



HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY PLAN

2022 UPDATE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Highlands Community Plan is more than just an update to the 2005 Land Use Plan. It captures a community's goals at the time it was written and distills their thoughts and feelings about their town into a set of policies that will guide decision making for the next 10-20 years. It serves as a guide for policy changes, land use and transportation planning, economic development, housing strategy, capital improvement planning, and more. The Highlands that is cherished today is due to decisions made decades ago, and will continue to be cherished thanks to all of those who participated in the creation of this plan and to those who will use it for future decision makings in the years to come.

PROCESS

A plan of this magnitude would not be possible without extensive input from across the community. Input from a wide variety of community members and stakeholders was essential to crafting a plan that accurately reflected residents' visions, concerns, and hopes for Highlands' future. The public engagement process included a diverse set of engagement opportunities in an effort to engage different people through the many formats. These included:

- » **Steering Committee** - The town board appointed ten representatives who met regularly during the process to provide feedback and guidance.
- » **Stakeholder Interviews** - A series of hour-long interviews were conducted with stakeholder groups in Phase One of the project.
- » **Survey** - The project team carried out two surveys, one community-wide and one for business operators, during the engagement process. The first was a broad survey of respondents concerns and preferences across all plan-related topics such as recreation and housing. The second was an open-ended comment form once the public reviewed the draft plan.
- » **Public Meetings** - Two public meetings were held at the Highlands Community Building. The first, the Visioning Workshop, collected general feedback early in the analysis phase of the project. The second was held in conjunction with the release of the draft plan and allowed attendees to give feedback.

Word cloud based on over 1,000 survey responses.



VISION STATEMENT

“Highlands is a vibrant and scenic mountain community founded on the beauty of the plateau’s natural environment, the uniqueness of its village character, and the richness of the area’s culture and history.”

PLAN GOALS

While the vision statement encapsulates the overarching image of Highlands in the future, the goals represent more discrete targets for the town. These six goals rose from public and stakeholder input, and together will help achieve the vision.



TOWN CHARACTER

Maintain and enhance the town center's village character that is surround by mostly low-density housing that blends with the natural environment.



PEDESTRIAN FOCUS

Create a downtown and commercial areas that emphasize pedestrian comfort and safety.



ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Preserve and enhance the natural environment and the scenic beauty of Highlands.



PARTNERSHIPS

Cultivate ongoing community partnerships with area organizations and governments to plan for and protect the plateau.



CULTURE AND HISTORY

Preserve and promote the rich cultural and historic resources of Highlands.



LOCAL ECONOMY

Support and sustain the local economy, including downtown businesses, tourism, the arts, and outdoor recreation.

RECOMMENDATIONS TOPICS

The recommendations section outlines the policies and strategies that the Town will use to achieve the vision and goals. These policies are statements that will guide decision-making in Highlands. The recommendations section is divided into the following topics.

- » Future land use map
- » Land use and Housing
- » Downtown and Tourism
- » Recreation and Natural Resources
- » Transportation
- » Infrastructure and public services

RECOMMENDATIONS & POLICIES

POLICIES	GOALS ADDRESSED					
LAND USE AND HOUSING	TC	EP	CH	PF	P	LE
LU 1: Regularly evaluate and update the Community Plan and Unified Development Ordinance.	TC	EP	CH	PF	P	LE
LU 2: Reinforce the existing town character through the design of new development and land use decisions.	TC	EP	CH			
LU 3: Manage growth along major entry corridors and edges.	TC	EP			P	
LU 4: Encourage a limited mix of housing types in defined areas.	TC			PF		LE
LU 5: Encourage lodging and tourism related rentals while limiting negative impact on existing residents and businesses.	TC		CH			LE
DOWNTOWN AND TOURISM						
DT 1: Maintain and enhance Highlands' small-town feel and village character.	TC	EP	CH	PF		LE
DT 2: Improve pedestrian facilities and increase wayfinding.	TC			PF		LE
DT 3: Monitor and manage existing parking.				PF		LE
DT 4: Further study potential improvements to Downtown streetscapes.	TC			PF		LE
DT 5: Continue marketing and events that encourage visitation.			CH		P	LE
DT 6: Preserve and enhance the Town's parks and green infrastructure.	TC	EP		PF		
RECREATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES						
RNR 1: Support recreation options and outdoor tourism.		EP	CH		P	LE
RNR 2: Discourage intense development on steep slopes and mountain ridges.	TC	EP				
RNR 3: Protect views and natural resources in Town and on the greater Highlands plateau.	TC	EP			P	
RNR 4: Encourage open space preservation and tree protection in new development.	TC	EP	CH			
RNR 5: Protect the Plateau's water quality.		EP			P	LE

TRANSPORTATION	TC	EP	CH	PF	P	LE
T 1: Maintain a resilient transportation system that caters to a variety of users.				PF	P	LE
T 2: Encourage context-sensitive design of roadways.	TC	EP	CH	PF		
T 3: Prioritize pedestrian safety, connectivity, accessibility, and comfort.			CH	PF		
T 4: Fill sidewalk gaps and improve accessibility.	TC			PF		
T 5: Continue to improve Highlands' Greenway System.		EP		PF	P	
T 6: Balance needs for parking with aesthetics and environmental impacts.	TC		CH			LE
T 7: Partner with Macon County Transit.				PF	P	LE
T 8: Plan for electric vehicles in Highlands.		EP			P	
INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES						
PS 1: Ensure adequate waste disposal and sanitation services.		EP			P	
PS 2: Maintain and enhance the electric grid.						LE
PS 3: Encourage energy efficiency and alternative fuel vehicles.		EP				
PS 4: Improve access to high-speed internet and expand cell coverage.					P	LE
PS 5: Focus water and sewer service improvements on existing Town limits.	TC	EP				LE
PS 6: Allow for limited extension of water and sewer to areas near town limit boundaries if conditions are met.	TC					LE
PS 7: Encourage an efficient, financially sound water and sewer system.		EP				LE
PS 8: Protect water quality in Lake Sequoyah.		EP				

Goals Key

TC	Town Character	PF	Pedestrian Focus
EP	Environmental Preservation	P	Partnerships
CH	Culture and History	LE	Local Economy

MAKING IT HAPPEN

Writing a plan is only the first step in crafting Highlands' future. These action items transform the policies into actionable steps that the Town can take to make improvements. This list captures the primary action items from the Plan. To view the full detail see Chapter 5.

LAND USE AND HOUSING ACTION ITEMS

1. Evaluate and update the Unified Development Ordinance and the Community Plan
2. Evaluate rezoning requests for conformity with the Community Plan
3. Maintain the scale and character of Highlands
4. Manage growth along major entry corridors
5. Allow a mix of housing in appropriate areas in order to address the housing shortage
6. Refine criteria for allowing accessory dwelling units
7. Monitor and mitigate the impact of short-term rentals (STRs) on the Highlands community

DOWNTOWN AND TOURISM ACTION ITEMS

8. Study of town owned properties to determine future uses
9. Wayfinding and streetscape plan and improvements
10. Continue marketing events that encourage visitors
11. Develop a Downtown pocket park south of Main Street

RECREATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES ACTION ITEMS

12. Pursue improvements at Recreation Park
13. Work with partners to improve access to parks and nearby public lands and nature preserves
14. Consider updates to the Unified Development Ordinance to protect natural resources, heritage tree, and water quality
15. Protect the Plateau's water quality by proactively managing stormwater runoff from development

TRANSPORTATION ACTION ITEMS

16. Prioritize the implementation of the Master Sidewalk Plan in Downtown and adjoining residential areas

17. Coordinate and support the Highlands Plateau Greenway in their efforts to improve Highlands' Greenway System

18. Develop an ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan

19. Manage and expand vehicular parking.

20. Encourage walking, biking and use of electric vehicles

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES ACTION ITEMS

21. Sanitation services improvements

22. Evaluate ways to improve electric system customer service, including outage reporting options

23. Pay off fiber project and improve public WiFi

24. Public safety improvements

25. Pursue grants to connect homes with septic systems in close proximity to Lake Sequoyah to the town sewer system







1 INTRODUCTION

The Highlands Community Plan will function as the Town of Highlands' comprehensive plan.

Just as Highlands in 2021 is the product of generations of stewardship of the built and natural environments, Highlands in 20 years will reflect the decision, visions, and values of today. The Highlands Community Plan builds on previous efforts, plans, and hopes, and will shape Highlands in 2025, 2030, and beyond. This plan provides policy guidance for land use, transportation, housing, open space preservation, and other aspects to provide for the quality of life for Town residents. It builds on, updates, and replaces the **2005 Land Use Plan** as the principal long-range planning document for the Town.

COMMUNITY PLAN OVERVIEW

Purpose

The Highlands Community Plan establishes a framework for growth and development while maintaining the character and the livability of the town that Highlands residents hold so dear. The Plan is a policy document that will guide zoning and development decisions. It will also affect future updates to the Unified Development Ordinance, development design, infrastructure investments, and staff work plans. State law (NC General Statute Chapter 160D) now requires that towns have a comprehensive plan to retain authority to enforce zoning and development regulations.



Process

In July of 2020, the Town of Highlands undertook a yearlong process to draft the Community Plan. Staff was tasked with creating a new comprehensive plan that would serve as an update to the 2005 Land Use Plan and address other issues in addition to land use, including infrastructure, parks and other topics important to the quality of life in Highlands.

With assistance from an appointed Steering Committee and consultants, Town Staff facilitated a four-phase planning process. The first phase included an assessment of existing plans and an analysis of demographics, environmental issues, infrastructure, and land use trends.

The second phase of the process included public engagement and review and refinement of the vision for the Town. The project team solicited public input from stakeholders, steering committee members, town leadership, and the general public to evaluate what residents would like to see, protect, and enhance in Highlands. A full description of the public engagement process is available on page 38 of this document.

After the analysis and visioning phase, the project team utilized the input and research results to create recommendations and the plan. To ensure the draft plan accurately reflected the community's vision, it was then reviewed by the Steering Committee and presented for review and feedback at a public meeting upon its release. Following further refinements, it was adopted in July of 2022.

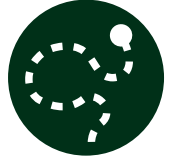
Project Process

Project Initiation

July – August 2020

- » Project Kick Off
- » Public Engagement Schedule
- » Branding and Website
- » Highlands Tour

TOUR



SURVEY



Analysis

August – December 2020

- » Plan Assessment
- » Existing Conditions
- » Study Area Research

PUBLIC MEETING



Visioning

Sept. 2020 – January 2021

- » Draft Vision and Goals
- » Public Workshop
- » Refinement

PUBLIC MEETING



Plan Development

February – April 2021

- » Policy Recommendations
- » Draft Plan

Implementation

May – June 2022

- » Develop Strategies
- » Refine Draft Plan

Adoption – July 2022

◆ Steering Committee Meeting

STUDY AREA

The Town of Highlands is located in Western North Carolina, about 50 miles Southwest of Asheville. The town is mostly within Macon County with a small portion within Jackson County. Highlands sits on a plateau in the southern Appalachian Mountains just miles away from the Georgia and South Carolina borders. US 64, NC 106, and NC 28 are the main roads connecting Highlands to the surrounding area. The 2019 American Community Survey states that the permanent population within the corporate limits was about 1,164. Other data sources estimate the population of the entire study area as being 1,495. During the summer months it is estimated that the population swells to three to four times its permanent population.

Boundaries

The study area for this plan encompasses the town limits of Highlands and significant areas of unincorporated land directly adjacent to Town on the plateau. The Town currently does not have a defined extraterritorial jurisdiction, but land adjacent to the town limits could be part of voluntary annexation requests in the future. The land in the study area that outside the current corporate limits includes much of the residential areas north of the Highlands corporate limits, as well as the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital. Recommendations will address issues experienced over the entire study area, but the Town currently can only enforce land use policies and regulations on the land within its jurisdiction.

Character

Highlands is a small, village-style resort town with a rich history. Its location and natural environment are unique and have shaped the town physically and culturally. The plateau was an important hunting ground for the Cherokee for thousands of years. It was also a place that held great importance in Cherokee mythology. Cherokee heritage is alive today in many of the area's features'

names. Satulah, for example, is a corruption of Sudalidihi, meaning Six-Killer.

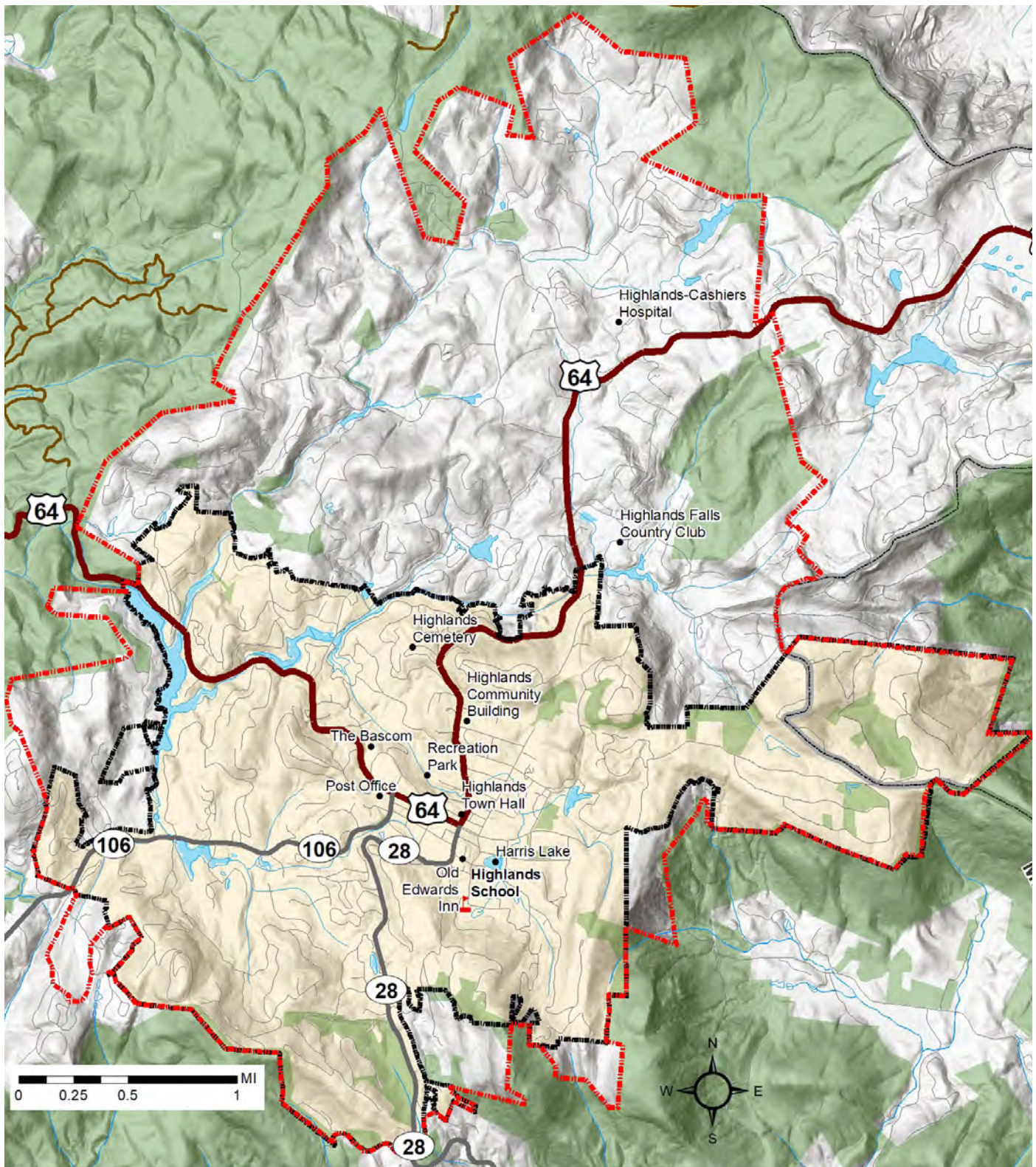
More recently the town has been a mixing ground of sorts and home to pioneers, tradesman, Scotch-Irish laborers and wealthy southern aristocrats. It has served as a cultural center for well-known artists, musicians, actors, authors, scholars and scientists who have thrived in its natural setting. The result, as the Highlands Historical Society describes, is "a town too cosmopolitan to be provincial, too broadly based to be singular in attitude and perspective, too enamored of its natural surroundings to be totally indifferent to them, and just isolated and small enough to be anxious about the benefits and setbacks of growth and development."

The town sits on a plateau nestled between protected ridges within the Nantahala National Forest. Steep slopes and protected lands on the perimeter of the plateau mean that the Town has natural boundaries, and cannot grow outward like most municipalities.

The town has an average elevation of 4,118 feet and is the second highest incorporated town east of the Mississippi River. Its elevation contributes to cool summers and abundant rainfall. Highlands sees about 100 inches of rain per year and is within one of two temperate rainforests in North America.

Highlands is known for its quaint downtown, located in the geographic center of town and radiating outward from the area around the Main Street and Fourth Street intersection. The original street pattern was laid out by the Kelsey Map created by Samuel Kelsey in 1881. Downtown is where most of the commercial land uses are found, though there are some outlying commercial uses and clubs along the primary roads that lead out of Town.

STUDY AREA MAP



The study area, shown in red in the map above, includes all of the municipal limits, includes area adjacent to the town that could petition for voluntary annexation and extends north to the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital.

HISTORY

Establishment

Highlands was founded by two developers from Kansas who drew two lines on a map, one from New York to New Orleans, and one from Chicago to Savannah. These men, Samuel Truman Kelsey and Clinton Carter Hutchinson, predicted that the intersection of these major trades routes would someday become a great commercial crossroads. They arrived in Highlands in 1875 with the intent on founding a town. They delighted to find cooler weather and unique fauna on the elevated plateau in the Blue Ridge Mountains and founded a community.

A Resort Destination Emerges

Highlands evolved as a thriving resort community. The area became known for its clean mountain air and water, and temperatures that provided respite from the hot southern summers. The town incorporated in 1879. The Highlands Inn, built in 1880, is on the National Register of Historic Places and was the first hotel in Highlands. It was soon joined by others such as the Old Edwards Inn. The Town's proximity to Atlanta meant that it was a convenient getaway for the well-to-do who needed to

escape and relax. Around the turn of the 19th century, Highlands became a noted location for tuberculosis treatments, with the fresh mountain air believed to work wonders on the disease. The Town found its niche after the opening of the Highlands Country Club in 1928, which helped it become a noted golfing and resort destination. By 1931 the Town's population had increased to 500 with 2,500 to 3,000 summer guests.

The Highlands Biological Station has existed in some form since 1927 due to the rich natural environment on the plateau.

Starting around the 1950s, lovers of the Town began buying second homes there. Many residents share a similar story of visiting Highlands and then deciding to make it their primary or secondary residence. Today seasonal residents and tourists are keystones of Highlands' economy, with the population swelling by many thousands in the high season. The Biological Station also is a part of the University of North Carolina systems ensuring a constant presence of biologists and students studying the biodiversity on the plateau. Thanks to the unique geography of the town, Highlands has remained a relatively exclusive, close-knit community made up of people from diverse backgrounds. Highlands now faces the challenge of protecting this delicate environment and character that have made it a destination for almost 150 years.



The Highlands Inn when the circus came to Town, date unknown.

References

- www.highlandschamber.org/about/history/
- www.highlandsinfo.com/activities/history.htm
- www.landmarkvacations.com/blog/history-of-highlands-nc/



Bug Hill, Dr. Mary Lapham's tuberculosis clinic 1908-1918 Source: *The Laurel Magazine*



The Kelsey Map, 1881. Source: highlandshistory.com

PREVIOUS PLANNING

2005 Land Use Plan

The 2005 Land Use Plan has functioned as Highlands' Comprehensive Plan since its adoption. Overall recommendations included:

- » Adopted mission statement to include protection of community character, and cultural and historic heritage.
- » Included strategies that are abstract and visionary.
- » Contained few suggestions for implementation.
- » Mentioned overbuilding relative to lot size, allowing limited multifamily developments, and clustering of open space for residential development.
- » Suggested adding a mini-park on Main Street and improving streetscape and aesthetic standards.
- » Included significant green space goals.

2018 Community Design Standards

- » Introduced urban design principles and regulations for new development.
- » Included a checklist of requirements for structural placement and scaling, façade design, roof structure, and exterior lighting.
- » Recommended Planning Board review all final elevations and plans for commercial and multifamily projects.

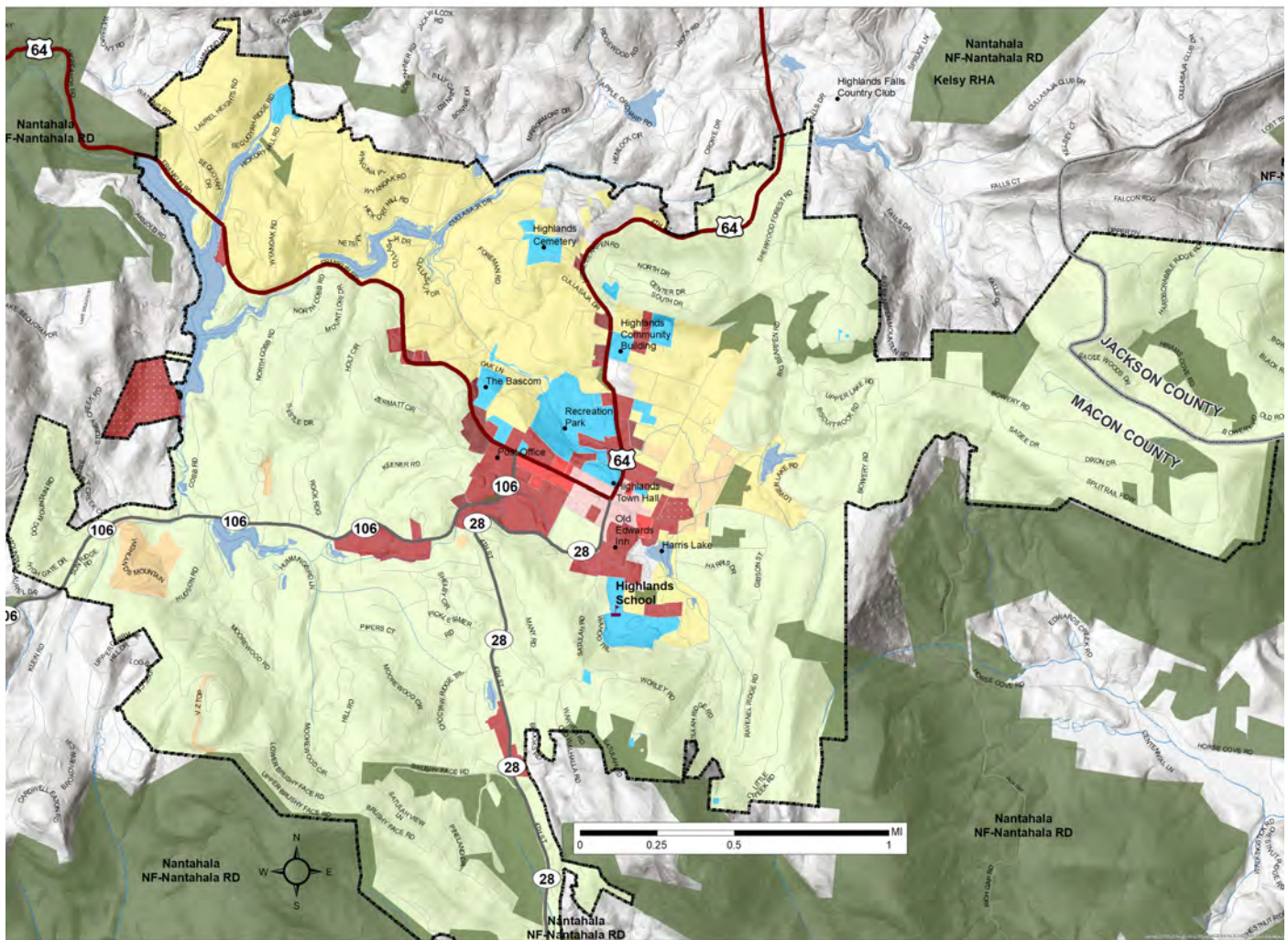
Unified Development Ordinance

The Town of Highlands has a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) that includes application, review and approval processes, zoning district regulations, infrastructure, parking and landscaping standards, and natural resource and environmental protection standards. The UDO is accessible at: https://library.municode.com/nc/highlands/codes/unified_development_ordinance. The UDO includes three residential zoning districts (R-1, R-2,

and R-3) and four commercial or mixed-use districts (B-1, B-2, B-3, and B-4). There is also a Government/Institutional (GI) District, an allowance for conditional zoning, and watershed overlay districts. A review of the UDO shows the requirements that currently shape development in Highlands:

- » Residential Development
 - Single Family dwellings are allowed in all districts except for the GI District.
 - Residential developments must meet relatively high minimum lot size standards unless they are part of a Planned Cluster Development which allows for smaller lots in exchange for larger amounts of open space.
 - Multi-family dwellings are only allowed in the R-3 district, are restricted in density, have larger buffer requirements, and require a special use permit.
- » Building height is generally limited to 35 ft with a maximum 3 habitable stories. Allowed for some exceptions for attic and basement space.
- » Commercial Districts
 - Incidental apartments are allowed in commercial zoning districts, but are regulated based on minimum square feet per unit.
 - Hotels and motels are allowed in the B-2 and B-3 districts, and a special use permit is required.
 - Commercial buildings must meet exterior materials and color standards.
- » Natural Resources
 - Established limits of disturbance based on slope and disturbance size thresholds.
 - Limited built-upon area in watersheds (12% built-upon area in critical watersheds, 24% in balance of watershed).

ZONING MAP



ZONING DISTRICT

R-1 - Residential District	R3CUD - Res District w/Conditional Uses	B3CUD - Bus District w/Conditional Uses
R-2 - Residential District	B-1 - Business District	B3CZ - Business District Conditional Zoning
R2CUD - Res District w/Conditional Uses	B1CZ - Business District Conditional Zoning	B-4 - Business District
R-3 Residential District	B-2 - Business District	GI - Governmental / Institutional District
	B2CZ - Business District Conditional Zoning	GICZ - Governmental / Institutional District Conditional Zoning
	B-3 - Business District	

The current zoning districts in the Town of Highlands are shown in the above map. There are three residential districts, four business districts, areas with conditional zoning, and a Government/Institutional district.

Downtown Highlands Parking & Circulation Study (2009)

The study was designed to be a dynamic tool to help influence infrastructure improvement decision-making – with goals to increase parking supply where needed while ensuring mobility and the safety of motorists and pedestrians. Recommendations were developed to address the parking supply and demand, traffic circulation, and pedestrian safety concerns. Recommendations focused on:

- » Increasing the parking supply within the Central Business District.
- » Enhancing traffic circulation.
- » Enhancing pedestrian safety.

Specific recommendations focused on making the intersection of 3rd Street and Main Street safer, reducing truck traffic along Main Street, and ensuring that sidewalk connectivity and crossings enabled safe walking throughout the downtown core.

Wayfinding Master Plan (2012)

As this plan states, the Town of Highlands prides itself on its magnificent mountain scenery, pure watersheds, and a bustling historic downtown. These resources create immense tourist traffic between June and December. To better direct these visitors and promote their natural and cultural attractions, the Town of Highlands contracted with Frazier Associates and Arnett Muldrow and Associates to create a branding program along with a system of directional and informational wayfinding. The result was an image and signage plan that conveys the Town's natural mountain beauty and promotes its many attractions. These signs are located at gateway locations to welcome visitors to town and residents to their home.

Sidewalk Master Plan (2008)

The Town maintains a sidewalk master plan that outlines the location of existing and needed future sidewalks.

2009 Parking & Circulation Study

This plan included recommendations for a number of issues:

- **Unified sign system to direct tourists to off-street parking and public destinations** Branding and signage improvements were made based on this recommendation, additional signage is still needed.
- **Consider making N. Third Street and Maple Street a truck route to get trucks off of Main Street** Town Board felt more analysis was needed on this topic.
- **Add landscaping to Main Street** Board did not support a center median but supported bump-outs or nodes at intersections to improve pedestrian safety.
- **Construct parking along north side of Main Street between 1st and 3rd Street** .Board recommended installation of sidewalk in the near-term and discussed a potential future project in this area for parking.
- **Traffic signal at Main Street and Third Street** Board supported a traffic signal, the intersection was later reconfigured to prevent northbound left-turns and southbound left turns, which has helped the traffic situation.
- **Convert Spring Street to one-way east bound and construct a sidewalk along the north side.** This has not been implemented, and there are still sidewalk gaps along Spring Street.
- **Install a traffic circle at Fourth Street and South Street** Town Board endorsed the idea of improving the design of the intersection, this has recently been done.
- **Midblock crossing on Main Street** Board was divided on this topic.



DOWNTOWN MARKETPLACE STUDY

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN HIGHLANDS, NORTH CAROLINA
MARCH 2011



The Downtown Marketplace Study included market, physical environment, financial, and organizational recommendations.

2011 Downtown Marketplace Study

This study was conducted by the Small Town Main Street program administered by the North Carolina Department of Commerce and focused on the central business district. The study found that empty-nesters and seniors were the principal demographic segments who live and own property in the area. The study included a customer survey and retail market observations. The study found that Downtown Highlands' commercial space was 97% occupied and that the seasonality of market activity was due to second homes. Recommendations included

- » Studying the preferences of baby boomers and needs of an aging community;
- » Developing eco-tourism opportunities;
- » Targeted marketing, event planning and promotion;
- » Addressing workforce housing;
- » Establishing a brand identity;
- » Supporting local business community and employees;
- » Creating wayfinding initiatives and improving the pedestrian experience;
- » Enhancing parking management strategies.

County Plans

2005 Macon County Recreation Master Plan

- » Comprehensive inventory of park facilities, schools, and private amenities
- » Recommended coordination between Macon County and Town of Highlands
- » Near term needs: land acquisition and budgeting for greenway project
- » Long term needs: pilot greenway project from Greenway Master Plan
- » Identified funding sources and grant programs

2012 Macon County Comprehensive Transportation Plan

- » U.S. 64 from NC 106 to NC 28 recommended for expansion and addition of bike lanes (Town did not accept recommendations because of existing central business district storefront patterns)
- » Buck Creek Rd. (SR 1538) improvements recommended from US 64 to NC 28 to US 64
- » Recommended bus connection
- » Sidewalk improvements in Town

2015 Clay-Macon Hazard Mitigation Plan

- » Evaluated natural hazard risks across Clay and Macon Counties
- » Provided historical data on damages and occurrences
- » Examined vulnerability of community facilities including the Highlands-Cashiers Hospital, Highlands Library, Town Hall, etc.
- » Prescribed actions to prevent damage; protect property, natural resources, and infrastructure; and improve emergency services, and public awareness.

HIGHLANDS

Elev. 4118





2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

Who lives in Highlands? Where do residents work? How has the Town changed in the last decade?

This chapter answers these questions by providing an analysis of the current conditions in Highlands. Demographic data, population estimates, housing information, economic data, and land use analysis provide an objective understanding of the trends and issues in Highlands at this time. Analysis of the data, along with community feedback, has formed the policy and land use recommendations.

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Population Characteristics

The U.S. Census estimates Highlands has a year-round municipal population of 1,164, and the study area has a population of 1,495. The population has a higher median age than Macon County, with its largest age bracket being those between 65 and 74 years and 58% ages 55 years or older.

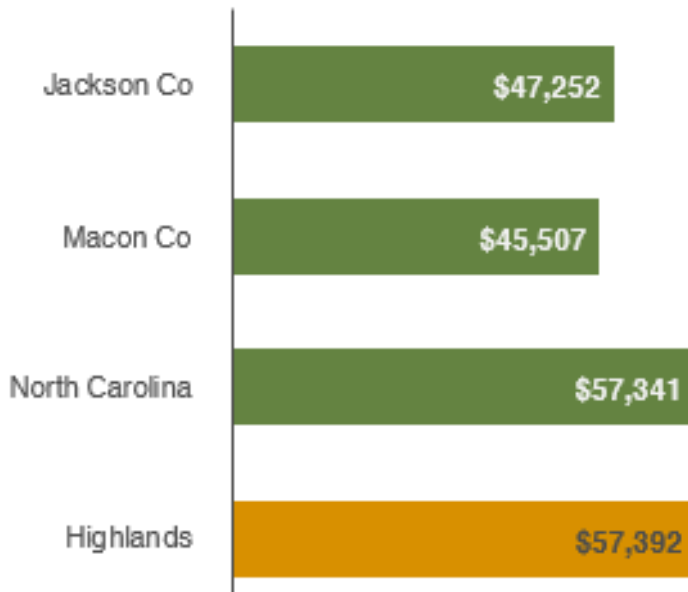
18,000

The Highlands Chamber estimates that the seasonal population for the “plateau” rises from 3,200 to 18,000 in peak season.

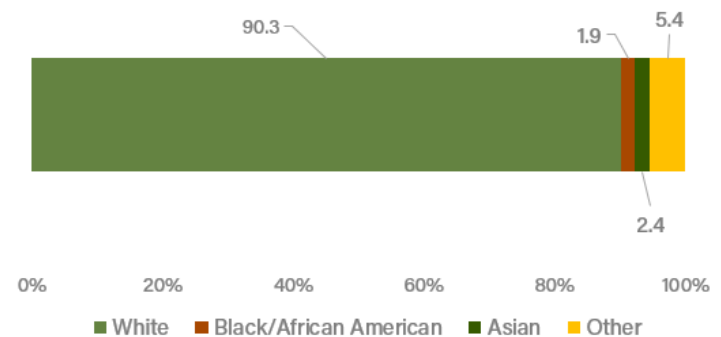
Seasonal Population

It is estimated that 1,473 homes are used as seasonal residences or rentals in the town. Seasonal population in the town and study area is likely 3 to 4 times the year-round population.

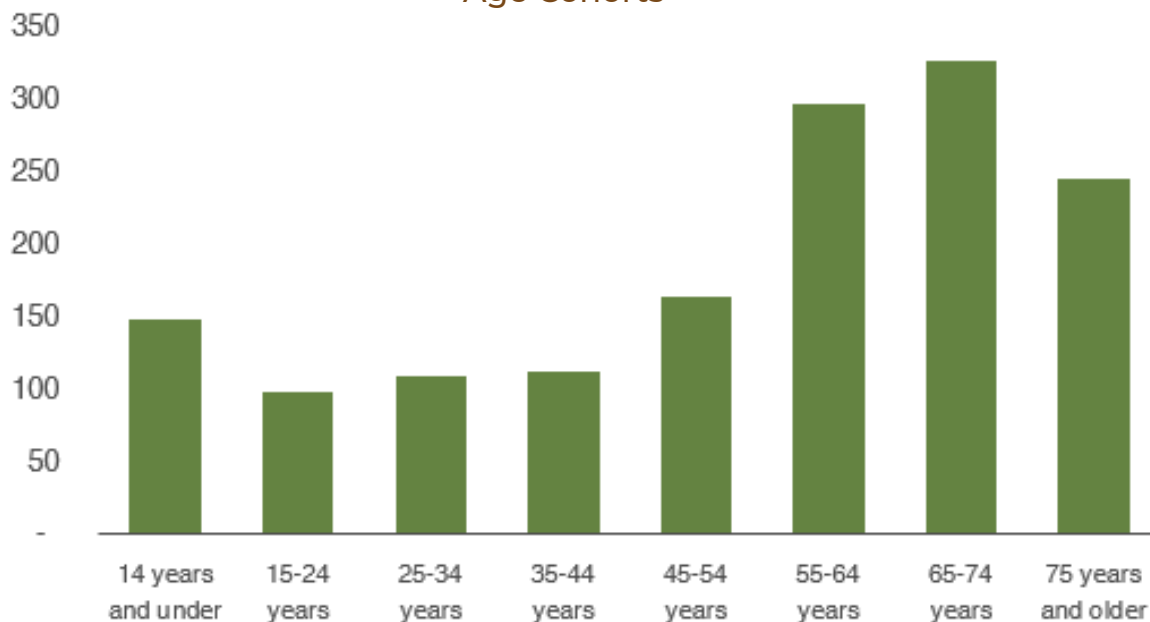
Median Household Income



Racial Composition



Age Cohorts



STUDY AREA

1,495

POPULATION



+9%

POP. CHANGE
SINCE 2000

59.9

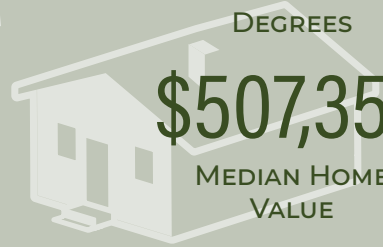
MEDIAN AGE



8.5%

MINORITY
POPULATION

21%

ADULTS WITH
BACHELOR'S
DEGREES

\$507,353

MEDIAN HOME
VALUE

MACON CO.

34,813

POPULATION



+17%

POP. CHANGE
SINCE 2000

50.1

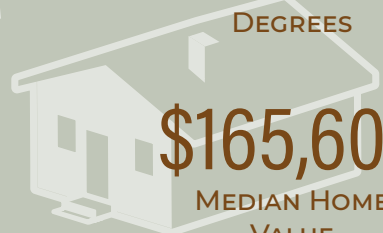
MEDIAN AGE



6.5%

MINORITY
POPULATION

23.8%

ADULTS WITH
BACHELOR'S
DEGREES

\$165,600

MEDIAN HOME
VALUE

STUDY AREA

1,409

2018 JOBS



HOSPITALITY

LARGEST EMPLOYMENT
SECTOR

.94

JOBS/
RESIDENT

\$56,834

MEDIAN
HOUSEHOLD
INCOME

60.5%

COMMUTE MORE
THAN 10 MILES

16%

HOUSEHOLDS
EARNING
\$150K+

MACON CO.

8,832

2018 JOBS



RETAIL

LARGEST EMPLOYMENT
SECTOR

.25

JOBS/
RESIDENT

\$45,507

MEDIAN
HOUSEHOLD
INCOME

47%

COMMUTE MORE
THAN 10 MILES

5.5%

HOUSEHOLDS
EARNING
\$150K+

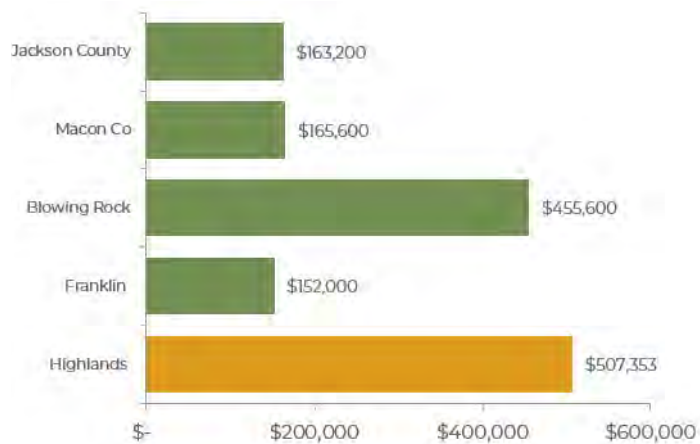
HOUSING

Housing in Highlands is dominated by single-family homes, which represent 85% of housing units in town. As of 2019, there are 3,344 housing units within the project study area, 2,223 of which are within the town's corporate limits. Of those homes within the town's corporate limits, 639 are primary residences with the other 1,584 units being another type of residence. These homes are likely seasonally used homes and vacation rentals but could also be unoccupied whilst for sale or for other reasons.

Likely due to its popularity as a tourist destination and limited land available for building, homes prices in Highlands are much higher than average for the County or State. The median home value in 2019 was \$507,000, about three times the average home value for Macon County.

Most of the homes in town were built after 1970 which is consistent with when Highlands became a very popular location for second homes.

