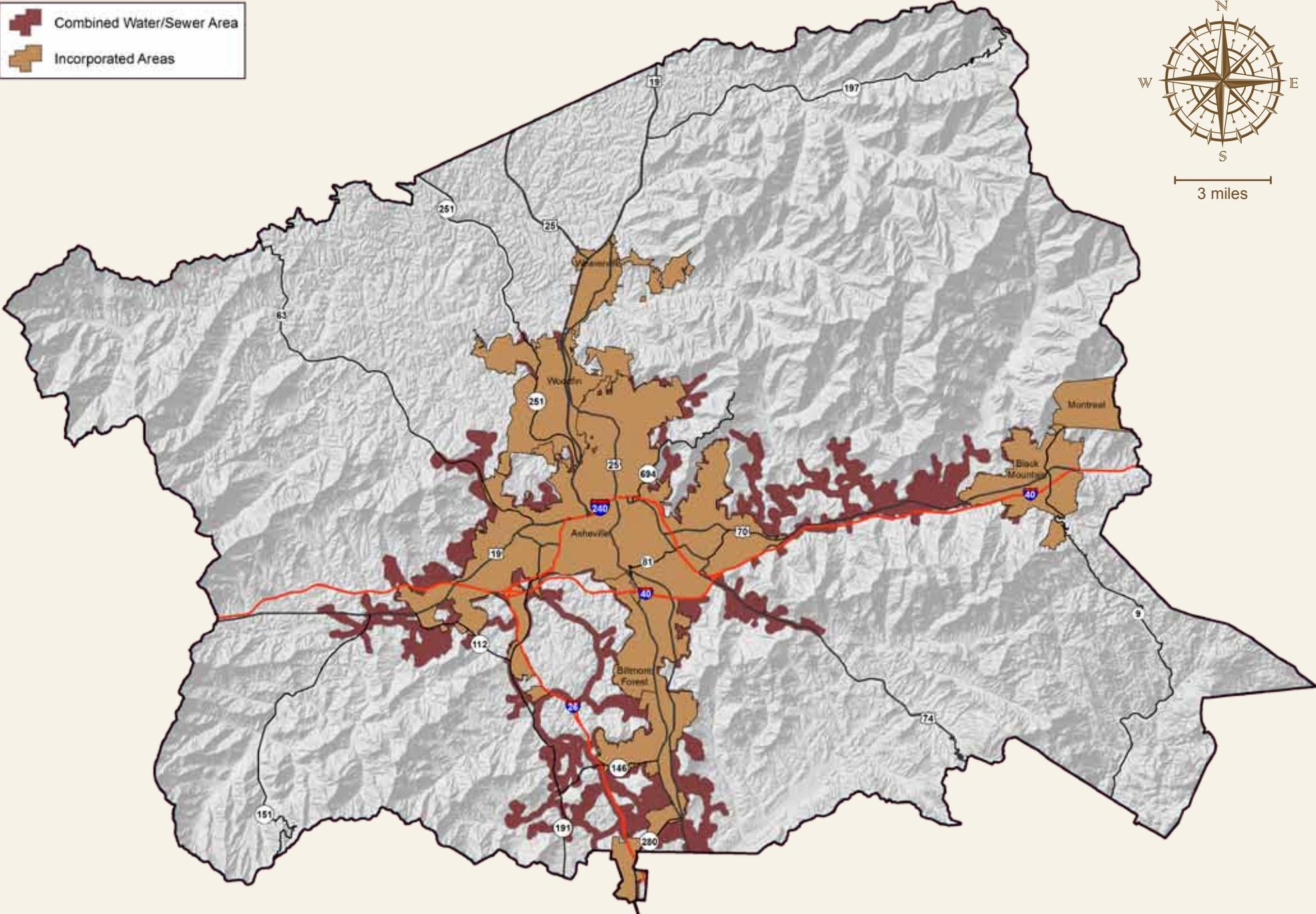


Figure 23. Land Use Constraints – Combined Water/Sewer Area

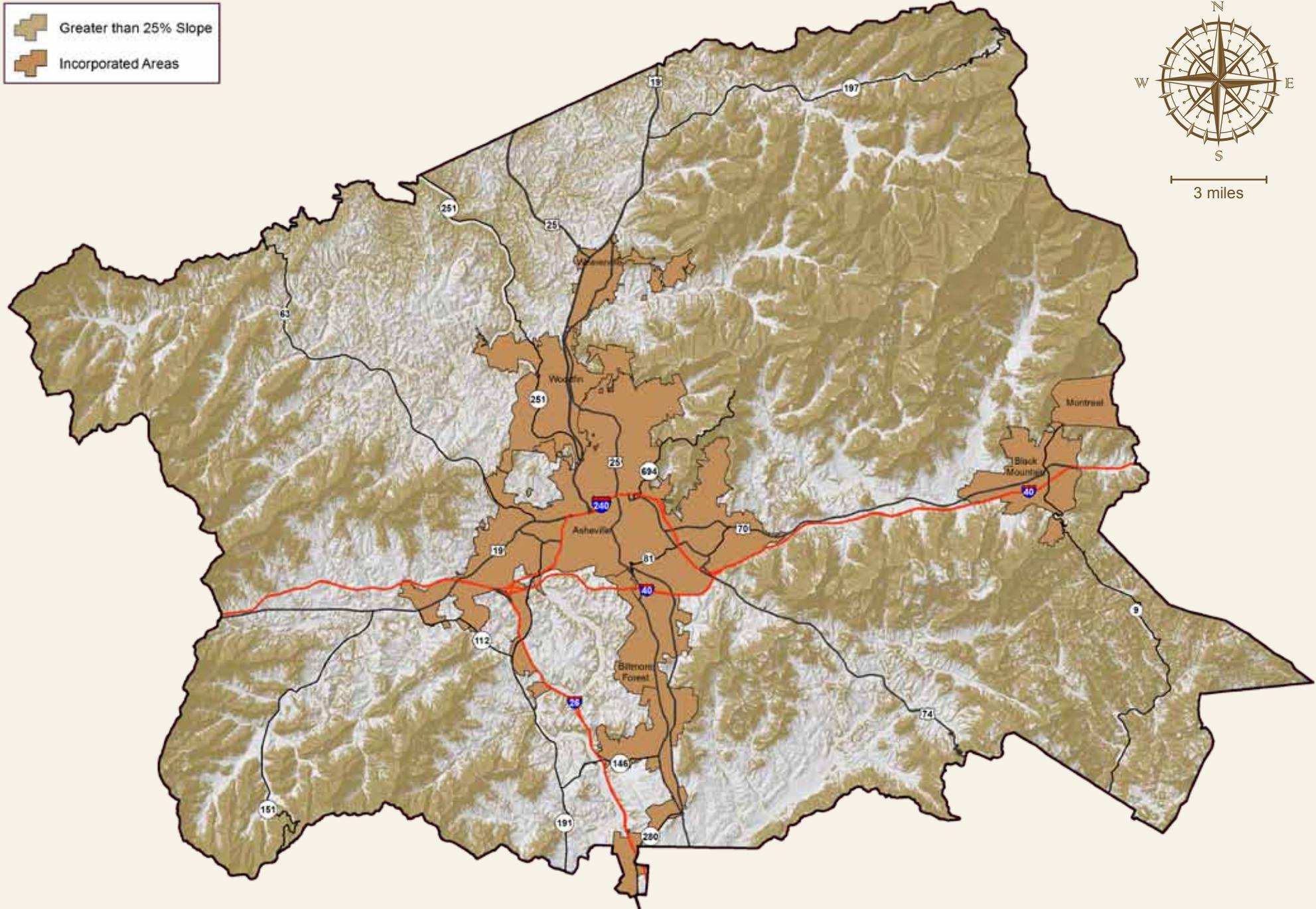


Figure 24. Land Use Constraints – Steep Slope Areas

Greater than 2,500 Ft Elevation  
Incorporated Areas

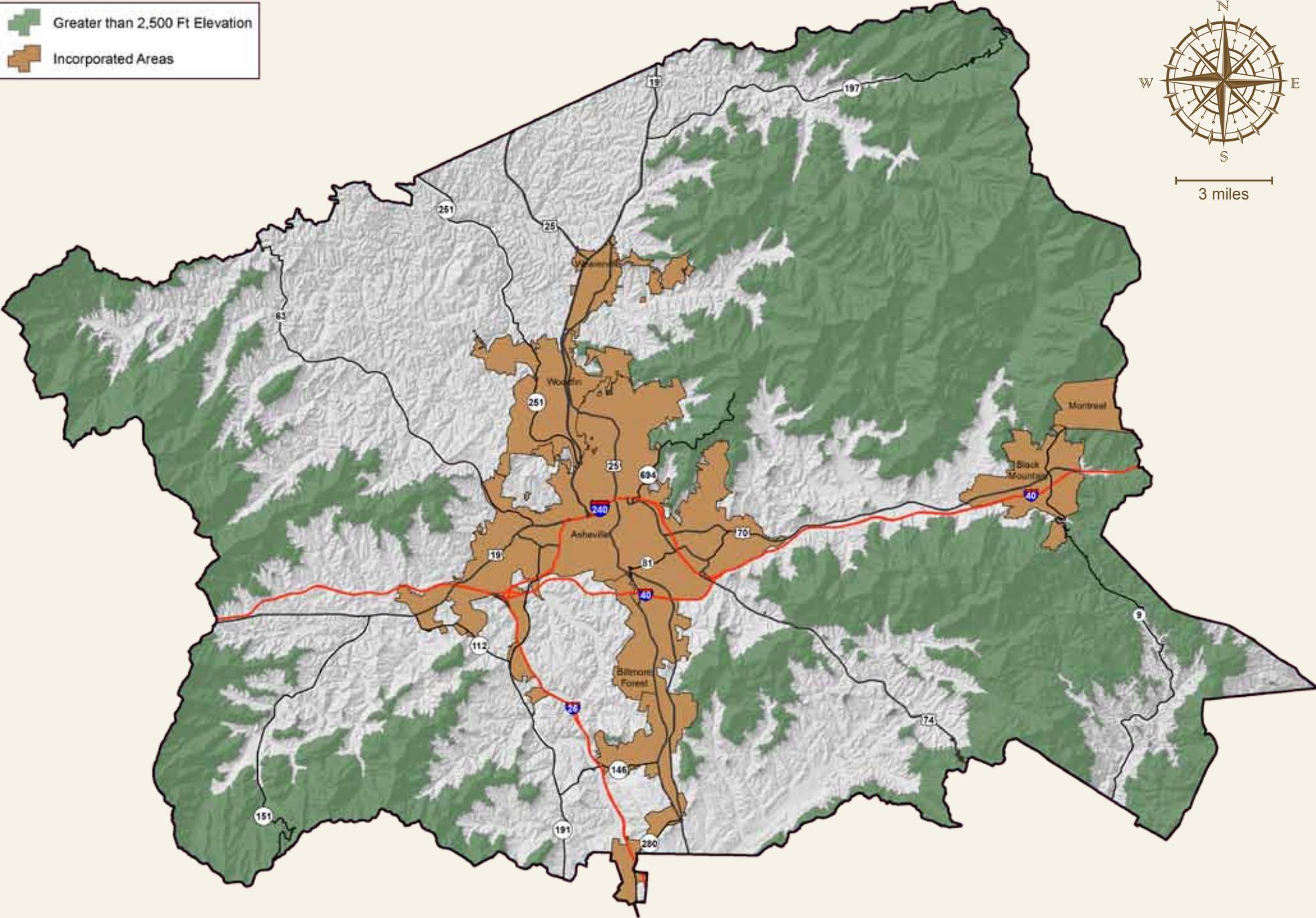
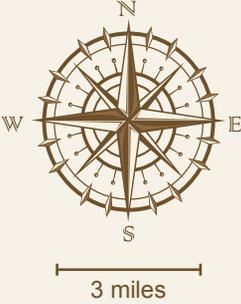