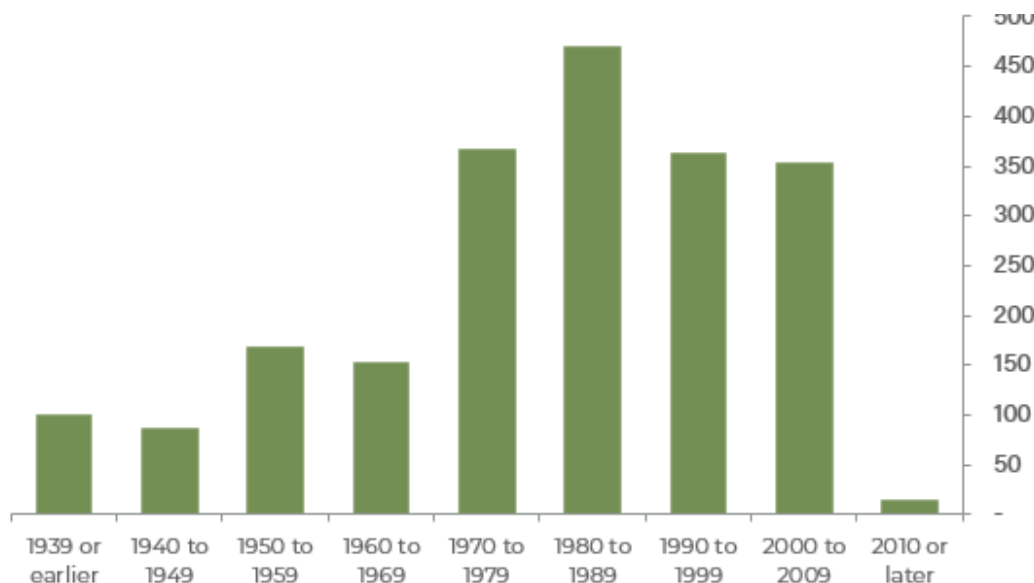
Median Home Value 2019



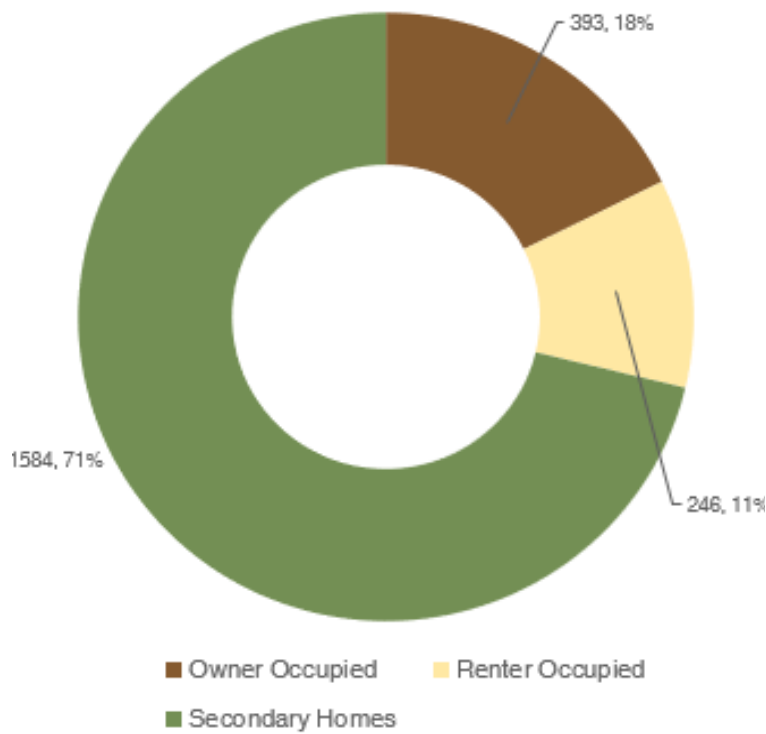
The median home value in Highlands is **3X** the median home value in Macon County.

Home value has increased **20%** in the past 10 years.

Housing by Year Built



Housing Tenure



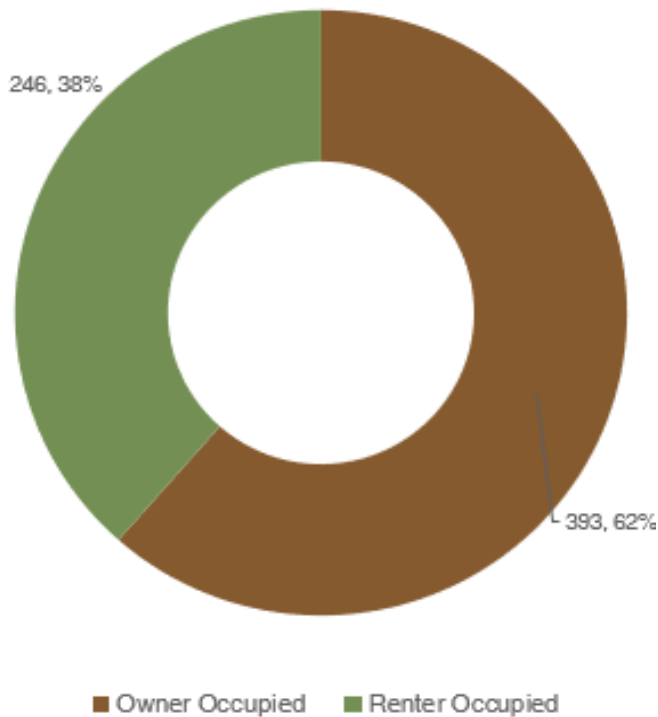
Defining Primary and Secondary Residences

How do we know who lives in Highlands full-time? Using the US Census data definitions of “occupied” and “vacant” housing units, we can determine how many homes are primary residences and extrapolate secondary residences.

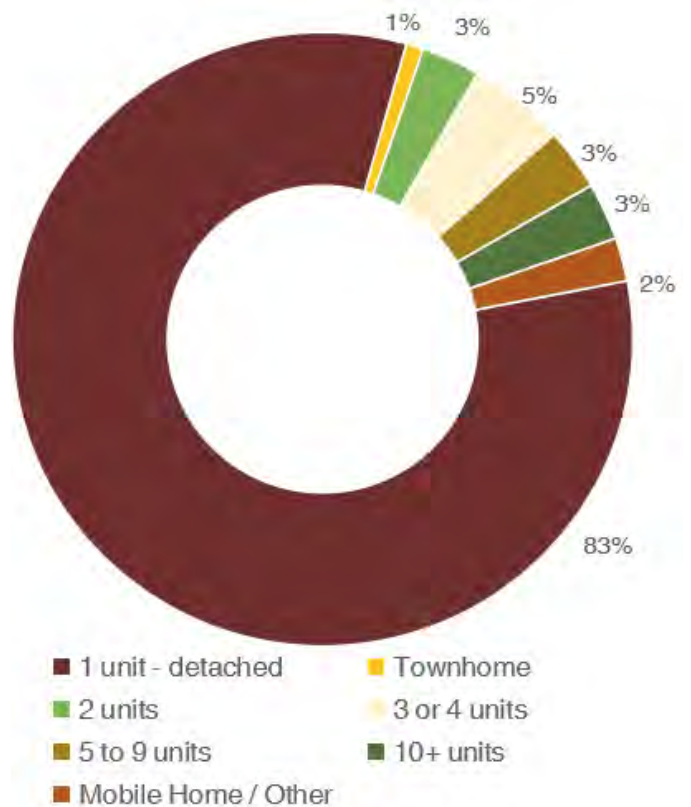
“Occupied” housing units are defined as those that are the “usual place of residence” for persons or a family.

“Vacant” housing units are defined as units where no one is living, or units owned by people whose “usual place of residence” is elsewhere. In popular tourist locations, “vacant” units are generally second homes or vacation rentals.

Housing Tenure for Primary Homes



Housing Type Distribution



NATURAL RESOURCES

Highlands is located in one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world. The topography, climate, and natural history of the area has led to a unique mix of northern species and southern species. The majority of areas within the study area are ranked as being high value for biodiversity and wildlife habitat by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program. There are 36 designated Natural Heritage Natural Areas located near Highlands. The Highlands Biological Station is a facility located in Highlands where researchers study the natural heritage of the area. The facility contains the Highlands Nature Center and Highlands Botanical Gardens.

A number of streams in the area are designated trout streams and serve as headwaters to public water supplies. Stakeholder interviews and the survey indicated that environmental protection is a priority. Citizens voiced concerns about increased pressure on resources, development impacts, and water quality.



Mill Creek parallels Main Street just north of downtown and eventually drains into Lake Sequoyah which is the water source for Highlands and the Cullusaja River a scenic river that is also a designated trout stream.

Near Highlands, there are



42,736 ACRES

OF PUBLIC LAND AND
CONSERVATION AREAS*

*INCLUDES NANTAHALA NATIONAL
FOREST WITHIN 5 MILES OF TOWN



107

MILES OF TROUT WATERS WITHIN
5 MILES



36

ECOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT
NATURAL AREAS (DESIGNATED
NATURAL HERITAGE NATURAL
AREAS)

**GREENWAYS, SIDEWALKS, HIKING TRAIL, AND MULTI-USE
PATHS**

54 MILES

OF

TRAILS ON FOREST SERVICE
PROPERTY



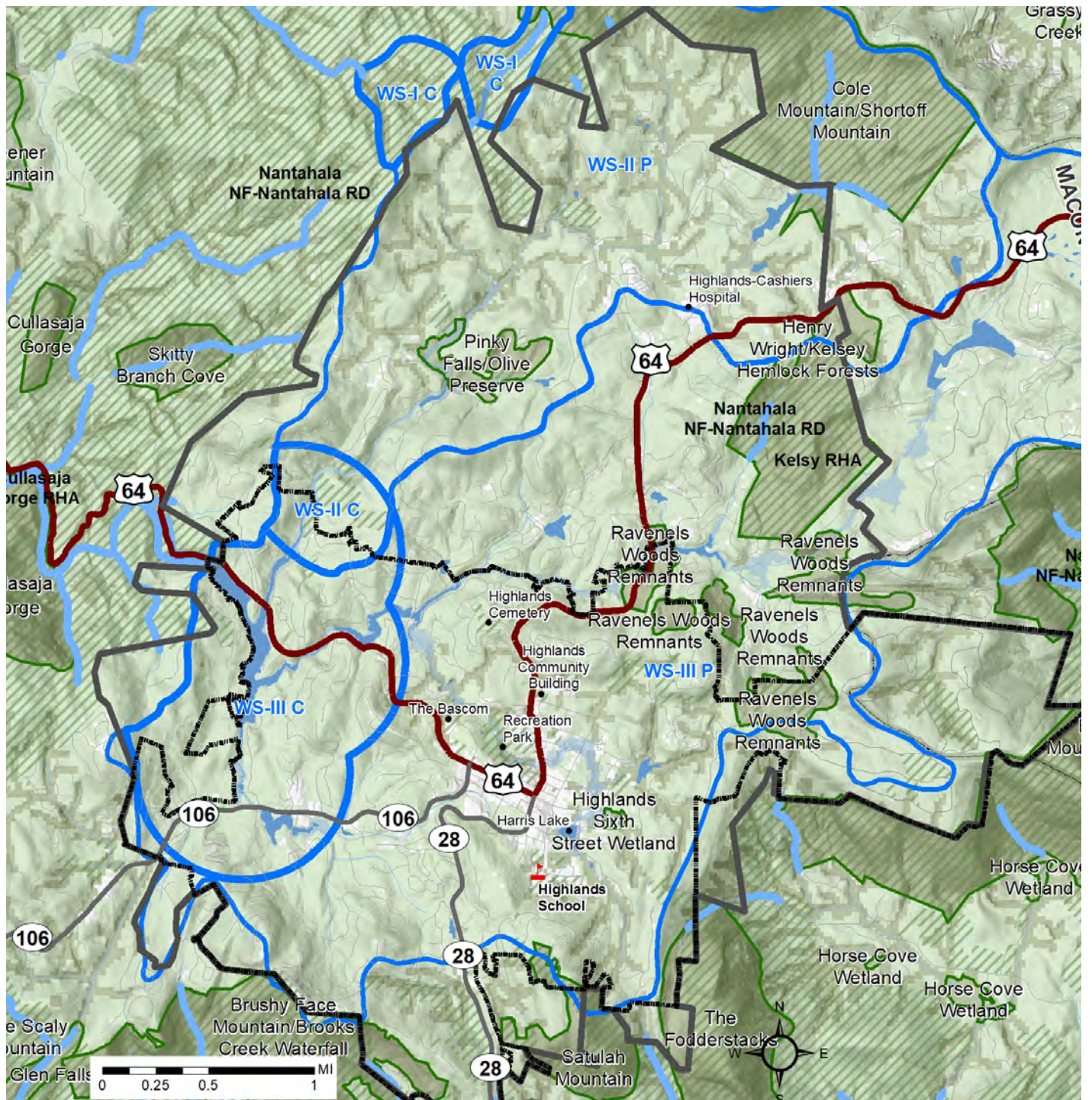
7 MILES

OF

EXISTING AND PROPOSED TRAILS
PART OF THE HIGHLANDS PLATEAU
GREENWAY



NATURAL RESOURCES MAP



Legend

Parks and Natural Resources

- Parks and Conservation Areas
- Natural Heritage Natural Areas
- Lakes
- Streams
- Trout Streams
- Floodplain

Water Supply Watersheds

- Critical Areas
- Protected Areas

Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitat Value

- Very High
- High
- Low-Medium

PARKS AND TRAILS

Highlands is nestled on a plateau between large tracts of public land in the Nantahala National Forest that provide outdoor recreation opportunities. The Town works with Macon County to maintain a number of parks and recreation opportunities. Highlands Recreation Park is a hub for local recreation that offers a gym, year-round pool, skatepark, playground, tennis, pickleball, programming, and a network of trails. Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park is located downtown and serves as a public gathering place with concerts and ice skating in the winter. The Town coordinates with the nonprofit group Highlands Plateau Greenway that develops and maintains a system of trails for walkers and hikers in town. A number of other publicly accessible greenspaces are located in the area and are owned by the Highlands Cashiers Land Trust (HCLC).



Parks and Recreation Facilities

KELSEY-HUTCHINSON FOUNDERS PARK

FOUNDERS PARK IS AN ASSET TO DOWNTOWN HIGHLANDS, OFFERING RESIDENTS AND VISITORS A PUBLIC GATHERING SPACE IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN. PROGRAMMING INCLUDES PUBLIC EVENTS SUCH AS CONCERTS AND ICE SKATING.

HIGHLANDS RECREATION PARK

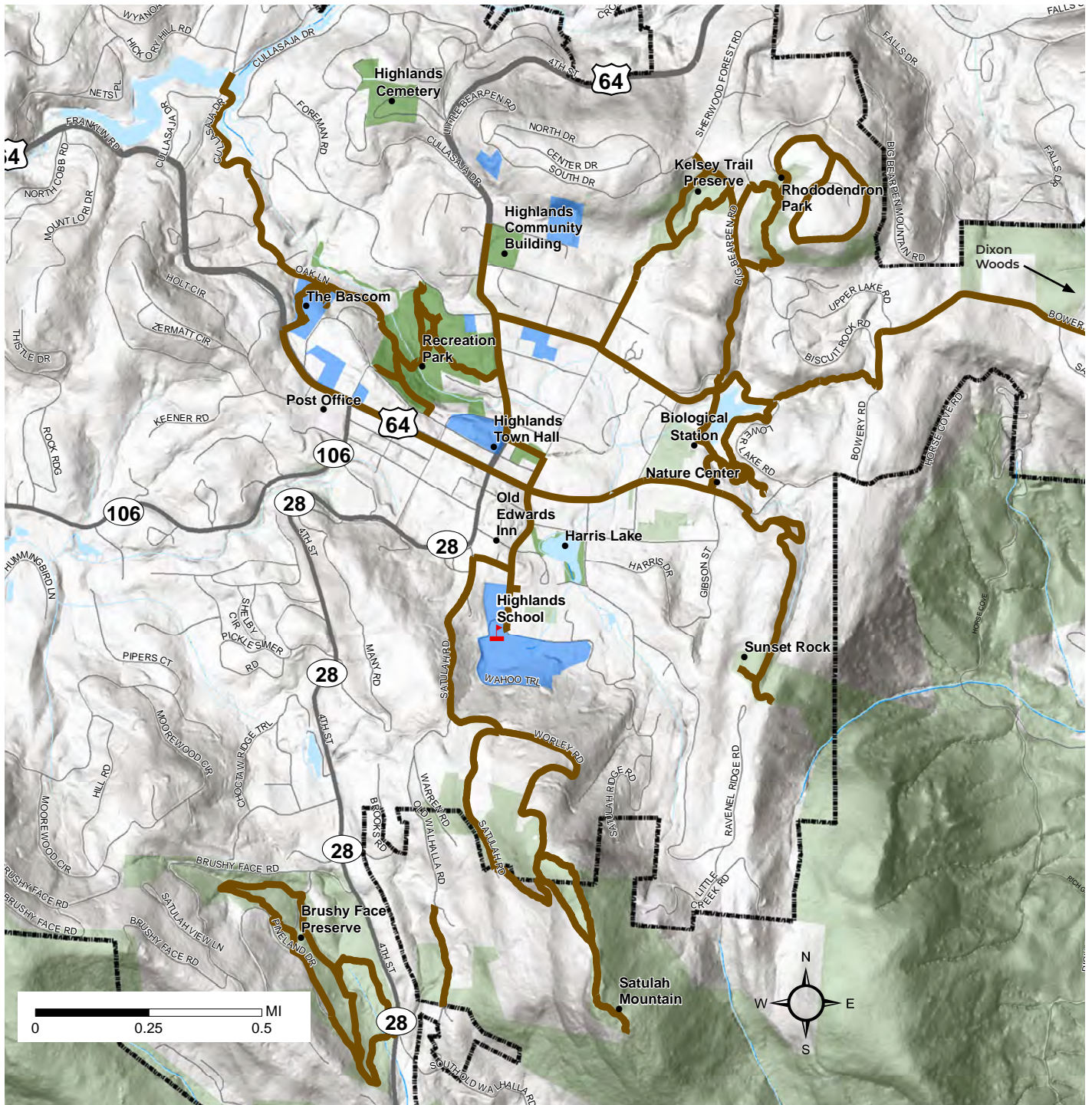
THE RECREATION PARK IS LOCATED ON A 30 ACRE PROPERTY JUST NORTH OF MAIN STREET. IT INCLUDES A GYM, CIVIC CENTER, POOL, SKATEPARK, PLAYGROUND, AND DOG PARK.

OTHER RECREATIONAL FACILITIES





- COMMUNITY BUILDING AND BASEBALL FIELD
- HARRIS LAKE PARK
- HIGHLANDS GREENWAY
- ZACHARY PARK (COUNTY-OWNED AND JOINTLY MAINTAINED)



PARKS AND TRAILS MAP



Legend

- | | |
|--|--|
|  Trails |  Lakes |
|  Civic |  Parks and Open Space |
|  Municipal Boundary |  Managed Areas |
|  Streams | |

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Historic Districts

The Highlands has three National Register Historic Districts within its municipal limits: the Highlands North Historic District, the Playmore-Bowery Road Historic District, and the Satulah Mountain Historic District. These districts recognize remnants of Highlands' history as a mountain outpost and as an early vacation and recreation destination. Land use policies can ensure that new development within and near historic districts helps to preserve the character of town.

Visitors who wish to take in Highlands' historic offerings can visit the Highlands Historical Society or walk along the Highlands Heritage Walking Trail, which features sites and buildings near Downtown.

Satulah Mountain Historic District

The Satulah Mountain Historic District is an well-preserved neighborhood of resort houses built between 1890 and 1940, set within the rich natural environment of the area surrounding Satulah Mountain. The District contains 46 contributing resources including the Henry M. Bascom House, The Rankin House, and the Calhoun House.

Other Districts

There are other areas in Town that are either on the study list to become a National Register Historic District or have been deemed eligible for the list: US 64 Highway, Mirror Lake Historic District, and the Webbmont Historic District.

Historic Structures

There are over 49 structures on the National Register List or located in a National Register Historic District in Highlands. These structures are located inside and outside the three official Historic Districts. Notable structures include the Highlands Inn (1880), the Edwards Hotel (constructed in 1880, with additions in 1930), the Elizabeth Wright Prince House (1877, with additions in 1935), and the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation (1896).

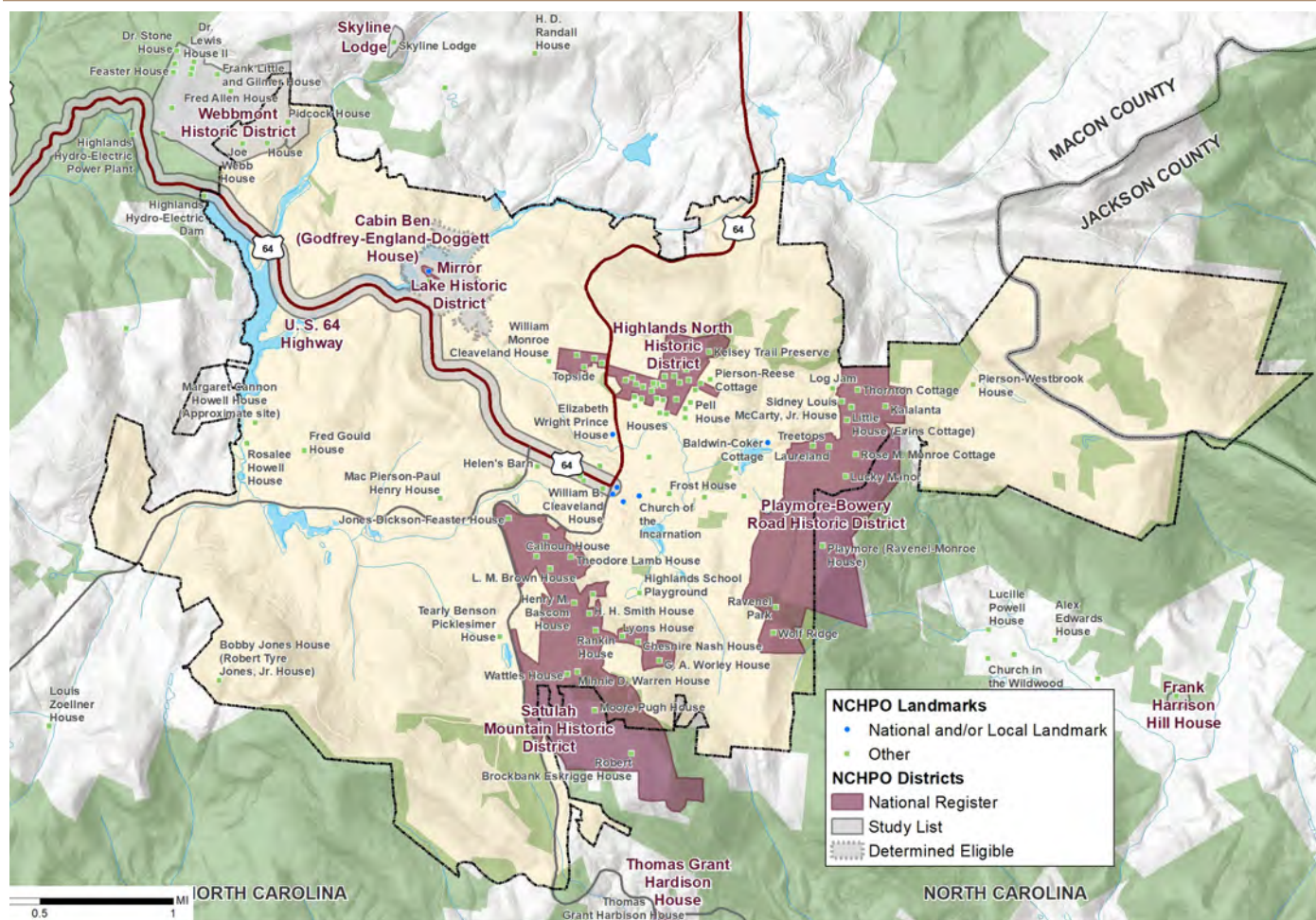


Elizabeth Wright Prince House, Fourth Street



Map of the Playmore-Bowery Road Historic District

HISTORIC RESOURCES



Highlands has three designated historic districts: the Highlands North Historic District, the Playmore-Bowery Road Historic District and the Satulah Mountain Historic District

There are significant historic structures located outside of the defined National Register Historic Districts and other areas in and near Town that are being studied for potential listing including the Mirror Lake neighborhood, the US 64 corridor to and through the Cullusaja River Gorge and the Webbmont area just west of Town.

DOWNTOWN & ECONOMY

Economy

Highlands' economy is unique, and its health is nearly inextricable from the prosperity of its downtown. Most businesses in Town are small and depend on the Town's status as a thriving tourist destination. Highlands is also the commercial hub of the Plateau, drawing customers from a wide area. There are an estimated 300 different businesses within the project study area (2020, NAICS).

Downtown

Downtown Highlands is the heart of activity on the Plateau. Spanning the blocks of the original Kelsey Plan, it resembles a quintessential mountain town that draws in locals and tourists alike. Its small-town feel is enhanced by a mix of businesses, alpine architecture, active facades and pedestrian friendly environment. It is also the commercial heart of Highlands. The business survey results on page 41 and in the Appendix provide more insight on the relationship between the downtown environment and the business community.

Employment

A common sentiment during stakeholder engagement was that Highlands' workers cannot afford to live in the town. Data shows that about 90% of employees in Highlands commute to work. Most of those who commute come from more than 10 miles away, from more affordable areas such as Franklin. The business operator survey found that over half of those who run businesses are concerned about availability of housing for their employees.

Economic Shifts

Many of the businesses in Town primarily serve and are dependent on tourism. This also means most of their business occurs between May and October, with the winter season presenting a challenge. However, local stakeholders indicated that tourist season is becoming longer over time.

93.5%

or **\$309,174,350**, of the value of commercially-zoned properties in Highlands is located downtown.

Source: Macon County Tax Data 2018

A change in the duration of tourist season is not the only transition Highlands' economy is experiencing. Business owner feedback indicated that customer demographics are changing. Business owners and operators are seeing younger customers, including families, more often.


A big driver of this shift is the Highlands' Chamber of Commerce and its efforts to promote Highlands' tourism in the off-season through promotion and events. These events draw out-of-town visitors to downtown and include:

- » Highlands Food and Wine Festival
- » Highlands Motoring Festival
- » Bear Shadow Music Festival
- » Meander in May Downtown
- » Holiday events in December
- » Weekly live music events



Main Street during the summer tourist season

Data demonstrates that Highlands' economy is becoming increasingly tourism-focused. The project team examined data that showed the number of employees per industry sector for jobs within the Town from 2010 and 2018. Figures showed :

 **83% growth** in hospitality-related jobs (arts, entertainment, accommodation, and food)
(40% of total jobs)

 **43% growth** in retail jobs
(24% of total jobs)

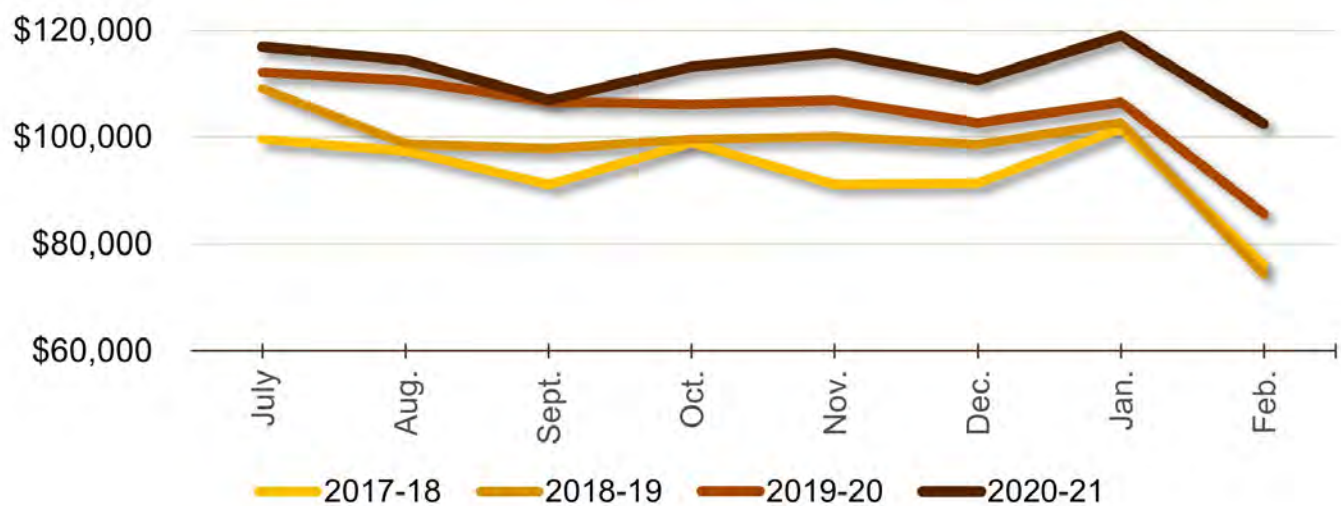
Source: US Census



Events like the Highlands Motoring Festival help people discover the Town every year.

Photo source: Plateau Daily News

Sales Tax by Month 2017-2021



The graph above show how 2020 was a record year for visitation and sales tax revenue despite and perhaps because of the coronavirus pandemic.

TRANSPORTATION

Roadways

Many of Highlands' roads are in good condition, and the Town is appropriately connected via US-64, SR-106, and SR-28 whose crossings form the heart of Highlands. US-64 is a scenic highway that serves as a significant facility for tourist traffic but is also used extensively by trucks. A review of NCDOT's average daily traffic along these corridors indicated that traffic volumes have not increased over the past several years, though the Town has some congestion during peak rush hours. This congestion is attributed to the interface between motorists, truck traffic, pedestrians, and those attempting to park or leave their parking space. It is not attributed to high traffic volumes.

Downtown

Highlands' downtown still shows the original grid from the Kelsey Plan, making the area well suited for walking. Stakeholder conversations and responses from community members indicated a strong desire to be able to walk to downtown from residences. Sidewalks exist along many of the primary Town streets. Main Street has wide sidewalks constructed of a combination of brick pavers and traditional concrete with amenities like shade trees, benches, and other landscaping elements. However, sidewalks on other streets are often narrow by current construction standards and many do not meet current ADA standards (frequently due to steep grades). A complete pedestrian network is necessary to provide connections for those who choose to leave their automobiles at home. This includes travelers for work, school, shopping, and recreational trips.

Parking

Parking in downtown was a common theme amongst stakeholder and community feedback. With the influx of tourists in peak seasons, parking along Main Street in Highlands is in demand, and motorists have expressed having difficulty finding parking spaces near their destinations. In addition, with numerous pedestrians crossing town streets and intersections, the conflicts between motorists and pedestrians creates some safety and operational concerns.

On-street parking is available with very few established restrictions to encourage turnover and maximize utilization. While employees are technically restricted from parking on Main Street, this practice does not consistently work due to enforcement challenges. There are currently no parking meters installed to regulate on-street parking, though this strategy has been previously considered and was mentioned during the public input period for this Plan.

Highlands' on-street parking on Main Street between Third Street and Fifth Street is often full or

There are **962**
free parking
spaces within the
downtown core.



near capacity (with peak hours between 1pm and 2pm), leading to a perception that there are not enough parking spaces. While the most convenient and accessible parking spaces along Main Street were typically full during the peak times, spaces were available along Oak Street, Spring Street, and Church Street, only a short walk from Main Street. The Parking and Circulation Study (from 2009) indicated that almost a third of total parking spaces were found to be unoccupied during the peak 1 to 2pm period.



The intersection of Fourth and Main Streets is the busiest intersection in Town but lacks sufficient space for pedestrians to wait on corners. It could benefit from additional safety upgrades.

Sidewalks in Highlands are prevalent in the downtown core and currently provide a suitable level of accessibility and connectivity. However, there are many roads that would benefit from new sidewalk construction or widening of existing sidewalk. Narrow roads are common due to the topography of Highlands, and it is understandable to only have sidewalks on one side, especially outside of the major corridors and downtown area.

From Third Street to Fifth Street, Main Street is a two-lane roadway with angled parking along both sides and a center angled parking area which is accessible in both the eastbound and westbound directions. Often motorists, instead of backing out of the center parking area, pull through and make a U-turn to travel in the opposite direction. This type of movement causes confusion,

congestion, and safety concerns. However, it is clear from discussions with various stakeholders that this parking is valuable and changes to Main Street's configuration would be met with resistance.

Recent Improvements

No major NCDOT roadway projects are slated for the near term to change alignments, widen segments, manage access, or add new signals at intersections. Recent improvements along Main Street (US-64) in Highlands include repaving and restriping all parking areas (including updates to handicapped parking pavement markings) and incorporating changes to pedestrian crossing infrastructure.

Transit

Regular bus service is not available in Highlands, and passenger rail service is not used in Western North Carolina. While NCDOT studies have indicated a long-term goal of linking major municipalities along an east-west rail corridor, this is not relevant to transportation in the Highlands area. Macon County Transit has been operating on-demand bus service for two decades, with a mission to "provide transportation services in an efficient, coordinated, cost effective manner that is responsive to the current needs of the residents of Macon County." There has been a focus on the Town of Franklin, with the agency located there and most trips scheduled in that area. If Highlands seeks growth in transit service, it will require a concerted effort to advocate for those needs and possibly a commitment to supporting the budget of Macon County Transit.

EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES

Sanitation

Garbage is picked up twice a week in residential areas in Highlands, and commercial trash is picked up seven days a week. All garbage must be placed in heavy plastic or metal containers with handles and tight-fitting lids no larger than 100 gallons in capacity. Voluntary recycling is available at the Macon County convenience centers outside the town limits.

New bear-proof garbage cans have been installed throughout the downtown area in an effort to be a “BearWise Community.” The new cans are bolted to the ground and have smaller openings to discourage bears digging through the can. These small openings also discourage residential and commercial trash from being disposed in them.

As the Town struggles to find the right balance to the sanitation department budget, there will arise a need to either raise rates or cut services. The Town could consider going out of the trash collection business altogether, but public input indicates general resistance to this option due to a perceived change in overall level of service.

Electricity and Internet

Depending on location, electricity is provided through the Town of Highlands, Haywood Electric Co-Op in Waynesville, or Duke Power in Franklin. The Highlands Electric Utility serves over 3,000 accounts, operating a municipal electric utility that owns more than 2,600 utility poles and 110 miles of line, most of which is aerial based. Interestingly, some of the customers reside in the areas of north Georgia.

Reliable electric provision and high-speed fiber optic Internet connectivity will benefit residents by providing telecommuting options and the capacity to operate businesses remotely. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, this capability is



Bear Resistant Toters required by August 1st, 2020. Toters can be purchased locally at Reeves Ace Hardware, at Home Depot and online.

For more information, please feel free to call Town Hall at (828)526-2118 or look at the ordinance online at: <https://highlandscnc.org/notices/803-new-sanitation-rules-and-regulations/file>



Bear-proof trash can campaign

essential and can mean the difference between success and failure for many small businesses, freelance workers, and others. It also has made clear that the digital divide is widening the disparity of students, as those with reliable Internet at home are more able to attend remote classes and complete assignments, while some struggled to make it through the year.

Depending on location, Highlands residents may choose from a total of 4 broadband providers; Frontier, Vyve (formerly Northland Cable), Highlands Cable, or Hotwire (assuming the town signs the contract with Hotwire in August) which utilizes Highlands own dark fiber network.

The Town initiated the project in 2015, after the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) struck down a state law that prevented local governments from building broadband networks. However, the FCC ruling was later overturned by a federal court, and the Town now partners with, Hotwire Communications, a private firm to lease and operate its network. The dark fiber network is nearing completion (mostly deployed via aerial fiber using the town's electric infrastructure) and will link every business and home in the Town to a dedicated fiber optic connection with spare fiber in all likely growth areas. Once completed, the fiber network will improve local broadband access as well as enable smart city applications, like enhanced utility systems monitoring. With better Internet connectivity, more Highlands residents will

be able to work from home successfully, attend remote school (including college classes), and start businesses that rely on online platforms. Some seasonal residents might stay for extended periods of time if they consider Highlands to be more of a home than a vacation destination.

Water, Sewer, and Stormwater

Inside the town limits, water is provided to most households and sewer is provided to 35-50% of households. Outside of town limits, private wells and septic systems are common, and several of the private clubs have their own community water and/or sewer system. The Town of Highlands water supply is the Lake Sequoyah reservoir. In the 1920s when the Town's water distribution system was born, the Town got its water from Houston Lake on Buck Creek Road. At that time, the Town received a permit from the United States Forest Service (USFS) to build a small reservoir at the headwaters of Big Creek to provide the Town's public water system. The water was chlorinated and traveled by gravity from Houston Lake to the water tank on Little Bear Pen and was pumping 65 gallons per minute. By 1965 Highlands was outgrowing the flow from that lake and EPA rules had changed. People could no longer drink surface water that had only been chlorinated; it had to be filtered, too. The Town built the current water treatment plant on Lake Sequoyah/Big Creek on Hickory Hill Road at the lower end of the Highlands watershed (1,500 gallons of water per minute) and applied for a permit to install an intake valve on the north side of the US-64 bridge, a much bigger reservoir.

The USFS took out the dam at Houston Lake and restored the creek, which feeds Lake Sequoyah. In the mid-1990s, projecting new demand, the Town applied to have Lake Sequoyah classified as a Class I Public Water Supply which meant, if necessary, the Town could draw from the main body of the lake. To address silt accumulation concerns, the Town installed an intake valve at the Lake Sequoyah Dam, which was property already owned by the Town. Now the Town has three options: draw from the creek at the water

plant, draw from the first intake in Lake Sequoyah near the bridge, draw from the intake valve at the dam, or a combination as needed. This allows plant operators to adjust according to water and turbidity levels.

Since 1993, the Town of Highlands' Water Supply Watershed Protection (WSWP) ordinance has included a stringent sediment control plan to keep silt and other pollutants from contaminating Lake Sequoyah and prevent runoff degrading water quality. The Town requires low-density development to limit impacts to water quality. Valid concerns exist regarding stormwater runoff draining into Lake Sequoyah, which serves as a drinking water source. The surface drinking water sources in this area are particularly important because the well water in the area contains naturally high concentrations of sulfur and metals and is not considered potable. Second, the Highlands Plateau is home to a unique ecosystem, with a wide variety of rare and endangered plants. The steep slopes of the surrounding land cause erosion from developing lots, threatening these species.

The Town's water system includes a Water Treatment Plant that can produce up to 2 million gallons per day (MGD), 9 ground storage tanks and 8 booster pump stations. A Water System Asset Management Plan was completed in 2019. Findings include:

- Water use is projected to increase significantly in the next 20 years.
- 30% of water distribution pipes and a number of hydrants, valves meters and storage tanks are in poor condition.
- There are \$35 million in capital needs over the next 20 years.

In 2007 a Stormwater Master Plan was created to identify priority improvements to stormwater conveyance and treatment in the Town of Highlands. The plan included a description of capital projects targeted at addressing inadequate stormwater facilities through replacements and the addition of new stormwater infrastructure that would improve water quality in local creeks and Lake Sequoyah.





3 PROCESS & VISION

How does the Highlands Vision and Goals for the next 20 years come together? Community conversations over the course of the yearlong planning process shape and inform the guiding concepts for the future.

This Chapter documents the public engagement process and demonstrates how public feedback has directly led to the vision, goals, and recommendations.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

A plan of this magnitude would not be possible or credible without significant public engagement. Throughout the yearlong planning process, residents and stakeholders were engaged at every step. The team prioritized engaging with vulnerable populations and ensured that the demographics of participants accurately reflected the demographics of Highlands.

Steering Committee

The Town Board appointed a 10-person Steering Committee of residents, business owners, and members of appointed boards. The Steering Committee met five times throughout the project to provide their valuable perspective on the community's strengths and needs and steer the direction and content of the plan.

Stakeholder Interviews

A series of hour-long interviews were conducted with stakeholder groups in Phase One of the project. These stakeholder groups consisted of 5 to 10 people drawn from across the Highlands community. Property and business owners, real estate professionals, nonprofit and community group members, education and healthcare representatives, elected officials and Town staff were represented. The lively conversations focused on what people valued about Highlands, their goals for the Town, and what priority issues should be addressed with this Plan. The meetings provided insight into the unique challenges and opportunities facing the Town and the broader plateau.

The public engagement process received feedback from the community through

1,662 Project Website Visits

1,015 Survey Responses

62 Business Survey Responses

2 In-person Public Meetings

2 Online Meetings

1 Walking Tour

5 Steering Committee Meetings

6 Stakeholder Meetings



The project website (www.highlandscommunityplan.com/) included information on the project and was regularly updated throughout the process.

Visioning Workshops

In October 2020, Town staff and consultants conducted a series of public meetings to gather input on Town issues and the community's vision for the plan. Meetings were held October 21 to 23 at the Highlands Community Building and included the following:

- » Traditional public meeting
- » Downtown walking tour
- » Stakeholder interviews
- » Steering Committee meeting

Meetings were conducted using CDC recommended social distancing protocols to limit potential spread of the COVID-19.

The in-person visioning workshop was followed by a virtual public meeting in November 2020 for those who preferred a remote format. This online meeting reached over 50 full- and part-time residents who were able to discuss Town issues directly with project staff and each other, replicating the experience of a traditional public meeting.

Draft Plan Meetings

In June and July of 2021, two public meetings, one in person and one virtual, were held to gather feedback on the draft plan. Both meetings included a presentation that provided an overview of the plan, the process, and the recommendations, before opening up for discussion and questions with

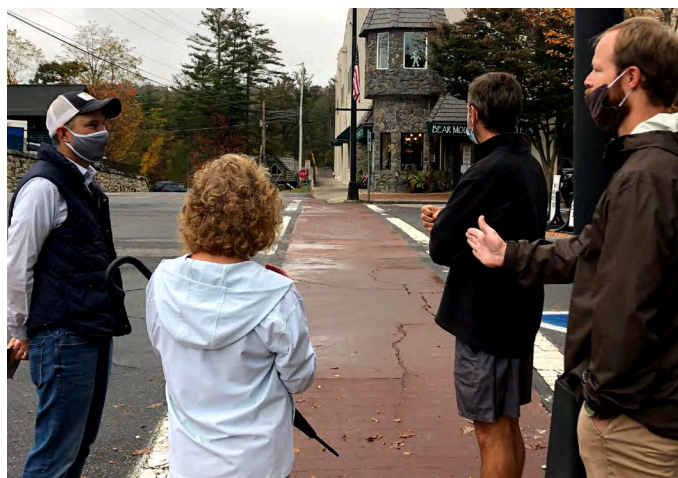
the attendees. Attendees were provided with options for making comments on the plan, either on a written comment card or through an online comment form. Feedback received was incorporated into the final Plan.

Surveys

The project team created two surveys to gather data about the community's vision, concerns, and goals for Highlands. This included a broad 19-question survey that asked respondents about their vision and goals for the Town. The project team also conducted a business owner-focused survey to learn about the unique needs of Highlands' businesses. The survey data was used to inform subsequent parts of the plan so that it accurately represents priorities from different segments of the community.