Figure 25. Land Use Constraints – High Elevation Areas

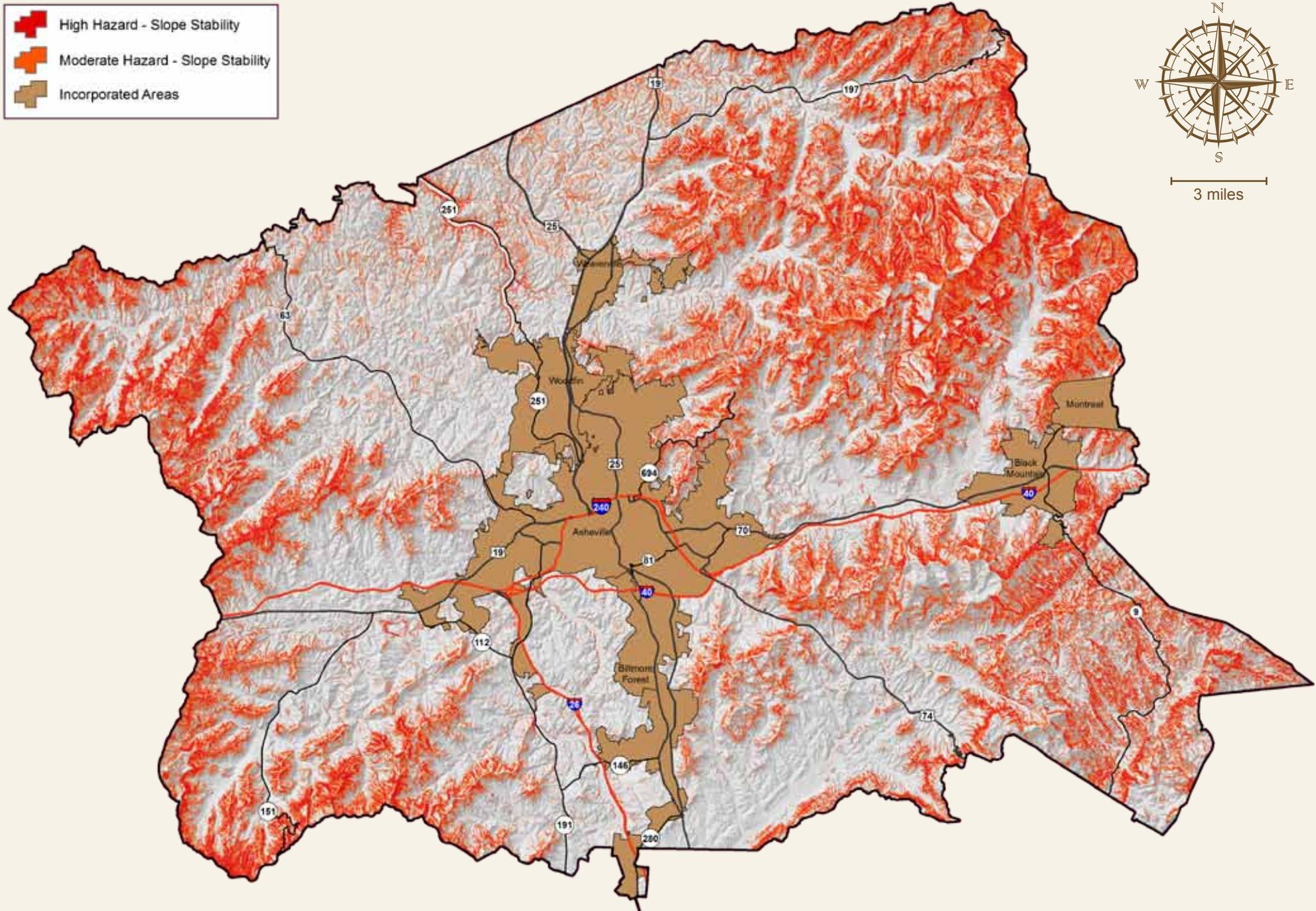


Figure 26. Land Use Constraints – High and Moderate Slope Hazard Areas

**FEMA Flood Hazard Areas**

- 500 yr
- A - 100yr
- AE - 100 yr
- Incorporated Areas

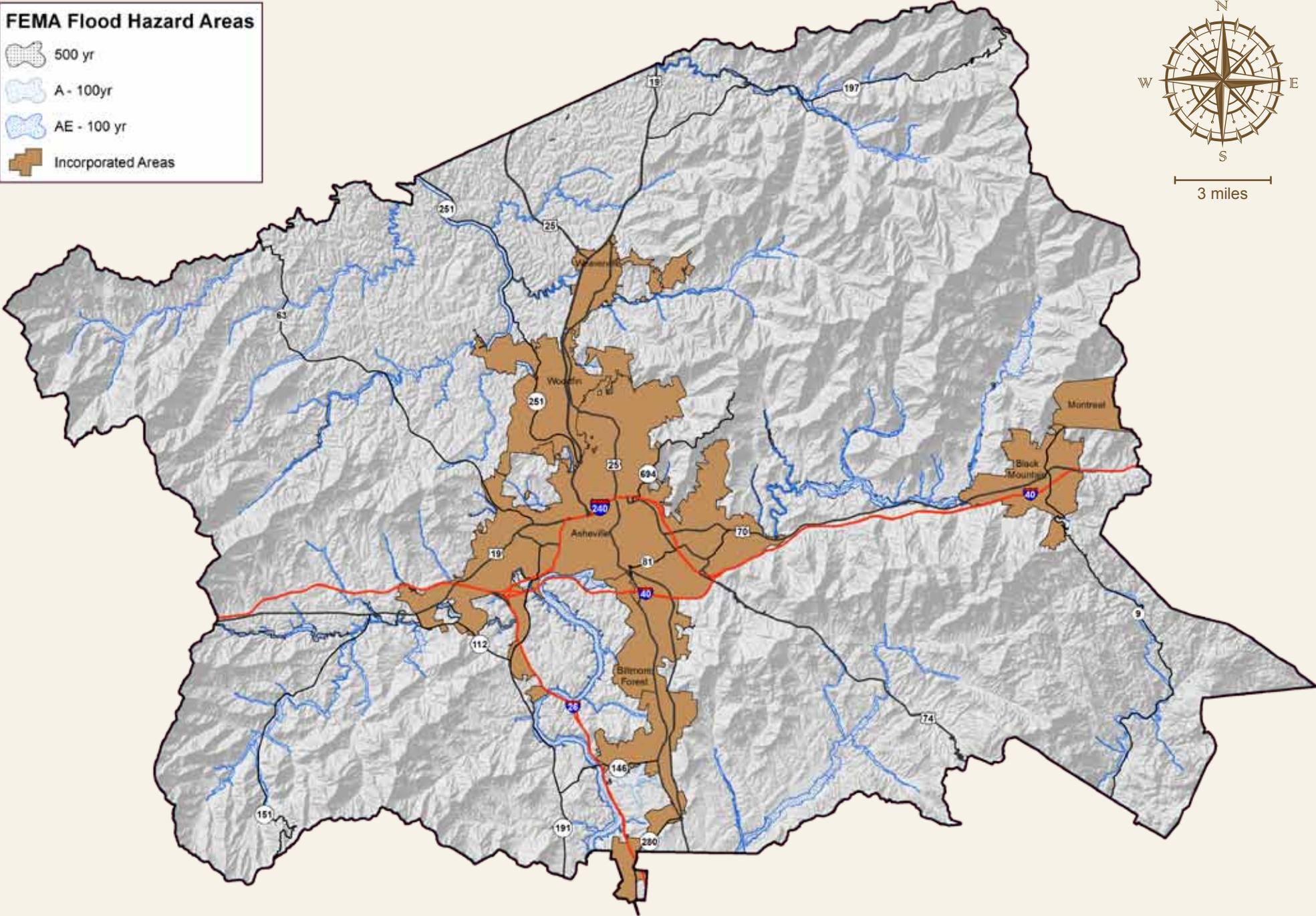
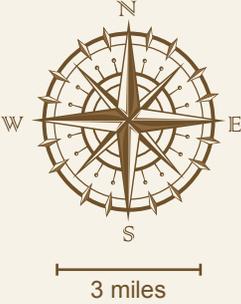


Figure 27. Land Use Constraints – Flood Hazard Areas

## Commercial and Institutional Uses

This section provides clarification to existing land use regulations in order to provide further clarification and guidance regarding the districts originally proposed in the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update.

### Institutional Uses

While one of the recommended zoning classifications of the 2006 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update was applying a major institutional district, this particular recommendation was never fully implemented. Most large institutional uses in the County were zoned Public Service District (PS) when County-wide zoning was implemented. This Plan Update provides a chance for clarification on this issue.

The original recommendation for a major institutional zoning district proposed those parcels 100 acres or over and controlled by a single entity be zoned major institutional. However, the Buncombe County Zoning Ordinance indicates that the currently existing PS District is intended to be a district that includes the following: governmentally owned properties, schools and large college properties, recreation parks and facilities, emergency services, community clubs, and conference centers with mixed uses which may include housing, hotels, retail shops, religious or secular retreats, and associated accessory uses. It also states that these uses should currently have public water and sewer services available or have a provision for internal supply of appropriate utilities.

The PS District fulfills a need in the County for classification of public facilities, organizations, and non-profits such as fire stations, governmental

buildings, and schools. However, it does not adequately address the large institutional uses specific to the County which have unique land use circumstances. Many of these larger institutional land uses require a wider range of permitted uses and flexibility in planning. In addition, such large land uses often engage in master planning and other long term efforts which are not accounted for under the current regulations. Further clarification will be discussed later in the Resort District section. The proposed Resort District will address those large institutional uses that have unique land use issues such as the Billy Graham Training Center, Blue Ridge Assembly, The Biltmore Estate, and Ridgecrest.

### Distinction between CS and EMP

While the Commercial Service (CS) and Employment (EMP) Districts were part of the original Limestone zoning, none of the previous versions of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan have adequately addressed the differences between these two districts.

The EMP District was primarily intended to be a district comprised of industrial and office development; in essence, a district where the County's employers are located. As retail use is allowed as a conditional use within this District, a large amount of the EMP District has been developed as commercial retail centers. The CS District was primarily intended to provide areas for clustered commercial development, and to encourage the concentration of commercial activities near major traffic arteries.

In the future, as commercial, industrial, and office development increases, the County should pay close attention to the separation between these uses and

existing housing, in order to provide residents with protection from the disturbances associated with large scale commercial, industrial, and office development. Additionally it should be recognized that while the EMP District is primarily intended for office and industrial uses, small scale retail uses as part of a larger manufacturing, industrial, or office development may be appropriate.





## Current Constraints and Limitations

With the shifting real estate market and the aging of the Buncombe County population<sup>39</sup>, it has become evident that several limitations currently applied to the development of structures and land may need to be revised. These issues and opportunities for remedy are discussed below.

### Height



**Issue:** Several recent cases have highlighted issues regarding limitations in height within commercially-oriented zoning districts. The current Zoning Ordinance limits height to 90' or less in each of the current commercial districts. Since the adoption of County-wide zoning, several applications have been received for variances within commercial districts for both commercial buildings and for structures associated with the urban environment (such as telecommunication towers). Currently, the only avenue for adjusting height limitations within these commercial districts is the variance process. The variance process is not ideal for these situations as it does not allow the board the flexibility to impose conditions related specifically to increases in height.



**Recommendation:** Given that there is a demand for structures which exceed the current height limitations in commercial districts, commercial districts should allow a specific height by right, while requests for additional height would be regulated as a Planned Unit Development/Conditional Use Permit. This shift should apply only to commercially-focused zoning designations. In addition, heights which require a Planned Unit Development/Conditional Use Permit should be subject to specific conditions which protect residential properties, viewsheds, transportation corridors, and regulated airspace. Use of the Planned Unit Development/Conditional Use Permit will allow the Board of Adjustment to specifically address the merits of each site without requiring the applicant to prove a hardship, which is difficult to do in relation to height standards.

### Key Points and Elements:

- Variances are currently used to handle requests for height and in this context it is very difficult to prove the required hardship.
- Allowing height to be considered under the conditional use process provides more flexibility in design while also allowing for contextual decision-making that protects the community.

<sup>39</sup>The current population age cohorts are discussed in Section 3 of this Plan Update.

### Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Requirements



**Issue:** In cases of building modification or retrofits which are necessary to accommodate the Americans with Disability Act, land use policies may inhibit timely interventions at a reasonable cost. The presence of land use restrictions applicable to ADA retrofits may deter such projects.



**Recommendation:** Modify current land use policies to allow for consideration of potential exemptions and variances as they relate to the Americans with Disability Act. Under this recommendation, staff would be granted authority to make decisions regarding ADA specific retrofits which do not comply with current land use policies. From a general perspective, this would expedite timelines for approvals and lower the cost of ADA retrofits. While staff would have discretion to make such decisions there should still be an opportunity to defer decisions to the appropriate administrative body if the decision involves a larger community impact or if the need for the retrofit is unclear.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Currently such retrofits must go through the standard variance process. The applicant must submit an application at least 30 days in advance of the public hearing and is responsible for paying appropriate fees.
- Many facilities were designed in such a manner that such retrofits would create potential compliance issues with the Zoning Ordinance.
- Staff should retain the ability to defer the issue to a higher-level administrative body if the decision cannot be clearly made due to mitigating factors or community impact.
- “Government bodies are required to make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability. Reasonable modifications can include modifications to local laws, ordinances, and regulations that adversely impact people with disabilities.”<sup>40</sup>
- This policy would allow for streamlined use of infill properties which may help in curbing issues of sprawl.