COVID-19

The project's schedule meant that it was directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to stick to the project schedule and continue learning from the public while maintaining social distance, staff had to find creative solutions for the remaining engagement. Accommodations included extending survey closing dates, virtual Steering Committee Meetings, and virtual Public Meetings that were posted online afterward. Engagement numbers were either similar to or above the number of attendees of a typical in-person meeting.



The project team held meetings during October and November of 2020 to gather feedback for the Community Plan.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

As part of the analysis and visioning process, the team conducted a survey so that the community could communicate their concerns, preferences, and aspirations for Highlands' future. The survey opened in conjunction with the public meeting in October 2020 and ran through January 2021. It was hosted online and available in English

and Spanish, with paper copies available.

In total, 1,015 people took the survey. Their responses covered topics such as values, concerns, downtown development, housing, land use, and demographics. The survey format included multiple choice, visual preference, and open ended questions. Select questions have been summarized below. For the full survey results, see the Appendix.

WHAT ARE YOUR BIGGEST CONCERNS FOR THE FUTURE OF HIGHLANDS?

Environmental Preservation

Maintaining a Vibrant Downtown

Expanding and/or upgrading infrastructure

Historic Preservation and Cultural Resources

Controlling short-term rentals

WHICH DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENT IS MOST APPEALING TO YOU?

Improved/additional open spaces and parks

New shops, businesses, and restaurants

Parking

Activities and special events

Improvements to sidewalks and crossings

IF HOUSING WERE DEVELOPED IN AREAS CLOSEST TO DOWNTOWN, WHAT TYPES OF HOMES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE?



BUSINESS SURVEY

Because downtown and the larger business community is so integral to life in Highlands, the team conducted a separate survey for business owners and operators. The goal of this survey was to identify how the Plan and the Town can better support the Highlands business community. It asked more in-depth questions about the relationship between Highlands' character and built environment and their businesses.

The Chamber of Commerce helped distribute the survey and was a key partner in advertising it. The survey ran from January to April 2021 and received 62 responses. These responses represented a total of 1,203 employees. Full responses can be found in the Appendix.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

- 78%** Agree that the look and feel of Downtown helps businesses
- 61%** Agree that more hotels or rentals Downtown would help their businesses
- 51%** Agree that more residential housing Downtown would help their business
- 0%** Agree that housing for employees is readily available
- 25%** Have issues with Downtown waste receptacles
- 59%** Feel increased wayfinding signage would help their business

WHAT IMPROVEMENT DOWNTOWN OR ELSEWHERE IN HIGHLANDS COULD MOST BOOST YOUR BUSINESS?

PARKING

WIDER SIDEWALKS

DECORATIVE LIGHTING

VISITOR KIOSK

WAYFINDING SIGNS

WITH YOUR BUSINESS IN MIND, PLEASE RANK THE COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS YOU WOULD MOST LIKE TO SEE IN DOWNTOWN HIGHLANDS:

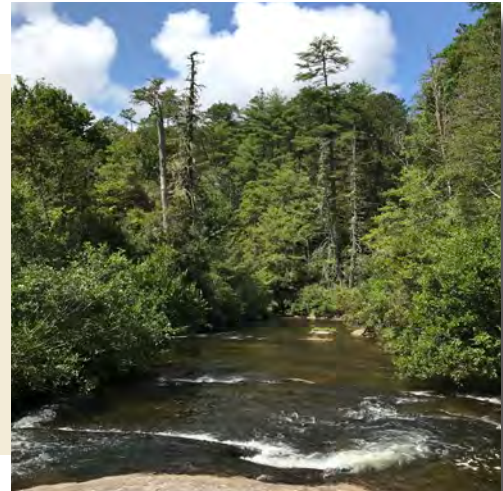
- 1** Improved open spaces, public gathering spaces, walking trails, greenways
- 2** Pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks, crossings, lighting)
- 3** Parking infrastructure (additional street parking on side streets, public deck or lots)
- 4** Public Art: sculptures, murals, interactive art
- 5** Other

EMERGING ISSUES

Through technical analysis, background research, and community engagement, a common set of issues emerged. Residents and tourists love the Town because of its rich natural environment, welcoming downtown, culture, and community feel. However, rising popularity threatens the most-loved qualities that attract people to the community. The issues described here are often interrelated, and solutions accordingly must be innovative and sensitive. The Vision, Goals, and Policies described in the following pages can help address these issues over the coming years.

Environmental Preservation & Parks

Much of the land around Highlands is protected; however, significant natural resources exist within and surrounding the Town. Care should be taken to ensure development design that protects water quality, wildlife habitat, and significant viewsheds. Engagement indicated that the park facilities in town, although exemplary for a town of Highlands' size, do not fully meet the needs of all demographics.



Downtown Parking

The Town has over 900 parking spaces for downtown visitors, but the downtown area still experiences some shortages during special events. Competition for spaces in the most desirable blocks of downtown is high and traffic accumulates when people drive slowly to find a spot, or have to back out into traffic to exit a space.

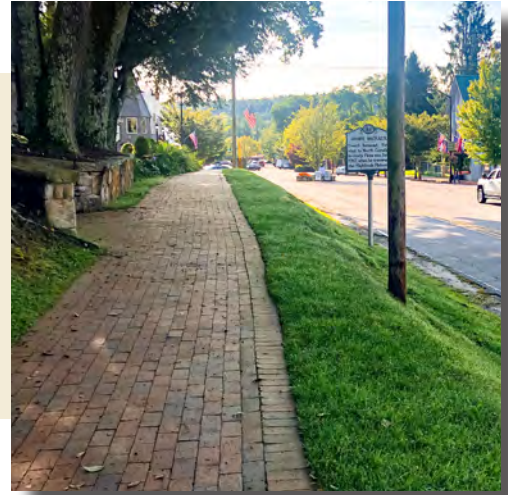
Downtown Development

The Town will have to balance preservation of structures and local character with demand for more shops, offices, and residential uses. As developable parcels are a dwindling resource, the Town will have to decide if and how it will accommodate additional commercial and residential development to meet demands.



Sidewalks and Pedestrian Environment

While downtown has good sidewalk connectivity, the condition and accessibility of some sidewalks require updates, and there are some missing links. Sidewalks should extend from the business district to nearby neighborhoods to increase safety for pedestrians and reduce demand for parking.



Housing

Highlands has a large portion of second homes that are used seasonally or rented out, which has reduced housing that is available to full-time residents. As demand for housing rises, so have the home prices throughout town, pricing out groups like young families, business owners, and workers.

Short-term Rentals


Housing demand issues are magnified by short-term rentals. Using housing for vacation rentals takes away housing stock that is available for residents, and is particularly an issue downtown, where the few existing apartments are increasingly being turned into rentals.



Utilities and Infrastructure

Infrastructure and critical services including water and sewer, electricity, and solid waste need to keep pace with a growing year-round and seasonal population. Issues surrounding waste disposal and receptacles were discussed throughout the public involvement, from inadequately sized downtown bins and lack of recycling options to issues with trash at short-term rentals.

VISION



“Highlands is a **vibrant and scenic mountain community** founded on the **beauty of the plateau’s natural environment**, the uniqueness of its **village character**, and the richness of the area’s **culture and history.**”

GOALS

1

TOWN CHARACTER

Maintain and enhance the town center's village character that is surrounded by mostly low-density housing that blends with the natural environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Preserve and enhance the natural environment and the scenic beauty of Highlands.

2

3

CULTURE AND HISTORY

Preserve and promote the rich cultural and historic resources of Highlands.

PEDESTRIAN FOCUS

Create a downtown and commercial areas that emphasize pedestrian comfort and safety.

4

5

PARTNERSHIPS

Cultivate ongoing community partnerships with area organizations and governments to plan for and protect the plateau.

LOCAL ECONOMY

Support and sustain the local economy, including downtown businesses, tourism, the arts, and outdoor recreation.

6



Highlands Wine Shoppe

CLOSED



4 LAND USE

The Land Use chapter of this plan includes a Future Land Use Map and defined character areas. These sections are meant to guide future growth and development in the Town of Highlands.

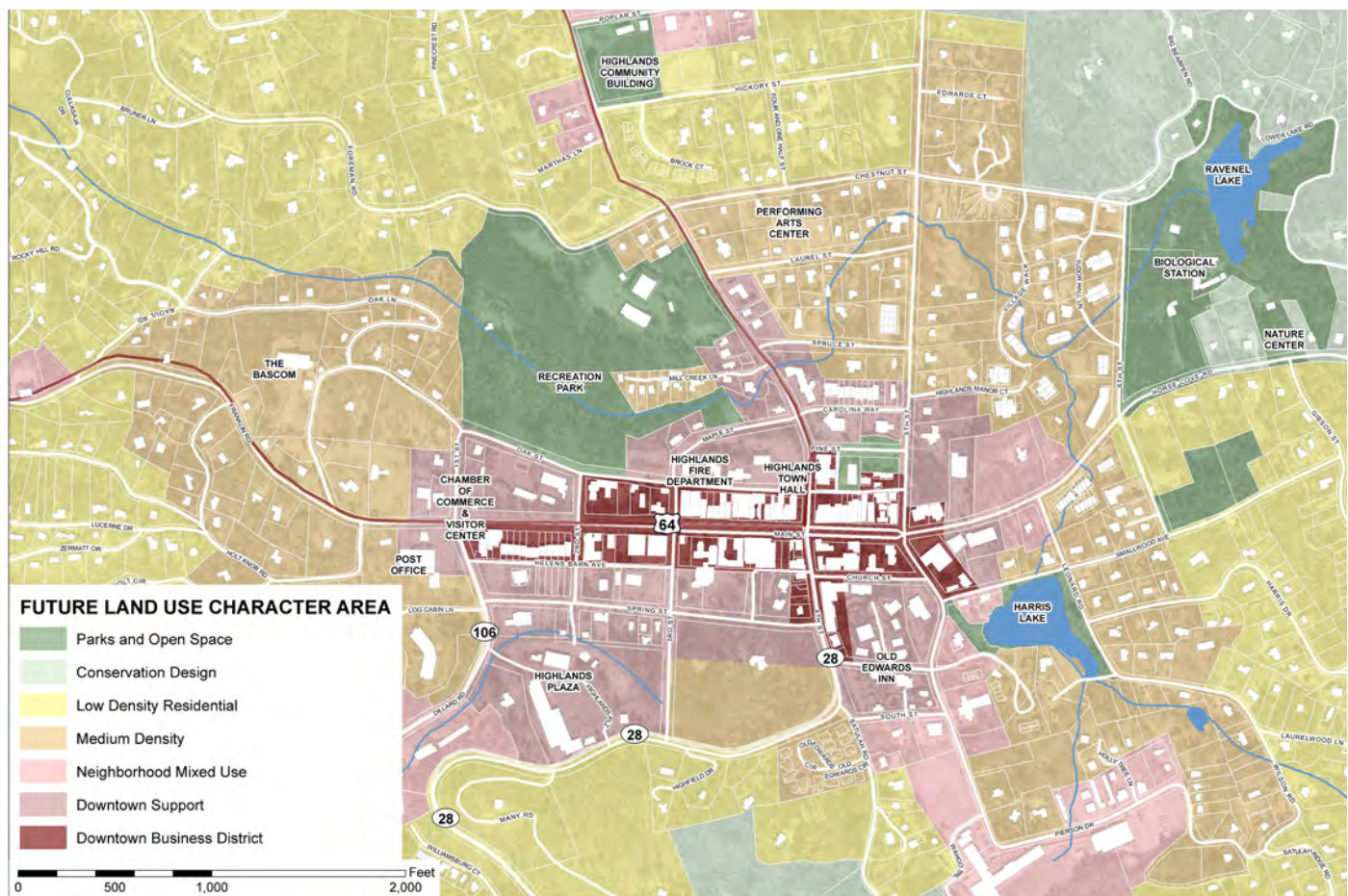
FUTURE LAND USE MAP OVERVIEW AND HIGHLIGHTS

The Future Land Use Map and associated character areas are meant to guide land use and infrastructure decisions within Highlands' corporate limits and the greater project study area.

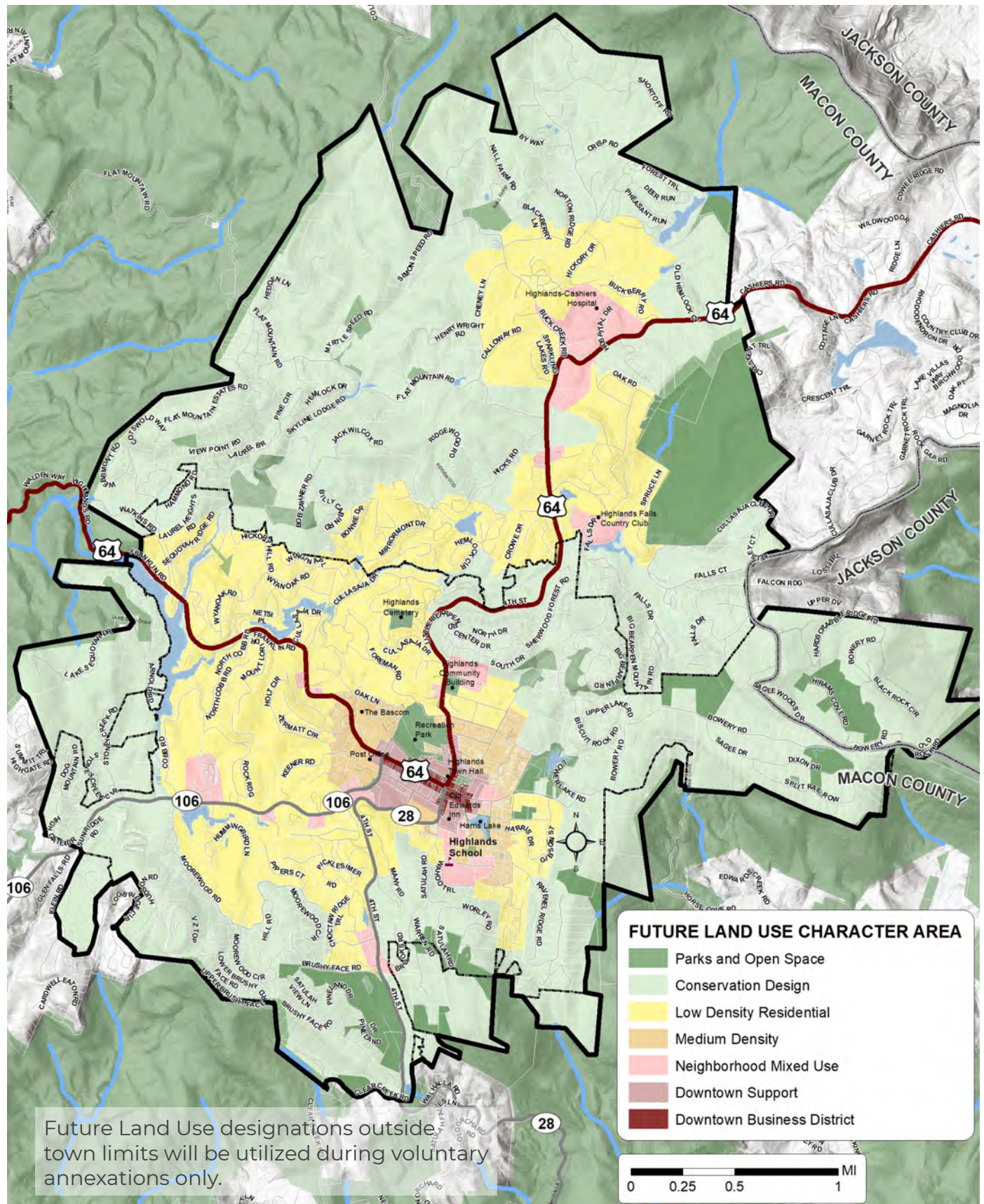
The future land use map illustrates the desired land use pattern in the Town of Highlands. It has been designed to help realize the Plan's Vision and Goals and includes:

- » Two downtown character areas that allow for different uses, character and densities
- » An area for small mixed use nodes that transition away from downtown to residential areas called Neighborhood Mixed Use
- » Small mixed-use nodes along major corridors
- » Three residential areas of varying densities
- » Areas for new housing types near downtown
- » Sensitive areas where lower density development should be integrated with the landscape to reduce impacts on natural resources

1: DOWNTOWN FUTURE LAND USE MAP



2: FUTURE LAND USE MAP



FUTURE LAND USE CHARACTER AREAS

The Future Land Use Map provides a generalized guide for land use decisions in Highlands. The character areas on the map are defined below and describe intended uses, density, scale, and design features of new development. These descriptions and the associated map should be utilized to guide regulations, private investment, infrastructure decisions, and rezoning decisions.

DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT



The Downtown Business District covers the heart of downtown and fosters and reinforces the quintessential mountain village character of downtown Highlands. It supports a mix of uses including commercial, office, and residential. Ground floor uses are primarily active retail and services with offices and apartments found on upper stories. Hotel uses are limited to what already exists. Design in the Downtown Business District focuses on creating an attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment. Building height and bulk are limited and parking requirements are significantly reduced for new development. The streetscape caters to pedestrians with generous sidewalks and plantings where feasible, on-street parking, and safe street crossings.

DOWNTOWN SUPPORT



The Downtown Support character area provides for mixed-use development adjacent to the Downtown Business District, serving as a transition from the heart of downtown to surrounding neighborhoods. Like the Downtown Business District, Downtown Support areas cater to a mix of uses including commercial uses, hotels, office, retail, and residential. Building footprints may be slightly larger and vertical mixed-use development is encouraged. This district also allows for a wider variety of residential housing, including apartments, townhomes, and cottage courts. The form of the Downtown Support area is like the Downtown Business District in that it emphasizes careful architectural form and a safe pedestrian environment, but has more requirements for on-site parking.

NEIGHBORHOOD MIXED-USE



The Neighborhood Mixed-Use area provides a commercial area that helps transition to and works in harmony with residential areas. These areas can be found as a transition from Downtown and/or highway commercial areas to neighborhoods. They allow low-intensity commercial uses, with some larger institutional, civic, and recreation buildings. They allow a mix of housing types including townhomes and pocket neighborhoods in addition to single family residential at medium densities. It has a well-connected street network, open spaces, and pedestrian facilities. Transitions to low-density neighborhoods are typically accomplished through design techniques such as preservation or planting of vegetated buffers, location of open space, utilizing topography, etc.

MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



The medium density residential area is comprised predominantly of neighborhoods within walking distance to downtown. Dwelling units are mostly single-family on medium-sized lots with some other small-format housing types incorporated, provided their design and density is compatible with the context. Because these areas are intended to be within walking distance to Downtown, pedestrian facilities should be provided.

LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL



The Low Density Residential district consists of low-density single-family homes and neighborhoods. The areas are more mountainous in character and generally have a density of 1 to 2 dwelling units per acre. Many of these areas are located within the water supply watershed for Lake Sequoyah and have built-upon area (impervious surface) limits as well as minimum lot sizes or density restrictions. This area also includes portions of designated historic districts where low-density single-family development is encouraged to maintain the character of the district.

CONSERVATION DESIGN



Conservation design areas are comprised of very low-density residential uses near sensitive natural and/or historic resources. These areas should be limited to very-low-density developments and feature context-sensitive design. Development should be clustered away from sensitive natural resources including streams, riparian areas, Natural Heritage Natural Areas, steep slopes and mountain ridges. These areas may not have public sewer access, in which case lots should be larger. Conservation subdivisions, which feature smaller lots and more open space (>40%), are encouraged if new development is connected to sewer.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



The Parks and Open Space designation is intended for environmentally sensitive lands (e.g., floodplains and steep slopes), or preserved areas with the potential for some recreational use. In most instances, this land is to be preserved in its natural state unless minimally developed for a recreational use.



WILL HENRY
STEVENS BRIDGE

NO
EXIT

A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a rustic wooden building with a steep roof. A white sign with black text that reads "NO EXIT" is mounted on the wooden wall. The building is surrounded by green trees and foliage.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

This Chapter offers policy recommendations and strategies related to land use and housing, downtown and tourism, recreation and natural resources, transportation, and public services and infrastructure.

The policy recommendations provide overarching guidance on key topics. Individual strategies provide more specific direction for different areas of Town, revisions to regulations, programs, and projects.

Recommendations are divided into five sections, and each section includes a short list of implementation steps meant to be addressed by ongoing, short-term or medium-term action items.

LAND USE & HOUSING

Overview

Land use and housing recommendations in this Section seek to continue the historical stewardship of the built and natural environments that has contributed to the unique character of Highlands. These recommendations help to protect natural resources, encourage sustainability without stagnation, enhance downtown, and address housing issues.

Primary Goals Addressed by Land Use and Housing Recommendations

GOAL #1 - Town Character:

Maintain and enhance the town center’s village character that is surrounded by mostly low-density housing that blends with the natural environment.

GOAL #2 - Preservation of the Environment:

Preserve and enhance the natural environment and the scenic beauty of Highlands.

GOAL #5 - Partnerships:

Strengthen partnerships to plan for and protect the plateau.

Policy LU 1: Regularly evaluate and update the Community Plan and Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

- LU 1.1: Regularly evaluate the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), zoning districts, and map. Consider adjustments to support implementation of the Highlands Community Plan.
- LU 1.2: Evaluate rezoning requests based on adherence to the Future Land Use Map, character area descriptions and policies included in the Highlands Community Plan.
- LU 1.3: Amend the Future Land Use Map as needed based on approved rezonings.
- LU 1.4: Update the Community Plan every 5 years or as infrastructure changes or market conditions necessitate.

Policy LU 2: Reinforce the existing town character through the design of new development and land use decisions.

- LU 2.1: Encourage a development pattern that follows the Future Land Use Map.
 - » Focus commercial land uses, mixed-use development and residential options in the Downtown Business District and the Downtown Support area.
 - » Encourage context-sensitive infill and redevelopment of underutilized commercial areas.
 - » Encourage low-intensity non-residential uses, mixed-use development and residential land uses in Neighborhood Mixed-Use areas.
 - » Limit the scale and density of new development in Low Density Residential and Conservation Design areas identified on the Future Land Use Map.

LU 2.2: Maintain policies and standards that encourage construction of new buildings and developments that are consistent with the scale of existing development and character of Highlands.

- » Continue to maintain building size limits that ensure that new development fits into the existing built and natural environment.
 - Limit buildings to 3 stories with a height limit of 35' at the front entrance.
 - » *Consider some flexibility for changes in grade, attics and/or basements and/or unique conditions such as where a new building will incorporate a publicly accessible parking deck*
 - Encourage small footprint buildings and articulation in building facades.
 - Continue to specify building material requirements and encourage architectural detail in new

commercial, mixed-use and multi-family development.

- » Maintain and revise built-upon area and/or impervious surface maximums in residential zoning districts to protect water quality and neighborhood character.
- » Encourage the use of adequate buffers and setbacks to reduce visual and noise impacts on existing development.
 - Exceptions to this include areas in and near downtown where required buffers should be reduced or eliminated between compatible uses to reinforce the existing character.
- » Encourage the use of native landscaping in new development, on town-owned land and in public projects.



BUILDING SIZE

The size of buildings in downtown Highlands has been managed to create a pedestrian scale Main Street. The design of buildings also has been regulated to encourage quality development that matches the character of existing structures. Existing regulations limit the floor-to-area ratio of new buildings in the B-1 zoning district to 1.4. There is an allowance of 0.35 for finished attic space. Building maximum is set to 3 floors (exclusive of basement).

Building size in the B-4 zoning district is also regulated to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). There are watershed regulations that limit impervious surface in B-2 and B-3 zoning districts, however a policy or standards specifying a maximum building size is suggested.

LU 2.3: Preserve the historic character of downtown and designated National Register Historic Districts and increase awareness of historic sites.

- » Encourage the preservation of historic buildings in commercial and residential districts.
 - Consider methods of encouraging the preservation of facades and exteriors of signature buildings downtown, including the Highlands Inn and the Old Edwards Inn.
 - Consider additional development regulations to protect the character of historic neighborhoods.

LU 2.4: Ensure new development adheres to design principles that reinforce the character of different commercial areas of Highlands.

- » Encourage new development in the Downtown Business District to adhere to the following design principles:
 - New buildings should front Main Street or 4th Street and include the main building entry facing the sidewalk and the public right-of-way.
 - Buildings should be designed at a pedestrian scale and should have frequent building entrances, architectural details and intricate facades including building offsets, awnings, covered entries, varied building materials, windows and other features noted in the Community Design Standards.
 - Maximum (not minimum) setbacks near public roads and adjacent buildings.
 - Limit required buffers, especially between compatible uses.
 - Parking in rear of buildings if provided.
 - Discourage auto-oriented uses including drive-thru restaurants.
 - Streets should have narrow turn radii, wide sidewalks, safe crossings,

plantings where feasible.

» **Downtown Support areas**

- Allow for buildings in the Downtown Support area that are slightly larger footprints than in the Downtown Business District.
- Consider implementing a maximum building size or maximum floor-area (FAR) ratio to keep the scale of new development compatible with downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.
 - › *A maximum building footprint size of 10,000 square feet is recommended with exceptions for redevelopment sites with larger existing buildings and prominent civic/institutional buildings*
 - › *A floor-to-area ratio maximum could also be studied to limit the scale of infill and redevelopment*
- New buildings should front public rights of way and include the main building entry facing the primary public right-of-way unless the building is screened from view.
- Focus new commercial and residential uses on principle streets or public spaces (e.g., a plaza, courtyard, or greenspace).
- Parking in rear or side of buildings if parking is required.
- Include a mix of housing types where feasible, such as upper-story residential, townhomes, or small multifamily buildings.

» **Neighborhood Mixed-use areas**

- Allow for renovation and redevelopment of existing commercial areas, new small scale commercial uses, and commercial or civic centers.
- Allow for a mix of housing types and lodging uses.
- Screen larger buildings and parking lots from principal roadways.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR COMMERCIAL AREAS

Downtown Business District (DBD)

- » Building close to the street
- » Active facades, with frequent entrances and many windows
- » Parking provided in rear, if at all
- » Smaller block size



Downtown Support

- » Buildings fronting the street or public spaces
- » Buildings slightly larger than in DBD
- » Active facades with awnings or other features
- » Mix of housing types



Neighborhood Mixed Use

- » Small-scale commercial centers
- » Mix of housing types
- » Parking lots screened from roads

**Policy LU 3: Manage growth along major entry corridors and edges.****LU 3.1: Enforce and refine design standards for new commercial development along major roadways.**

- » Continue to require that parking and storage areas be screened from view using structural elements, topographic features, and/or plantings.
- » Encourage that larger buildings larger (i.e. greater than 5,000 square feet)

be screened from view along major roadways, including US 64, NC 28 and NC 106.

- » Encourage Macon County to establish a zoning overlay district that requires design standards along US 64 and other main corridors outside of Highlands.

LU 3.2: Encourage the conservation of natural areas along major roadways on the edges of town. *See Natural resources recommendations for more detail.*

Policy LU 4: Encourage a limited mix of housing types in defined areas.

LU 4.1: Continue to allow for flexibility in lot size for Planned Cluster Developments that meet defined design criteria.

- » Number of lots shall not exceed total number of lots allowed in underlying zoning district or Watershed Overlay District (whichever is more restrictive.)
- » Maintain high standards including buffers, setbacks and requirement for 50% open space.



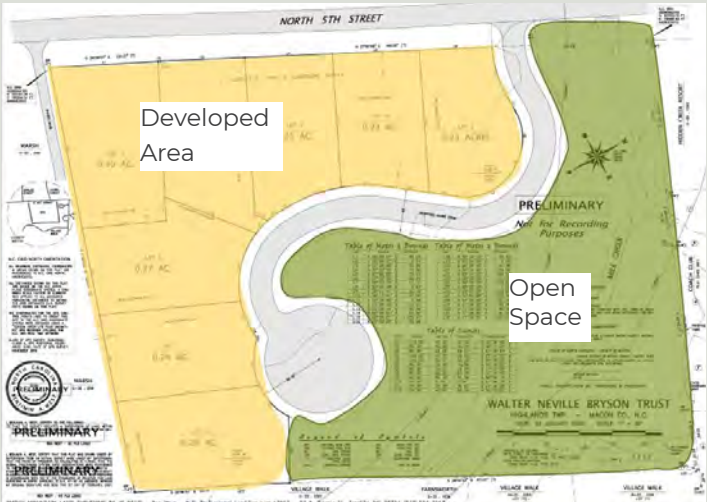
The image above depicts a “pocket neighborhood” in Langley, Washington. This type of development includes small single-family homes oriented around a shared greenspace. Encouraging these types of developments near downtown and other commercial areas could be a way to allow housing variety while preserving the single-family character of some streets.

LU 4.2: Create opportunities for small, single-family homes with shared open space (pocket neighborhoods) near downtown and/or other commercial areas.

- » Consider defining pocket neighborhoods as a use in the Unified Development Ordinance and allowing them in certain areas if design criteria are met.
- » Modifications in dimensional standards and/or a modest density increase may be needed to allow for this type of housing.

CLUSTER DEVELOPMENTS

Current regulations in Highlands allow for Planned Cluster Developments, also known as Conservation Subdivisions. This option provides flexibility in design in order to preserve environmental or historical features. It allows for lots that are smaller than the minimum lot size specified in the zoning district, in exchange for larger amounts of open space. Other criteria must also be met. The number of lots cannot exceed total number of lots allowed in an underlying district and other standards must also be met including a 40-foot Buffer, 10-foot building setbacks and at least 50% open space.



The image above shows a recent cluster development proposed on Fifth street. The cluster development option allowed smaller lots in exchange for preserved open space along Mill Creek.

LU 4.3: Continue to allow incidental apartments in B-1, B-2, and B-3 zones.

- » Clarify allowable density of incidental apartments in development code.

LU 4.4: Consider limited multi-family opportunities consistent with the village character of Highlands.

- » Consider allowances for additional residential housing types in CMU, NMU, and MDR areas based on context if design criteria are met.
 - Consider all housing options as part of redevelopment of underutilized commercial properties in the B-3 zoning district.
 - Allow for 2nd story residences, townhomes, and house-scale multi-family structures in NMU areas.
 - Allow for house-scale multi-family structures as part of new development in MDR areas via existing special use permit process.



The above conceptual rendering shows a redevelopment scenario for Highlands Plaza. This area, located in the B-3 zoning district could be a target area for allowing some multi-family housing as part of redevelopment. Design criteria could include a maximum density, screening requirements and minimum open space requirements.

WHERE AND HOW TO ALLOW HOUSING VARIETY

Existing regulations and public preferences were evaluated as part of the Community Plan. There is a strong desire to preserve the character of Highlands and a recognition that some mix of housing may be beneficial. The survey indicated a preference for pocket neighborhoods and live/work units near downtown. The business survey also recognized that it is very difficult for employees and in some cases owners of businesses to find housing in town.

Current regulations allow for some incidental apartments and multi-family housing but are very restrictive. The code limits the number of apartments based on district and regulations require a 2-acre minimum and have maximum density allowance of 4 dwelling units per acre (DUA) for all multi-family housing. Recommendations in this plan suggest ways to provide some additional flexibility on housing types while preserving the character of town.

Recommendations include:

- » Consider allowing pocket neighborhoods near downtown and other commercial areas. Establish standards for these. Potentially allow at slightly higher densities (6 DUA) if design criteria are met.
- » Consider modest increases in allowances for incidental apartments in the Downtown Support Areas.
- » Consider allowing additional residential density and/or housing types on underutilized B-2 and B-3 zoning district properties, especially in the Downtown Support area. Allowing 6-8 DUA may be appropriate.

LU 4.5: Refine criteria for allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).

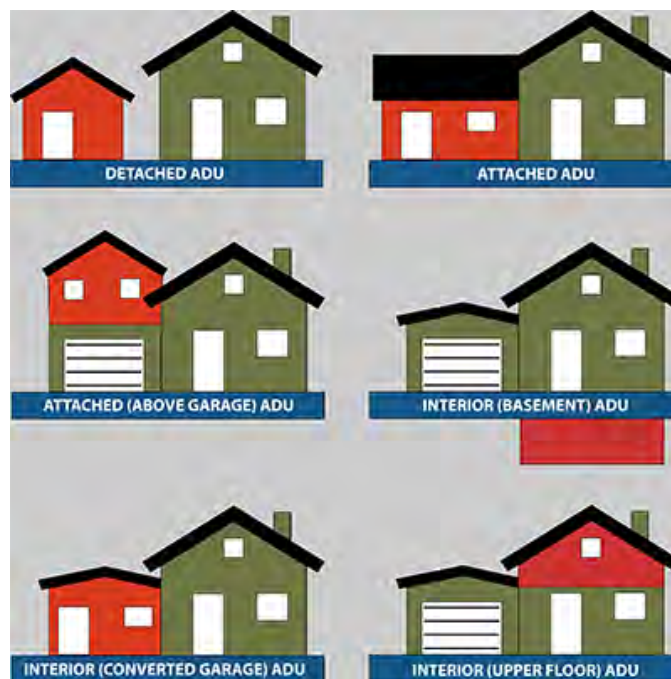
- » Consider establishing performance based criteria for permitting ADUs in order to reduce potential conflicts.
- Current standards for accessory dwelling units require building must be attached to principle structure.
- Performance-based criteria for permitting new Accessory Dwelling Units (with living quarters) could include a minimum parcel size, maximum building footprint and other design criteria.

LU 4.6: Look for opportunities to partner with landowners and regional partners to increase the amount of workforce housing accessible to those employed in and around Highlands.

- » Consider extension of water and sewer to workforce housing developments near city limits.
- » Coordinate with Macon County, Jackson County and nearby towns to improve availability and access to workforce housing on and off the plateau.

ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE HOUSING

While some large employers in Highlands have taken steps to provide employee housing, worker housing is still at a premium. Encouraging partnerships between homeowners and businesses with seasonal employees, in exchange for services at the business, is a model found in other remote, seasonal towns.



Accessory dwelling units can be configured in a variety of ways, with some options being nearly indistinguishable from single family homes.

Image via American Planning Association

Policy LU 5: Encourage lodging and tourism related rentals while limiting negative impacts on existing residents and businesses.**LU 5.1: Encourage lodging uses in defined areas where limited conflicts exist.**

- » Encourage new lodging in the Downtown Support Area on the Future Land Use Map and in compatible zoning districts (B-2 & B-3).
- » Encourage new small-scale lodging in Neighborhood Mixed Use areas on the Future Land Use Map.
- » Encourage the renovation of properties and structures with historical lodging uses
- » Continue to require a Special Use Permit (SUP) in B-2/B-3 or a conditional zoning process in other areas.

LU 5.2: Strike a balance between the need for home ownership, long-term rentals and the increase in demand for short-term rentals.

- » *See LU 2 for recommendations related to housing types that may lead to increases in long-term rental options.*

LU 5.3: Consider establishing standards for permitting event venues.

- » *Currently there is not a formal process for approving temporary event venues such as home rentals for weddings. This could lead to conflicts, especially in residential areas. A formal permitting process for larger events is needed.*

LU 5.4: Monitor and mitigate the impact of short-term rentals (STRs) on the Highlands community.

- » Create an inventory of known short-term rentals and improve tracking of nuisance complaints.
 - Allow landlords to voluntarily register their units or use a third party service to track rentals.
 - Consider a no fee business permit.
 - Improve tracking of complaints.
- » Continue enforcement efforts (i.e. noise and trash ordinances)
- » Begin education and outreach effort to rental owners to emphasize existing trash and noise regulations.
- » Encourage HOAs to regulate STRs.

LU 5.5: Consider updating land use regulations to define short-term rentals as a use and establish geographic restrictions, approval requirements and/or performance-based standards for the use.

- » Facilitate additional study and discussions related to short-term rentals, economic benefits, impacts and regulatory options.
- » Define Short-term rentals as a use in the Unified Development Ordinance.
 - Consider potentially differentiating full-time short-term rentals and occasional rentals.
- » Where short-term rentals are allowed, ensure the following requirements are met:
 - Specify no more than 1 contract on a property at a time.
 - On-site parking is available at 1 space per bedroom.
 - Landlords must provide information on proper waste disposal within each rental unit.
- » Consider updates to regulations to prohibit full-time short-term rentals in residential zoning districts (R-1, R-2, R-3), allow STRs in business districts (B-1, B-2, B-3, and B-4 districts).

LAND USE ACTION ITEMS

The items below list priority regulations, plans and programs that, if implemented, will advance town goals. Implementing the recommendations of this plan will involve town staff, elected officials, appointed boards, partners, residents and business owners.

Action Item 1: Evaluate and update the Unified Development Ordinance Update and the Community Plan. (LU1)

- » 1A: Regularly evaluate the Unified Development Ordinance and consider updates to support implementation of the Community Plan.
- » 1B: Update the Community Plan every 5 years or as infrastructure or market conditions change

COST: N/A

TIMEFRAME: ONGOING

Action Item 2: Evaluate rezoning requests for conformity with the Community Plan. (LU1)

- » 2A: Rezoning requests should be evaluated by the Planning Board, Zoning Board and Board of Commissioners on a case by case basis.
- » 2B: A table that shows where rezonings may be appropriate and in-line with recommendations in the Community Plan is included below.

COST: N/A

TIMEFRAME: ONGOING

Highlands Community Plan Future Land Use Category		Residential			Government / Institutional	Business Districts			
		R-1	R-2	R-3	GI	B-1	B-2	B-3	B-4
Parks and Open Space	OS								
Conservation Design	CD								
Low Density Residential	LDR								
Medium Density	MD								
Neighborhood Mixed Use	NMU								
Downtown Support	DS						*	*	
Downtown Business District	DBD						*	*	
		=rezoning is likely appropriate.							
		= rezoning <u>may</u> be appropriate, but only if compatible with the neighborhood and surrounding uses. Conditional or Special Use restrictions may be advisable.							
		= current zoning districts may need revisions to support implementation of the Community Plan							

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME
- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

- ONGOING = UNDERWAY AND RECOMMENDED TO CONTINUE
- SHORT-TERM = 1-2 YEARS
- MEDIUM-TERM = 2-3 YEARS
- LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

LAND USE AND HOUSING ACTION ITEMS (CONTINUED)

Action Item 3: Maintain the scale and character of Highlands. (LU2)

- » 3A: Evaluate and update Community Design Standards as necessary
- » 3B: Consider establishing a maximum building size for B-2 and B-3 zoning districts.
- » 3C: Encourage the preservation of historic buildings in commercial and residential districts, consider additional development regulations to protect the character of historic neighborhoods.

COST: LOW

**TIMEFRAME: SHORT
(3B), MEDIUM-TERM (3A &
3C)**

Action Item 4: Manage growth along major entry corridors. (LU3)

- » 4A: Encourage the screening of parking, storage areas and larger buildings along US 64, NC 28 and NC 106 outside of existing commercial areas.
- » 4B: Encourage Macon County to establish a zoning overlay district that requires design standards along US 64 and other main corridors.

COST: LOW

**TIMEFRAME: ONGOING
(4A), MEDIUM-TERM (4B)**

Action Item 5: Allow a greater mix of housing in appropriate areas. (LU4)

- » 5A: Continue to allow incidental apartments in mixed use development and clarify code language related to allowances. The current code language is confusing and may be a barrier to development.
- » 5B: Consider allowing additional residential types and slightly higher densities near downtown and on underutilized commercial properties. Establish standards for pocket neighborhoods near downtown and other commercial areas. Potentially allow at slightly higher densities (i.e.. 6 dwelling units per acre) if design criteria is met (*the current maximum is 4 dwelling units per acre*). Consider allowing additional residential types and slightly higher densities on underutilized B-3 zoning district properties, especially in the Downtown Support area if design criteria is met.
 - Allow for Small-format apartments and condominiums, townhouses and house-scale multi-family (duplex, triplex, quadruplex) if they meet defined design criteria. Criteria could include a maximum gross density (i.e. 6-8 dwelling units per acre), maximum building size, screening and minimum open space requirements.
 - Refine design, dimensional and density standards for multi-family in B-3. Adjust minimum parcel size for multi-family in the B-3 zoning district. Current minimum is 2 acres.

COST: LOW

**TIMEFRAME: SHORT (5A
AND 5B)**

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME
- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

- ONGOING = UNDERWAY AND RECOMMENDED TO CONTINUE
- SHORT-TERM = 1-2 YEARS
- MEDIUM-TERM = 2-3 YEARS
- LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

LAND USE AND HOUSING ACTION ITEMS (CONTINUED)

Action Item 6: Refine criteria for allowing accessory dwelling units. (LU4)

- » 6A: Consider establishing performance based criteria for permitting ADUs in order to reduce potential conflicts. Potential performance based criteria includes:
- Parcel size > 1.25x or 1.5x district minimum*

• Max footprint 800 sq ft or 0.5x of home size, whichever is less*

• If design can meet basic criteria:

› 1 parking space

› Setback and buffer from neighbors*

› Disturbance of existing vegetation is limited in size*

› Must be on a permanent foundation

› Must be connected to sewer and water

COST: LOW

TIMEFRAME:
MEDIUM-TERM

**Criteria should be further defined in ordinance*

Action Item 7: Monitor and mitigate the impact of short-term rentals (STRs) on the Highlands community. (LU5)

- » 7A: Voluntary registration of units or 3rd party tracking
- » 7B: Enforcement of trash and noise ordinances
- » 7C: Begin education and outreach effort to rental owners to emphasize existing trash and noise regulations.
- » 7D: Encourage HOAs to regulate STRs
- » 7E: Consider updates to land use regulations to define STRs as a use and establish restrictions or an additional approval requirement.
- Consider alternative approval processes, design requirements, restrictions of short-term rentals, and/or requiring a minimum length of stay throughout town or in residential areas.