<sup>40</sup><http://www.ada.gov/comprob.html>.

**Development patterns appear to indicate that reductions in setbacks and lot size are necessary to promote the availability of workforce and affordable housing.**



### Dimensional Requirements



**Issue:** Since the adoption of County-wide zoning, the planning department has received numerous requests for reductions in setbacks and lot size through the variance process. In addition, development patterns appear to indicate that reductions in setbacks and lot size are necessary to promote the availability of workforce and affordable housing. As discussed in Section 5, Housing Status and Needs, the Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan points out that the number of affordable homes on the market has declined steadily. The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice identified several strategies including the promotion of high density affordable housing as an alternative to manufactured home parks, increase access to housing in areas of high opportunity, and review land use policy and zoning as potential barriers for affordable and special needs housing. Additionally, allowing for smaller lot sizes in areas where infrastructure is available will decrease development pressures in more rural areas.

The current lot size parameters (allowing for reduction in lot sizes in areas where utilities are available) do not align with realistic infrastructure requirements. Dramatic lot size reductions are allowed on lots where public water is available and where public water and sewer are available, however, such reductions are not allowed in scenarios where only public sewer is available. In areas where both public water and public sewer are available, the minimum lot size and setbacks are more stringent than one would expect.



**Recommendation:** Efforts should be made to align lot sizes to the surrounding land use context including the availability of infrastructure. In areas where public sewer is not available, lot size should be adjusted to allow adequate space for septic facilities. Setbacks should be adjusted to allow for greater flexibility in areas with access to urban infrastructure. Both setbacks and lot size should be adjusted to more accurately reflect the density limitations provided in each district.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Currently setbacks and lot sizes do not align with patterns of development.
- Setbacks, lot size, and maximum densities are divergent under the current ordinances.
- In areas where public sewer is unavailable, lots size do not provide adequate space for septic fields and septic repair fields.

### HUD Labeled Manufactured Homes



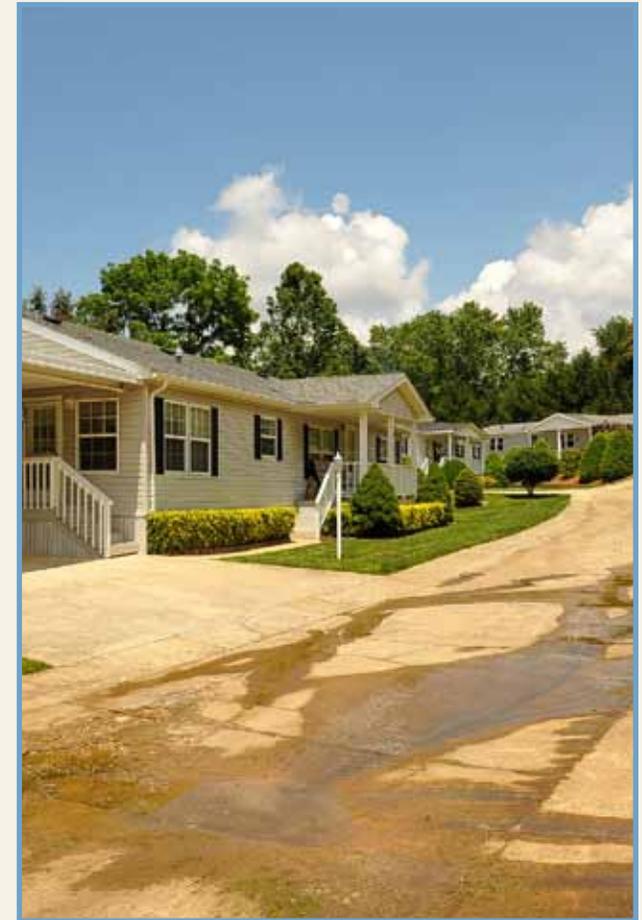
**Issue:** Manufactured housing is currently allowed within four zoning districts (Open Use, R-3 Residential, Residential Low Density, and Employment) within Buncombe County. In the districts where manufactured homes are allowed, only two are specifically residential districts (Open Use and Employment allow for both commercial and residential uses). The Open Use District is typically located outside of major transportation corridors and does not provide access to public utilities. The Residential Low Density District allows manufactured homes, but requires a minimum lot size of one acre. The R-3 Residential District allows manufactured homes and manufactured home parks. The possibility of allowing manufactured home parks to be established has generated substantial public opposition when requests to have property rezoned to the R-3 District have been heard. The current zoning scenario within Buncombe County does not allow for flexibility in the placement of manufactured homes and places limitations on where manufactured homes can be placed.



**Recommendation:** In unison with other refinements to the zoning districts, the Zoning Ordinance should be modified to create a clear separation between manufactured homes and manufactured home parks within residential districts which are not constrained by environmental factors. Separating manufactured homes and manufactured home parks would reduce opposition in rezoning requests and would allow such requests to better align with the character of existing neighborhoods. In addition to these efforts, options to allow manufactured homes to be placed in a more flexible way (while still respecting the character of the surrounding neighborhood) should be investigated.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Manufactured homes are allowed within a limited number of districts.
- The association between manufactured homes and manufactured home parks creates opposition during public hearings.





### Residential Construction Standards



**Issue:** Since the adoption of zoning in Buncombe County, the County has received a number of inquiries and complaints regarding non-standard structures (i.e. those not certified as HUD labeled manufactured housing or built to State Building Code) being utilized as permanent single-family dwellings. The Zoning Ordinance does not directly codify the requirements for a structure or vehicle to be utilized as a single-family residence. The use of non-standard structures as single-family housing is potentially detrimental to property values and creates issues of compliance with regard to other County regulations.



**Recommendation:** Buncombe County should adopt a policy that defines a permanent single family dwelling as any structure (or vehicle) which is utilized as a place of dwelling for more than 180 days each calendar year. Any structure or vehicle which is used in a permanent capacity should adhere to all applicable sections of North Carolina Building Code or should have the appropriate certifications for a HUD labeled manufactured home. Structures which are not inspected as permanent single-family dwellings should be road ready in order to be utilized as a temporary dwelling. Policies should be implemented to ensure that temporary dwellings are utilized in a manner which protects property values while allowing for recreational uses of land. Temporary dwellings should be allowed in rural jurisdictions and in areas that allow for public recreational uses of property. The Zoning Ordinance should prohibit those dwellings which cannot be classified as permanent single-family dwellings or temporary single family dwellings (with appropriate vehicular registrations) with the exception of tents or other similar amenities that are temporary and incidental to outdoor recreation.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Current policies do not provide clear direction in terms of how temporary dwellings should be addressed.
- Current lapses in policies make it possible for individuals to establish a residence without any life safety inspections.
- There have been a number of efforts to circumvent Building Code requirements in favor of creating low-cost housing scenarios which can be potentially disruptive to area property values.
- The use of HUD standards and NC Building Code to regulate housing provides a clear and equitable regulatory framework. Non-standard housing is not regulated by any discernible standard in most cases or is self-regulated by the industry.
- Non-standard housing has been found which is unregulated by either Building Code or Environmental Health regulations. Such sites pose risk to public health and safety and do little to protect surrounding property values.

### Variety in Community Structures



**Issue:** Economic difficulties associated with a constrained real estate environment as well as desire for higher levels of community integration have caused a demand for housing models such as “cohousing” and “intentional communities” to emerge. These models allow for multiple families or individuals to establish both shared housing and shared communities with common infrastructure. The current land use regulations may pose limitations on such communities thus restricting potential opportunities for senior populations, agricultural communities, or other communities established around a specific purpose.



**Recommendation:** Buncombe County should work to integrate concepts from cohousing and intentional community models in order to allow for more flexibility in residential options. Such housing models should be allowed under current multi-family provisions within the Zoning Ordinance and modifications to relevant land use policies should be made to allow for more flexible housing options. This flexibility should not circumvent other existing land use policies related to densities, conditional use standards, etc. In addition, these provisions for cohousing and intentional communities should remain separate from standards designed for those living in group homes or other assisted living type facilities.

**Key Points and Elements:**

- Both cohousing and intentional community scenarios occupy a number of different development types. In both scenarios there are shared facilities and unique design parameters that may function outside of our current codes.
- With respect to intentional communities, such as senior housing, the relationships between mixed-uses and the Permitted Use Table is not altogether clear. This recommendation would clarify those relationships.



**Buncombe County should work to integrate concepts from cohousing and intentional community models in order to allow for more flexibility in residential options.**





## Zoning Enhancements

As the Comprehensive Land Use Plan is the basis for land use regulation in the form of zoning, it is imperative that the Plan Update evaluate the successes and shortcomings of our current zoning regulations, especially given their relatively recent application County-wide. The below issues and opportunities deal specifically with the development of additional districts, and incorporate recommendations for both those districts which may be currently relevant (though not yet addressed in the Zoning Ordinance) and those which may become necessary in the coming years.

Due to recent legislation enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly, additional areas have come under the zoning jurisdiction of Buncombe County. Especially where these areas were previously zoned by municipalities, it is important to continue to provide similar detailed zoning in these areas. Though some of these areas may fall outside of the Primary MSD District Boundary, continuity in expectations and regulation should be provided. Also, as previously mentioned, with the consolidation of local water and sewer infrastructure development under one authority, we expect that these service district boundaries may be modified in the near future.

## Resort District



**Issue:** Buncombe County is situated in a unique natural environment which makes it attractive to resorts (including seasonal camps) as well as large scale conference centers and recreation facilities. Current land use policies do not address the unique characteristics of large-scale resort and conference center type facilities. The disjunction between the current zoning designations of these facilities imposes limitations on expansions and improvements. In addition, the current land use policies fail to adequately accommodate the uses which occur on these facilities as well as the unique patterns of development.



**Recommendation:** A Resort/Conference Center Zoning District should be developed in order to accommodate large-scale resort, retreat, or conference facilities. This District should be targeted toward those facilities which are 100 acres and more (referring to the total collection of adjacent properties) and managed through a common entity. The District should account for the unique needs of conference centers and resorts providing flexibility while still ensuring the protection of surrounding residential properties.

### Key Points and Elements:

- Many of our current conference centers are zoned inappropriately (i.e. residential dwellings).
- While the Public Service District could be applied to such facilities, it does not provide the necessary distinction between an institutional-type use and a resort/conference center type use.
- The current zoning districts have created difficulties in addressing the needs of expansions for our current conference centers and resorts.

### Airport Overlay District



**Issue:** In an effort to ensure the continued safe operation of the Asheville Regional Airport and to ensure that the Airport is capable of meeting its obligations under Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) Part 77, an overlay district should be established in accordance with FAR Part 77.

Federal Aviation Regulations Part 77 establishes standards and notification requirements for objects affecting navigable airspace. This notification serves as the basis for:

- Evaluating the effect of the construction or alteration on operating procedures;
- Determining the potential hazardous effect of the proposed construction on air navigation;
- Identifying mitigating measures to enhance safe air navigation; and
- Charting of new objects.
- Notification allows the FAA to identify potential aeronautical hazards in advance thus preventing or minimizing the adverse impacts to the safe and efficient use of navigable airspace.

Airports that have received federal funds are obligated by grant assurance to identify and mitigate hazards to navigable airspace at their airport.

It is prudent to protect the airspace around the airport to prevent loss of existing approaches or other negative impacts affecting utilization of the airport. It is also prudent for property owners to understand current flight patterns and avoid potential conflicts during development.



**Recommendation:** Buncombe County should adopt a Zoning Overlay District which establishes the limitations required for compliance with FAR Part 77. This Overlay District should be adopted alongside jurisdictions which also contain portions of the area controlled through FAR Part 77 in

order to create uniformity.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Construction or alteration of objects on or around airports can have an adverse impact to operations at the airport.
- Construction of objects may result in an increase to approach minimums to runways.
- The location of constructed objects may impact runway protection zones, safety areas, object free areas and obstacle free zones.
- The transmitting frequency of the proposed facility could impact the proper operation of navigational aid facilities at the airport.





### Airport Industrial District



**Issue:** Buncombe County has recently assumed jurisdiction for land use regulations over the Asheville Regional Airport and a number of the surrounding properties. The current zoning designation of the airport (Public Service District) is inappropriate for the operation of an airport and related facilities. In addition, businesses in the area surrounding the airport are offered little flexibility to apply for necessary land use policy changes which would support operations incidental to aeronautical facilities and related industries. These limitations potentially hamper airport facility expansion and economic development opportunities.



**Recommendation:** Buncombe County should provide an Airport Industrial District which accounts for the land use needs of the Asheville Regional Airport, while allowing industrial and commercial uses which are related to the operation of an airport. This District should support Federal Aviation Association limitations on residential housing, which would provide a clear separation between airport operations and new residential development.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- The current zoning of the airport places the entire airport in a status of a legal nonconforming use. This status places certain constraints on future expansions of the airport.
- The current zoning classifications do not contain applicable uses or language that can address aeronautic specific issues.
- The current zoning does not account for the specific requirements of the Federal Aviation Administration in ensuring that residential properties are appropriately protected from airport land use impacts.
- The current land use policies do not account for unique opportunities in terms of aviation specific industries or air hub concepts.

## Planned Unit Developments

### Affordable/Workforce Housing Planned Unit Development



**Issue:** In the context of development and housing availability within Buncombe County, there is a distinct need for housing units to be made available for individuals and families that fall within the income ranges associated with affordable and workforce housing needs. The current land use ordinances lack any incentive to develop such housing. While there are a number of programs available to provide financial incentives for such housing to be developed, these incentives in isolation do not provide an adequate mechanism to allow affordable and workforce housing projects to be economically viable in comparison to market rate housing. Developers targeting those eligible for affordable and workforce housing are not provided tools which enable them to meet the objectives for the availability of such housing. As discussed in Section 5, Housing Status and Needs, the Consolidated Strategic Housing and Community Development Plan identified several priorities, including to coordinate housing development with transportation, jobs, and services and make efficient use of available land and infrastructure by exploring strategies including encouraging higher density construction near transit corridors and exploring density bonuses as a use-by-right for affordable housing development, as well as other land-use incentives. The Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice also identified several strategies including incentivizing affordable housing; increasing access to housing in areas of high opportunity; and expanding access to affordable transportation.

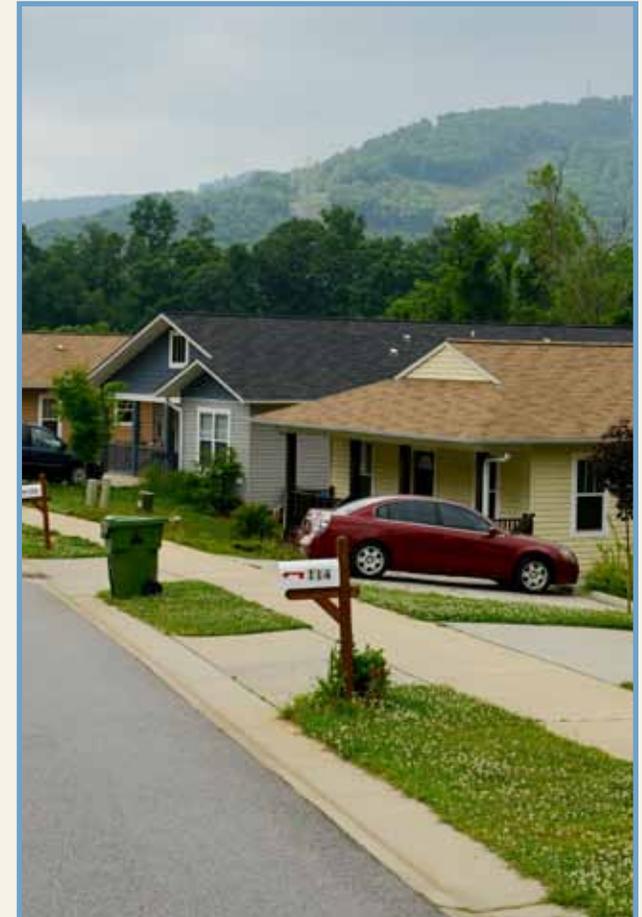


**Recommendation:** A targeted effort should be made through the Planned Unit Development process to create incentives for workforce and affordable housing projects. Such an Affordable/Workforce Housing Planned Unit Development should provide mechanisms to allow for appropriate increases in density in exchange for guarantees that units will remain affordable for a determined period of time. The Affordable/Workforce Housing Planned Unit Development should require non-market rate units to be of similar quality in both construction and aesthetics as market rate units. Due to the increases in allowed densities, the Affordable/Workforce Housing Planned Unit Development should be focused in areas with adequate access to infrastructure and transportation facilities.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Developers currently experience prohibitive financial constraints in attempting to offer dwelling units which meet the needs of affordable and workforce housing families.
- The County does not currently provide regulatory incentives for such projects.
- The need for affordable and workforce housing continues to expand in Buncombe County.