COST: LOW

TIMEFRAME: ONGOING
(7B), SHORT-TERM (7A, 7C,
7D, 7E)

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME

• LOW = COST > \$10,000

• MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000

• HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

- ONGOING = UNDERWAY AND RECOMMENDED TO CONTINUE

• SHORT-TERM = 1-2 YEARS

• MEDIUM-TERM = 2-3 YEARS

• LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

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DOWNTOWN & TOURISM

Overview

Downtown Highlands serves as the civic, cultural and commercial center for the town and the greater plateau. This chapter includes recommendations that support downtown, nearby neighborhoods and the local economy.

Primary Goals addressed by Downtown and Tourism Recommendations

GOAL #1: Town Character: Vibrant village center with distinct character that is surrounded by mostly low-density housing that blends with the natural environment.

GOAL #6: Support the local economy including downtown businesses, tourism, the arts, and outdoor recreation. Incorporate support for downtown businesses, tourism, housing, outdoor recreation and natural resources.

Policy DT 1: Maintain and enhance Highlands' small-town feel and village character.

DT 1.1: Develop green and/or open spaces, plazas and other areas that invite gathering and create an experience around the town's charm and character.

DT 1.2: Continue focusing recruitment of local businesses as opposed to national chains.

DT 1.3: Enhance and codify design standards for development in the Downtown Business District and the Downtown Support area.

- » Codify portion of the Community Design Guidelines.
 - For example, façade transparency standards, mechanical equipment placement, lighting standards.
- » Update community design guidelines to include pedestrian access and streetscape standards.



The main building of the Old Edwards Inn, built in 1935 embodies the architectural detail and pedestrian scale of buildings that contribute to the village character of Downtown Highlands. The three and a half story building has a brick foundation with a tri-gable asphalt-covered roof and has been described as Italian Alpine in architectural design.

Policy DT 2: Improve pedestrian facilities and increase wayfinding.

DT 2.1: Increase sidewalk facilities between residential, parking, and retail and improve pedestrian crossings.

DT 2.2: Improve wayfinding for public facilities, shopping, parking, historical attractions, and amenities such as the greenway.

DT 2.3: Extend landscaping, brick pavers and other furnishings (lights, benches, etc.) along sidewalks downtown and onto secondary streets and alleys.

DT 2.4: Work with the Highlands Plateau Greenway to improve connections from neighborhoods to downtown through greenway extensions or sidewalk connections.

DOWNTOWN IMPROVEMENTS MAP



Intersection Improvements

Intersection and Roadway Improvements would prioritize pedestrian safety with crosswalks, a midblock crossing is recommended on Main Street.



Streetscape Improvements

Streetscape Improvements continue work done downtown to improve pedestrian amenities and add parallel parking and shade trees. Note, lighting enhancements may be needed on other streets in addition to those highlighted.



Greenspace Improvements

Greenspace Improvements would include beautification, trail improvements, and new and improved downtown park spaces.



Redevelopment Opportunities

Redevelopment Improvements can provide new commercial and residential opportunities in and adjacent to downtown, as well as potential parking.

Policy DT 3: Manage public parking and study opportunities for increased on-street and off-street public parking.

DT 3.1: Monitor and manage existing parking.

- » Continue to regulate public parking zones and designate areas that are employee restricted, handicap parking, 15-minute, loading zone and unrestricted areas.
- » Consider additional time limitations or metering on portions of Main Street.
- » Regularly monitor parking usage by conducting parking counts periodically throughout the year.

DT 3.2: Study improvements to town-owned rights-of-ways to improve conditions for pedestrians and increase on-street parking.

- » Street retrofit candidates include Spruce Street, West Main Street and Oak Street.

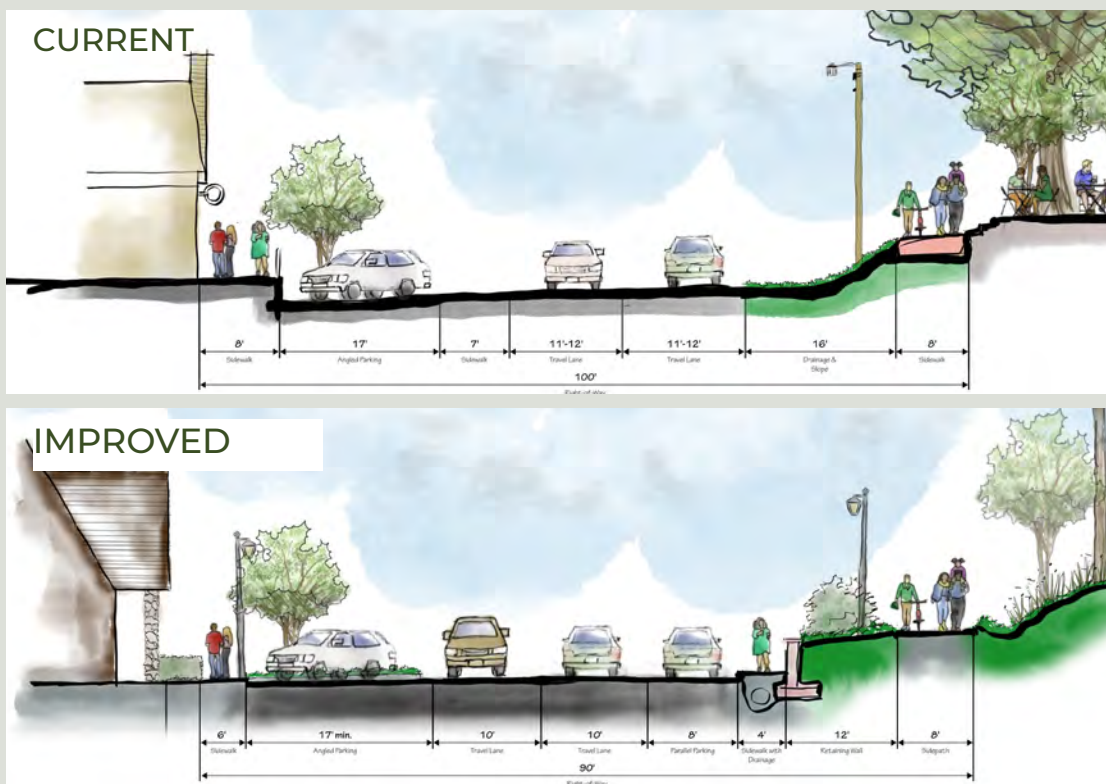
DT 3.3: Study opportunities for additional publicly accessible surface lots or a parking deck.

- » Study opportunities for additional public parking and redevelopment near Maple and Oak Street and along Spring Street.

DT 3.4: Entertain potential public-private partnerships to increase available parking.

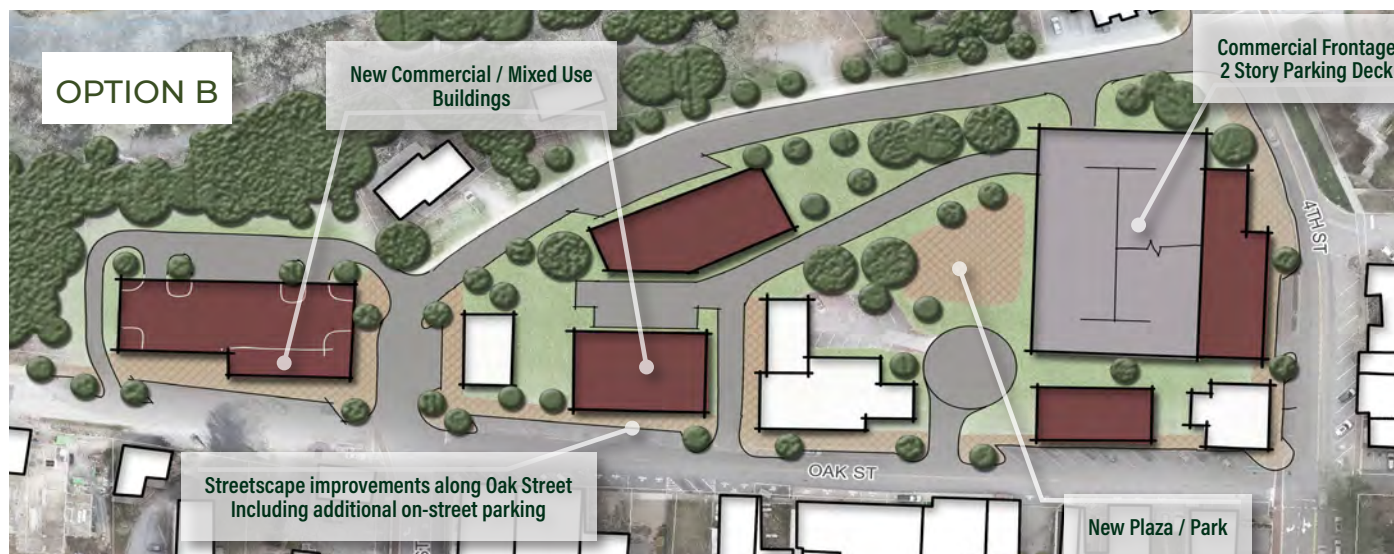
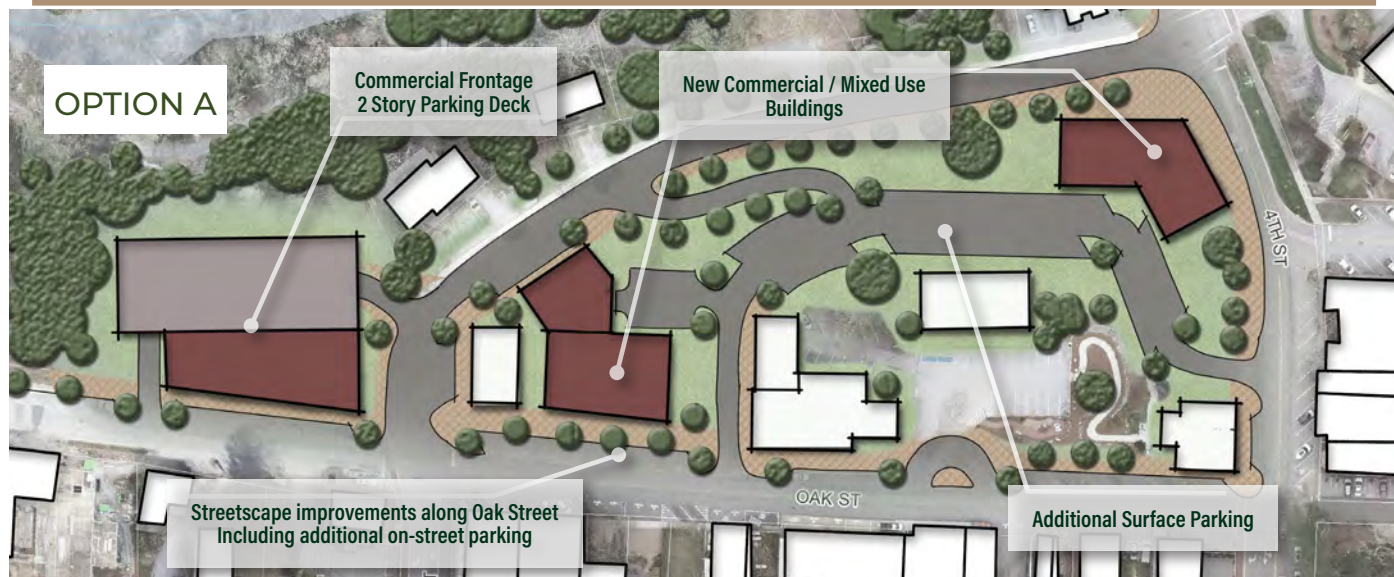
- » This could include a cost-share approach for a parking deck.

WEST MAIN STREET ALTERNATIVES



The images above show the current cross-section of Main Street west of 3rd Street and a potential improvement that includes additional on-street parking. It is recommended to study making the best use of its 100-foot right-of-way by adding parallel parking on the north side, with stormwater retention devices and ADA accessible sidewalks. This will continue the “downtown” feel further west along Main Street and add new parking opportunities. Additional study is needed, but it is estimated that an additional 20-24 parking spaces could be added between 3rd St and 1st St.

MAPLE STREET BLOCK REDEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS



The concepts above show two options for redevelopment on land in the vicinity of the old fire station near Oak Street and Maple Street. The two scenarios show the footprint of two different sized parking decks and also illustrate potential infill development, access and improvements along Oak Street. New development in this area could help activate Oak Street, add parking and potentially include a new plaza or public space. The options are further described below:

- Option A: Streetscape improvements along Oak Street. New commercial or mixed use buildings on Oak and 4th Street. Additional surface parking. A public / private partnership could include a two level deck at the corner of Oak St and 3rd St with entrances on Maple Street and Oak Street.
- Option B: Streetscape improvements along Oak Street. New mixed-use buildings and a new plaza or park. Town owned land may be able to accommodate a deck with an entrance on 4th Street and Maple Street. This option could require the

Policy DT 4: Further study potential uses of town-owned properties and improvements to Downtown streetscapes.

DT 4.1: Conduct a study of town-owned properties to determine future uses.

DT 4.2: Pursue the creation and adoption of a Downtown Master Streetscape Plan that phases streetscape improvements.

Policy DT 5: Continue marketing and events that encourage visitation.

DT 5.1: Work with the Chamber of Commerce to create campaigns that attract younger visitors and potential residents.

DT 5.2: Support a year-round economy by scheduling festivals and other events in the shoulder and off-season.

- » Consider additional festivals or events during the shoulder or low season with a similar draw as that of the Highlands Food and Wine Festival.

DT 5.3: Support the creation of an online

Guide to Local Businesses.

Policy DT 6: Preserve and enhance the Town's parks and green Infrastructure.

DT 6.1: Maintain and enhance existing park facilities.

- » Pursue planned upgrades at the Recreation Park
 - Playground expansion / addition
 - Remodel bathrooms
 - New multi-purpose building
- » Upgrades should be considered for the community field and Harris Lake
 - New lighting at Community Field
 - Evaluate improvements to Harris Lake including pedestrian facilities along Smallwood Ave, parking and signage improvements and a dock or seating.

DT 6.2: Work with the Highlands/Cashiers



The vacant lot (e.g. the Loafer's Bench lot) just west of Main Street and 4th Street would be a great opportunity for a pocket park near the center of town. See the Downtown Improvements Map for location.

Land Trust and the Highlands Biological Station to identify and preserve important natural areas and resources.

DT 6.3: Encourage the preservation of existing tree canopy in and around downtown.

- » Review and update standards related to tree preservation in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

DT 6.4: Explore opportunities for additional publicly accessible greenspace near downtown.

- » Need/demand exists for the following facilities:
 - A park or greenspace on the south and/or west sides of downtown
 - Play facilities for very young children (i.e. a baby swing near downtown)
 - Play equipment that appeals to a greater age range (i.e. older kids) than the existing playground at the Recreation Park.
- » Develop additional greenspaces in the Central Business District.
 - Consider partnerships to purchase all or part of the vacant lot (e.g. the Loafer's Bench lot) just west of Main Street and 4th Street and create a pocket park.



Bronze sculptures greet those that pass the Corey James Gallery located at the corner of Spring Street and 3rd Street.

Policy DT 7: Promote the cultural heritage of Highlands and its diverse forms of expression.

DT 7.1: Promote and publicize the dynamic interaction between the cosmopolitan interests and the traditional mountain and Cherokee culture of Highlands - in the areas of theatre, art, music, continuing education, etc.

DT 7.2: Encourage location of cultural activities in or near the village center.

DT 7.3: Support public-private partnerships with non-profit organizations that support the above strategies.

DOWNTOWN AND TOURISM ACTION ITEMS

The items below list priority regulations, plans and programs that, if implemented, will advance town goals. Implementing the recommendations of this plan will involve town staff, elected officials, appointed boards, partners, residents and business owners.

Action Item 8: Study of town-owned properties to determine future uses (DT4)

- » 8A: A study should consider future operational needs of the town and evaluate potential divestment options of underutilized town-owned land. The study should include options for the block that covers 3.4 acres just north of Main Street. A portion of this block will remain occupied by town services, however the town could enter into a developer agreement for the remainder and outline conditions including additional parking, streetscape improvements and/or commercial space.

COST: MEDIUM
TIMEFRAME: MEDIUM-TERM

Action Item 9: Wayfinding and streetscape plan and improvements (DT 2 and DT4)

- » 9A: A study should build on work in the Community Plan to prioritize and determine costs and phasing for streetscape improvements. The study should include more detailed evaluation of the benefits of streetscape improvements including the addition of on-street parking, landscaping, and pedestrian lighting in the rights-of-way.
- » 9B: The town should partner with the Chamber of Commerce to determine and implement priority wayfinding improvements. Wayfinding can also be addressed in the potential streetscape plan.

COST: LOW-MEDIUM (9A), MEDIUM (9B)
TIMEFRAME: MEDIUM (9A), MEDIUM-LONG-TERM (9B)

Action Item 10: Continue marketing and events that encourage visitation. (DT5)

- » 10A: Work with the Chamber of Commerce to create campaigns that attract younger visitors and potential residents.

COST: LOW
TIMEFRAME: ONGOING

Action Item 11: Develop a Downtown pocket park south of Main Street. (DT6)

- » 11A: Consider partnerships to purchase all or part of a vacant lot south of Main Street (i.e. the Loafer's Bench lot) or another property to create a pocket park.

COST: HIGH
TIMEFRAME: LONG-TERM

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME
- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

- ONGOING = UNDERWAY AND RECOMMENDED TO CONTINUE
- SHORT-TERM = 1-2 YEARS
- MEDIUM-TERM = 2-3 YEARS
- LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

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RECREATION & NATURAL RESOURCES

Overview / Issues to Address

Due to a history of community involvement, philanthropic giving, and town investment, Highlands has a remarkable system of parks and trails. Maintaining and building on this system can help maintain the high quality of life for permanent and seasonal residents while supporting a healthy community. During the development of this plan community feedback indicated environmental preservation was a top priority. Protecting the rich natural heritage of Highlands will require careful planning of future development and continued stewardship of the environment.

Primary Goals addressed by Recreation and Natural Resource Recommendations

- GOAL #1:** Town Character: Vibrant village center with distinct character that is surrounded by mostly low-density housing that blends with the natural environment.
- GOAL #2:** Preservation of the Environment: Preserve and enhance the natural environment and the scenic beauty of Highlands.

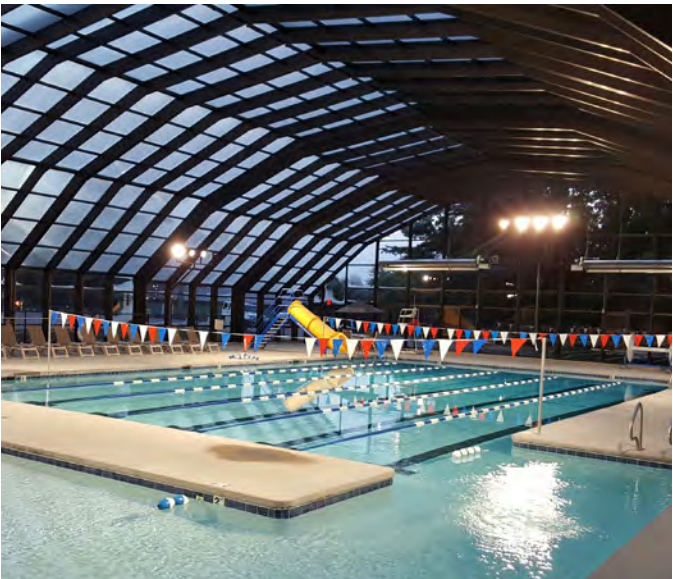
Policy RNR 1: Support recreation options and outdoor tourism.

RNR 1.1: Improve connections and access to green space and parks.

- » Improve sidewalks and trail connections to existing parks and nature preserves.
- » Work with partners to make other basic access improvements at parks and nearby nature preserves (i.e. parking, information, etc.)
- » Coordinate with the US Forest Service to improve safe access to trails and public lands near Highlands.

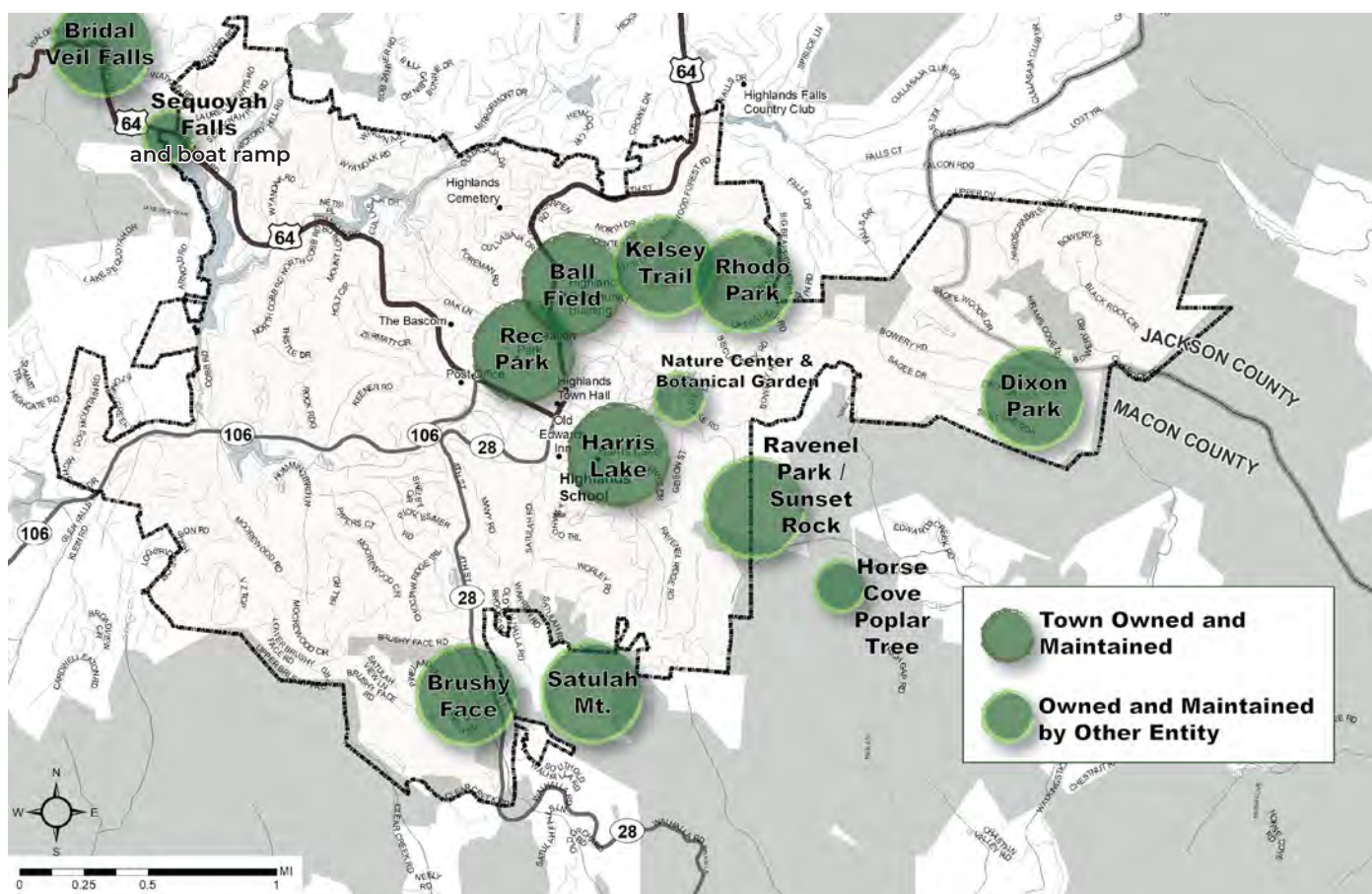
RNR 1.2: Work with Macon County and other partners to address recreation priorities.

- » According to the survey and other feedback received during the Community Plan, priorities included:
 - Natural areas and trails
 - Playground equipment for older age children
 - Indoor fitness & programming
 - Tennis/pickleball



The Highlands Pool Complex is a year round facility and is located on the Recreation Park property, next to the Civic Center.

EXISTING PARKS AND RECREATION ASSETS



The Town of Highlands has a number of parks and recreational assets in and near the town limits. A number of facilities are owned and maintained by the Town. The Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust and Forest Service also maintains areas for public recreational access.

Policy RNR 2: Discourage intense development on steep slopes and mountain ridges.

RNR 2.1: Continue limitations on removal of vegetation on steep slopes.

- » Continue to enforce limits on disturbance based on slope thresholds and size of disturbance.
- » Monitor impacts and consider modifications to slope thresholds and when site plan category 1, category 2 and erosion and sediment control plan is needed.

RNR 2.2: Continue to require the submission of topographic info when making application for development permit.

RNR 2.3: Adhere to North Carolina Ridge-top Development Regulations.

- » The N.C. State Ridge Law regulates development on “protected mountain ridges” that include ridges that are 500 ft or more above the adjacent valley floor and lie at an elevation >3,000 ft. No buildings may rise more than 35ft above the crest of the ridge.
- » Exemptions include utility and communications towers, vertical projections (i.e. chimneys or steeples) and historic structures.
- » Town ordinance has limit of height of 35ft as well.

Policy RNR 3: Protect views and natural resources in Town and on the greater Highlands plateau.

RNR 3.1: Encourage sensitive design around key natural resources.

- » New development, especially in the Conservation Design areas on the FLU Map, should be designed in a way to reduce grading and clear-cutting and limit impacts to viewsheds.
- » Development should be clustered away from natural resources on the property and on adjacent properties.
 - Priority features that should be preserved include steep slopes, rock outcrops, streams, rare species, habitat corridors and designated Natural Heritage Natural Areas.

RNR 3.2: Work with Macon County to consider establishing additional land use protections on the plateau surrounding Highlands.

- » Of particular concern is the US 64 corridor north of Highlands. Currently this area has no zoning and limited land use protections from large-scale commercial or residential development.
- » A zoning overlay district could help ensure that new development in the county jurisdiction protects natural resources and is in keeping with the character of existing development.

- » Re-establishing a limited ETJ along major corridors could also be considered.

RNR 3.3: Utilize water and sewer service as an incentive for new development to meet natural resource and character recommendations in the Highlands Community Plan.

- » Consider water and sewer service for new development near existing municipal boundaries if the provision of utilities can help reduce impact on natural resources and/or views from main roads.
- » By-right development in the county jurisdiction without water and sewer may necessitate more grading and clearing of trees for septic drain fields in addition to potentially straining groundwater resources.

RNR 3.4: Encourage land conservation on the Highlands plateau.

- » Coordinate with Highlands Cashiers Land Conservancy, landowners and other partners to protect views and high-value natural resources.
- » Lobby at the state level for the ability to create a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program
- » Consider changes to regulations to enable the transfer of built upon area (impervious surface) within the same watershed

NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS WITHIN AND SURROUNDING HIGHLANDS

There are 36 designated Natural Heritage Natural Areas within 5 miles of the Town of Highlands. Nineteen of these sites are rated Exceptional or Very High conservation value based on the quality of the site and its statewide and global significance. The Highlands Plateau, Fishhawk Mountains and Cullusaja Gorge to the northwest and the Escarpment to the southeast are home to granitic domes, spray cliffs, rich cove forests, hemlock forests, montane white oak forests, cedar glades, southern Appalachian bogs and other unique natural communities. These ecosystems host a diverse array of flora and fauna including many rare plants and animals. Rare fauna present includes the rock-dwelling green salamander, southern water shrew, and peregrine falcons. In addition, there are old growth and mature stands of hemlocks that were recommended for treatment and monitoring against the ongoing woolly adelgid infestation.

- » Work with partners to establish a land bank and study a mechanism to fund it. Could include title transfer tax or other sources.

RNR 3.5: Support the continued and additional treatment of mature hemlocks against the woolly adelgid.

RNR 3.6: Conduct efforts to remove invasive species on town-owned land and in rights of ways

Policy RNR 4: Encourage open space preservation and tree protection in new development.

RNR 4.1: Evaluate existing minimum lot size allowances, open space requirements impervious surface limits and consider revisions to protect neighborhood character and water quality and allow sufficient flexibility in design to protect natural resources on larger properties.

RNR 4.2: Require tree protection in commercial development.

- » Continue to encourage property owners to save existing trees eighteen inches or more in diameter whenever possible by requiring approval.

RNR 4.3: Discourage heritage trees from being felled in residential developments.

- » Consider updates to the Unified Development Ordinance to incentivize preservation of old growth or “heritage” trees.

Policy RNR 5: Protect the Plateau’s water quality.

RNR 5.1: Require new development that meets a disturbance or density threshold to manage the velocity and amount of run-off.

- » Currently land disturbances greater than 1 acre or commercial development or redevelopment with >8,000 square foot of new impervious



Large trees such as this large white pine along the trails at Brushy Face Preserve provide valuable habitat and food for animals, capture rainfall and air pollution, and sequester large amounts of carbon.

surface need a stormwater permit.

- » Based on recommendations in the 2007 Stormwater Master Plan and a study of peer communities with similar high quality water resources and terrain, consider revisions to stormwater requirements for new development.

RNR 5.2: Require the use of stormwater management best practices in new development to closely mimic natural hydrological patterns.

RNR 5.3: Encourage the preservation and planting of riparian vegetation in new development.

- » Consider specifying riparian areas as priority open space type in Planned Cluster Developments.

RNR 5.4: Ensure that stormwater infrastructure is appropriately sized and well-maintained.

- » Maintain staff resources and expertise related to stormwater permitting and inspection.

- » Require new development to build and maintain stormwater infrastructure.
- » Carefully consider current policies and standards related to underground stormwater devices.
 - Ensure underground storage devices are sized appropriately, designed to include an upstream water quality inlet or stormwater treatment BMP to trap sediments, located in a way that anticipates maintenance needs and approved only with a detailed maintenance and inspection plan.

RNR 5.5: Encourage low-impact development techniques and green stormwater infrastructure in new development.

- » Disconnected impervious surfaces, pervious pavements, bioswales, stormwater planters, cisterns, rain gardens, and green roofs can help reduce impacts of new development.

RNR 5.6: Support public and private improvements that reduce impacts on water

quality, moderate in-stream temperature and flow and improve conditions for the natural reproduction of trout and the biological integrity of streams.

- » Continue to apply for NCDOT grants to replace undersized storm water culverts with arches that can accommodate existing and future storm water runoff along state-maintained and Town-owned roadways.

RNR 5.7: Consider implementing impact fees or a stormwater utility fee to fund improvements to existing stormwater infrastructure.

- » Projects should seek to decrease the peak volume of run-off, moderate the temperature of urban runoff and/or improve the quality of run-off from more developed areas of town.

STORMWATER AND WATER QUALITY

Stormwater and runoff from developed areas impacts water quality on the Plateau and in communities downstream. The majority of Highlands drains to Lake Sequoyah that serves as the water supply for the town. Downstream of Lake Sequoyah the Cullasaja River flows north to Franklin and eventually the Little Tennessee River. Areas south and east of Highlands drain into the Chatooga River, a designated Wild and Scenic River. Headwaters that form in and around Highlands contribute to drinking water sources used by thousands of people and host trout fisheries, including native brook trout, and populations of other rare fish, mussels and invertebrates. Encouraging on-site stormwater retention, treatment and infiltration will be key to preserving water quality on the Plateau.



The Cullasaja River rambles free and clear beside the Mountain Waters Scenic Byway between Highlands and Franklin.

- » Recommended projects from the 2007 Stormwater Master Plan include:
 - Significant upgrades to the Central Business District that could be constructed in tandem with other utility improvements, streets and sidewalk upgrades including:
 - › *Water quality treatment structures*
 - › *Installation of a new stormwater trunk line on Fourth Street and Fifth street*
- › *Improvements near the Episcopal Church*
- › *Installation of landscaping and pervious pavers along Main Street*
- › *A naturalized stormwater treatment amenity at Recreation park*
- › *Stream restoration on Monger Creek*
- › *Improved stormwater treatment near Highlands Plaza and Spring Street*

RECREATION & NATURAL RESOURCES ACTION ITEMS

The items below list priority regulations, plans and programs that, if implemented, will advance town goals. Implementing the recommendations of this plan will involve town staff, elected officials, appointed boards, partners, residents and business owners.

Action Item 12: Pursue improvements at Recreation Park. (RNR1)

- » 12A: Conceptual design for an indoor recreation center / multi-purpose building.
- » 12B: Expand the playground and renovate existing bathrooms.
 - *Incorporate play equipment for a variety of ages (older and younger kids).*
 - *Determine location for a baby swing*

COST: MEDIUM

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM (12A), MEDIUM-TERM (12B & 12C)

Action Item 13: Work with partners to improve access to parks and nearby public lands and nature preserves. (RNR1, DT6)

- » 13A: Improve sidewalks and trail connections to existing parks and nature preserves. Work with partners to make other basic access improvements at parks and nearby public lands and nature preserves (i.e. parking, information, etc.)
- » 13B: Evaluate improvements to Harris Lake including pedestrian facilities along Smallwood Ave, parking and signage improvements and a dock or seating.

COST: MEDIUM

TIMEFRAME: MEDIUM-TERM (13A), LONG-TERM (13B)

COST KEY

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- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

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- LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

RECREATION & NATURAL RESOURCES ACTION ITEMS (CONTINUED)

Action Item 14: Consider updates to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to protect natural resources, heritage trees and water quality. (RNR3, RNR4, RNR5)

- » 14A: Encourage Conservation Subdivision design using the Planned Cluster Development option currently available in areas with sensitive natural resources.
- » 14B: Evaluate the UDO to determine how to improve the quality of open space and protect heritage trees in new development.
 - *Consider revisions to the Cluster Development option to specify priority open space types including riparian areas, seeps, wetlands, mature forest and other valuable wildlife habitats.*
 - *Encourage low-impact development techniques and green stormwater infrastructure in new development including disconnected impervious surfaces, pervious pavements, bioswales, cisterns, rain gardens and green roofs.*
 - *Consider revisions to incentivize the preservation of heritage trees in residential developments.*

COST: N/A (14A), LOW (14B)

TIMEFRAME: ONGOING (14A), SHORT-TERM (14B)

Action Item 15: Protect the Plateau’s water quality by proactively managing stormwater runoff from development. (RNR5)

- » 15A: Evaluate peer communities with similar high quality water resources and consider revisions to stormwater requirements for new development.
 - *This could include modifying the threshold for land disturbances and/or impervious surface thresholds that require a stormwater permit.*
- » 15B: Maintain adequate staff resources and expertise related to stormwater permitting and inspection.
- » 15C: Support public and private improvements that reduce impacts of stormwater runoff on water quality,
- » 15D: Consider implementing impact fees or a stormwater utility fee to fund improvements to existing stormwater infrastructure.

COST: LOW (15A), LOW-MEDIUM (15B, 15D), HIGH (15C)

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM (15A), MEDIUM-TERM (15B, 15C), LONG-TERM (15D)

COST KEY

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TIMEFRAME KEY

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TRANSPORTATION

Overview / Issues to Address

Increases in residents and visitation brings more people driving on Highlands’ roads. To maintain the quality of life for which Highlands is recognized the Town must plan for future transportation needs. Highlands’ primary commercial areas are designed with a few blocks of grid pattern and have sidewalks, making the downtown well suited for walking. Balancing the needs of automobiles, including parking demand, while maintaining the character of the town and improving pedestrian crossings and connections from downtown to other areas of town is a theme throughout the recommendations in this chapter.

Primary Goals addressed by Transportation Recommendations

GOAL #1: Town Character: Vibrant village center with distinct character that is surrounded by mostly low-density housing that blends with the natural environment.

GOAL #2: Preservation of the Environment: Preserve and enhance the natural environment and the scenic beauty of Highlands.

GOAL #4: Pedestrian Focus: Create a downtown and commercial areas that emphasize pedestrian comfort and safety.

Roadway Recommendations

Policy T 1: Maintain a resilient transportation system that caters to a variety of users.

T 1.1: Coordinate transportation facilities and improvements with development activities, and with regional transportation and land use plans to achieve maximum benefit with limited funds.

T 1.2: Use data-driven analysis to manage transportation improvements in Highlands.

- » Municipalities that generate and maintain certain data can more effectively justify allocating funds to certain projects. By indicating a need, Highlands can prepare itself for any debate about budgeting for projects and demonstrate that there is benefit for warranted investments. For instance, counting parked cars, intersection turning movements, pedestrians and bicyclists, and surveying residents about public

perceptions can all help the Town justify making changes to the transportation network.

T 1.3: Consider enhancing roadways using existing right-of-way to accommodate as many users as possible.

- » Improvements should be studied to improve vehicular flow, add parking and increase safety for pedestrians.
- » Study street retrofits on Spruce St, Main Street, and Oak Street.

T 1.4: Maintain and build on the existing street grid pattern by encouraging a high level of roadway connectivity and short block lengths in and near downtown Highlands including areas shown as the Downtown Business District, Downtown Support, and Medium Density areas on the Future Land Use Map.

- » Specifically encourage:
 - The extension of Poplar Street to N 5th Street.

- Development of external street connections to Highlands Plaza, including a continuation and upgrade of 2nd Street past Spring Street to directly link to Highlands Plaza.

Policy T 2: Encourage context-sensitive design of roadways

T 2.1: Continually monitor NCDOT roadway projects in town to effectively leverage state funding for local goals and communicate with the public for input on design.

- » Future projects may involve major infrastructure improvements that will affect all modes of travel, and Highlands needs to make sure that NCDOT understands the Town's needs and plans for adjacent land use.

T 2.2: Continue to plan and engineer streets for their context (with adjacent land use influencing overall design).

- » A successful example is Pine Street, which was designed with a pedestrian focus, aesthetic appeal, and sensitivity to the adjacent park space without

losing any functionality as a two-way street. Make sure every roadway improvement makes sense for the people who will use it.

T 2.3: Reduce the environmental impact of existing roads, new roads, and road improvements.

- » Street design should seek to minimize grading and avoid natural resources and historic features.
- » Take a proactive approach to storm water management along Highlands' streets, using vegetated buffer areas, medians and other features to capture sedimentation and filter excess rainwater.
- » Consider culvert retrofits as needed to improve drainage and improve habitat for wild trout populations.

STREET DESIGN

In the future it will be necessary to balance the needs of all users in future street design in town. Employing Complete Streets policy and design prioritizes the safety and comfort of users of all abilities. In Highlands the historic features and environmental assets need to be factored into street design as well. To ensure safety and comfort across the travel modes, some balancing of priorities must occur. Street improvements should include consideration of placemaking elements, the need for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, the target speed of automobiles, topography and right-of-way constraints, shade and landscaping, parking, stormwater management, and redevelopment opportunities.



- » Consider modifications to road standards to allow for movement of aquatic organisms.

Pedestrian and Greenway Recommendations

Policy T 3: Prioritize pedestrian safety, connectivity, accessibility, and comfort.

T 3.1: Prioritize intersection improvements along Main Street at 3rd Street and 4th Street.

- » 4th Street: These should include curb extensions/bulb-outs to allow room for people to congregate as they wait to cross, and consideration of a lead pedestrian interval or a pedestrian “scramble”/diagonal crossing, wherein pedestrians get an entire light cycle to cross any length of road, including diagonally. This option could improve ease of crossing during peak tourism months.

- » 3rd Street: These should include crosswalk striping along the western edge, installation of a traffic signal with pedestrian countdowns (with sufficient time to cross), curb extensions/bulb-outs to allow room for people to congregate as they wait to cross, and ADA access to each sidewalk connection, including in front of the Highlander Mountain House.

T 3.2: Look for opportunities to install pedestrian refuge islands at midblock locations on Main Street.

- » Refuge islands can shorten the length of the crossing and giving pedestrians the chance to only cross half the street width at a time, improving safety for children and the elderly. Medians and refuge islands also enclose the visual perception of the roadway, encouraging heightened awareness of surroundings and greater compliance with speed limits and other traffic laws.

INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS AT 4TH AND 3RD STREET



The concepts above show potential pedestrian crossing improvements at Main Street and 4th Street (left) and Main Street and 3rd Street (right). Minor improvements to curb ramps will be made in the Summer of 2021 with the resurfacing of Main Street. Future improvements shown above could include pedestrian refuges to reduce crossing distances and the addition of trees and landscaping in key locations.

T 3.3: Study opportunities to increase shade trees and landscaping along roads downtown.

- » Plant street trees along sidewalks, either in a designated planting area (i.e. buffer) or in designated grate structures.
- » Continue maintenance of street trees and landscaping at regular intervals along primary streets.
- » Study the conversion of several on-street parking spaces along Main Street into bulb outs, with shade trees and landscaping.
 - These should serve to buffer pedestrian crossings at both midblock locations and intersections, providing areas of refuge while crossing and shortening the distance of each crossing. This will improve safety, comfort, and aesthetics.

T 3.4: Consider hosting an “Open Streets” event downtown.

- » Highlands’ well-connected central business district could host an “Open

57.8%



Of survey responses indicate that people want more landscaping and trees downtown. Adequate room in the right-of-way exists for adding trees and landscaping, but may require the removal of a few parking spaces. Replacement of spaces should be balanced with a reassurance that additional parking spaces elsewhere are planned for the near term. Placement of trees and landscaping should also seek to minimize impacting views to businesses.

Streets” event (temporarily closing one or several streets to automobiles on a weekend day to provide a safe space for walking, bicycling, socializing, and other outdoor activities). Main Street is ideal for such an event, with wide pavement width and effective detour options for through traffic. This would serve as a strong declaration in support of pedestrians and provide an opportunity to encourage healthy behavior.