**The Affordable/Workforce Housing Planned Unit Development should be focused in areas with adequate access to infrastructure and transportation facilities.**





### Residential Planned Unit Development



**Issue:** Under Buncombe County's current Zoning Ordinance, applicants are only provided a single type of Planned Unit Development (PUD) as an option to develop complex residential or commercial sites. Due to the lack of a tailored process, each applicant must undergo the same process regardless of the nature of their development. The generic process which is currently in use results in applications that may not address the specific concerns associated with each type of development. In the case of residential development, the threshold for a Planned Unit Development may not align with community impacts, in that Planned Unit Developments currently evaluate every category of development under identical criteria regardless of intensity or density.



**Recommendation:** In order to facilitate a better tailored process, a new class of Planned Unit Developments should be created specifically associated with residential development. This Planned Unit Development should be designed to capture proposed land uses which are solely residential in character and which create a significant community impact to trigger a higher level of review (beyond the staff level).

#### Key Points and Elements:

- The threshold for residential developments should be tuned specifically to address the types of concerns that occur at a residential scale.
- The Residential PUD would eliminate unnecessary requirements under the current PUD process by requiring only the information relevant to a residential application.

## Commercial and Mixed-Use Planned Unit Development



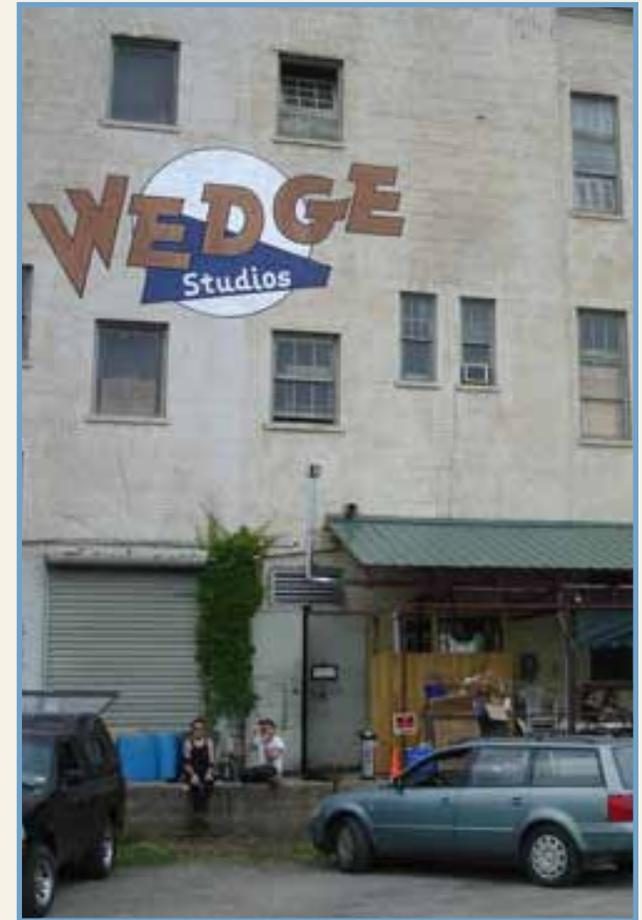
**Issue:** Under Buncombe County's current Zoning Ordinance, applicants are only provided a single type of Planned Unit Development (PUD) as an option to develop complex residential or commercial sites. Due to the lack of a tailored process, each applicant must undergo the same process regardless of the nature of their development. The generic process which is currently in use results in applications that may not address the specific concerns associated with each type of development. With respect to commercial developments, the current standards do not adequately reflect the review needs of a commercial application. Under the current standards, mixed-use type developments are not provided a wide enough degree of latitude to allow uses that would complement the proposed development.



**Recommendation:** In order to facilitate a better tailored process, new classes of Planned Unit Developments should be created specifically associated with Commercial and Mixed-Use Developments. The Commercial Planned Unit Development would be broad enough to incorporate a range of commercial and industrial applications while focusing on the specific criteria relevant to those sites. These Planned Unit Developments would streamline the application process to require information pertinent to the application at hand and would create submittals that speak to key community concerns without providing extraneous information. The creation of a Commercial Planned Unit Development should also provide some degree of latitude which would allow planning staff to advance projects on existing commercial sites needed to enhance the functionality of the site, without an impact to the surrounding neighborhood.

### Key Points and Elements:

- The relevant advantages would be similar to those presented by the Residential PUD.
- Through presenting categories of PUDs, staff would be enabled to communicate more clearly about the submission requirements of applications.
- A tailored PUD process would enable the Board of Adjustment to expedite review and to create more sound findings of facts based on complete applications.





### Conservation District



**Issue:** Areas permanently protected through federal or state designation or regulation and those protected through a conservation easement are often zoned in a way which does not reflect their permanent status as undevelopable land. It is anticipated that at some point detailed zoning may be extended into those areas currently outside of the MSD Primary Sewer Service District. When this occurs, parklands, water supply watersheds, and other permanently conserved areas should be zoned in such a way that reflects these development constraints. The current Zoning Ordinance does not contain a district which could be readily applied to these areas.



**Recommendation:** As conditions warrant and as mechanisms for land conservation evolve, Buncombe County could develop a Conservation District for classification purpose. This District could be initially applied to parklands, though the status could also be extended upon request to privately held properties, especially those under permanent conservation. This District would not prevent agricultural uses of land.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Permanently protected land is not zoned in a manner that reflects its protected status.
- A Conservation Zoning District would allow for easier identification of land in a protected status.

## Connectivity

In addressing the land use context in Buncombe County, it is important to understand land use concerns which impact development on a County-wide basis as well as those issues which have more regional implications. These issues include the extension of public utilities and infrastructure, the provision of connected roadways and multi-modal infrastructure, and others and underscore the need for regional collaboration.

### Public Utilities and Infrastructure



**Issue:** Under the current land use policies in place within Buncombe County, there are very few opportunities which provide appropriate review of public utility stations and energy generation facilities. Recently with the proposal of several large-scale projects, concern has developed regarding both the placement of these facilities as well as the long-term land use issues associated with maintenance and decommissioning. Currently, Buncombe County does not have a means of evaluating private energy production facilities which do not sell power back to the grid. Additionally, renewable energy generation facilities are not explicitly covered within the current Zoning Ordinance table of uses. While both public utilities and energy generation facilities are a necessity, there should also be efforts to ensure that these facilities are well-maintained and that neighboring property owners have reasonable safeguards put into place.



**Recommendation:** The Zoning Ordinance should be modified in a manner that separates public utility stations and energy generation facilities according to their impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. Energy generation facilities of all types which sell electrical energy back to the grid should be regulated as public utilities (this does not include facilities at a single-family residence scale). Public utility stations and energy generation facilities which sell directly back to the grid should continue to be a conditional use within residential districts and environmentally sensitive areas, and should also be considered conditional in all districts if the collective footprint of the facility is greater than two acres.

Those private generating facilities which can fit within the context of the community with minimal impact (less than a two acre site footprint) should be permitted as a use by right (or as conditional uses in more environmentally sensitive areas). Footprint means the outer perimeter of the facility. Facilities within close proximity to one another under common ownership or operation will be considered collectively.

Given the safety consideration specific to the operation of wind energy facilities, additional public safety regulations should be implemented specific to wind energy. Wind energy facilities should be regulated based on the following classifications in order to appropriately address the level of community impact:

- Small Wind Energy Facility,
- Community Scale Wind Energy Facility, and
- Utility Wind Energy Facility.

Given the specific concerns about safety and impacts on adjacent properties, wind energy facilities should be separated from residential uses and should be appropriately reviewed through a detailed process.

Specific conditions which ensure the safety of the public should be placed on these facilities as an element within the conditional use process. The conditional use process should require specific security standards for such facilities and should ensure that the site is buffered in a manner that limits aesthetic impacts. As a condition of approval, all such facilities should have a funded decommissioning plan in place which would require decommissioning of the site within one year of the cessation of operations.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- The current categories addressing utilities and energy generation do not adequately address the scales at which these uses may occur.
- The current conditional use process does not provide specific language which would require that inoperable sites be decommissioned (which may create future instances of derelict facilities).
- The current approval process does not regulate public safety in a direct manner.