POTENTIAL MIDBLOCK CROSSING ON MAIN STREET



The concepts above illustrate options for a midblock crossing on Main Street between 3rd Street and 4th Street. The addition of a formal pedestrian crossing in this location would break up a 650ft block and create an easy and safe way for pedestrians to cross the street. It would also provide space for the addition of plantings. The exact design of the crossing will need to be refined through future study and coordinated with NCDOT. Ideally, the crossing would be implemented along with the creation of additional parking elsewhere.

Policy T 4: Fill sidewalk gaps and improve accessibility.

T 4.1: Strategy 4.1: Update, expand, prioritize, and implement the Master Sidewalk Plan in the downtown and adjoining residential areas.

- » Update Master Sidewalk Plan based on recommendations in the Community Plan.
- » Review types of sidewalk facility planned and refine recommendations based on available right-of-way and existing and potential development.

T 4.2: Work with NCDOT and other partners to address sidewalk extension priorities including:

- » NC 106 (downtown to Highlands Country Club)
- » US 64 (Will Henry Stevens Covered Bridge to Mirror Lake Road)
- » Oak Street (downtown to The Bascom)

T 4.3: Improve pedestrian crossings by studying modifications to light cycles, the addition of pedestrian actuated signals, and adding curb extensions and/or pedestrian refuges along major corridors.

- » As NCDOT makes improvements to key roadways through Highlands, Town staff should indicate a desire for intersections designed with curb extensions (bulb-outs) and reduced curb radii wherever feasible to shorten the distance that pedestrians must travel to cross a street, while slowing vehicular traffic as cars make turns. Narrowing the travel lane and reducing vehicular speeds during turning movements helps create a safer pedestrian environment.

T 4.4: Maintain a comprehensive sidewalk condition survey to prioritize infrastructure improvements and adhere to ADA accessibility standards for all new sidewalk construction.

- » Completing the sidewalk network throughout the downtown is a priority, with a need for additions along the primary routes into town. Low-cost measures such as painted pavement can be evaluated.

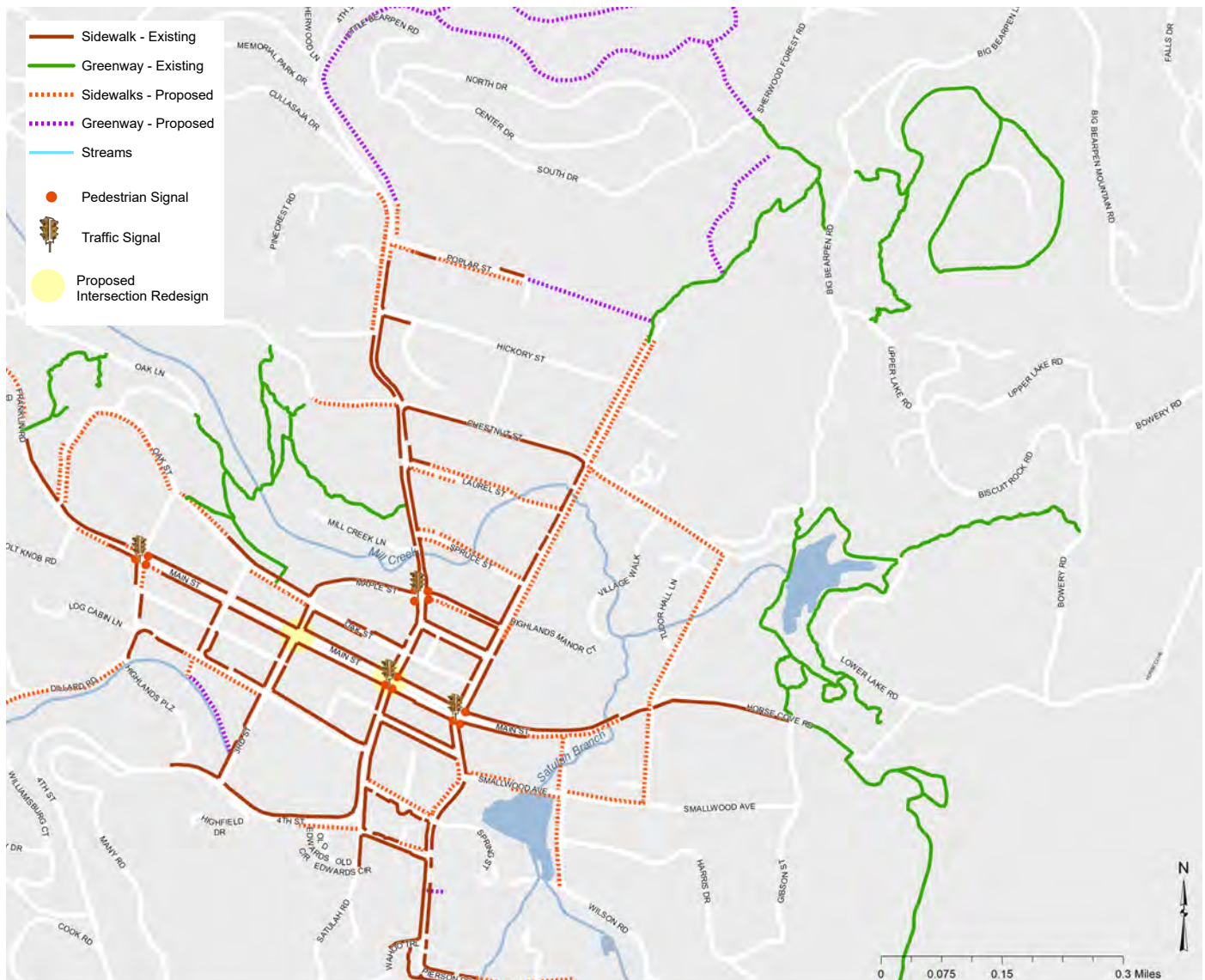
T 4.5: Develop an ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan.

- » Work with NCDOT to formalize a document highlighting key accessibility priorities, improvement schedules, and accountability metrics (including designating an ADA Coordinator to respond to resident questions and concerns).

T 4.6: Establish a pedestrian task force, responsible for providing input to decision makers on projects, programs, and policies.

- » This task force should make sure to receive and respond to citizen ideas and concerns, holding regular quarterly (or biannual) meetings to discuss all issues related to walking and pedestrians, including major projects (e.g. bridges, street repaving, comprehensive plans).
- » Pedestrian advisory groups can help spur innovation by providing a community forum to work through complicated issues such as sidewalk funding prioritization.

EXISTING AND PLANNED SIDEWALKS AND GREENWAYS MAP



The map above shows existing and planned sidewalks and greenways in the Town of Highlands.

Policy T 5: Continue to improve Highlands' Greenway System.

T 5.1: Support the Highlands Plateau Greenway, a non-profit organization focused on developing a system of walking and hiking trails that protect the natural settings and historic sites of the Highlands area.

- » The Town of Highlands should be a voice of support and a committed presence at meetings and support greenway extensions and formalizing existing paths.

T 5.2: Work with property owners and new development to add internal and external sidewalk connections in new development

- » Candidate locations include along streets without adequate sidewalk facilities and greenway along creeks or connecting existing trails or key destinations.
- » All greenway easement agreements on private property should specify adequate room for both the construction and maintenance of the trail. The Town should consider

using available sewer easements and unused rights-of-way as a trajectory for possible future greenway paths.

- » Collaborate with the Highlands Plaza property owner to incorporate a greenway trail and/or pocket park along the creek at the north end of the property as part of future redevelopment site planning. Encourage a pedestrian connection from 2nd Street into the plaza and potentially to 3rd Street.

T 5.3: Consider utilizing existing right-of-way for sidewalk, greenway or trail improvements.

- » Work with NCDOT to discuss feasibility/cost of a multi-use path within the right-of-way along Dillard Road (NC 106) from Spring Street to the Town limit (or at least to Highlands Country Club). A sidewalk is a priority here, but a wider path is recommended to accommodate bicyclists and a greater number of users. This path could spur additional residential and commercial development along that corridor, while providing a safe multi-modal transportation and recreation corridor.
- » Engage with partners on long-range regional greenway planning projects, including a 10-mile multi-use path along Cashiers Road (US-64) connecting Highlands to Cashiers. Adequate right-of-way exists along this corridor, but considerable investment in financing and engineering will be necessary. Highlands should be represented at any regional planning level to ensure that the needs of the community are met.

T 5.4: Improve visibility of the Highlands Greenway System through signage (wayfinding, markers or stencils, and maps) so that people understand how to access the trail system more intuitively.

- » Develop a new Highlands Greenway Map that clearly differentiates between sidewalks, hiking trails, and paved paths. It is important for visitors to understand what a specific segment is supposed to look like and whether they are still on the right path, especially for users with mobility constraints. This will help ensure that the trail system is used correctly, comfortably, and easily. The map should highlight points of interest, parking areas, and other public amenities like bicycle parking and restrooms.

T 5.5: Establish new pedestrian signage and trailhead enhancements to heighten visitor awareness of existing trails, enable access, and encourage use.

- » Priority enhancements include pedestrian signage on 2nd Street to direct trail users to Oak Street trailhead, the northern terminus of 5th Street, and at Highlands Rec Park.
- » Existing and future public parking areas are also candidates for a trailhead for the Town's greenway system.

Parking & Transit

Policy T 6: Balance needs for parking with aesthetics and environmental impacts.

T 6.1: Consider utilizing paved portions of the right-of-way to address stormwater runoff on the Town's streets through strategic location of landscaping and/or permeable pavement.

T 6.2: Plan for a future parking garage near Main Street.

- » Continue to study town-owned land between Maple Street and Oak Street and the corner of Oak Street and Maple Street as potential locations for a parking deck with capacity for 75-200 or more vehicles.
- » The design of any multi-level public parking structures should incorporate commercial or residential uses wrapped around the structure's façade where feasible to maximize the use of space and improve aesthetics.
- » To encourage use, consider free parking at the garage coupled with increased restrictions and/or fees for parking on Main Street.

T 6.3: Consider long-term implementation of metered parking along portions of Main Street.

- » Metered parking could be implemented on a portion of Main Street between 3rd Street and 5th Street, where occupancy is typically highest.
- » These parking spaces are highly desirable and should reflect that value through a fee structure. The goal is to disincentivize people from parking all day in locations that benefit from turnover (i.e. commercial uses) and encourage people to park for free at peripheral locations (Oak Street, Spring Street, and 3rd Street) or future parking garages.



Main Street is the heart of Downtown, but prioritizes parking over pedestrian comfort and safety.

- » Coordination with downtown businesses will be necessary to determine an acceptable balance between free parking and metered parking.
- » Revenue could contribute to an enterprise fund used for the construction of additional on-street spaces, streetscape maintenance and beautification efforts on or near Main Street.

T 6.4: For new developments, allow off-site parking and enable shared parking arrangements for adjacent or nearby uses.

- » For example a bank can share parking spaces with a bar, since their peak business hours occur at different times of day.

T 6.5: Allow for lower minimum parking requirements (or offsets for bicycle parking) where appropriate.

- » Areas within walking distance to downtown and high rates of potential pedestrian or bicycle trips are candidate locations for reduced parking requirements.

- » Continue to allow reduced parking requirements in the Downtown Business District.
 - › *No parking requirement for B-1 uses or for first 2 accessory apartment units*
 - › *1 space per unit after 2 accessory units*
- » Downtown Support Area
 - Encourage shared parking agreements.
 - Consider reduced parking requirements.
 - › *Current code allows reduction of 20%, consider increasing this reduction to 33% if the development meets other defined criteria.*
 - › *Criteria could include a mix of residential and commercial development, access to sidewalk infrastructure, available on-street parking nearby, provision of bike parking on site, age targeted housing, etc.*
- » Medium Density Area
 - Require only 1 space per accessory dwelling unit (ADU.)

T 6.6: Work with Highlands residents to design and implement a “Locals” parking system.

- » The system could allow for year-round residents to purchase a parking permit with a decal that enables them to park in a restricted area on either Oak Street or Spring Street.
- » The total number of restricted spaces should equal the number of permits. This would enable them to confidently find parking a block from Main Street, even during the busiest peak seasons, while adding revenue to support an enterprise fund or other initiative.
- » Enforcement would be critical to success.



Shaded area represents a 10-minute walking distance from the intersection of Fourth and Main Streets. via Walkscore

T 6.7: Begin to install bicycle parking infrastructure on Main Street and develop a systematic approach to placement selection and prioritization.

- » Consider installation of bicycle parking on town-owned properties
- » Consider initiating a Town-sponsored bike parking application program for businesses and property owners, creating a streamlined process to apply for bike parking in the public right-of-way
- » There is an opportunity to rely on public demand and business support to influence placement location decision-making – using an application form whereby property owners or tenants can request installation of a bike rack.
- » Standard options for both on-the-sidewalk inverted u-racks and in-the-parking-lane bike corrals should be developed, with up-to-date design standards for both types.

Policy T 7: Partner with Macon County Transit.

T 7.1: Seek representation on the Macon County Transit Advisory Board.

- » A representative from the Town of Highlands should attend all Board meetings in Franklin to keep abreast of new endeavors, advocate for investments in the Highlands area, and ensure that the interests of Highlands residents are voiced.

T 7.2: Coordinate a study to gauge the feasibility, cost, and need for a fixed bus route in Highlands.

- » The service could be similar to Franklin's Mountain Gem route, whereby a daily shuttle navigates the primary streets with service to major employers and medical facilities in the area.
- » Having reliable regular bus service can be beneficial for employees, people who are not able to drive a personal vehicle, and visiting tourists.
- » Consider subsidizing this effort so that fares could be free or affordable (the Mountain Gem route is \$1 per boarding).

T 7.3: Begin a dialogue with Macon County Transit about the possibility of implementing a seasonal (i.e. summer) circulator shuttle system.

- » In the short-term, this can ease parking demand on Main Street by enabling people to park farther away (Oak Street, Spring Street, 3rd Street, etc) but still access their destination on Main Street.
- » In the long-term, this can provide incentive for people to park at a nearby parking garage knowing they can easily ride the shuttle bus to other location in Highlands.



A custom bike rack could be design and used around downtown, starting with a few locations on town owned property or in the right-of-way, then included near other destinations.

Policy T 8: Plan for electric vehicles (EVs) in Highlands.

T 8.1: Combat “range anxiety” by investing in new EV charging stations.

- » Highlands should work with business leaders, benefactors, and other agencies to incorporate charging stations at schools, public parking lots and garages, retail outlet parking lots (like Highlands Plaza and Wright Square), country clubs, hotels, workplaces, and other major trip origins and attractions in Highlands.
- » The Town should consider a goal of adding one charging station on each block of Main Street, Oak Street, and Spring Street within the downtown business district.

T 8.2: Replace all or a portion of the Town of Highlands' gas-powered vehicle fleet with zero-emission electric vehicles.

- » In the short-term, this should include any cars and light trucks. Prioritize buying electric cars when the price is within 5% of the cost of a gas car.
- » Heavy-duty vehicles used for snow removal and other needs might be phased out as technology advances and they become reliable for those uses and more cost-competitive.

T 8.3: Consider new development standards for multi-family residential and non-residential construction that require developers to install electric charging stations.

- » These standards can be incorporated into existing parking requirements and can become more stringent over time. Consider requiring one (1) EV charging station for every twenty (20) conventional parking spaces (or 5% of the total).

T 8.4: Encourage new single-family residential homes that are "EV Ready"

- » EV Ready homes have appropriate electrical panel capacity, conduit, and circuitry to accommodate future charging of EVs.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES (EVs)

While the internal combustion engine automobile has dominated the 20th century, prevalent electric vehicle (EV) technology will be the future. Introduced in 2010 as the world's first mass-market electric vehicle, the Nissan Leaf has led the way in making the excitement and convenience of electric driving accessible to non-luxury buyers. Coupled with the success of higher-end electric vehicles like those designed and produced by Tesla, EVs are poised to dominate the market share of vehicles on the road within a few decades.

It is assumed that sales of electric and hybrid vehicles will quickly increase as charging infrastructure expands and battery costs decrease. Owners of electric and hybrid vehicles in North Carolina pay less in combined gas taxes and registration fees compared to owners of gasoline-powered vehicles. This shortfall will add up as the use of these vehicles continues to grow.

These challenges have prompted many states and local governments to consider actions that increase or modernize their transportation revenue sources. As more drivers alter their mobility patterns that reduce miles traveled and shift to more fuel-efficient vehicles, motor fuel tax revenues will decline. As a result, new or better revenue sources will be necessary to offset those losses and ensure that North Carolina can meet its future transportation investment needs. Highlands should be prepared for a near-term drop in Powell Bill fund levels for Town-maintained roads and prioritize maintenance strategies to accommodate those changes.

TRANSPORTATION ACTION ITEMS

The items below list priority regulations, plans and programs that, if implemented, will advance town goals. Implementing the recommendations of this plan will involve town staff, elected officials, appointed boards, partners, residents and business owners.

Action Item 16: Prioritize the implementation of the Master Sidewalk Plan in downtown and adjoining residential areas (T4).

- » 16A: Priority connections include NC 106 (downtown to Highlands Country Club), US 64 (Will Henry Stevens Covered Bridge to Mirror Lake Road), and Oak Street (downtown to The Bascom)

COST: MEDIUM-HIGH

TIMEFRAME: MEDIUM-TERM

Action Item 17: Coordinate and support the Highlands Plateau Greenway in their efforts to improve Highlands' Greenway System (T5).

- » 17A: Implement priority signage and trailhead enhancements
- » 17B: Pursue priority trail extensions
 - *Study a greenway/trail extension along US 64 north of town*
 - *Formalize trail between Poplar Street and the trailhead at the end of 5th Street for the Kelsey Trail Preserve. Also consider adding a formal turn-around and signage.*

COST: LOW (17A), MEDIUM (17B)

TIMEFRAME: MEDIUM-TERM

Action Item 18: Develop an ADA Self-Assessment and Transition Plan (T4).

- » 18A: Designate staff resources or hire a consultant to document highlighting key accessibility priorities, improvement schedules, and accountability metrics (including designating an ADA Coordinator to respond to resident questions and concerns).

COST: MEDIUM

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM

Action Item 19: Manage and expand vehicular parking. (T6)

- » 19A: Continue to manage existing parking and consider additional steps, including metering in some areas, to encourage turnover for visitation of businesses.
- » 19B: Study feasibility and costs of adding additional on-street parking on Main Street, Oak Street and Spruce Street.
- » 19C: Study additional public parking lot and/or parking deck options and costs.

COST: MEDIUM

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM (19B), MEDIUM-TERM (19A), LONG-TERM (19C)

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME
- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

- ONGOING = UNDERWAY AND RECOMMENDED TO CONTINUE
- SHORT-TERM = 1-2 YEARS
- MEDIUM-TERM = 2-3 YEARS
- LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

TRANSPORTATION ACTION ITEMS (CONTINUED)

Action Item 20: Encourage walking, biking and use of electric vehicles. (T6, T8)

- » 20A: Consider reduced parking requirements in walkable areas.
- » 20B: Locate new bicycle parking and EV charging stations downtown.

COST: N/A (20A), LOW (20B)

TIMEFRAME: MEDIUM-TERM

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME
- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

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INFRASTRUCTURE & PUBLIC SERVICES

Issues to Address

Each summer and well into the fall the population of the Town of Highlands swells by many thousands from an influx of seasonal residents, overnight visitors and day trippers. Managing sanitation, electric, water and sewer and public safety infrastructure and services for current demands is challenging. If more seasonal residents become year-round residents and if post-COVID population growth continues, Highlands can anticipate future increases in infrastructure and services needs. It is imperative to plan for strategies to meet those needs before they become a problem.

Primary Infrastructure and Service Goals

GOAL #1: Town Character: Vibrant village center with distinct character that is surrounded by mostly low-density housing that blends with the natural environment.

GOAL #2: Preservation of the Environment: Preserve and enhance the natural environment and the scenic beauty of Highlands.

Goal #3: Local Economy: Support and sustain the local economy including downtown businesses, tourism, the arts, and outdoor recreation.

Policy PS 1: Ensure adequate waste disposal and sanitation services.

PS 1.1: Continue enforcement of existing regulations related to waste disposal.

PS 1.2: Regularly evaluate the balance of expenditures and revenues for the sanitation department.

- » Consider hiring a third-party accounting firm to perform an unbiased audit and develop creative and practical long-term solutions.

PS 1.3: Regularly evaluate the need for increases in garbage collection fees for both residential and commercial customers to cover town service costs.

- » The short-term need is likely an additional \$3-\$4/month per customer in order for the department to remain solvent.
- » Explore options for phasing that cost in over time or allocating more of the burden to businesses instead of residential customers (e.g. raising rates

for commercial weekend pickup only or targeting fees for businesses that require additional pick-ups).

- » Consider cardboard and other recycling services needs and costs during the evaluation.

PS 1.4: Consider reducing residential garbage pickup to one time a week instead of two.

- » Many communities follow this schedule, and it could help lower overall costs while still providing adequate services.
- » Allow residents to weigh in on this decision, with a public survey to gauge acceptance of this change versus an increase in monthly fees.

PS 1.5: Continue to commit to bear-proof refuse containers.

- » Bear-proof containers are needed for public use downtown and for residential and commercial customers.
- » Replacing all shared commercial dumpsters with 95-gallon "toters"

(cans on wheels) is also advised.

PS 1.6: Identify a location for a convenience center within or near town limits.

- » Residents and businesses can take their waste and recycling in between scheduled pickups.
- » This would enable the department to simultaneously shift its pickup schedule to a more limited basis because it would offer a solution for those with more of a need.

Policy PS 2: Maintain and enhance the electric grid.

PS 2.1: Maintain and work to improve the resiliency of the electric grid.

- » Continue regular maintenance activities
- » Enhance operational capacity coincident with increased demands
- » Evaluate replacement and upgrade projects on an annual basis

PS 2.2: Evaluate ways to improve customer service including outage reporting options.

- » Consider establishing an after-hours answering service and/or a website based or mobile application for reporting outages

PS 2.3: Reduce visibility of utilities.

- » Encourage underground utilities, especially in the downtown area
 - Consider developing a formal policy specifying where underground utilities are required.
- » Consider the replacement of existing utilities with underground utilities wherever feasible.
 - Consider the pursuit of grant funding to support this effort.
 - Candidate locations include:
 - › West Main Street between 3rd and 1st Street
 - › US 64/Franklin Road gateway area

Policy PS 3: Encourage energy efficiency and alternative fuel vehicles

PS 3.1: Encourage energy efficiency in new buildings (i.e. LEED certification, solar energy, or other measures).

PS 3.2: Consider electric vehicles or hybrids when purchasing new vehicles for the town fleet.

Policy PS 4: Improve access to high-speed internet and expand cell coverage.

PS 4.1: Support activation and completion of the fiber network.

- » Will benefit residents by providing telecommuting options and businesses.
- » Support completion of the fiber network, with a goal to reassess the lease agreement after the term expires.
- » Encourage gradual expansion beyond the Town limits, in an effort to ensure rural connectivity throughout Macon County.

PS 4.2: Improve public WiFi.

- » Market/advertise existing public WiFi hot spots.
- » Determine opportunities for future hot spots (coordinate with businesses).

PS 4.3: Explore options for “Smart City” technologies like real-time meter reading that make use of the expanded fiber optic Internet capacity.

- » Smart meters are the foundation for intelligent measurement, monitoring, and control of electricity and water usage.
- » These systems can make a significant contribution to the transparency of actual power and water consumption bringing benefits to all parties involved.

PS 4.4: Work with partners to improve 5G coverage.

- » Consider partnerships with Macon County and other entities to improve cell phone coverage in and around town

Policy PS 5: Focus water and sewer service improvements on existing town limits.

Policy PS 6: Allow for limited extension of water and sewer to areas near town limit boundaries if conditions are met.

PS 6.1: Consider limited extension adjacent to town limits if new development advances town goals, such as environmental preservation.

- » Contiguous development is encouraged to prevent leapfrog development.
- » Water/sewer extension should be contingent upon annexation.

Policy PS 7: Encourage an efficient, financially sound water and sewer system.

PS 7.1: Regularly evaluate connection and usage fees to allow for maintenance and necessary capital recovery.

PS 7.2: Consider updating policies to require utilities to be built to town standards.

PS 7.3: Continue policies to ensure new development is responsible to fund sewer extensions for private development.

PS 7.4: Continue policy of requiring grand-

fathered existing users outside of town limits to pay double rates.

PS 7.5: Explore options for “Smart City” technologies like real-time water meter reading that make use of the expanded fiber optic Internet capacity.

Policy PS 8: Protect water quality in Lake Sequoyah.

PS 8.1: Continue to limit impervious surface in water supply watersheds.

PS 8.2: Continue to prioritize stormwater best management practices (e.g. green roofs, on-site bioretention). See the Natural Resources chapter for more recommendations.

PS 8.3: Encourage subdivisions to include tree canopy preservation areas.

PS 8.4: Pursue grants to connect homes with septic systems in close proximity to Lake Sequoyah to the town sewer system.

LAKE SEQUOYAH WATER SUPPLY PROTECTION PROJECT

There are a number of homes with older septic systems in close proximity to the water supply of Highlands.

Lake Sequoyah is the only source of water for the plateau and many homes (100-150 homes) have septic systems. Some of these homes are as old as 1920. A major retrofit project is needed to convert homes on septic drain fields to sewer. A similar project complete for Mirror Lake many years ago.

The Town has pursued grants but none of the \$5-6 million project has been completed yet. Due to its impact on the water supply this is the #1 priority sewer project inside the city limits.

PS 8.5: Continue to monitor water quality in the town water system.

- » Regularly clear the Lake Sequoyah intake and the Big Creek intake to ensure that sedimentation does not impair water supply allocation or distribution.
- » Continue to test water at peoples' homes at a rate of 20 homes every three years.

PS 8.6: Continue to plan for maintenance and replacement costs of essential utilities infrastructure.

- » Fund the replacement of a large clarifier tank, which has been in operation for over 50 years and is reaching its serviceable limit.
- » Plan for and fund necessary upgrades to the water and sewer system.
 - › *The 2019 Water Asset Management Plan notes proposed capital improvements that total \$35.9 million.*

PS 8.7: Continue to pursue federal funding and prioritize local funding for major treatment upgrades and waterline replacement projects.

- » Maximizing cost-sharing for essential projects will help keep long-term costs down by minimizing leaking pipes and improving overall capacity by keeping pipes free from debris and made from long-lasting material.

PS 8.8: Develop a Water & Sewer Master Plan every five years in an effort to address ongoing needs, gauge success of maintenance and improvements, and remain eligible for state revolving loan projects and grants.

- » Having up-to-date master plan documentation provides data to support projected future needs, which is helpful in the grant application process.

PS 8.9: Work with the Upper Cullasaja Watershed Association to continue the bi-weekly newsletter, Know Your Watershed, with the Town of Highlands newspaper and the storm drain stenciling initiative.

- » These activities help raise awareness of water quality and the efforts to protect drinking water in Highlands. In the future this can be coupled with a water conservation public education program.

Policy PS 9: Maintain adequate fire and emergency management response.

PS 9.1: Continue to coordinate with Macon County regarding fire coverage and response.

PS 9.2: Monitor personnel needs in order to maintain adequate fire coverage.

- » Consider additional personnel in order to transition to 24 hour fire coverage.

PS 9.3: Coordinate with Macon County Emergency Services Office to maintain and improve emergency response in Highlands and on the greater plateau.

Policy PS 10: Maintain adequate police coverage in the Town of Highlands.

PS 10.1: Monitor personnel and equipment needs in order to maintain adequate police coverage.

- » Encourage officer health and fitness.
 - Consider the addition of gym equipment at police station.
- » If growth in year-round population and visitation continues there may be a need for another officer per shift, especially at night.
 - In the long-term an additional rotating split-shift position may be needed.

PS 10.2: Monitor speeds downtown and consider additional enforcement activities as needed

- » Low speeds have kept downtown a safe place for pedestrians
- » Lower speed limits, roadway changes and/or additional enforcement activities should be considered as needed to keep pedestrians safe.

PS 10.3: Continue coordination with Macon County Sheriff Dept. for mutual aid calls within established policies and confines of defined coverage area.

PS 10.4: Continue and expand community-oriented policing efforts

- » Outreach to local businesses
- » Bike and foot patrol downtown
- » Education efforts
 - Crime reduction measures for seasonal residents
 - Outreach and education related to Short Term Rentals for owners and neighbors
 - “Coffee with a cop” events
 - Articles in paper, radio station recordings.

PS 10.5: Encourage Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) on town owned properties

- » Ensure adequate lighting and sight lines.
- » Consider the addition of CCTVs on public properties as needed.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES ACTION ITEMS

The items below list priority regulations, plans and programs that, if implemented, will advance town goals. Implementing the recommendations of this plan will involve town staff, elected officials, appointed boards, partners, residents and business owners.

Action Item 21: Sanitation Services Priorities

- » 21A: Evaluate fee structure and pick-up schedules.
- » 21B: Identify a location for a convenience center within or near town limits.

COST: LOW (21A), MEDIUM (21B)

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM

Action Item 22: Evaluate ways to improve electric system customer service including outage reporting options.

- » 22A: Consider establishing an after-hours answering service and/or a website based or mobile application for reporting outages

COST: LOW

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM

Action Item 23: Pay off fiber project and improve public WiFi

- » 23A; Continue to make loan payments according to the amortization schedule for the initial \$4.6 million fiber optic construction project. Principal payments of approximately \$306,666 (plus interest payments) will continue through the year 2034.
- » 23B: Improve public Wifi by advertising existing hot spots and expanding coverage.

COST: LOW (23B), HIGH (23A)

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM

Action Item 24: Public Safety Priorities

- » 24A: Enhance community-oriented policing activities
- » 24B: Short Term rentals education and outreach
 - *Develop educational material in Winter of 2021*
 - *Coffee with a Cop / Q&A for STR - Citizen training in Spring of 2022*
- » 24C: Fund fitness equipment in police station and transition to SUVs for patrol vehicles.
- » 24E: Consider additional personnel in order to transition to 24 hour fire coverage and maintain adequate police coverage.

COST: N/A (24A, 24B), LOW (24C), MEDIUM (24D, 24E)

TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM (24 A-C), MEDIUM-TERM (24E)

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME
- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

- ONGOING = UNDERWAY AND RECOMMENDED TO CONTINUE
- SHORT-TERM = 1-2 YEARS
- MEDIUM-TERM = 2-3 YEARS
- LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES ACTION ITEMS (CONTINUED)

Action Item 25: Pursue grants to connect homes with septic systems in close proximity to Lake Sequoyah to the town sewer system.

COST: HIGH
TIMEFRAME: MID-TERM

Action Item 26: Plan for and fund necessary upgrades to the water and sewer system.

- » See the Water Asset Management Plan and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for details.

COST: HIGH
TIMEFRAME: SHORT-TERM

COST KEY

- N/A = NO COST / CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED WITH EXISTING RESOURCES AND STAFF TIME
- LOW = COST > \$10,000
- MEDIUM = COST \$10,000-100,000
- HIGH = COST >\$100,000

TIMEFRAME KEY

- ONGOING = UNDERWAY AND RECOMMENDED TO CONTINUE
- SHORT-TERM = 1-2 YEARS
- MEDIUM-TERM = 2-3 YEARS
- LONG-TERM = 3+ YEARS

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APPENDIX

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SHORT TERM RENTAL REGULATION

Often short-term rentals are zoned residential and developed to residential standards, but function as small hotels or other accommodation businesses. While short-term rentals (STRs) are not a new concept, new technologies such as AirBNB and VRBO have given rise to increased usage of seasonal homes and investment properties as short-term rentals. They are increasingly popular and have the potential to be strong economic engines for tourism revenue and can enable investment and ownership. However, they also have the potential to change the character of established neighborhoods, increase housing costs, reduce the availability of long-term rentals and can come with zoning, nuisance, and noise concerns. This new era of STR popularity brings questions about regulation. Homeowners in residential areas who have experienced their communities change and seen nuisances grow want more regulation, while landlords and those benefiting from STRs disagree. Local governments are caught in the middle. The state of North Carolina limits, more than other states, how local governments can regulate STRs. The following case studies illustrate ways that this has manifested throughout the state in Raleigh, Asheville, Blowing Rock, and Wilmington.

ASHEVILLE

Asheville's STR approach is arguably the most successful in the state so far. The City has utilized zoning law and language to classify whole-home rentals for under 30 days as a separate zoning use, which is only allowed in one zoning district. The City also maintains a database of known STRs as they appear on rental websites via a third-party service. It should be noted that though the City's STR ordinance still stands at this time, it has been challenged in court.

RALEIGH

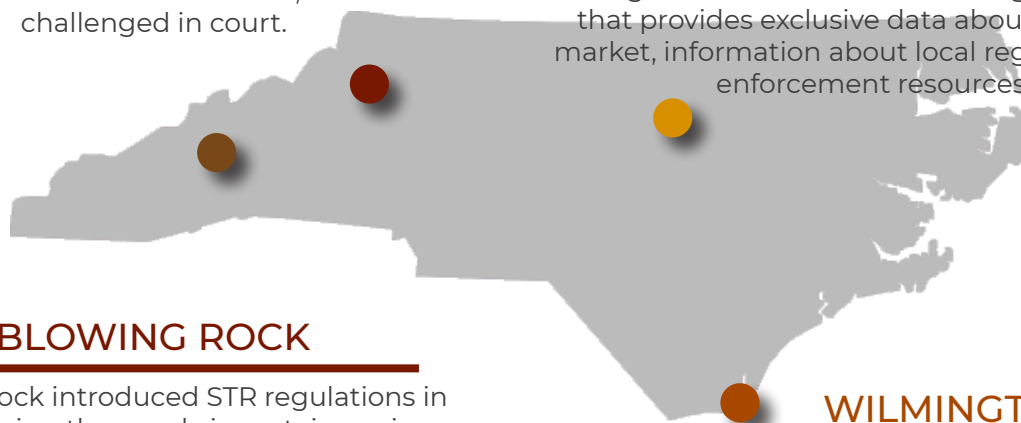
The city updated its STR laws in January 2020, allowing whole-home rentals but requiring that owners pay for an annual permit from the City. The update to the Vacation Rental Act in July 2020, which outlawed required permits, renders this illegal and unenforceable according to some. In September 2020, it was announced that Raleigh would be one of 15 pilot cities for an AirBNB program call City Portal, a platform for governments and tourism organizations that provides exclusive data about the rental market, information about local regulations and enforcement resources.

BLOWING ROCK

Blowing Rock introduced STR regulations in 2018, allowing them only in certain zoning districts. The ordinance defines short-term rentals as those which host stays under 28 days and sets parking requirements per rental. STRs are not permitted in single-family residential districts. Currently, the Town requires that all STR operators obtain a zoning permit, with fees that fund inspections of the rentals. However, this permit is not valid under the 2020 updates to the Vacation Rental Act.

WILMINGTON

A 2019 local ordinance regulating STRs through a required registry, parking regulations, and limits on number of STRs was challenged in the case *Schroeder vs. City of Wilmington*. The decision on the case, released in April 2022, determined that mandatory registration of STRs is not legally permissible. The decision upheld local governments' right to enforce regulations on STRs such as parking requirements and zoning restrictions.



NORTH CAROLINA STR REGULATIONS

North Carolina has unique strict laws regarding how local governments can regulate short-term rentals. Many regulations utilized in other states are not legal here, increasing the challenge of regulating STRs. The state regulates STRs through the Vacation Rental Act, and updated it in 2020 with new limitations. Highlights from the act include:

- » Requiring rentals to register is unlawful
- » Local governments cannot levy a tax or fee on residential rental property that is not levied against other commercial and residential properties

It is argued that the Vacation Rental Act leaves room for regulating STRs via local zoning, which is similar to Asheville's strategy.



AVERAGE NIGHTLY RATE FOR A SHORT-TERM RENTAL IN HIGHLANDS:

\$306

Source: AirDNA data
accessed January 2021

1: REGULATION OPTIONS

Taking into account the current limitations set by the State of North Carolina, there are still several regulatory options for Short-term Rentals that local governments can consider. These options differ in implementation effort, cost to municipalities, and likely effectiveness. Options are described below. They have been organized into tiers, with Tier 1 being the easiest to implement, though likely less effective, to Tier 3 being the most involved to implement, but most effective.

TIER 1

- » Tracking nuisance complaints and referencing them with known STRs.
- » Providing better education and resources for landlords and STR tenants.

TIER 2

- » Using a third-party service to track STRs and nuisance complaints.

TIER 3

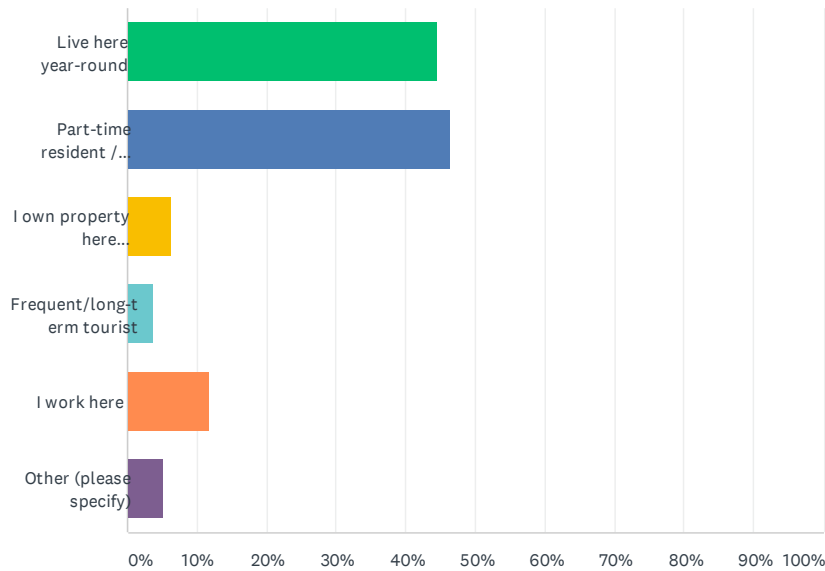
- » Using zoning ordinances to regulate STRs. This can include:
 - Defining STRs as a distinct use.
 - Restricting zoning districts in which STRs can locate as a permitted use.
 - Can also be used to dictate requirements related to parking, buffers, fire code, and density.

FULL COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q1 We want to hear from everyone that considers themselves a part of the Highlands community. How do you relate to Highlands? Select all that apply.

Answered: 1,008 Skipped: 4

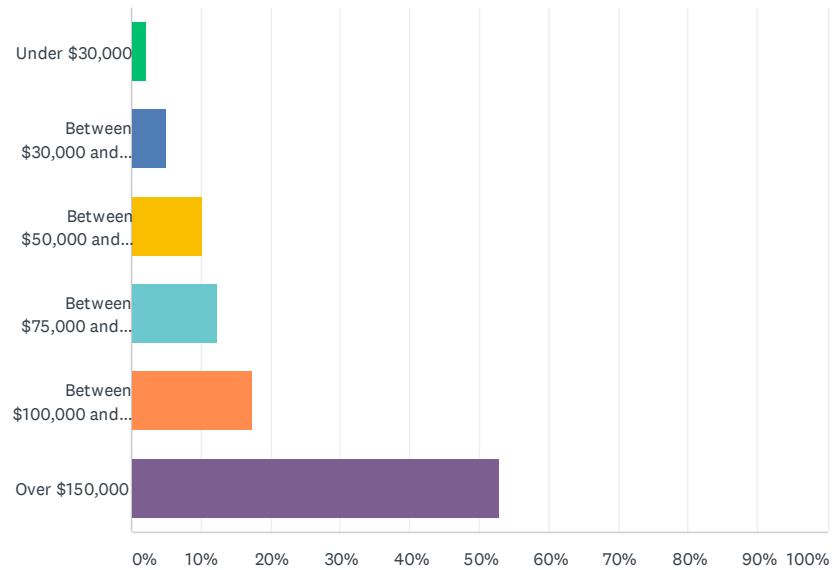


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Live here year-round	44.54%	449
Part-time resident / second home owner	46.43%	468
I own property here (commercial property or a home I don't live in)	6.35%	64
Frequent/long-term tourist	3.87%	39
I work here	11.81%	119
Other (please specify)	5.16%	52
Total Respondents: 1,008		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q2 What is your annual household income?

Answered: 964 Skipped: 48

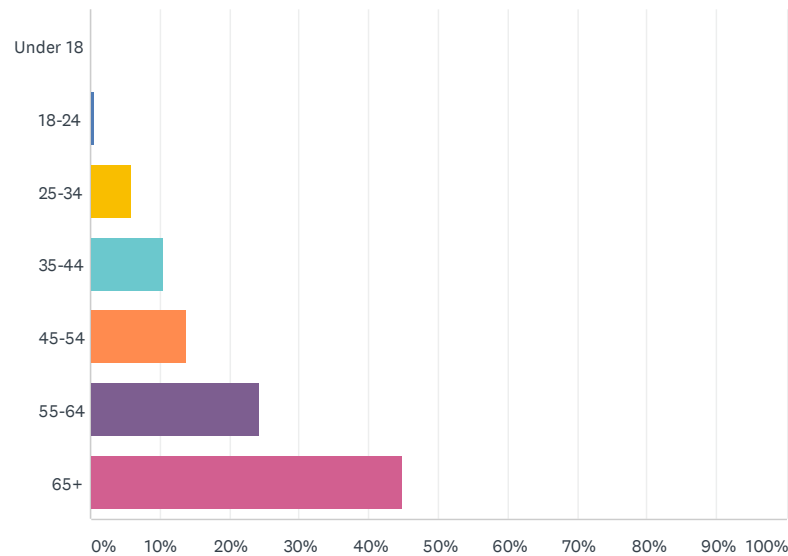


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under \$30,000	2.07%	20
Between \$30,000 and \$49,999	4.98%	48
Between \$50,000 and \$74,999	10.17%	98
Between \$75,000 and \$99,999	12.34%	119
Between \$100,000 and \$150,000	17.43%	168
Over \$150,000	53.01%	511
TOTAL		964

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q3 What is your age?

Answered: 1,007 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.10%	1
18-24	0.70%	7
25-34	5.76%	58
35-44	10.53%	106
45-54	13.90%	140
55-64	24.23%	244
65+	44.79%	451
TOTAL		1,007

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q4 What do you value about Highlands?

Answered: 971 Skipped: 41

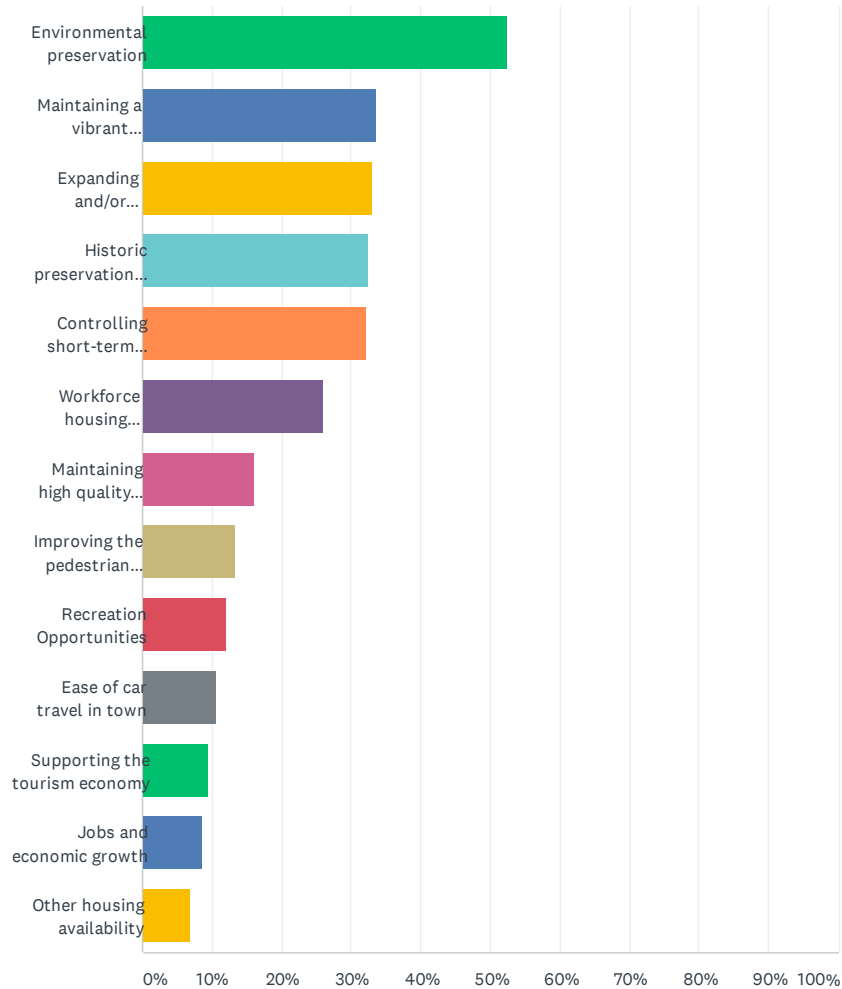
Please contact the Town of Highlands offices for full response list.



Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q5 What are your biggest concerns for the future in Highlands? (Choose up to three)

Answered: 1,012 Skipped: 0



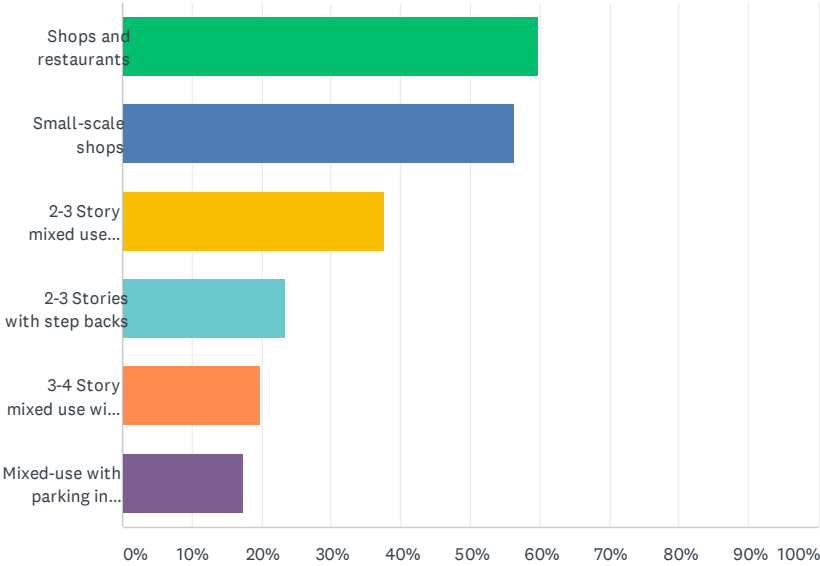
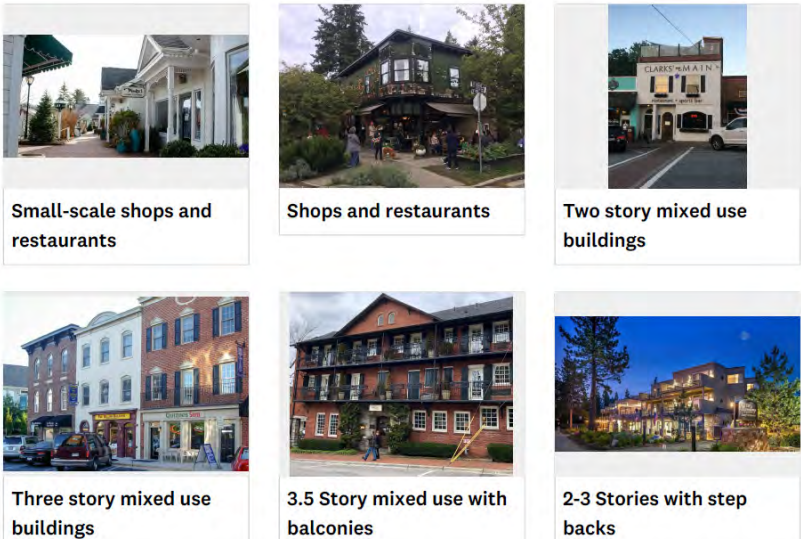
Highlands Community Plan Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Environmental preservation	52.57%	532
Maintaining a vibrant Downtown	33.60%	340
Expanding and/or upgrading infrastructure (water, sewer, internet)	33.00%	334
Historic preservation and cultural resources	32.51%	329
Controlling short-term rentals	32.21%	326
Workforce housing availability	25.99%	263
Maintaining high quality design for buildings	16.01%	162
Improving the pedestrian environment	13.44%	136
Recreation Opportunities	12.06%	122
Ease of car travel in town	10.67%	108
Supporting the tourism economy	9.39%	95
Jobs and economic growth	8.60%	87
Other housing availability	6.82%	69
Total Respondents: 1,012		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q6 As demand to be close to Downtown increases, many parcels in and near the existing Downtown Business District are likely to be redeveloped. What would you like commercial or mixed use development to look like closest to Downtown? Click on the images you like.

Answered: 900 Skipped: 112



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Shops and restaurants	59.78%	538
Small-scale shops	56.22%	506
2-3 Story mixed use buildings	37.67%	339
2-3 Stories with step backs	23.44%	211
3-4 Story mixed use with balconies	19.78%	178
Mixed-use with parking in front	17.33%	156
Total Respondents: 900		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q7 If housing were developed in areas closest to Downtown, what types of homes would you like to see? Click on the images you like.

Answered: 895 Skipped: 117



Smaller homes w/ shared open space



House-scale multifamily



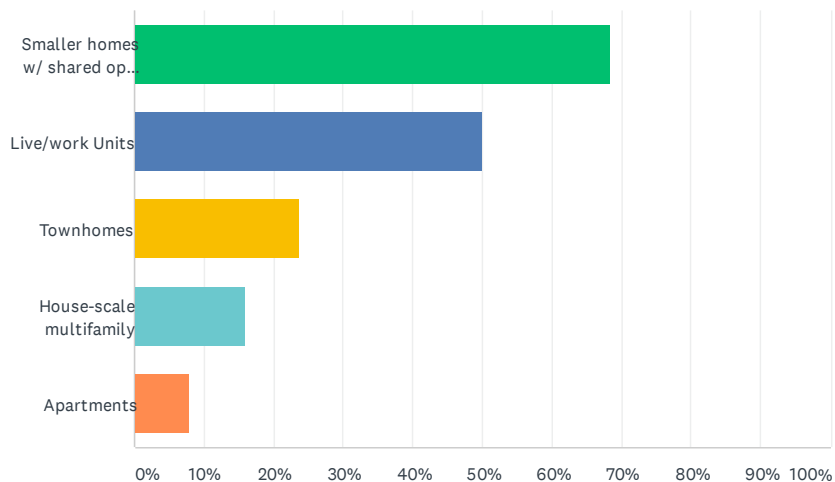
Townhomes



Apartments



Live/work Units

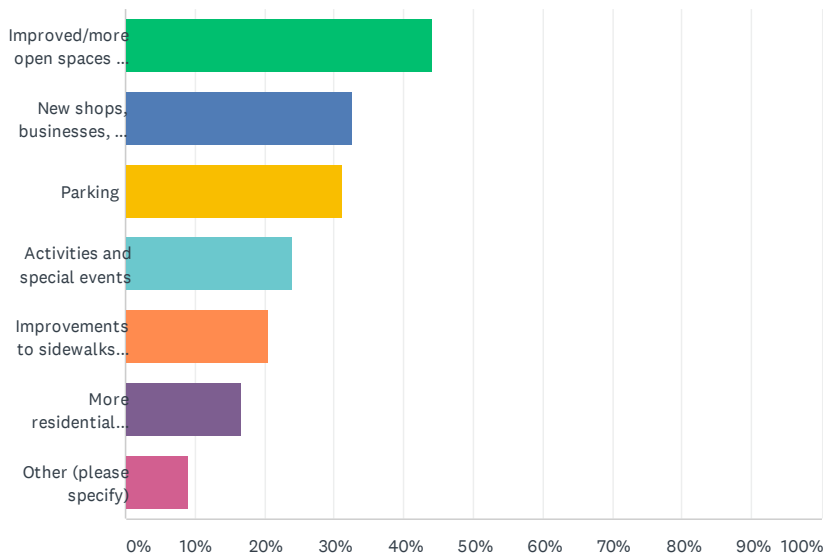


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Smaller homes w/ shared open space	68.49%	613
Live/work Units	50.06%	448
Townhomes	23.58%	211
House-scale multifamily	15.87%	142
Apartments	8.04%	72
Total Respondents: 895		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q8 Which Downtown improvement is most appealing to you? (Choose two)

Answered: 926 Skipped: 86

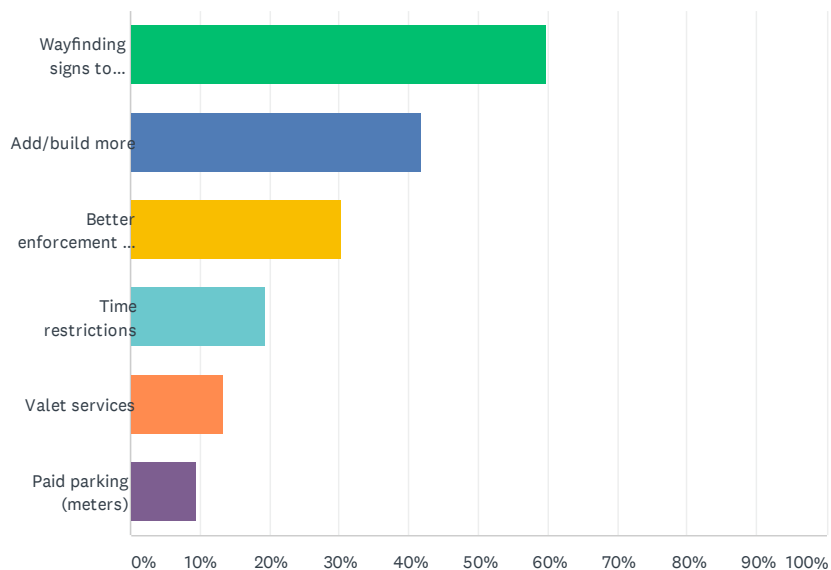


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Improved/more open spaces and parks	44.06%	408
New shops, businesses, and restaurants	32.72%	303
Parking	31.10%	288
Activities and special events	24.08%	223
Improvements to sidewalks and crossings	20.52%	190
More residential options	16.74%	155
Other (please specify)	8.96%	83
Total Respondents: 926		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q9 How could parking be improved throughout Highlands' Downtown Business District? choose two

Answered: 926 Skipped: 86

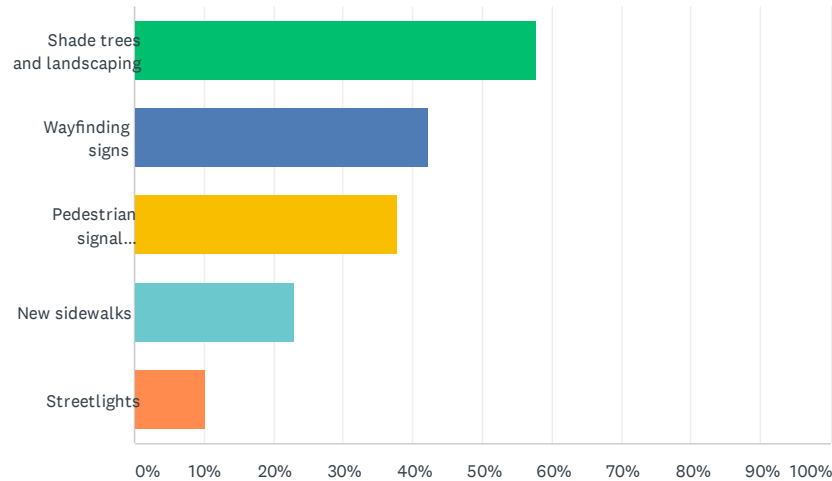


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Wayfinding signs to additional parking	59.94%	555
Add/build more	41.79%	387
Better enforcement of Downtown Business District Parking Ordinance	30.24%	280
Time restrictions	19.55%	181
Valet services	13.39%	124
Paid parking (meters)	9.50%	88
Total Respondents: 926		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q10 Which two pedestrian elements are most needed in the Downtown Business District?

Answered: 926 Skipped: 86

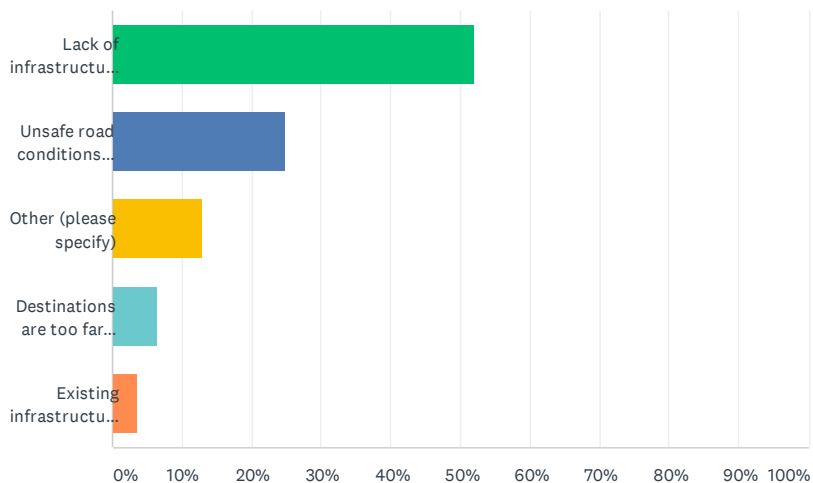


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Shade trees and landscaping	57.78%	535
Wayfinding signs	42.22%	391
Pedestrian signal countdowns for crossing	37.90%	351
New sidewalks	23.11%	214
Streetlights	10.15%	94
Total Respondents: 926		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q11 What is the biggest barrier that keeps you from traveling by using active transportation (walking or bicycling) in Highlands?

Answered: 902 Skipped: 110

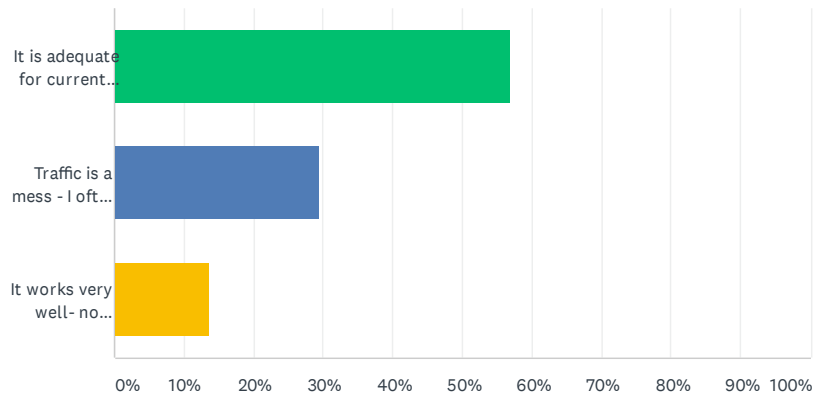


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Lack of infrastructure (sidewalks, bike lanes, trails)	52.11%	470
Unsafe road conditions (i.e. motor vehicle speeding)	24.94%	225
Other (please specify)	12.97%	117
Destinations are too far apart	6.43%	58
Existing infrastructure does not accommodate people with disabilities	3.55%	32
TOTAL		902

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q12 Which of the following choices best describes your perception of car travel in Town?

Answered: 921 Skipped: 91

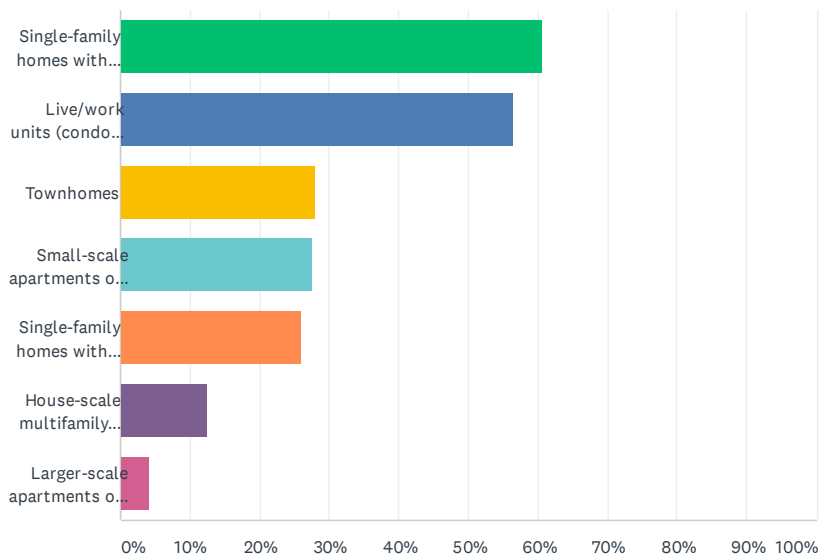


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
It is adequate for current traffic levels, but it may need improvement if the Town grows.	56.89%	524
Traffic is a mess - I often experience delays when I drive through the Town.	29.42%	271
It works very well- no problems getting around Town.	13.68%	126
TOTAL		921

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q13 Demand for housing in Highlands is increasing overall. In general, what types of housing would you like to see in Town? Check all that apply.

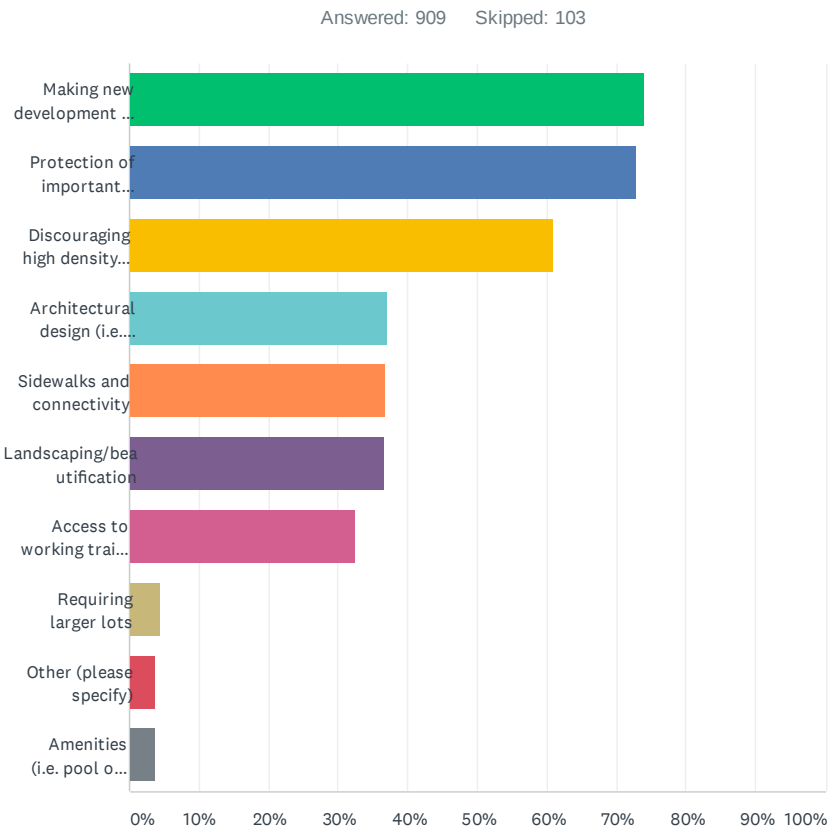
Answered: 901 Skipped: 111



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Single-family homes with smaller yards and access to shared open space	60.71%	547
Live/work units (condos above commercial or office space)	56.49%	509
Townhomes	28.08%	253
Small-scale apartments or condos	27.64%	249
Single-family homes with larger private yard	25.97%	234
House-scale multifamily homes (duplexes, triplexes)	12.54%	113
Larger-scale apartments or condos	4.22%	38
Total Respondents: 901		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q14 What should be priorities for residential development design in the Town? Select up to 4 priorities.



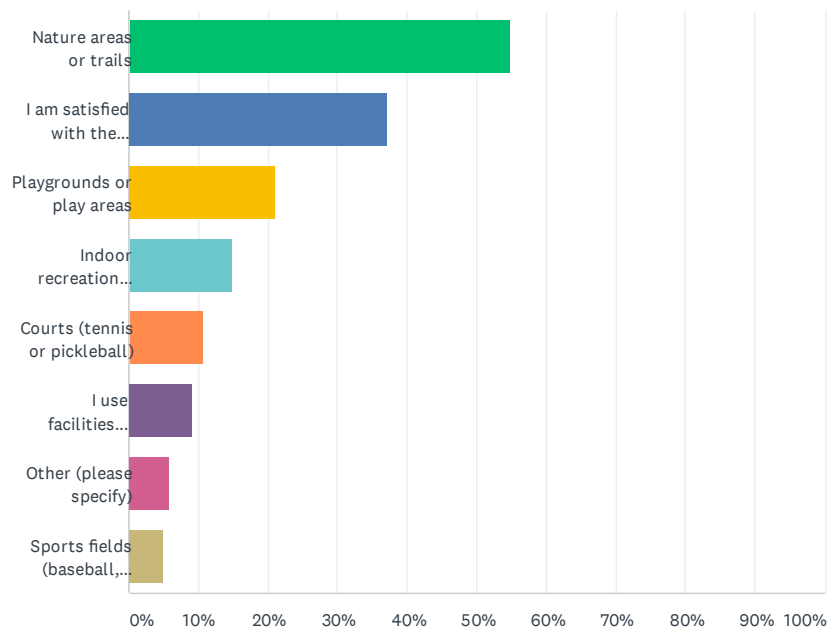
Highlands Community Plan Survey

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Making new development fit the character of the town	74.15%	674
Protection of important natural resources (i.e. water quality, tree canopy, habitat)	72.83%	662
Discouraging high density development	60.95%	554
Architectural design (i.e. materials or finishes on the outside of the home)	37.07%	337
Sidewalks and connectivity	36.85%	335
Landscaping/beautification	36.63%	333
Access to working trails, parks and greenspace	32.45%	295
Requiring larger lots	4.40%	40
Other (please specify)	3.85%	35
Amenities (i.e. pool or gym)	3.74%	34
Total Respondents: 909		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q15 What sort of recreation opportunities would you most like to see in Highlands?

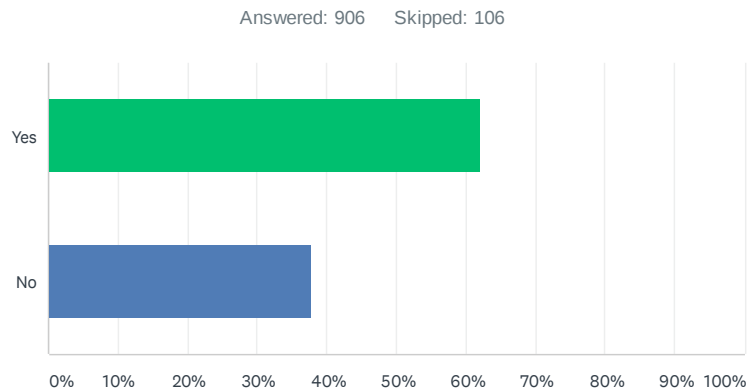
Answered: 907 Skipped: 105



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Nature areas or trails	54.80%	497
I am satisfied with the recreation opportunities in Highlands or it is not a priority for me	37.16%	337
Playgrounds or play areas	21.17%	192
Indoor recreation opportunities	14.88%	135
Courts (tennis or pickleball)	10.69%	97
I use facilities elsewhere in the area and am satisfied	9.26%	84
Other (please specify)	5.95%	54
Sports fields (baseball, soccer, etc.)	5.07%	46
Total Respondents: 907		

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q16 Do you have concerns about short-term rentals?

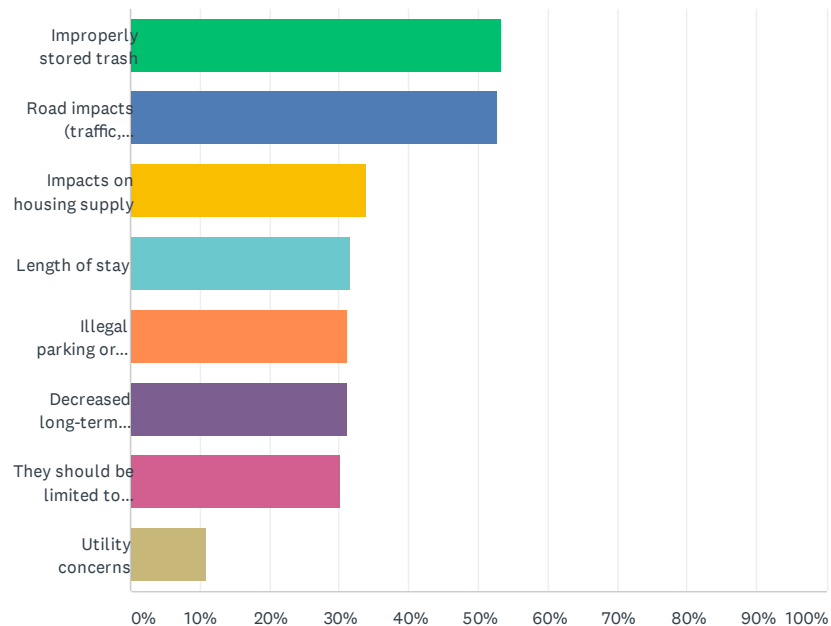


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	62.03%	562
No	37.97%	344
TOTAL		906

Highlands Community Plan Survey

Q17 What are your concerns about short-term rentals?

Answered: 532 Skipped: 480



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Improperly stored trash	53.38%	284
Road impacts (traffic, speeding)	52.63%	280
Impacts on housing supply	33.83%	180
Length of stay	31.58%	168
Illegal parking or lower availability of shared parking	31.20%	166
Decreased long-term rental options	31.20%	166
They should be limited to certain areas	30.08%	160
Utility concerns	10.90%	58
Total Respondents: 532		

Q18 Do you have any other comments or concerns about the future of Highlands?

Answered: 580 Skipped: 432

Please contact the Town of Highlands offices for full response list.

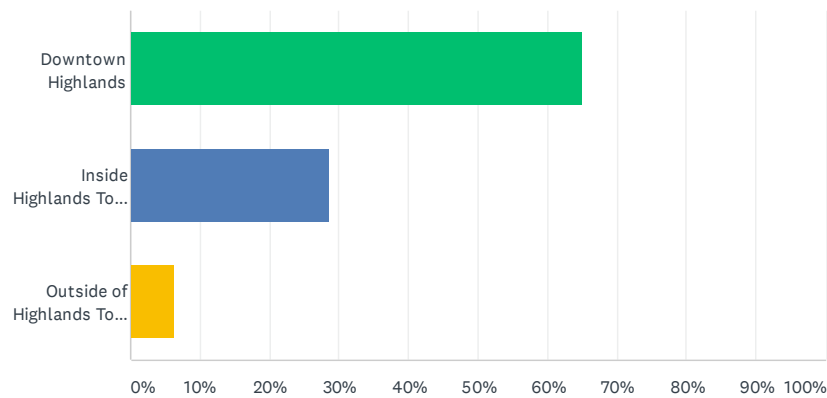
BUSINESS SURVEY RESULTS

Question 1 omitted to protect respondents' privacy.

Highlands Business Survey

Q2 Where is your business located?

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0

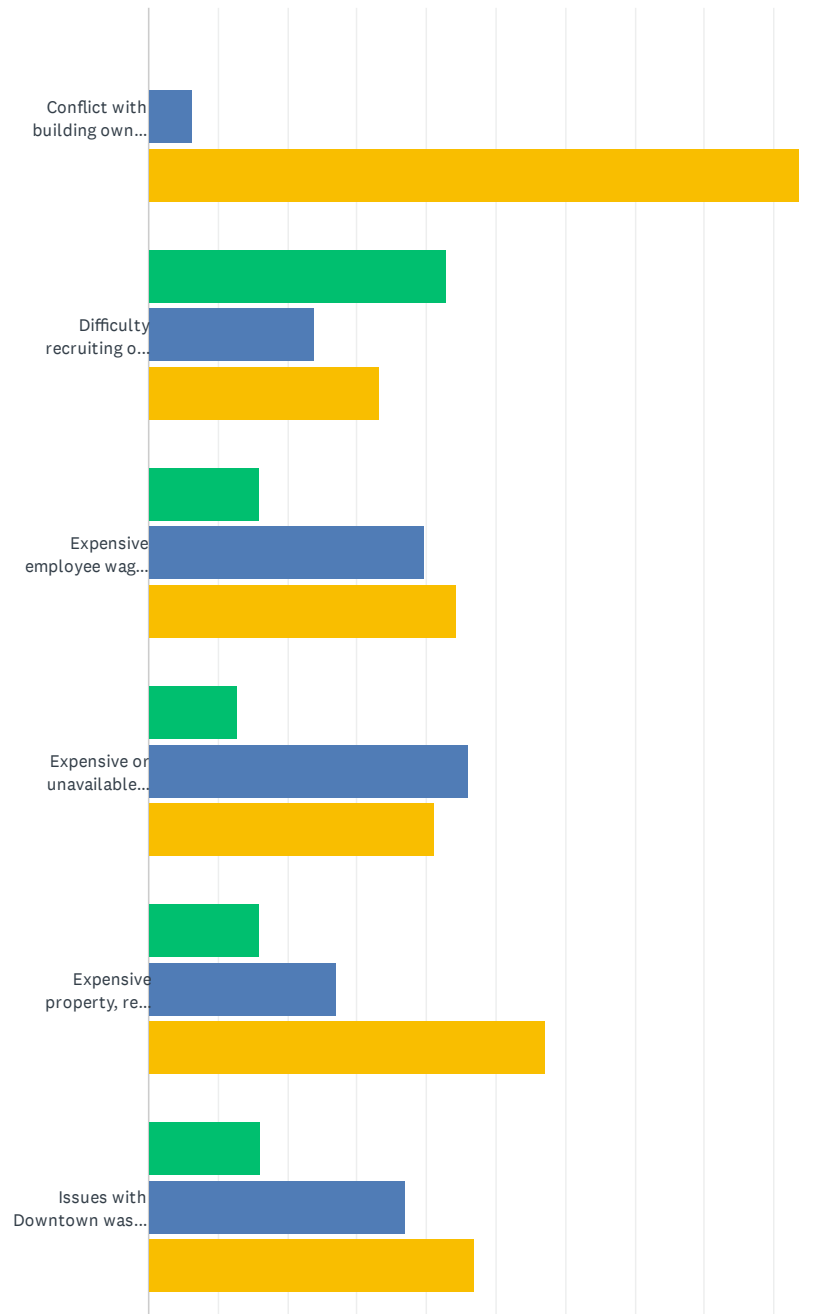


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Downtown Highlands	65.08%	41
Inside Highlands Town Limits, but outside of Downtown	28.57%	18
Outside of Highlands Town Limits	6.35%	4
TOTAL		63

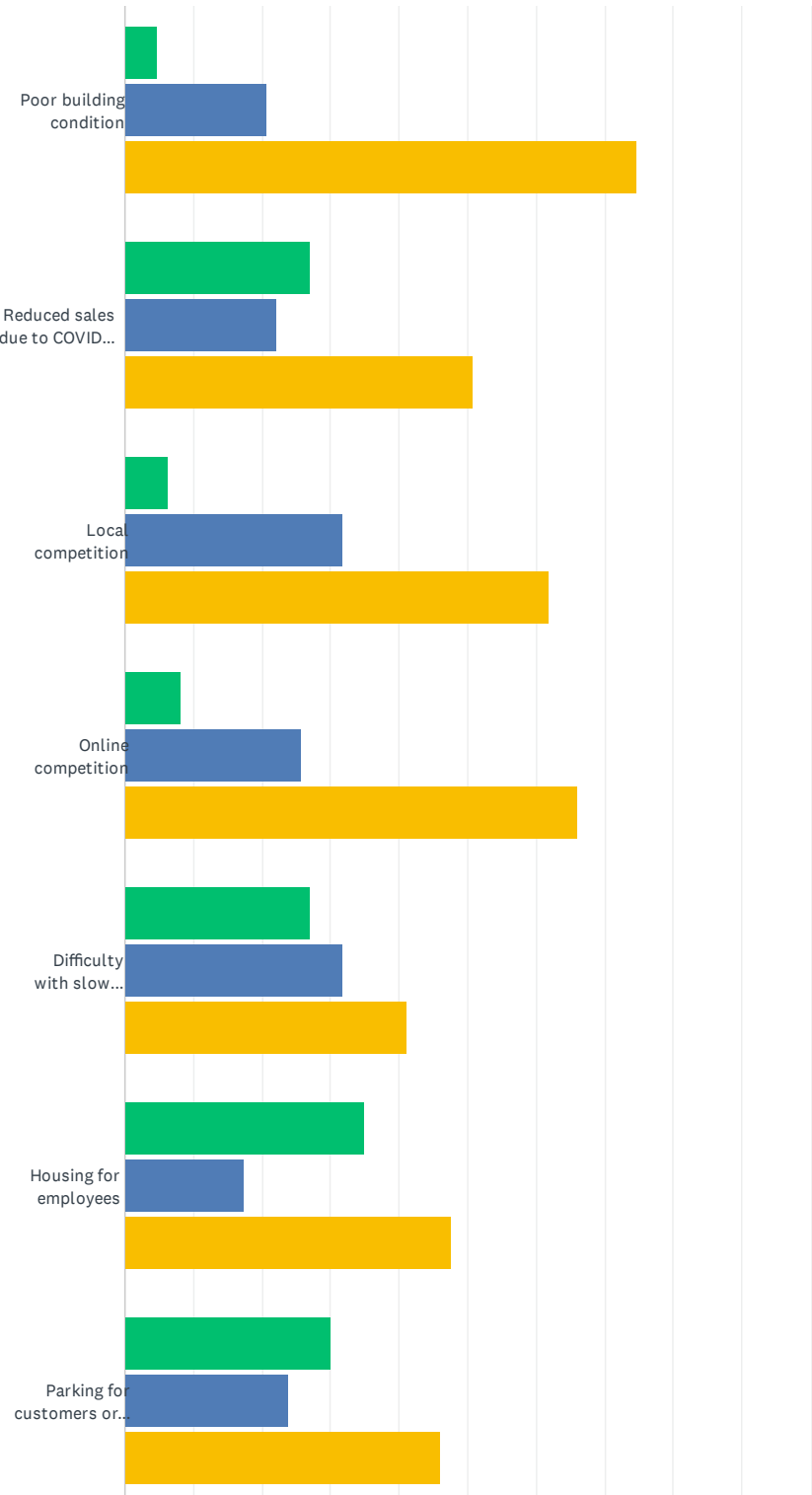
Highlands Business Survey

Q3 Please rate the degree to which you are experiencing the following business challenges.