### Telecommunications Facilities



**Issue:** As County residents move away from having landlines in their homes as a primary form of communication, and increasingly rely on mobile phones and portable computing devices, the County should be braced for additional demand for wireless telecommunications facilities and networks. This additional demand will require modification to existing towers as well as the addition of new tower sites throughout the County. The demand will exponentially increase as new devices requiring mobile data packages are introduced to the market.



**Recommendation:** These trends will result in an increase in demand for wireless telecommunications towers. The County should continue to encourage and promote the practice of collocation on existing towers, as well as keeping abreast of what is happening in the telecommunications industry and how these changes will affect the County's regulations regarding telecommunications towers. In addition to allowing for collocation on existing towers, the County should take advantage of opportunities to minimize the aesthetic impact by allowing wireless telecommunication antennas to be added to existing structures and buildings as a means of minimizing the construction of new wireless communications towers.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Demand for wireless communication towers is increasing.
- Demand is likely to increase further as new devices are introduced to the market.
- The County should allow for collocation and alternate siting of wireless antennas.

## Complete Streets



**Issue:** The NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) adopted a “Complete Streets” policy in July 2009. The policy directs NCDOT to consider and incorporate several modes of transportation when building new projects or making improvements to existing infrastructure. This policy facilitates the use of existing and new NCDOT road networks as multimodal facilities and insures a pattern of constant progress in recognizing the needs of multimodal users. At a County level, there is currently a lack of coordination between County approvals for development projects and potential Complete Streets improvements in the surrounding areas. Failure to examine projects within the context of Complete Streets developments may cause missed opportunities for multimodal connections between existing transportation projects and new developments.



**Recommendation:** Buncombe County review processes should begin to incorporate an assessment of a project’s connectivity with existing multimodal networks and potential Complete Streets improvements. Such review should be integrated with existing administrative reviews and should function to make the applicant aware of potential changes to the surrounding transportation network as well as to allow the applicant the opportunity to maximize the multimodal options available at the development site. In projects which require administrative reviews beyond the staff level, the applicant should submit information pertaining to the development’s interaction with Complete Streets to the appropriate board.

### Key Points and Elements:

- This process is not to create binding requirements for Complete Streets connectivity or pedestrian infrastructure but is intended to facilitate better information flow that prevents disjunction between development and Complete Streets efforts.
- The Complete Streets process is still relatively new to NCDOT. The French Broad Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is examining current projects as part of its Technical Coordinating Committee and Technical Advisory Committee. This process will allow staff to communicate future intent beyond most of our development cycles.
- The French Broad MPO is currently in the process of developing a regional Complete Streets policy which will allow for a more tailored process which accounts for topography and road conditions.





### Interconnectivity



**Issue:** As areas of the County continue to develop in a more urban context, there can be a lack of connectivity between both commercial and residential development. Accounting for, or at a minimum addressing, interconnectivity between developments enhances future development potential and addresses traffic safety and congestion issues. After a subdivision or a development is completed, it is difficult to make appropriate acquisitions and changes to promote connectivity, the ability to travel between developments, making the review process the most advantageous time to make necessary recommendations for interconnectivity.



**Recommendation:** Buncombe County review processes should begin to incorporate an assessment of a project's interconnectivity potential including opportunities for coordination with other scheduled projects. Such review should be integrated with existing administrative reviews and should function to make the applicant aware of potential changes to the surrounding transportation network as well as to allow the applicant to understand where potential opportunities for interconnectivity between developments exist. In projects which require administrative reviews beyond the staff level, the applicant should submit information pertaining to the development's interaction with nearby land uses.

#### Key Points and Elements:

- Topography makes interconnectivity extremely difficult, especially with regard to residential subdivisions.
- A lack of interconnectivity or a lack of planning for interconnectivity creates difficulties in developing commercial projects along corridors due to an abundance of drive aprons.
- Interconnectivity can present other desirable solutions for shared parking and better opportunities for site reconfiguration or redevelopment.
- Interconnectivity can capitalize on multimodal opportunities and can make mixed-use development more feasible.
- This recommendation is best suited toward urban and urbanizing sections of the County.

## Regional Connections



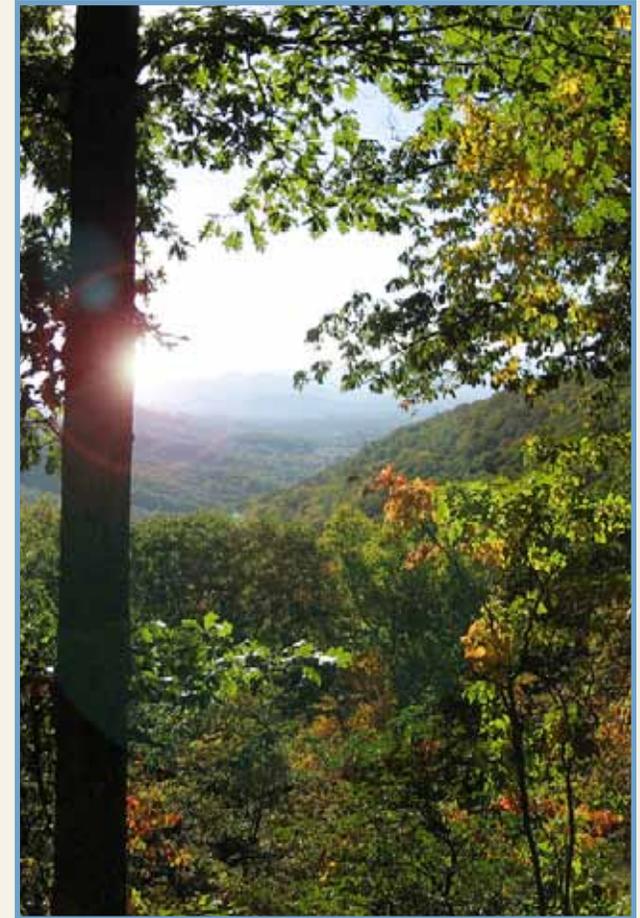
**Issue:** As Buncombe County continues to grow, the need for regionally aligned plans has become apparent. Buncombe County residents are not confined solely to the borders of Buncombe County in their daily activities and employment and may need access to the infrastructure within other jurisdictions or they may be impacted by land development occurring in other jurisdictions. In recent years a number of initiatives have created an interest in regional planning efforts which look to advance the collective interest of Western North Carolina.



**Recommendation:** As Buncombe County continues to plan for its future, efforts should be made to partner with regional planning initiatives in order to understand efficiencies in service delivery as well as to ensure the needs of Buncombe County's citizens are met. Buncombe County should work to understand which land development regulations and policies can be best served by collaborative efforts and how regional efforts can work to accomplish those goals. In addition, Buncombe County should continue to participate in wider planning efforts and initiatives such as those offered through the French Broad MPO and the Land-of-Sky RPO.

### Key Points and Elements:

- Buncombe County's citizens need access to infrastructure and services both inside Buncombe County as well as within the surrounding region.
- Preserving the unique mountain aesthetic of Western North Carolina requires a collective regional effort.
- Several efforts (such as the proposed airport overlay district) require the cooperation of multiple area jurisdictions.





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# The CONCLUSION

**T**he 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update provides an understanding of how Buncombe County has evolved since the adoption of the 1998 Comprehensive Land Use Plan and subsequent Plan Updates. In addition, this document allows for an understanding of how Buncombe County is expected to develop in future years. The intent of the 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update is to enable citizens and decision makers to understand the context of land use in Buncombe County in order to develop more informed decisions.

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Through assembling a demographic profile of Buncombe County and documenting land use trends, we can use the Comprehensive Land Use Plan as a basis for justifying decisions about the future of development. It is expected that citizens will be able to refer to the Comprehensive Land Use Plan as a single source of information in understanding the nature of development within Buncombe County and in understanding how their own development plans fit within the context of the County.

A major element of this document includes a series of recommendations for changes and additions to existing land use policies and regulations. As Buncombe County continues to improve its regulatory framework, an effort should be made to integrate the recommendations set forth within this document. In addition, the County's decision-making bodies should utilize the recommendations set forth within this document to guide their actions and to achieve our stated objectives:

- Establish land use regulations which allow for a flexible range of development options while still accounting for the needs of Buncombe County.