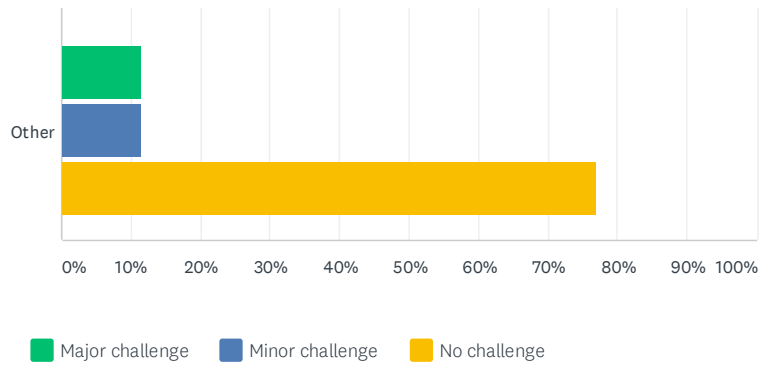
Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



Highlands Business Survey



Highlands Business Survey

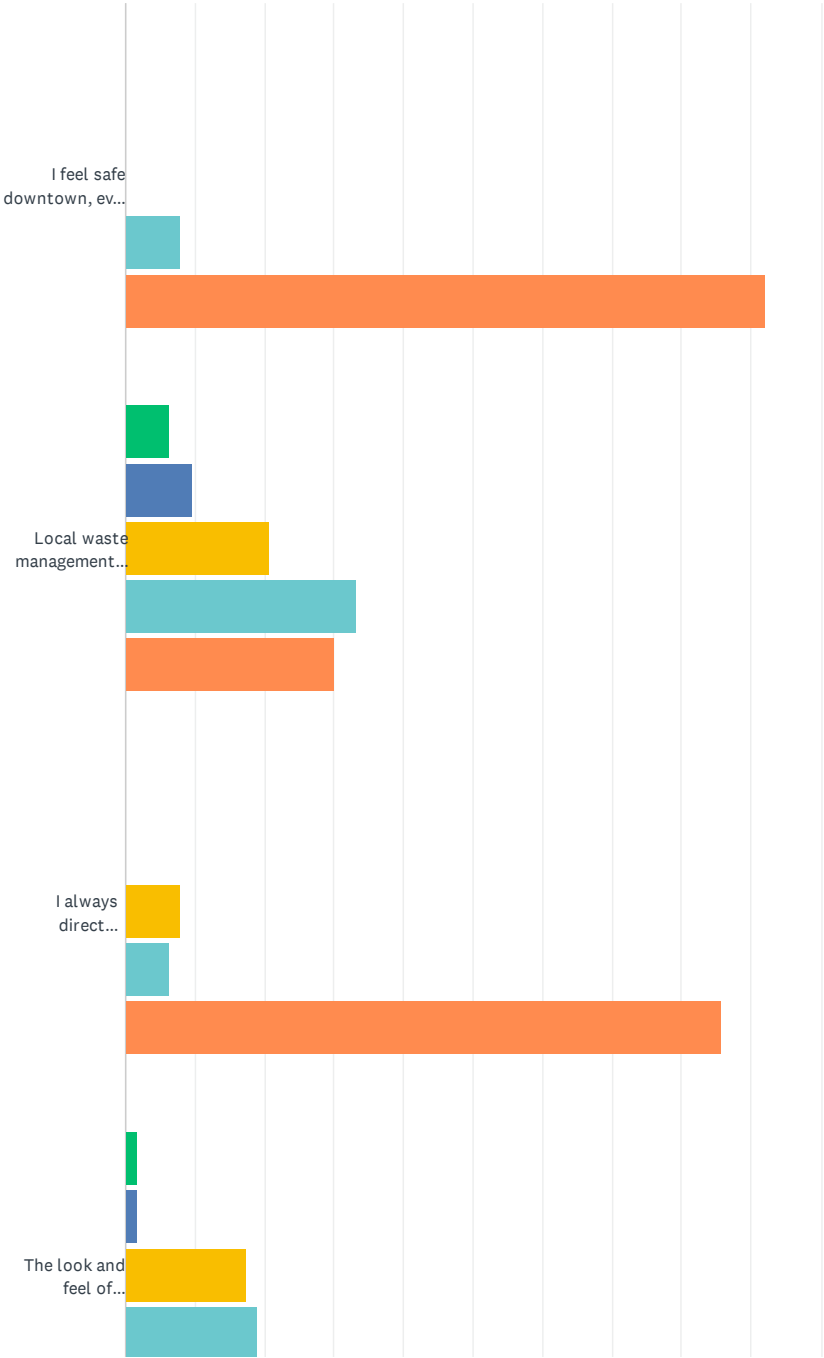


	MAJOR CHALLENGE	MINOR CHALLENGE	NO CHALLENGE	TOTAL
Conflict with building owner or tenant	0.00% 0	6.35% 4	93.65% 59	63
Difficulty recruiting or retaining employees	42.86% 27	23.81% 15	33.33% 21	63
Expensive employee wages or benefits	15.87% 10	39.68% 25	44.44% 28	63
Expensive or unavailable utilities	12.70% 8	46.03% 29	41.27% 26	63
Expensive property, rent and/or taxes	15.87% 10	26.98% 17	57.14% 36	63
Issues with Downtown waste receptacles	16.13% 10	37.10% 23	46.77% 29	62
Poor building condition	4.76% 3	20.63% 13	74.60% 47	63
Reduced sales due to COVID-19 pandemic	26.98% 17	22.22% 14	50.79% 32	63
Local competition	6.35% 4	31.75% 20	61.90% 39	63
Online competition	8.06% 5	25.81% 16	66.13% 41	62
Difficulty with slow business during the winter	26.98% 17	31.75% 20	41.27% 26	63
Housing for employees	34.92% 22	17.46% 11	47.62% 30	63
Parking for customers or employees	30.16% 19	23.81% 15	46.03% 29	63
Other	11.54% 3	11.54% 3	76.92% 20	26

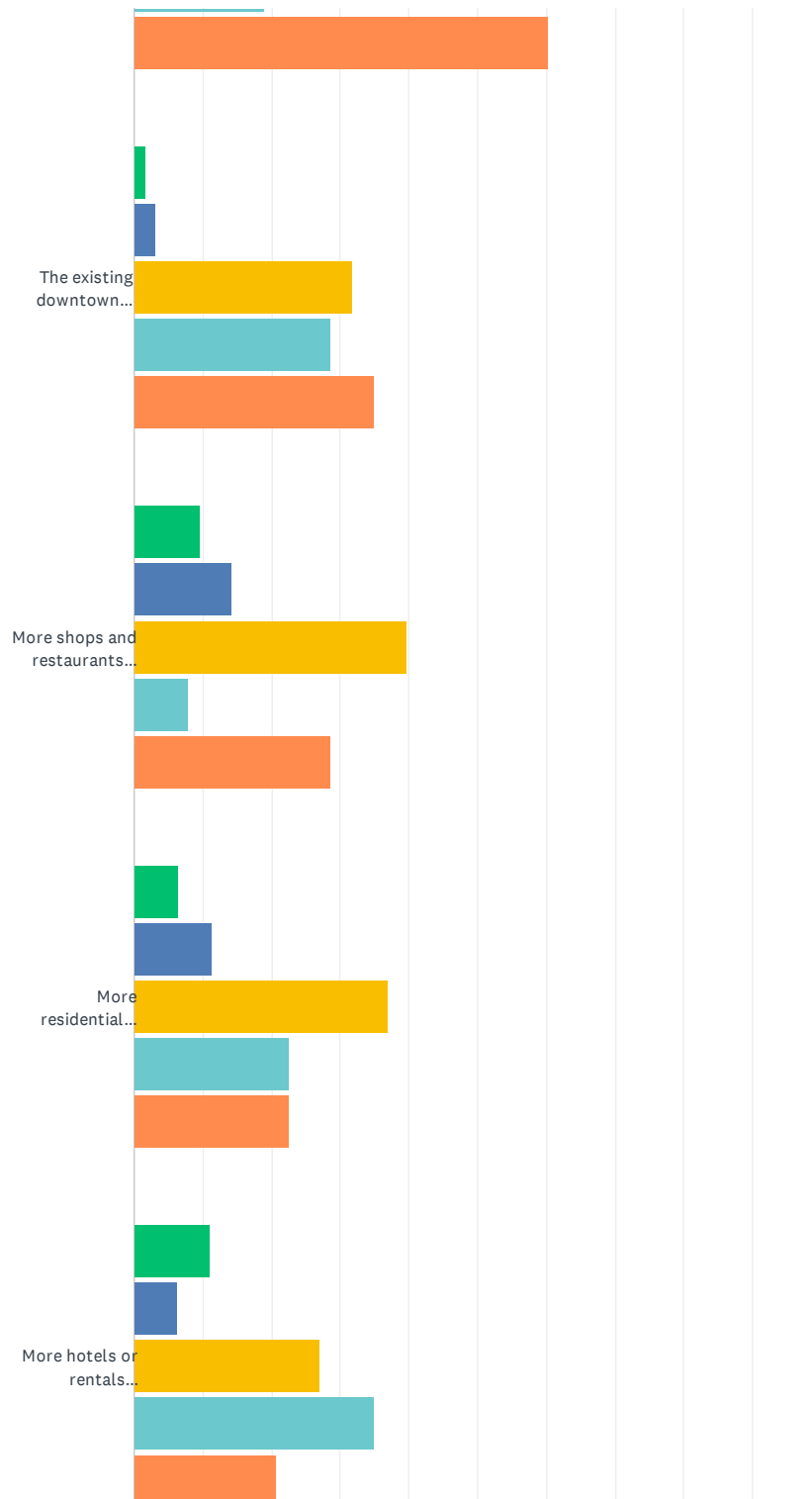
Highlands Business Survey

Q4 How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

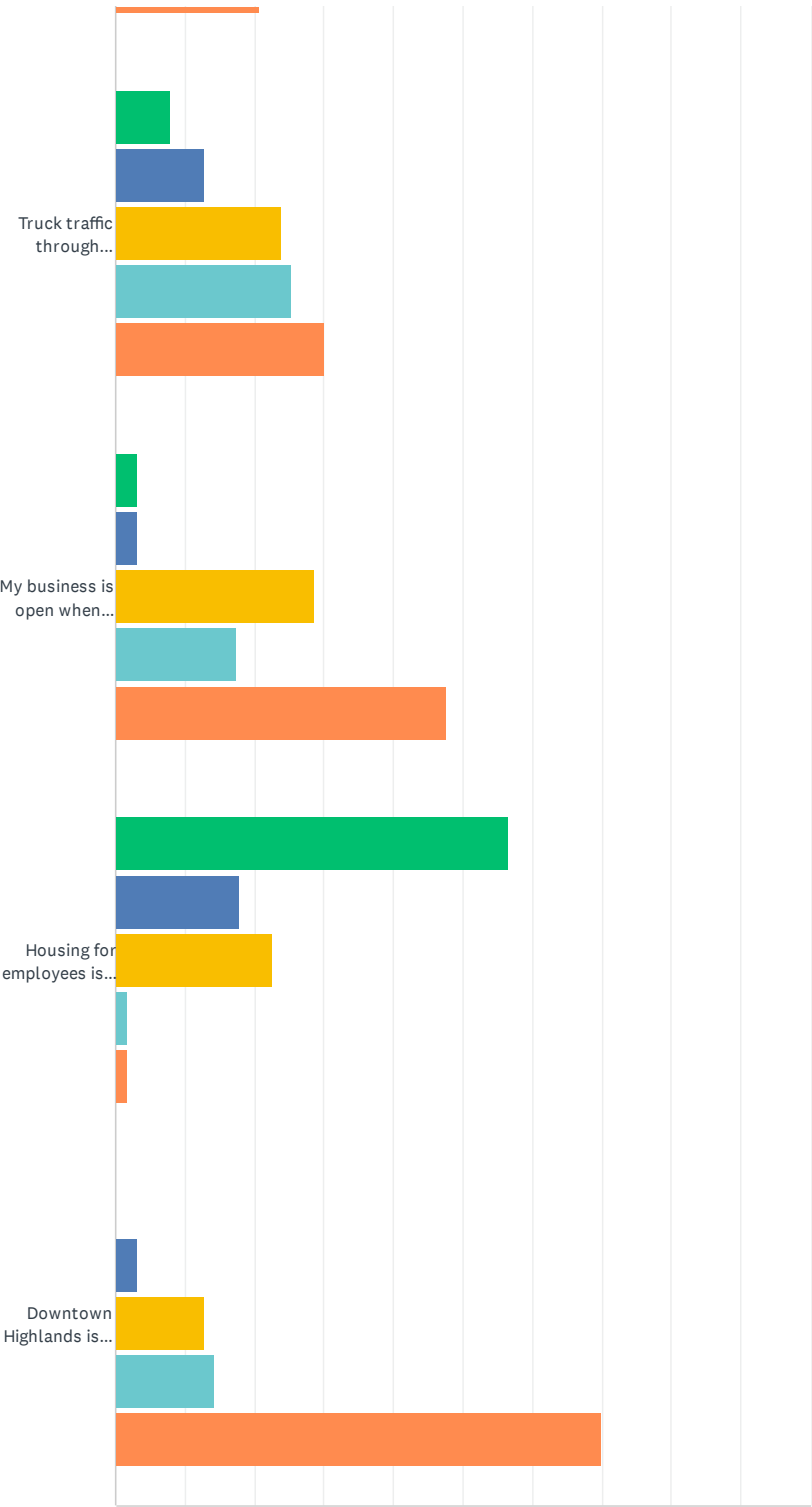
Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



Highlands Business Survey



Highlands Business Survey



Highlands Business Survey

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Somewhat disagree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Somewhat agree
 ■ Strongly agree

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
I feel safe downtown, even at night	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7.94% 5	92.06% 58	63	4.92
Local waste management service is outstanding	6.35% 4	9.52% 6	20.63% 13	33.33% 21	30.16% 19	63	3.71
I always direct customers to other downtown businesses	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	7.94% 5	6.35% 4	85.71% 54	63	4.78
The look and feel of downtown helps my business	1.59% 1	1.59% 1	17.46% 11	19.05% 12	60.32% 38	63	4.35
The existing downtown business mix helps my business	1.59% 1	3.17% 2	31.75% 20	28.57% 18	34.92% 22	63	3.92
More shops and restaurants downtown would help my business	9.52% 6	14.29% 9	39.68% 25	7.94% 5	28.57% 18	63	3.32
More residential downtown or near downtown would help my business	6.45% 4	11.29% 7	37.10% 23	22.58% 14	22.58% 14	62	3.44
More hotels or rentals downtown or near downtown would help my business	11.11% 7	6.35% 4	26.98% 17	34.92% 22	20.63% 13	63	3.48
Truck traffic through downtown is an issue that should be addressed	7.94% 5	12.70% 8	23.81% 15	25.40% 16	30.16% 19	63	3.57
My business is open when customers want to shop	3.17% 2	3.17% 2	28.57% 18	17.46% 11	47.62% 30	63	4.03
Housing for employees is readily available	56.45% 35	17.74% 11	22.58% 14	1.61% 1	1.61% 1	62	1.74
Downtown Highlands is an excellent place to have a business	0.00% 0	3.17% 2	12.70% 8	14.29% 9	69.84% 44	63	4.51

Highlands Business Survey

Q5 How satisfied are you with the present location of your business

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES		AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
		9	541	63
Total Respondents: 63				
#		DATE		
1	10	4/8/2021 11:56 AM		
2	10	4/7/2021 1:00 PM		
3	10	4/7/2021 12:02 PM		
4	10	4/6/2021 6:20 PM		
5	10	4/6/2021 3:22 PM		
6	10	4/6/2021 12:14 PM		
7	10	4/6/2021 11:49 AM		
8	1	4/6/2021 10:13 AM		
9	10	4/6/2021 9:23 AM		
10	10	4/6/2021 8:32 AM		
11	10	4/6/2021 7:28 AM		
12	5	4/5/2021 10:43 PM		
13	10	4/5/2021 8:42 PM		
14	4	4/5/2021 8:24 PM		
15	9	4/5/2021 4:55 PM		
16	10	4/5/2021 4:04 PM		
17	10	4/5/2021 3:45 PM		
18	10	4/5/2021 3:38 PM		
19	10	4/5/2021 3:29 PM		
20	10	4/5/2021 3:20 PM		

Highlands Business Survey

21	10	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
22	5	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
23	7	4/5/2021 2:26 PM
24	8	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
25	5	4/5/2021 1:32 PM
26	10	3/25/2021 12:40 PM
27	10	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
28	10	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
29	8	3/4/2021 10:44 PM
30	0	3/3/2021 2:43 PM
31	10	3/2/2021 9:45 PM
32	9	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
33	8	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
34	8	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
35	10	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
36	8	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
37	10	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
38	8	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
39	8	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
40	10	2/16/2021 12:56 PM
41	10	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
42	8	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
43	10	2/5/2021 3:21 PM
44	10	2/5/2021 1:00 PM
45	10	2/2/2021 1:50 PM
46	10	2/2/2021 12:50 PM
47	10	2/2/2021 12:17 PM
48	9	2/2/2021 10:35 AM
49	10	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
50	10	2/1/2021 8:54 PM
51	10	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
52	6	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
53	9	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
54	10	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
55	10	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
56	8	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
57	6	2/1/2021 2:35 PM
58	7	2/1/2021 2:01 PM
59	10	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
60	0	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
61	10	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
62	10	2/1/2021 1:06 PM
63	7	2/1/2021 1:00 PM

Highlands Business Survey

Q6 What improvement downtown or elsewhere in Highlands could most boost your business?

Answered: 52 Skipped: 11

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	More Public Parking in General	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	A more pedestrian friendly downtown with wider sidewalks, greenery/green spaces and benches.	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
3	I believe we need to attract more variety in our restaurants and stores. We need a transportation company for visitors and locals that dont want to drive after dining in town. We need affordable living, closer to Highlands, for the talent we attract to work here. We need better recycling available for in town garbage disposal. Thank you for the bear proof garbage bins:)	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
4	Truck noise. Jake brakes.	4/6/2021 3:22 PM
5	Not sure	4/6/2021 12:14 PM
6	Speeding	4/6/2021 11:49 AM
7	My business is a destination so there is not much the outside influences would have on my day to day business.	4/6/2021 10:13 AM
8	More affordable workforce Housing. Soften the look of Main Street. trees or shrubs	4/6/2021 9:23 AM
9	Macon County is still a dry county. This is unheard of for a resort destination. There are additional alcohol restrictions for Highlands that exceed state restrictions.	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
10	Signage. I'm a block off Main Street and new comers and even people who have frequented Highlands have no idea my business exists	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
11	Bringing back downtown concerts, adding more regularly scheduled downtown events.	4/5/2021 8:42 PM
12	Wright Square is in sore need of an upgrade to the parking lot and traffic flow. Traffic flow through the parking lot is dangerous to pedestrians, especially around the Pharmacy. The largest center unit of the square has been covered in brown paper for years now.	4/5/2021 8:24 PM
13	Add parking areas near main st	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
14	More parking, more employment housing	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
15	Parking!!!!	4/5/2021 3:38 PM
16	More lighting	4/5/2021 3:20 PM
17	Town workers need to be conscious of where they park ... i.e. workers who come to maintain Kelsey Hutchinson Park park on Oak Street whenever anything has to be done in the ice rink area. Oak St is a basically a one-way, service alley behind main st that is always full of trucks delivering to the shops/restaurants on main. Town workers parking on Oak for hours at a time really clog the road.	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
18	Stopping trucks from using their engine brake. It is so loud and annoying, it hurts our coffee shop as well as guests trying to sleep.	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
19	Nothing	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
20	Some type of shuttle from outlying parking areas to Main Street may be helpful.	4/5/2021 1:32 PM
21	Have more parking. Even a parking garage. We've needed that for years, but nothing seems to change.	3/25/2021 12:40 PM
22	The absolute immediate ceasing of the elitist exclusivity Idea that is being pushed	3/24/2021 12:24 AM

Highlands Business Survey

astonishingly by our own Chamber of Commerce. The pay to play structure by the Chamber of Commerce is also a disgrace. Looking out for only old Edwards Inn's interest in business pursuits and desires does nothing for the town in general it's people who are real human beings that have needs concerns and rights that should be heard. Excepting the reality that OEI is a business, And their entire and only purpose is to make money. They Should not be viewed or treated any differently than the other businesses in town no matter how much money they inject into events in organizations. Back in the day this used to be called a bribe and it should be viewed under the same definition today. There needs to be a commerce board separate from Chamber of Commerce that features local shop owners that can report to the town board on issues and represents the downtown commercial district as a whole. It should be voted on by only shop owners of the downtown district and I believe wholeheartedly that it would greatly soften the long going divide between the commercial district in town matters. Mini shop owners do not have a voice in the town political structure as they do not live in Inside town limits. Even if they own the land and property and building that their businesses in. I fortunately do live inside town limits but I the same time I feel like those people deserve a voice as the commercial district of the town no matter how much people want to paint as the demon of every situation. Is intricately tied to the success of the town and the sustainability of the area. Without a vibrant downtown and I am not talking about trees and stupid grasslands in the downtown district. There would be no way for the town to survive economically and that should be taken into consideration when decisions are made. Furthermore the town board needs to really take a deep look and honest look at the boards in which it creates in the unfair Policies it makes giving certain people privileges certain businesses privileges by the same time not extending the same to everyone else. Based on a buddy system which should have been illuminated back in the 1920s. I have a tear in my whole life and I have seen this town grow beyond imagination a lot of ways unfavorable to my own likes and wishes. But the betterment of the town as a whole and that does not always mean a increase in tourism and the idea of catering and targeting of a certain class either economically or socially benefits the town of Highlands as a whole. The town of Highlands must welcome everyone no matter what their walk of life, background or economical status should be. Profits be damned.

23	If "off main street" wasn't ignored.	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
24	Not sure	3/3/2021 2:43 PM
25	This wouldn't necessarily boost my business, but I'd love to see the fragrance/skin care shops on Main that hassle people passing on the sideway go away. They don't belong downtown Highlands.	3/2/2021 9:45 PM
26	parking	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
27	Parking	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
28	Better signage on Main Street. A directory that would direct shoppers to stores on 4th Street. Many shoppers say that they have never been off of Main Street.	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
29	More restaurants and things to do in downtown	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
30	Traffic calming measures to slow down vehicles in front of my business. Sidewalks to allow pedestrian traffic.	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
31	Wider sidewalks More trees on main st Off site parking with shuttle Employee parking Lighting on main street that is inviting and warm Flowers all around during season Off season decor downtown	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
32	continue to allow VRBOs as the town is based on tourism. If that is taken away, all businesses will suffer.	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
33	a kiosk to sell tickets for performances	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
34	Get rid of skincare/fragrance stores that allow their foreign sales people to stand at the door and lure in vulnerable customers; add to lights and Christmas decorations downtown (perhaps white lights on tree trunks all winter) as Highlands is no longer "dead" in the winter	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
35	parking for our customers - even timed parking for a few spots in front of our business for customers needing to be in and out quick	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
36	N/A	2/5/2021 3:21 PM
37	N/A	2/5/2021 1:00 PM

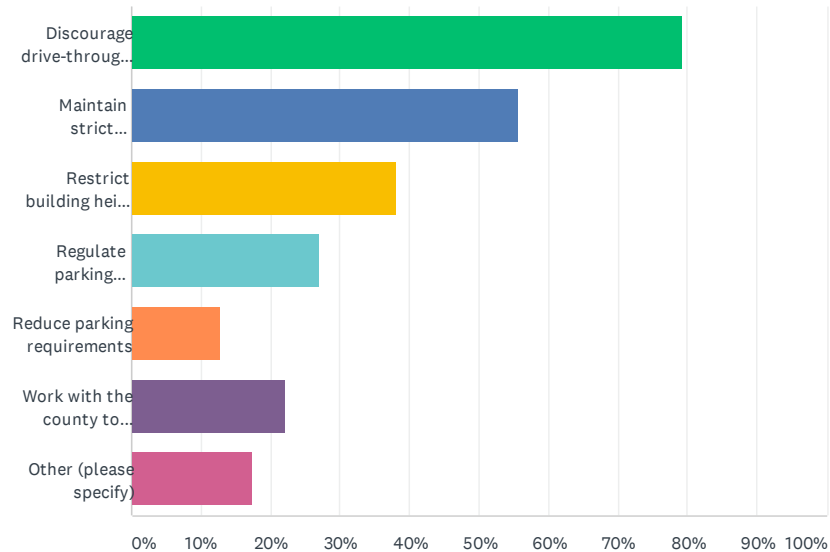
Highlands Business Survey

38	USPS delivery to Main Street businesses would reduce the consternation we have around deliveries. Enhanced parking would also help.	2/2/2021 12:50 PM
39	More year-round restaurants, public transportation and/or better parking	2/2/2021 12:17 PM
40	I drive the Dillard Road into Highlands and into Georgia. I believe first impressions create lasting opinions of visitors and residents. I frequently pick up the trash on my strip of the Dillard Road and can identify trash in places that are too dangerous to stop and remove on my way into town. Maybe a group effort to change this would inspire new business for our community.	2/2/2021 10:35 AM
41	Additional Parking	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
42	More parking and to lighten up on all sign ordinance	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
43	more signs in town directing guests to various shopping and restaurants, etc. We need better signs - but fix the sidewalks!	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
44	Seasonal visitor kiosk	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
45	Easing of zoning restrictions on housing to target employees of town businesses.	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
46	MORE PARKING AFFORDABLE EMPLOYEE HOUSING OR ASSISTANCE CONTINUED EFFORTS TO INCREASE TOURIST VISITATION IN THE OFF SEASON GET MORE INPUT FROM DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES ON TOWN PROJECTS AND LISTEN TO THAT INPUT - OFFICIALLY PETITION BUSINESSES FOR THEIR OPINIONS AND USE THAT DATA TO INFLUENCE AT LEAST TOWN DECISIONS THAT WILL HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THOSE BUSINESSES SUCH AS PARKING ON MAIN ST AND PLANTING TREES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PARKING AREA	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
47	Reliable high speed internet	2/1/2021 2:35 PM
48	Parking maybe having a walking area like park and more open spaces.	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
49	Extend Streetscape to more streets and alleys	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
50	More parking for Main Street shops. People use our parking lot (library) to shop Main Street and then on busy summer days there isn't enough parking for our patrons.	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
51	The town should charge businesses for what they actually USE in water and electricity. The minimum rate is ridiculous for businesses that barely use those utilities like mine. I understand having a minimum for seasonal residents but paying \$250 for utilities that I don't use is ridiculous	2/1/2021 1:06 PM
52	I work from home so downtown doesn't really affect my consulting business.	2/1/2021 1:00 PM

Highlands Business Survey

Q7 What can the Town do to ensure that Highlands retains its unique small-town feel while also maintaining its status as a high-quality destination? Check up to three options.

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Discourage drive-through restaurants and big box stores		79.37%	50
Maintain strict architectural and design standards		55.56%	35
Restrict building height and/or size		38.10%	24
Regulate parking footprint or placement in new development		26.98%	17
Reduce parking requirements		12.70%	8
Work with the county to restrict development (i.e. other major corridors) outside of town (elsewhere on the plateau)		22.22%	14
Other (please specify)		17.46%	11
Total Respondents: 63			

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Issues with Semi's up and down the gorge road	4/7/2021 1:00 PM
2	put in a parking garage and turn Main Street into a more pedestrian access and feel	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
3	Be more strategic in who we market our town. We are not "all things to all people." For example, Highlands was founded as a place to come heal. A strategic plan to reestablish this initiative.	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
4	Don't get too many more businesses crowded in downtown	4/5/2021 4:04 PM

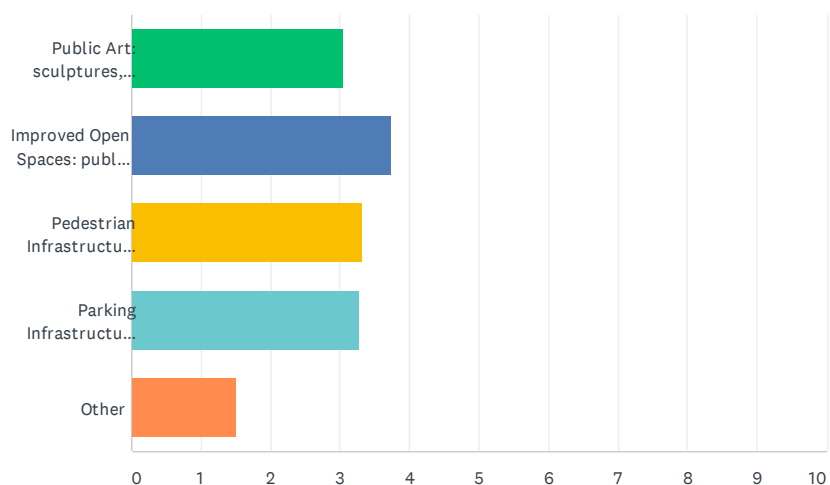
Highlands Business Survey

5	stop trying to make downtown into a forest and let business conduct business	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
6	Provide adequate parking for downtown, even if away from Main Street	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
7	Restricting building height and or size is not a very valid option for any type of regulation as developers and savvy business people know how to get around this. And even suggesting the idea of putting trees and or green areas in the downtown district is astronomically foolish. And only benefits one business and we all know who that is.	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
8	Have a "zero footprint" campaign to reduce litter.	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
9	Allow more retail locations to be built without overpriced rental fees	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
10	Create an in season talent show to engage visitors and residents to keep them in town	2/2/2021 10:35 AM
11	There are no specific items that will retain the small town feel. It's a changing variety of restrictions that will achieve this goal. Zoning restrictions put in place 20 years ago may or may not be effective today. The Town's ability to change will be what keeps the small town feel. Highlands of 1975 had a small town feel but would not be considered a successful small town by today's standards.	2/1/2021 3:25 PM

Highlands Business Survey

Q8 With your business in mind, please rank the community improvements you would most like to see in downtown Highlands:

Answered: 61 Skipped: 2

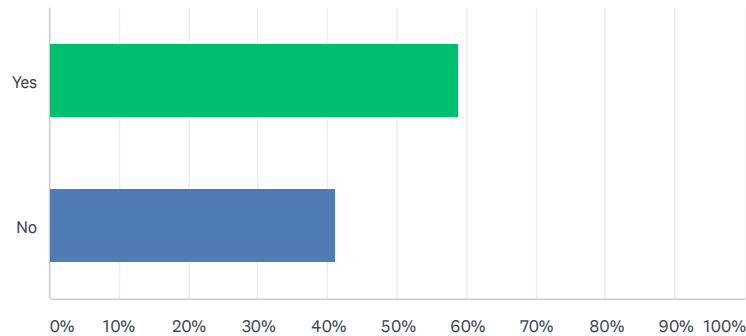


	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Public Art: sculptures, murals, interactive art	18.37% 9	20.41% 10	12.24% 6	46.94% 23	2.04% 1	49	3.06
Improved Open Spaces: public gathering spaces, pocket parks, walking trails, greenways	30.77% 16	30.77% 16	23.08% 12	13.46% 7	1.92% 1	52	3.75
Pedestrian Infrastructure Improvements: improved sidewalks and pedestrian crossings, lighting, more sidewalks	16.36% 9	32.73% 18	27.27% 15	14.55% 8	9.09% 5	55	3.33
Parking Infrastructure: Addition of parking along side streets, evaluating the potential for a parking deck or public lots	35.59% 21	11.86% 7	16.95% 10	16.95% 10	18.64% 11	59	3.29
Other	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25.00% 7	0.00% 0	75.00% 21	28	1.50

Highlands Business Survey

Q9 Would additional wayfinding signage help to boost visitors to your business?

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	58.73%	37
No	41.27%	26
TOTAL		63

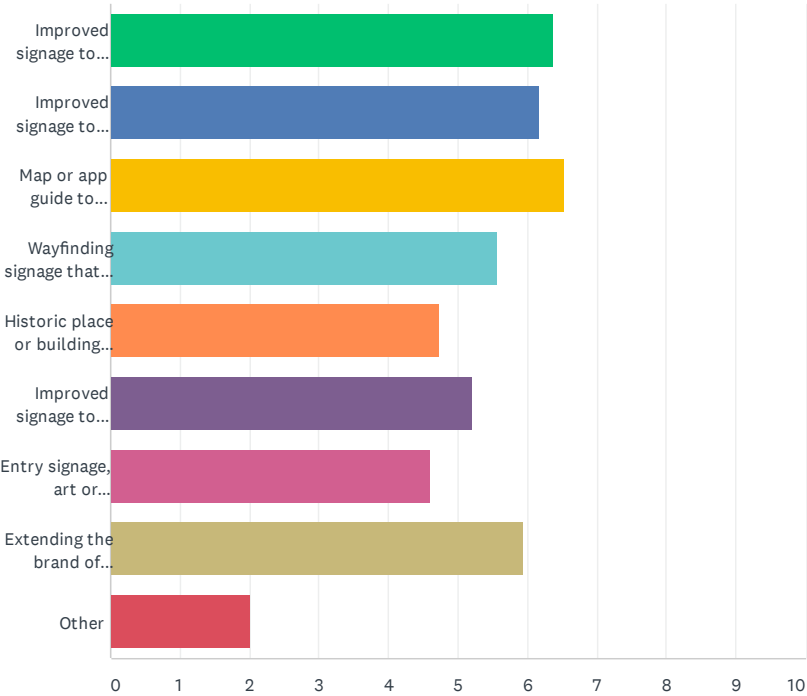
#	COMMENTS	DATE
1	I often see people with shopping bags glance up 4th street from Main and then turn around and walk in the other direction. There are shops and restaurants up there. Also, I've given direction to the Ugly Dog to several people wondering around the corner of 4th and Main because it doesn't look like anything much is up "the hill" on 4th.	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
2	we help enough visitors to know this would be helpful to them.	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
3	Any signage on Main Street would be helpful to all businesses that are a short walk off the beaten path	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
4	Would love for Carolina Way to have business signage on 64	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
5	Would be nice to point out there are shops and dinning on 4th st.	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
6	Highlands is a pretty simple place to navigate. And as history is shown most of the time the signage only helps businesses that are in favor of the buddy system at the time.	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
7	thank you!	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
8	People need to know there are businesses off of Main Street	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
9	Less state signage to many speed, road ,stop etc. city want t restrict business signage but state signage is out of control.	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
10	na	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
11	I work from home, off of Main Street	2/1/2021 1:00 PM

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Highlands Business Survey

Q10 With your business in mind, please rank the community wayfinding and branding improvements you would most like to see in Highlands.

Answered: 58 Skipped: 5



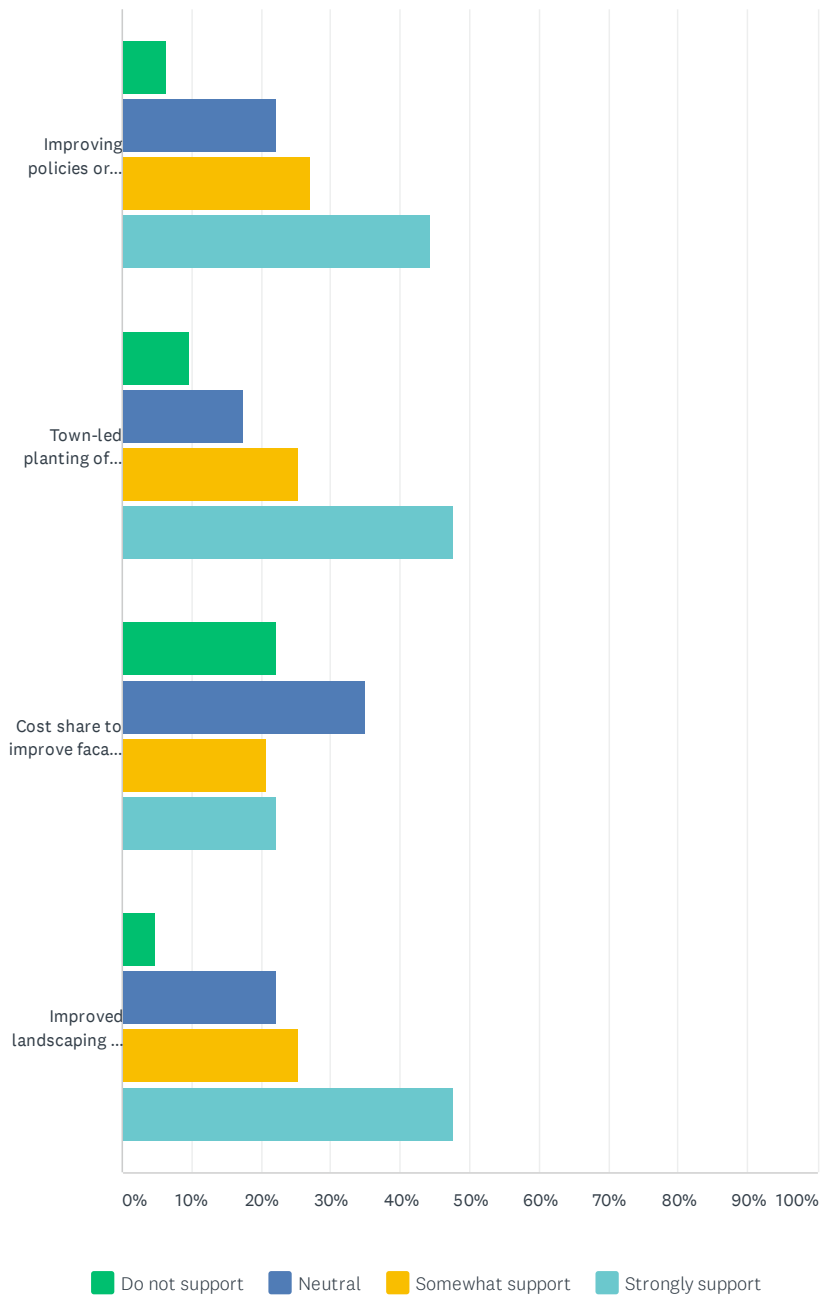
Highlands Business Survey

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	TOTAL	SCORE
Improved signage to parking	22.73% 10	11.36% 5	20.45% 9	15.91% 7	9.09% 4	6.82% 3	6.82% 3	4.55% 2	2.27% 1	44	6.39
Improved signage to shopping and restaurants	13.16% 5	18.42% 7	18.42% 7	7.89% 3	21.05% 8	10.53% 4	7.89% 3	2.63% 1	0.00% 0	38	6.18
Map or app guide to businesses	20.00% 9	28.89% 13	22.22% 10	2.22% 1	2.22% 1	2.22% 1	11.11% 5	8.89% 4	2.22% 1	45	6.53
Wayfinding signage that is accessible by a wide range of users	6.98% 3	13.95% 6	23.26% 10	20.93% 9	2.33% 1	6.98% 3	6.98% 3	13.95% 6	4.65% 2	43	5.56
Historic place or building designation	6.98% 3	9.30% 4	4.65% 2	6.98% 3	27.91% 12	11.63% 5	13.95% 6	13.95% 6	4.65% 2	43	4.72
Improved signage to parks and other activities	6.52% 3	6.52% 3	8.70% 4	28.26% 13	13.04% 6	17.39% 8	8.70% 4	6.52% 3	4.35% 2	46	5.20
Entry signage, art or plantings	6.38% 3	8.51% 4	8.51% 4	6.38% 3	12.77% 6	19.15% 9	21.28% 10	14.89% 7	2.13% 1	47	4.60
Extending the brand of downtown through streetscape improvements that use brick, lighting and furnishings	28.85% 15	11.54% 6	5.77% 3	9.62% 5	13.46% 7	7.69% 4	7.69% 4	7.69% 4	7.69% 4	52	5.94
Other	0.00% 0	4.55% 1	4.55% 1	4.55% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	18.18% 4	68.18% 15	22	2.00

Highlands Business Survey

Q11 Additional landscaping (such as small gardens, green space, flowers, trees and plantings) was identified as an element most needed in the Downtown Business District in the public Highlands Community Plan Survey. Rate your support for the following:

Answered: 63 Skipped: 0



Highlands Business Survey

	DO NOT SUPPORT	NEUTRAL	SOMEWHAT SUPPORT	STRONGLY SUPPORT	TOTAL
Improving policies or establishing a program to preserving existing trees near downtown	6.35% 4	22.22% 14	26.98% 17	44.44% 28	63
Town-led planting of trees and landscaping in right of way	9.52% 6	17.46% 11	25.40% 16	47.62% 30	63
Cost share to improve facades or landscaping on private property (grant programs)	22.22% 14	34.92% 22	20.63% 13	22.22% 14	63
Improved landscaping as part of pedestrian crossing enhancements	4.76% 3	22.22% 14	25.40% 16	47.62% 30	63

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	possibly have an annual festival where people can assist with planting, preserving our fauna. Maybe around Arbor Day.	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
2	I approve of flowers and plantings. Highlands is surrounded by trees and I don't see the need for any more in downtown area. It has always been open and that visibility is good for businesses and customers.	4/6/2021 7:28 AM
3	Keep the trees we have downtown, don't add more unless replacing	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
4	The only people who surveyed the downtown area needed more trees and landscaping and parks. You have to understand based on your own surveying data but the majority the people that filled out your survey or second homeowners that were above the age of 65. This is not a country club they were people here that live here actual human beings. This town is not exclusive to the top 10% of income earners. Does push for exclusivity makes me disgusted.	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
5	don't want to pay for others landscaping	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
6	Cross walk art	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
7	More lights downtown at night	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
8	I DO NOT SUPPORT PLANTING OF TREES IN THE MIDDLE PARKING AREA ON MAIN ST.	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
9	na	2/1/2021 1:33 PM

Highlands Business Survey

Q12 Provide the names of the top three areas customers are coming from (eg. Internet shoppers, Charlotte, Atlanta, Knoxville, Greenville, etc.)