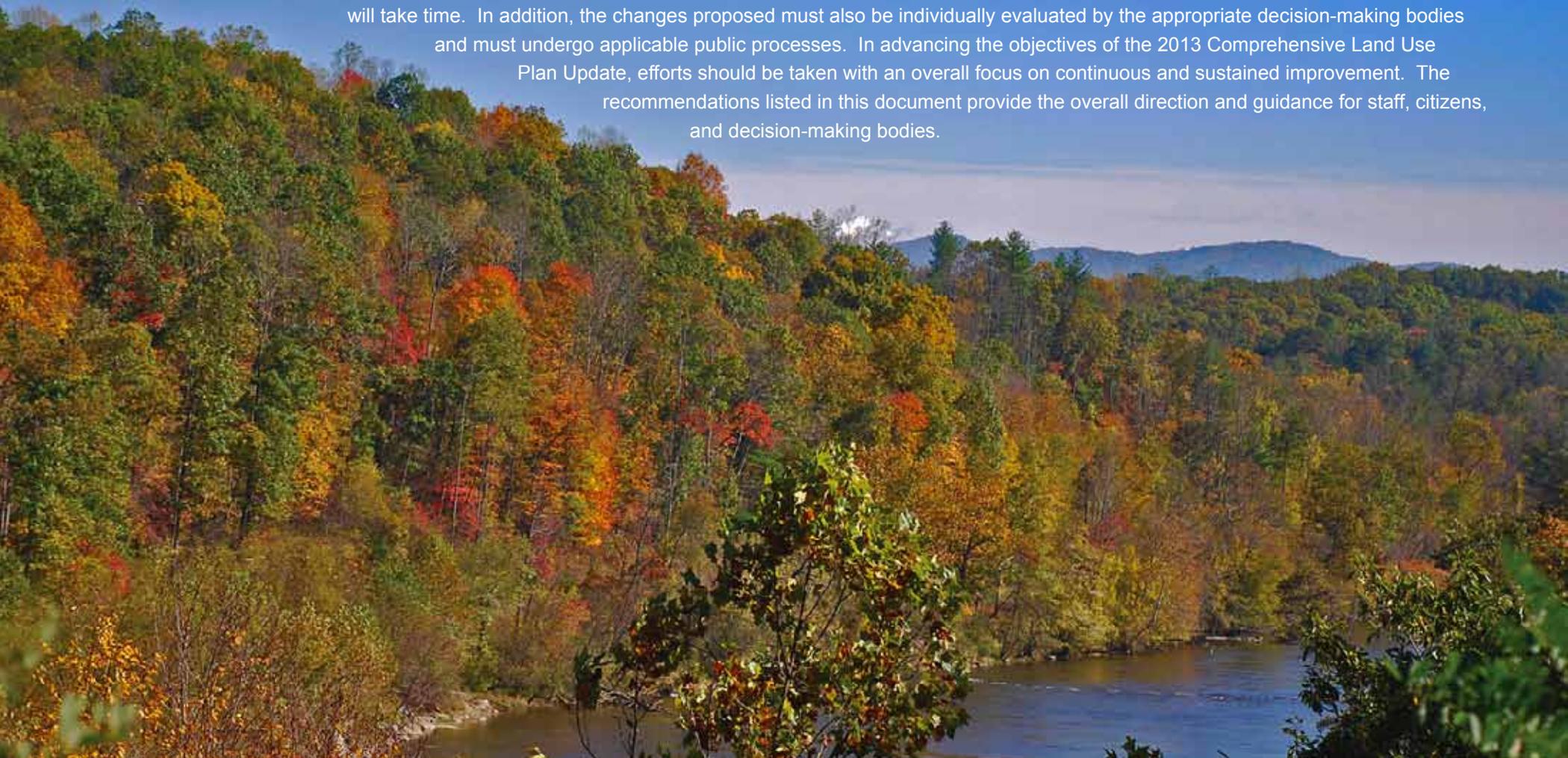
- Create tools which enable staff and appointed boards to make land use decisions based on the context of each proposal.
- Adjust land use policies to account for changes within the regulatory environment.
- Streamline existing regulations and policies in a manner that accounts for lessons learned since the last Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update.
- Clarify existing ambiguities in land use policies and regulations.
- Expand existing land use policies and regulations to adjust for changes in land use patterns and demands.
- Implement new policies that address land use in an integrated and comprehensive manner.
- Incorporate the Buncombe County Sustainability Plan into this Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update in an effort to support the government and citizens of Buncombe County in making the best-informed decisions.

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**The recommendations listed in this document provide the overall direction and guidance for staff, citizens, and decision-making bodies.**

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While the recommendations provided will help to improve land planning and development, it is important to understand that implementation will take time. In addition, the changes proposed must also be individually evaluated by the appropriate decision-making bodies and must undergo applicable public processes. In advancing the objectives of the 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update, efforts should be taken with an overall focus on continuous and sustained improvement. The recommendations listed in this document provide the overall direction and guidance for staff, citizens, and decision-making bodies.





# The APPENDIX

Plans	Year Adopted/ Accepted	Current Issues and Opportunities Addressed											
		Housing Status and Needs	Geographic and Land Use Factors	Airport Overlay	Resort District	Airport Industrial District	Planned Unit Developments	Conservation District	Variety in Community Structures	Public Utilities and Infrastructure	Transportation and Connectivity	Economic Development	Regional Connections
Agricultural Development and Farmland Protection Plan	2007							✓				✓	✓
Transit Master Plan	2009									✓	✓	✓	✓
Buncombe County Sustainability Plan	2012	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Consolidated Affordable Housing Plan	2010	✓										✓	
GroWNC Regional Sustainability Plan	Pending adoption	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓	✓
2035 Long Range Transportation Plan	2010										✓		✓
2012 Long-Range Transportation Demand Management Plan	2012									✓	✓	✓	✓
Airport Master Plan	2013		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Buncombe County All Hazards Mitigation Plan	2011		✓							✓			✓
Asheville 5x5 Job Creation Initiative	2011											✓	

**Appendix B Parks**

**Facility**

**Park Operator(s)**

Tomahawk Lake	Community	Walnut Island River Park	Buncombe County
Carver Community Center	Community	North Buncombe Park	Buncombe County
Montreat Conference Center	Community	North Buncombe Middle School	Buncombe County
Lake Louise	Community	Karpen Fields	Buncombe County
Black Mountain Municipal Golf Club	Community	Ledges River Park	Buncombe County
Biltmore Athletic Association	Community	Erwin High School	Buncombe County
Avery's Park	Community	Aston Park	Buncombe County
White Pine Park	Community	Buncombe County Golf Course	Buncombe County
Reed Creek Greenway	Community	St. Genevieve Field	Buncombe County
McCormick Field	Buncombe County	Buncombe County Sports Park	Buncombe County
Nature Center	Buncombe County	Roberson High School	Buncombe County
Reynolds High School	Buncombe County	Cane Creek Pool and Fields	Buncombe County
Zeugner Center	Buncombe County	Lake Julian Park	Buncombe County
Owen Pool	Buncombe County	Glen Arden School	Buncombe County
Recreation Park	Buncombe County	Glen Bridge River Park	Buncombe County
Erwin Community Pool	Buncombe County	Owen Middle School	Buncombe County
UNCA	Buncombe County	Corcoran Paige River Park	Buncombe County
Warren Wilson College	Buncombe County	Woodfin Riverside Park	Buncombe County
Charles D Owen Park	Buncombe County	Collier Nature Preserve	Buncombe County
Haw Creek School	Buncombe County	Alexander Greenway Extension	Buncombe County
Charles Bell School	Buncombe County	Alexander Mountain Biking Trails	Buncombe County
Jean Webb River Park	Buncombe County	Valley Springs Middle School	Buncombe County and Partners
Asheville-Buncombe Tech	Buncombe County	Kenilworth Park	Buncombe County and Partners
Sand Hill School	Buncombe County	Asheville Middle School	Buncombe County and Partners
Hominy Creek River Park	Buncombe County	Memorial Stadium	Buncombe County and Partners
Enka Middle School	Buncombe County	Asheville High School	Buncombe County and Partners
Reynolds Middle School	Buncombe County	Kenilworth Park	Buncombe County and Partners
Hominy Valley Park	Buncombe County	Beacon Field	Buncombe County and Partners
Bent Creek River Park	Buncombe County	UNC-A Botanical Gardens	State of North Carolina
Estes School	Buncombe County	N. C. Arboretum	State of North Carolina
		Folk Art Center	Federal
		Lake Powhatan	Federal



Prepared for  
**BUNCOMBE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**  
[www.BuncombeCounty.org](http://www.BuncombeCounty.org)