Answered: 61 Skipped: 2

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Top area		100.00%	61
Second area		88.52%	54
Third area		78.69%	48

#	TOP AREA	DATE
1	Atlanta	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	Georgia	4/7/2021 1:00 PM
3	Atlanta	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
4	Atlanta	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
5	Atl	4/6/2021 3:22 PM
6	Florida	4/6/2021 12:14 PM
7	Atlanta	4/6/2021 11:49 AM
8	no shoppers - clients from all over	4/6/2021 10:13 AM
9	Atlanta	4/6/2021 9:23 AM
10	Atlanta	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
11	Florida	4/6/2021 7:28 AM
12	Atlanta	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
13	Atlanta	4/5/2021 8:42 PM
14	Atlanta	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
15	Atlanta	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
16	Atlanta	4/5/2021 3:45 PM
17	Atlanta	4/5/2021 3:38 PM
18	Inernet	4/5/2021 3:29 PM
19	Atlanta	4/5/2021 3:20 PM
20	Atlanta	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
21	Atlanta	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
22	South Florida	4/5/2021 2:26 PM
23	Atlanta	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
24	Atlanta	4/5/2021 1:32 PM
25	Florida	3/25/2021 12:40 PM
26	Only where the chamber targets	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
27	Atlanta	3/12/2021 3:50 PM

Highlands Business Survey

28	Local	3/4/2021 10:44 PM
29	Atlanta	3/3/2021 2:43 PM
30	Atlanta	3/2/2021 9:45 PM
31	Atlanta	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
32	Atlanta	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
33	Atlanta	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
34	Georgia	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
35	Atlanta	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
36	Atlanta	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
37	Atlanta	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
38	Atlanta	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
39	Atlanta	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
40	Atlanta	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
41	Naples, Florida	2/5/2021 3:21 PM
42	Atlanta	2/5/2021 1:00 PM
43	Atlanta	2/2/2021 1:50 PM
44	Florida (all of it)	2/2/2021 12:50 PM
45	Atlanta	2/2/2021 12:17 PM
46	Locals	2/2/2021 10:35 AM
47	Atlanta	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
48	Atlanta	2/1/2021 8:54 PM
49	Atlanta	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
50	Atlanta	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
51	Atlanta	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
52	Florida	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
53	Atlanta	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
54	ATLANTA	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
55	Atlanta	2/1/2021 2:35 PM
56	Atlanta	2/1/2021 2:01 PM
57	Georgia,Alabama,South Carolina,Florida	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
58	Atlanta	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
59	Atlanta	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
60	Georgia	2/1/2021 1:06 PM
61	IDK	2/1/2021 1:00 PM
#	SECOND AREA	DATE
1	Birmingham	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	Florida	4/7/2021 1:00 PM
3	Greenville	4/7/2021 12:02 PM

Highlands Business Survey

4	Florida	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
5	Savannah	4/6/2021 3:22 PM
6	Alabama	4/6/2021 12:14 PM
7	Orlando	4/6/2021 11:49 AM
8	NA	4/6/2021 10:13 AM
9	Charlotte	4/6/2021 9:23 AM
10	Greenville	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
11	Georgia	4/6/2021 7:28 AM
12	Alabama	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
13	Florida	4/5/2021 8:42 PM
14	Florida	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
15	Birmingham	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
16	Florida	4/5/2021 3:45 PM
17	Florida	4/5/2021 3:20 PM
18	Florida	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
19	Charlotte	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
20	Atlanta	4/5/2021 2:26 PM
21	Florida	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
22	Greenville	4/5/2021 1:32 PM
23	Atlanta	3/25/2021 12:40 PM
24	Only where the chamber targets	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
25	Florida	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
26	NC	3/4/2021 10:44 PM
27	Alabama	3/2/2021 9:45 PM
28	greenville	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
29	Florida	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
30	Greenville, SC	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
31	Florida	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
32	Florida	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
33	Anywhere in FI	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
34	South Florida	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
35	Florida	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
36	Florida	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
37	Florida	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
38	Atlanta, Georgia	2/5/2021 3:21 PM
39	Florida	2/2/2021 1:50 PM
40	Georgia	2/2/2021 12:50 PM
41	Greenville	2/2/2021 12:17 PM

Highlands Business Survey

42	Birmingham	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
43	Florida	2/1/2021 8:54 PM
44	Florida	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
45	Florida	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
46	Nashville	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
47	Atlanta	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
48	Charlotte	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
49	SOUTH EAST/WEST FLORIDA	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
50	Charlotte	2/1/2021 2:35 PM
51	Florida	2/1/2021 2:01 PM
52	Florida	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
53	Florida	2/1/2021 1:06 PM
54	IDK	2/1/2021 1:00 PM
#	THIRD AREA	DATE
1	Jacksonville	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	South Carolina	4/7/2021 1:00 PM
3	Charlotte	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
4	Alabama	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
5	Charleston	4/6/2021 3:22 PM
6	Atlanta	4/6/2021 12:14 PM
7	Naples	4/6/2021 11:49 AM
8	NA	4/6/2021 10:13 AM
9	Greenville	4/6/2021 9:23 AM
10	Birmingham	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
11	Florida	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
12	South Carolina	4/5/2021 8:42 PM
13	Internet	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
14	Florida	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
15	Tennessee	4/5/2021 3:45 PM
16	South Carolina	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
17	Jacksonville	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
18	Charlotte	4/5/2021 2:26 PM
19	Birmingham	4/5/2021 1:32 PM
20	Alabama and texas	3/25/2021 12:40 PM
21	Only wear old Edwards Inn's advertisements and the chamber targets	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
22	Athens	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
23	SC	3/4/2021 10:44 PM
24	Louisiana	3/2/2021 9:45 PM

Highlands Business Survey

25	Alabama	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
26	Tennessee	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
27	Greenville	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
28	Greenville	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
29	General Southeast	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
30	Southeast	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
31	Alabama	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
32	Greenville	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
33	Mississippi	2/5/2021 3:21 PM
34	Louisiana	2/2/2021 1:50 PM
35	TN / SC	2/2/2021 12:50 PM
36	Knoxville	2/2/2021 12:17 PM
37	Florida	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
38	Birmingham	2/1/2021 8:54 PM
39	Alabama	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
40	All across the south	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
41	Charlotte	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
42	Greenville	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
43	Upstate SC	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
44	MONTGOMERY/BIRMINGHAM ALABAMA	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
45	Florida	2/1/2021 2:01 PM
46	Locals	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
47	Alabama	2/1/2021 1:06 PM
48	IDK	2/1/2021 1:00 PM

Highlands Business Survey

Q13 We'd like to learn a little more about the impact of special events on your business in downtown Highlands

Answered: 55 Skipped: 8

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES
Which current events generate more customers for your business?		87.27% 48
What types of events would generate more customers for your business?		74.55% 41
What time of year are new events needed to increase customer traffic?		90.91% 50

#	WHICH CURRENT EVENTS GENERATE MORE CUSTOMERS FOR YOUR BUSINESS?	DATE
1	Festivals, Holiday events	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	4th of July and Memorial day celebrations	4/7/2021 1:00 PM
3	Highlands Food and Wine	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
4	Fourth of July fireworks, Food and Wine Festival, Christmas parade, Halloween, ice skating, musical events in the parks,	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
5	Food & Wine	4/6/2021 11:49 AM
6	NA	4/6/2021 10:13 AM
7	HF&W	4/6/2021 9:23 AM
8	4th July fireworks, Halloween	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
9	I serve the business community what is good for them is good for us.	4/6/2021 7:28 AM
10	Day time events, craft shows, car shows, tournaments of any sort.	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
11	Concerts in Town Square, Food & Wine, Halloween, downtown events	4/5/2021 8:42 PM
12	Fourth of July	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
13	Concerts in the Park	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
14	NONE	4/5/2021 3:29 PM
15	None	4/5/2021 3:20 PM
16	Food & Wine, Holiday events like July 4th, Christmas etc	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
17	Food and Wine	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
18	seasonal	4/5/2021 2:26 PM
19	N/A	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
20	Our season	3/25/2021 12:40 PM
21	Nothing at the town does on its own but the Fourth of July is a holiday in general as well as Halloween Black Friday and around the Christmas season.	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
22	Arts and Crafts shows in the park, motoring event	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
23	None	3/4/2021 10:44 PM
24	Festivals	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
25	n/a	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
26	Food & Wine Festival	3/1/2021 5:32 PM

Highlands Business Survey

27	Summer	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
28	Highlands Food & Wine Festival	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
29	Food and wine	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
30	All of the festivals throughout the year	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
31	live concerts	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
32	Fourth of July	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
33	motoring festival / fourth of july fireworks	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
34	Wine Festival	2/5/2021 3:21 PM
35	N/A	2/5/2021 1:00 PM
36	Christmas Parade	2/2/2021 12:50 PM
37	N/A	2/2/2021 10:35 AM
38	Car Show	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
39	Food and Wine Festival	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
40	Food and wine festival	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
41	festivals - so guests have to spend the night	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
42	Weekend music	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
43	Food & Wine; Christmas-New Year	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
44	MAYBE THE CAR SHOW	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
45	None	2/1/2021 2:35 PM
46	4th July, Thanksgiving, Christmas	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
47	na	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
48	community-wide initiatives (such as Kids Hike Highlands)	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
#	WHAT TYPES OF EVENTS WOULD GENERATE MORE CUSTOMERS FOR YOUR BUSINESS?	DATE
1	Festivals, Holiday events	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	Outdoor events with picnic type atmospheres	4/7/2021 1:00 PM
3	Music, Food & Beverage	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
4	our guests miss the auctions that Scudders used to do.	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
5	Social Events	4/6/2021 11:49 AM
6	small events. Keep quaintness is what my clients prefer	4/6/2021 10:13 AM
7	Same	4/6/2021 9:23 AM
8	Target market niche events. garden tours, family legacy speakers, guest authors	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
9	Events held during shoulder seasons; March-April, November- December. Any other time of the year is not a problem	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
10	Main Street concerts, Main Street art exhibitions, sip and strolls, downtown/Main Street festivals - ex: fire and ice festival in winter (chili and ice sculpture competition), etc.	4/5/2021 8:42 PM
11	Health focused, Family focused	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
12	Food and Wine	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
13	NONE	4/5/2021 3:29 PM
14	Music & events at KH park	4/5/2021 3:20 PM

Highlands Business Survey

15	Large social events like food and wine	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
16	all events	4/5/2021 2:26 PM
17	Anything that would bring in a high quality person, such as the Motoring Festival	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
18	Welcoming every class of Americans	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
19	?	3/4/2021 10:44 PM
20	Fall for Greenville	3/2/2021 9:45 PM
21	Pairing events	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
22	n/a	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
23	Golf Tournaments	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
24	Concerts	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
25	Arts, Food & Beverage, Music	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
26	Music events	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
27	Festivals	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
28	More live music downtown, Saturday morning farmers market on Main Street	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
29	all events that bring customers to town helps us	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
30	N/A	2/5/2021 1:00 PM
31	Events that do not compete with established retail shopping	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
32	Music, and Food	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
33	More festivals	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
34	festivals and special events	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
35	Family festivals/attractions	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
36	Sidewalk art shows; music in the park;	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
37	MORE COMBO FESTIVALS LIKE BEAR SHADOW THAT WILL APPEAL TO A YOUNGER AUDIENCE	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
38	None	2/1/2021 2:35 PM
39	Music, Craft, Wine, Holloween, Christmas events	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
40	Free to public high quality of life events	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
41	I don't know!	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
#	WHAT TIME OF YEAR ARE NEW EVENTS NEEDED TO INCREASE CUSTOMER TRAFFIC?	DATE
1	Year round!	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	Summer/Fall	4/7/2021 1:00 PM
3	January through April	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
4	Winter Months (January/February/March)	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
5	Spring	4/6/2021 3:22 PM
6	February and March	4/6/2021 12:14 PM
7	March-May	4/6/2021 11:49 AM
8	Fall and winter	4/6/2021 9:23 AM
9	N/A we are successful year round	4/6/2021 8:32 AM

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10	See above. November- March	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
11	January - April	4/5/2021 8:42 PM
12	March, April	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
13	Jan-March	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
14	NONE	4/5/2021 3:29 PM
15	Shoulder & winter	4/5/2021 3:20 PM
16	shoulder seasons like September, spring	4/5/2021 3:15 PM
17	March/ April	4/5/2021 2:35 PM
18	year long	4/5/2021 2:26 PM
19	Winter	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
20	January,feb,march	3/25/2021 12:40 PM
21	None	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
22	?	3/4/2021 10:44 PM
23	March, April	3/2/2021 9:45 PM
24	January-April	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
25	n/a	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
26	September	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
27	Winter activities	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
28	Winter	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
29	Spring	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
30	Spring and Winter	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
31	spring	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
32	Spring	2/5/2021 7:38 PM
33	seems like we have a good year round appeal	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
34	N/A	2/5/2021 1:00 PM
35	spring and fall	2/2/2021 1:50 PM
36	March - late May	2/2/2021 12:50 PM
37	Shoulder Seasons	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
38	winter	2/1/2021 8:54 PM
39	November and December	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
40	April and May	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
41	Jan, Feb, and March	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
42	Shoulders	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
43	Spring; between Thanksgiving & Christmas	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
44	JANUARY-MARCH	2/1/2021 2:42 PM
45	None	2/1/2021 2:35 PM
46	October, May,	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
47	na	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
48	winter (but good luck with that)	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
49	Spring and summer	2/1/2021 1:06 PM
50	Off season	2/1/2021 1:00 PM

Highlands Business Survey

Q14 What can the Chamber and/or the Town do to further support downtown businesses and continue to make Highlands a year-round destination?

Answered: 41 Skipped: 22

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	In the future when things return to a more "normal" look into creating events in the "off Season" that more local's can enjoy and afford. People with in a 75 miles radius would love to get away for a weekend and experience what Highlands is all about. They could take advantage of the Hotels that offer local specials, and having some sort of inside shows, concerts could be a real draw.	4/8/2021 11:56 AM
2	Focus on workforce housing (among other reasons, so the people that are raised here can afford to stay or return after collage to make this their home and raise their own families, and also to create more of a year-round culture. Even educated professionals, including doctors and other healthcare workers move because they can't afford to live here or find decent long-term rentals. Therefore the downtown (shops especially) is increasingly viewed as a tourist attraction, which in turn keeps it a tourist attraction because with "locals" living at least 30 minutes way, they end up doing their business elsewhere. Support events and initiatives that will attract a young, affluent demographic that appreciates nature and the quiet beauty of the area. Educate businesses on what offerings, merchandising, types of advertising, curb appeal, etc. draw today's audience and appeal to younger affluent demographics in order to foster the continuance of Highlands as a fresh, relevant, fun and cool place to live, work, do business and visit. Ensure that growth (residential, business and infrastructure) is strategic and purposeful in order to protect the very small footprint of the Highlands area and ensure that it doesn't become a sardine can of tourists, residents and traffic, which will kill its appeal as a coveted "retreat" destination, especially for high-end visitors and residents. Also, get a handle on short-term rentals, which have been shown to suck the warmth, social/neighborly feel and year-round culture out of other destinations like ours, giving them a reputation of transiency as opposed to a sought-after place to live, be part of a community and raise a family. Support music, arts, culture and eco-friendly practices, including a recycle program. Cherish and protect our natural water resources and don't let them turn to marsh. Encourage and support local gardens and agriculture to help make this area self-sustaining since we are isolated.	4/7/2021 12:02 PM
3	attract businesses that will enhance our offerings. Quality ride service, more restaurants, different stores. We dont have many empty windows, but we have some. Develop housing/apartments for the working class just outside of town.	4/6/2021 6:20 PM
4	Be more responsible with chamber budget	4/6/2021 3:22 PM
5	Encourage more retail to stay open year round.	4/6/2021 12:14 PM
6	Full disclosure of all grants from occupancy tax. Establish a strategic committee to identify "best use" of funds and align with overall strategic plan of Highlands.	4/6/2021 8:32 AM
7	The Chamber and Town government have a difficult balance to maintain. Improve business environment but remain a second home community. We are a second home community and that is the most important characteristic to maintain.	4/6/2021 7:28 AM
8	Drive more visitors here during the months from late November- March. It's a very hard time for businesses to justify staying open when utilities are much higher to heat a space and you see such a decrease in visitors. It's also impossible to maintain your employees when your volume dramatically decreases. There's nothing to do in the winter months in highlands. I'm not sure how you could change that to make sense for every business to stay open year round. There's no magical answer. I've been actively involved at Lakeside for 15 years, owned it for 8 years and I still can not justify being open in January and February. December is difficult but at least the Christmas holiday and New Years helps a little. For me, I'm off Main Street and no matter what time of year I somehow am unknown.	4/5/2021 10:43 PM
9	Get rid of the ridiculous mask mandate!!!	4/5/2021 8:42 PM

Highlands Business Survey

10	Road pavement and repair. Better crosswalks - especially at 3rd and Main St.	4/5/2021 8:24 PM
11	Let's keep it green! No 5G in town. Limit use of pesticides. Educate visitors on 'leave no trace' ethics.	4/5/2021 4:55 PM
12	Promote local businesses staying open throughout the year	4/5/2021 4:04 PM
13	Hopefully in your figuring, you realized the numerical part of the survey did not designate which numbers were "good" and which were "bad " marks. For my answers, higher numbers means higher preference. 10=Good, 1=Bad. Why does Highlands need to be a year-round destination?	4/5/2021 3:29 PM
14	More public parking-maybe parking garages	4/5/2021 3:20 PM
15	Provide a more thorough business mix in their advertising(not just hotels, restaurants, and realtors) at a lesser cost to the Chamber members	4/5/2021 2:03 PM
16	The chamber needs to take a deep look at itself. Having a paid tier system is probably the most anti-chamber like policy of all time. The more someone pays the higher up they are. Just think about that. The entire point of the Chamber of Commerce is to promote the entire commercial district as a whole. For every member is equal and just as important. What the town can do in my opinion is to demolish the current Chamber of Commerce and it elitist, racist, entitled, discriminatory being.	3/24/2021 12:24 AM
17	Get rid of the litter - more trash receptacles off main street so that people are not leaving household garbage, dirty diapers, masks, cans, bottles, cigarette butts - hire more trash collectors, have a zero footprint campaign	3/12/2021 3:50 PM
18	Idea: Add white lights to tree trunks down Main in winter	3/2/2021 9:45 PM
19	It's hard to say because everyone from everywhere is starting to discover this town.	3/2/2021 8:58 AM
20	Get businesses, restaurants, clubs to stay open and operating year round	3/2/2021 7:54 AM
21	Advertising throughout the South	3/1/2021 5:32 PM
22	Charge fair utilities to businesses - eliminate minimum charges it's ridiculous !! Making small businesses pay utilities they don't use is an easy way to kill a business	3/1/2021 4:17 PM
23	Marketing, events, and new developments required to have businesses stay open year-round.	3/1/2021 3:51 PM
24	Marketing support during off season Investing in parking and walking ease through town Lighting that is inviting year round Planting lots of flowers for season Additional trees on main	3/1/2021 3:45 PM
25	Market winter events	3/1/2021 3:34 PM
26	I think both do a great job.	3/1/2021 3:30 PM
27	Parking is our major issue. We need to have designated spots(even with a time limit) so customers wanting to get in and out quick can park close to the business, especially when they have bags to carry. Visitors walking downtown can park in designated places off of main street.	2/5/2021 4:23 PM
28	continue to broaden the season beyond June-September	2/2/2021 1:50 PM
29	Children are the future of everything. Find a way to improve the whole family visit locally.	2/2/2021 10:35 AM
30	Provide additional parking. Enforce signage laws to support businesses that pay Main Street rent.	2/2/2021 10:16 AM
31	The Chamber is doing a good job of promoting the town.	2/1/2021 7:42 PM
32	Winter time festivals would help the businesses tremendously	2/1/2021 5:04 PM
33	continue with target marketing	2/1/2021 3:43 PM
34	Year round public subsidized staff housing	2/1/2021 3:32 PM
35	The intro to this survey says that The Town knows that "the local businesses are an invaluable asset to Highlands" yet the town has repeatedly said the success of local businesses is not their responsibility. This attitude needs to change.	2/1/2021 3:25 PM
36	MORE EVENTS LIKE THE BEAR SHADOW - IF POSSIBLE WITH MORE WELL KNOWN	2/1/2021 2:42 PM

Highlands Business Survey

TALENT MORE FOCUS ON EVENTS THAT WILL APPEAL TO A SLIGHTLY YOUNGER AUDIENCE EARLY 30'S TO EARLY 40'S MODERNIZE THE REC PARK TO SOMETHING LIKE THE ONE IN CASHIERS UNIQUE PARK/PLAYGROUND EXPERIENCE WITH EQUIPMENT TO PLAY ON-ROPES COURSE, ROCK CLIMBING WALL, ETC

37	Help provide better internet service	2/1/2021 1:36 PM
38	We need a break. Season has already become 10 months long.	2/1/2021 1:33 PM
39	I think working on increasing visitors for off-season (winter) rather than trying to boost the already bulging summer season (COVID years excepted) would be the most helpful.	2/1/2021 1:14 PM
40	Stop charging minimum utility fees and charge what the business ACTUALLY USE for utilities	2/1/2021 1:06 PM
41	Figure out a long term parking solution. Enforce dog waste ordinance. Plan more events on lower volume weekends.	2/1/2021 1:00 PM

DRAFT PLAN COMMENTS

Q1 What did you like about the plan?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 1

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	It was comprehensive and well considered. We have a lot of options and the plan made that clear.	6/16/2021 10:46 AM
2	Emphasis on pedestrian accommodations. Maintaining the small town mountain feel.	6/16/2021 8:41 AM
3	I like the emphasis on keeping the village flavor of Highlands and making the town pedestrian-friendly.	6/15/2021 3:11 PM
4	I'm a full time resident and concerned about controlling STRs. The Vacation Rental Act limits what can be done to regulate them. What I want to see is enforcement of laws for STRs concerning trash, noise, parking and trespassing. Also I'm afraid a creation zone limiting STRs, if passes, will choose a affordable neighborhood such as Mirror Lake which is being inundated with STRs	6/7/2021 1:58 PM
5	My name is Danielle Hartsfield Chambers and I own Crown Heritage Flowers. I was not given/provided an opportunity to take the business survey - why?	6/4/2021 4:26 PM
6	I'd be interested to see the revenue created directly from STR's and how this affects the town's budget if they were greatly reduced.	6/4/2021 3:07 PM

Q2 What needs to be changed or emphasized more?

Answered: 4 Skipped: 3

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Restrictions on STRs in an effort to provide more long term rentals for workers should exclude properties with lots larger than an acre. Long term renters do not want to maintain large lots and including maintenance costs for larger lots in the monthly rent cost would make the cost or renting prohibitive. Including larger properties in any STR restrictions will not solve the problems that are attempting to be addressed. The plan should acknowledge that properties over an acre are different than more high density housing and should treat them differently.	6/16/2021 10:46 AM
2	I believe the economic benefit of STR's should be addressed. STR's spend more money in town then residents and long term renters. They also contribute to the tax digest through accommodations and use taxes. My small second home contributed almost \$4,000 last year alone. I have no issues with regulations and even nominal fees, as long as they are used for enforcement. Also, eliminating STR's will not increase affordable housing availability. When you have a booming economy, housing prices go up.	6/16/2021 8:41 AM
3	VRBO and other short-term rentals greatly threaten the goals of the draft plan. I live in an R-1 neighborhood and vandalism has spiked with short-term rentals. I would welcome an Asheville-like policy regarding short-term rentals (especially 1-3 nights) in R-1 neighborhoods. The noise from late-night partying for wedding weekends and people driving too fast on our curvey road make weekends miserable.	6/15/2021 3:11 PM
4	Thank you for this wonderful Plan and to all who have contributed their time & efforts. For many of the reasons that the Plan has been created, would Highlands please make efforts to discourage & reduce unnecessary vehicular noises from cars and motorcycles that do not have proper mufflers. The drivers of those seem to go out of their way to make as much noise as possible, both in town, as well as in our valleys, and thereby, utterly destroy the peace for all of the rest of us; animals included. Many thanks for any feedback you may provide. Blake	6/14/2021 8:43 AM

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARKING AND CIRCULATION STUDY



XI. RECOMMENDED IMPROVEMENTS

After determining that constructing wide sidewalks along Main Street would result in a significant loss of valuable parking, the Advisory Board instructed WSA to move forward in developing a preferred alternative to generally include the features previous included in Alternative B. The following are the key features of the Preferred Alternative:

- Landscaped median down Main Street from 1st Street to 5th Street
- Amenities such as park benches, community art, trash receptacles, etc. should be incorporated into the landscaped area along the north and south sides of Main Street
- Gateways which will include a combination of wayfinding signage and island separator are recommended on US 64 from the north and 5th Street from the east, and NC 106 from the south
- Another gateway feature, a traffic circle, is recommended at the intersection of 4th Street and South Street in order to act as a gateway, traffic calming measure, and to make this confusing intersection safer
- Retaining wall and sidewalk along the north side of Main Street from 1st Street to 3rd Street
- Midblock crossings on Main Street midway between 1st Street and 2nd Street; 3rd Street and 4th Street; and 4th Street and 5th Street. These midblock crossings shall be constructed with stamped, pigmented asphalt with high white thermoplastic markings and appropriate signage consistent with the signage requirements outlined in the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*²
- Crosswalks at intersections shall be constructed with stamped, pigmented asphalt with high white thermoplastic markings and appropriate signage consistent with the signage requirements outlined in the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*²
- Construct angular parking spaces along the north side of Main Street from 1st Street to 3rd Street
- Construct additional parking spaces along Spring Street, S. 3rd Street, N. 2nd Street, Oak Street west of 2nd Street, and N. 5th Street, and Main Street east of 5th Street.
- Convert Spring Street to one-way eastbound and construct a sidewalk along the north side of Spring Street
- Pursue the construction of a traffic signal at Main Street/3rd Street intersection.
- Construct sidewalks on side streets such as N. 2nd Street, N. 3rd Street, Spring Street west of 3rd Street, Oak Street west of 2nd Street,
- Provide pedestrian countdown heads at all signalized intersections
- Remove all outdated and ineffective signage
- Plan, design, and implement an effective, customized wayfinding system to meet the Town's needs
- Convert N. 3rd Street and Maple Street to US 64 Truck Route and S. 3rd Street to US 28 Truck Route

The key features included in the Preferred Alternative are illustrated in Figure 11. The preferred typical section for Main Street is illustrated in Figure 12.

The Preliminary Wayfinding System, illustrating recommended signage for destinations, gateways,



and kiosks are illustrated in Figure 13. It should be noted that the recommendations shown are preliminary and did not include a specific brand for Highlands. Furthermore, the actual number of signs may change as the needs of the Town change.

The desire to have a no net loss of parking was a criterion for developing the preferred alternative. With this goal in mind, the parking supply resulting from the implementation of the Preferred Alternative will be 1017 public parking spaces which equates to a net gain of 55 parking spaces.

The proposed parking supply by zones illustrated in the graph below.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARKING AND CIRCULATION STUDY

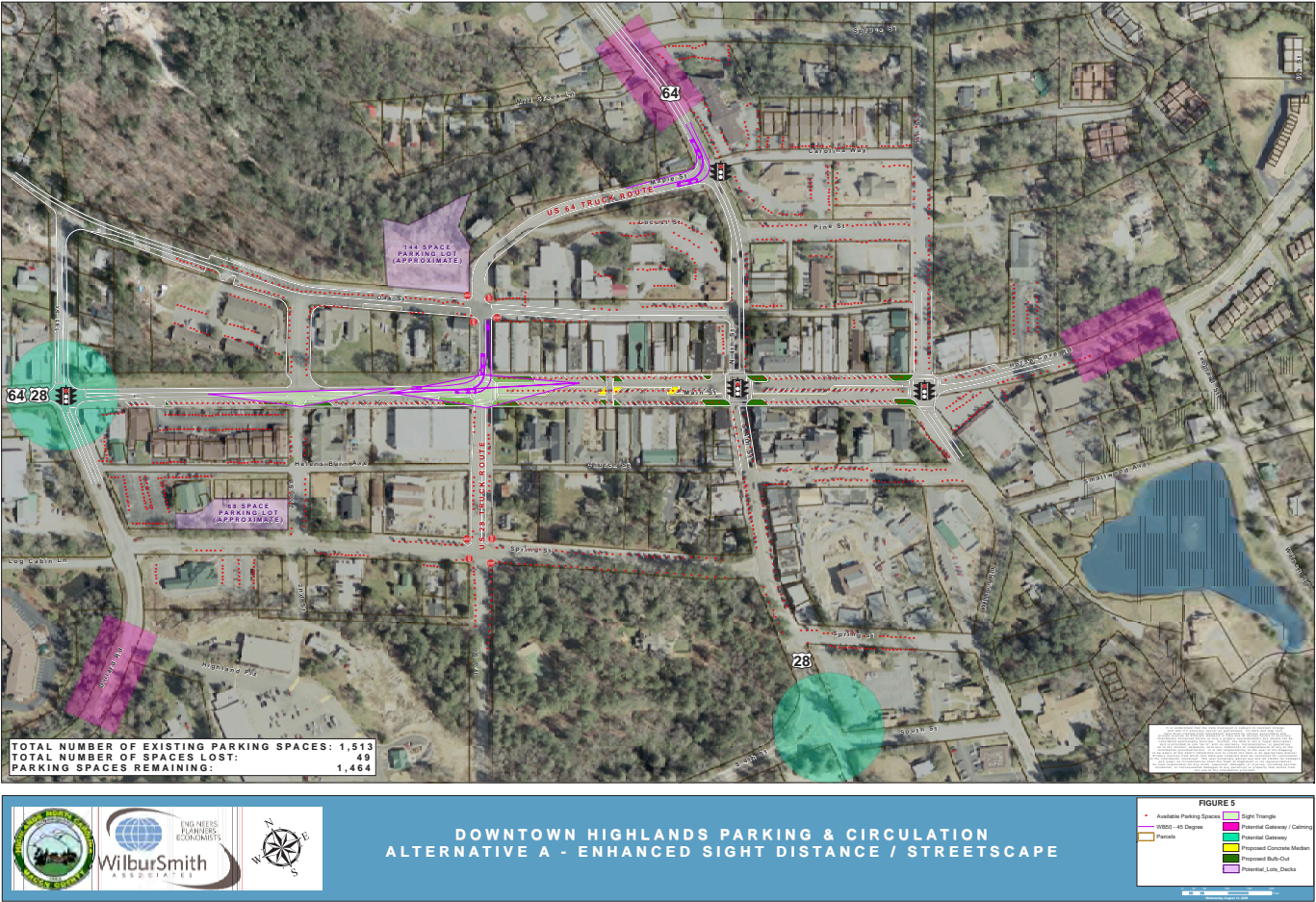
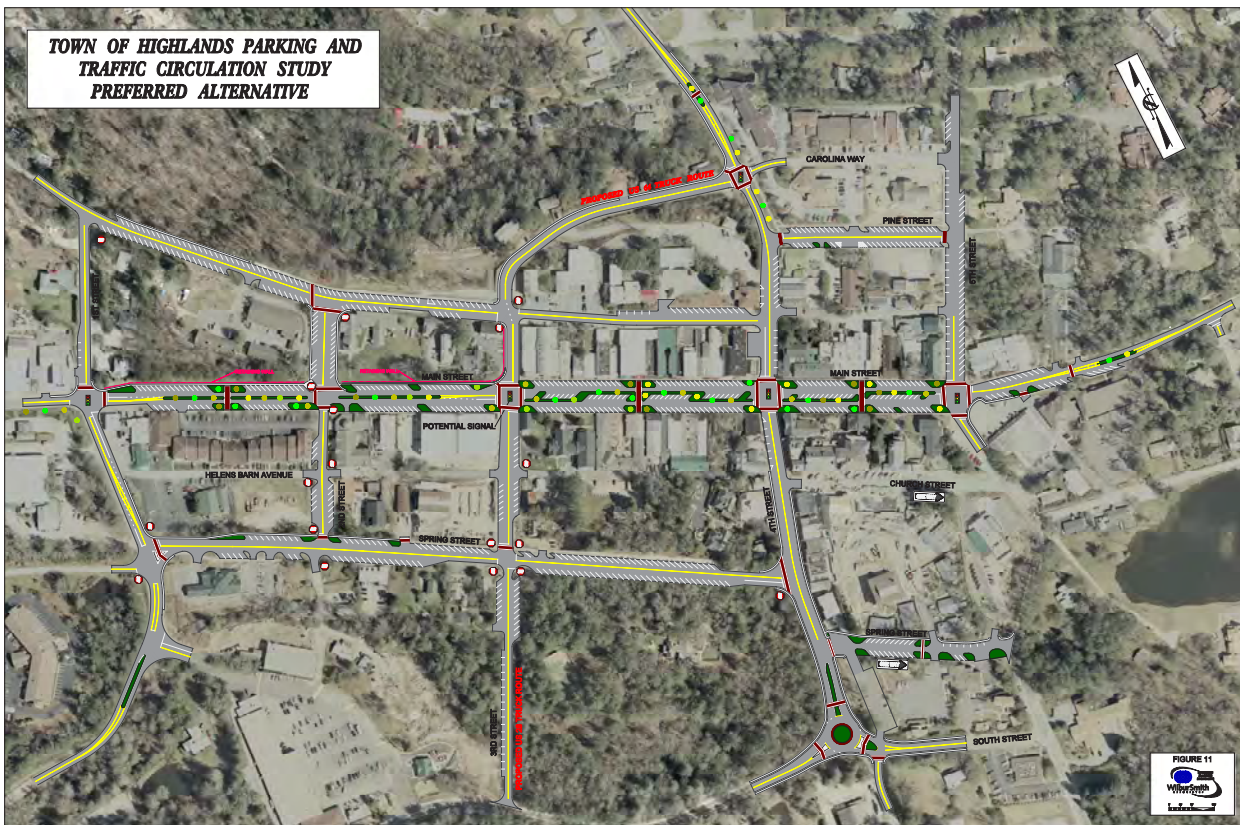
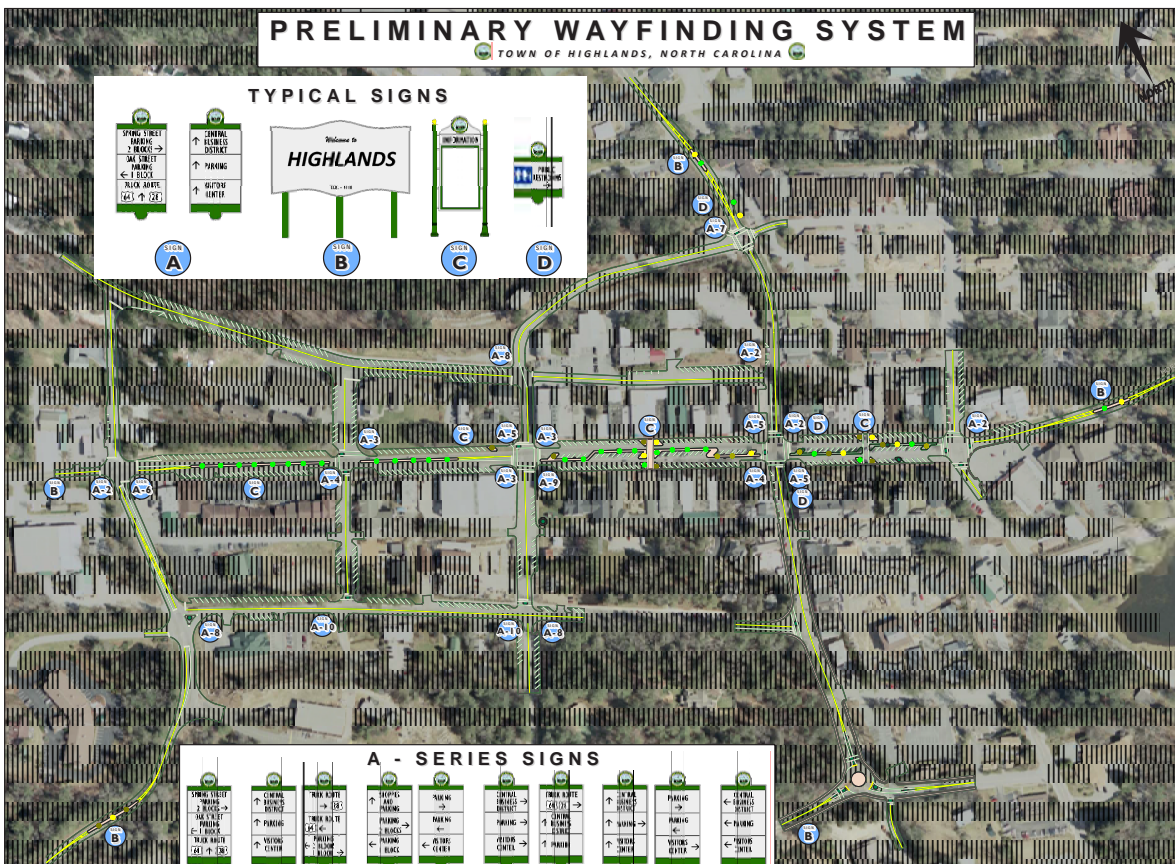


Figure 5 from Parking and Circulation Study showing potential parking lot locations at Maple Street and Oak Street and 2nd Street and Spring Street.



Preferred Alternative from Parking and Circulation Study



Preferred Alternative from Parking and Circulation Study

STORMWATER MASTER PLAN EXCERPTS

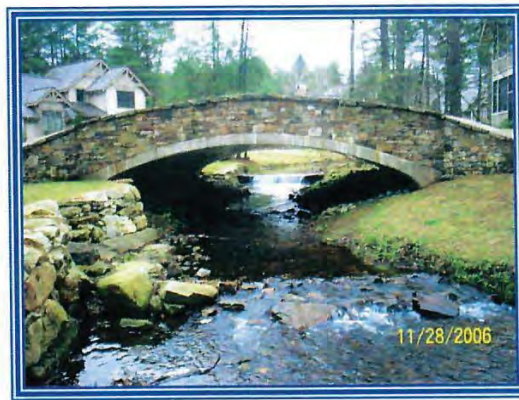
Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

HYDRAULICS:

Due to the number of crossings and the on-going development in the basin the road culverts in the Mill Creek watershed were selected to be analyzed. A conservative hydraulic analysis of each crossing was performed utilizing the 1-hour duration storm event to estimate the peak discharge rates. The review assumed maintaining outlet control on the structure, to prevent overtopping, up to the 100-year storm event. The results are listed in the table below:

Road Name	Culvert Type			Suggested Size			
	Material	Shape	Size (in.)	10 YR	25 YR	50 YR	100 YR
Biscuit Rock Rd.	CMP	Circular	30	OK	OK	OK	OK
Village Walk (Private Road)	Concrete	Con-Span	72x288	OK	OK	OK	OK
4th Street	Concrete	Rectangle	108x72	OK	OK	OK	OK
Spruce	Brick/CMP	Arch	80x72	OK	OK	OK	78x160
Heatherwood/Cullasaja Dr.	Concrete	Rectangle	48x156	OK	OK	OK	48x408
Leonard	CMP	Circular	48	OK	OK	48x56	48x70
6th Street	CMP	Circular	36	OK	OK	48x48	48x60
Wilson Street	CMP	Circular	36	OK	OK	36x79	36x106
Laurel Drive	CMP	Circular	48	OK	48x177	48x256	48x332
5th Street	CMP	Circular	48	OK	48x132	48x190	48x247
Horsecove (Main Street)	CMP	Ellipse	72x42	OK	42x72	42x106	42x146
Tudor Drive (Private Road)	CMP	Circular	36	OK	36x48	36x68	36x92
Smallwood	CMP	Circular	36	OK	36x62	36x86	36x108
Stonebridge	CMP	Circular	36	OK	36x108	36x154	36x208

The suggested replacements are based on a single span reinforced concrete structures with a natural bottom. This three sided structure will not only be more hydraulically efficient than the multiple pipes at each crossing but will also be more environmentally friendly and should require less maintenance. The pictures below highlight the difference between single span and multiple pipe type of crossing.



Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN:

The following improvement projects are suggested for inclusion the Town of Highlands Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). In order to finalize the CIP these projects should be prioritized and funding sources should be identified. These identified projects are preliminary in nature and will require further refinement in order to become final designs. While efforts were made to provide realistic cost estimates, they are preliminary and should be used cautiously. As final designs are completed detailed cost estimates based on the most recent data and final design should be made in order to determine the true and current cost of the project.

Central Business District Upgrades:

Analysis of the stormwater conveyance system in the Central Business District indicates a majority of the pipes are not capable of accepting the one-year storm event without surcharging. Given also that the existing system appears to be a hodgepodge collection of pipes and inlets, installed to address an immediate need but with no capacity analysis or consideration of future development, it is recommended that a new collection and conveyance system be installed. All improvements to the CBD's stormwater collection system should include the following:

Water Quality Treatment Structures:

Since little room exists in the CBD to install natural systems, such as wetlands and bio-retention cells, to effectively treat the large discharges from the highly impervious urbanized areas it is recommended that underground water quality treatment structures be installed. Current regulations only require treatment of the one-inch storm; however, these devices should be sized to treat runoff from all storms up to and including the one-year event, removing at least 90% of the Total Suspended Solids (TSS) from the way-stream. Efforts should be made to address volatile substances, such as oils and greases, nitrogen, phosphorous and other nutrients and heavy metals.

Potential manufactures of Hydrodynamic Stormwater Quality Structures include Crystalstream Technologies, Stormceptor, Vortech, and CDS. Makers of catch basin inserts include Kristar and Inceptor.

Stormwater Collection and Conveyance System:

In order for the treatment structures to work effectively a modern stormwater collection and conveyance system must be installed to route untreated runoff to the water quality device and remove the clean water. Either Reinforced Concrete Pipe (RCP) or High Density PolyEthylene Pipe (HDPE) with a minimum inside diameter of 15-inches should be used. Metal pipes should be avoided due to their shorter life span and higher flow resistance values.

Standard NC DOT Hood and Grated Curb Inlets, Embossed with Trout and "DUMP NO WASTE DRAINS TO LAKE SEQUOYA" and Heavy Duty Manhole Covers and

Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Castings Embossed with “TOWN OF HIGHLANDS NC” “STORM SEWER” and “DUMP NO WASTE DRAINS TO LAKE SEQUYOYA” should be used.

Incorporation of Other Improvements:

Because stormwater conveyance systems require large diameter pipes and box culverts they require larger cuts into the existing streets and sidewalks of an urban center and often conflict with other existing underground utilities (UGU). Therefore, it is beneficial to plan for other improvements when completing these projects and have one comprehensive project incorporating upgrades and replacements of existing UGU like water and gas mains and burying existing overhead utilities such as electric power, cable and telephone lines.

This plan of addressing projects has an extra benefit when replacing or upgrading wastewater lines. Inflow and Infiltration (I/I) is a problem with many wastewater systems caused by natural ground water or runoff entering the wastewater system through holes and cracks in the pipes during a storm. The additional rain water places a strain on the system which is usually not designed to handle these flows and results in either Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSO's), often at low points in the system along a creek or stream, or extra water to be treated or bypassed at the wastewater treatment plant. I/I works both ways and on dry days wastewater systems can leach sewerage into the ground which regularly finds its way into the lower stormwater system. This dry weather I/I may be occurring in Highlands as a Hydrogen Sulfide odor noticed at several storm sewer outfalls to Mill Creek from the CBD.

The final reason to incorporate improvements into a single project is the restoration of the Town's streets, sidewalks and other amenities. Consideration should be given to replacing paved surfaces with landscaping or semi-pervious areas where possible to help maintain the water balance within the basin and reduce the rate and amount of runoff. Also large canopy trees should be utilized to help intercept rainfall and provide shade to help reduce the effects of urban heating.



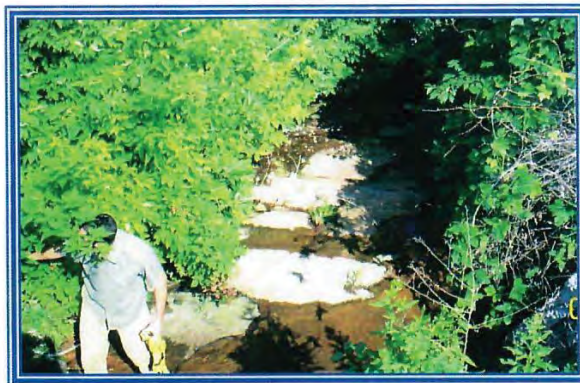
Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Upgrade Stormwater Collection Systems – Mill Creek Basin

Projects in the Mill Creek Basin should begin with construction at the outlet to Mill Creek and work upstream. An overall plan for the ultimate build-out in the basin, including all the options the Town wishes to pursue should be considered before beginning detailed design.

Outfall to Mill Creek: There are two highly visible locations where the velocities at outfalls are causing scour problems in Mill Creek. One is at the current outfall of the CBD stormwater system just below the intersection of Maple and 4th Streets. The other is the 18-inch drop on the downstream face of the 4th Street Culvert. Wing walls and headwalls exist on both faces of the Culvert; however, it lacks an apron to control erosion of the natural stream bottom. It is recommended that a concrete apron be poured on both sides of the bridge and that the left wing wall be modified/extended to allow the proposed Fourth Street Trunk to outlet on the proposed apron rather than its current location.

Estimated Cost: \$20K to \$50K



Outfall of the Central Business District Stormwater System

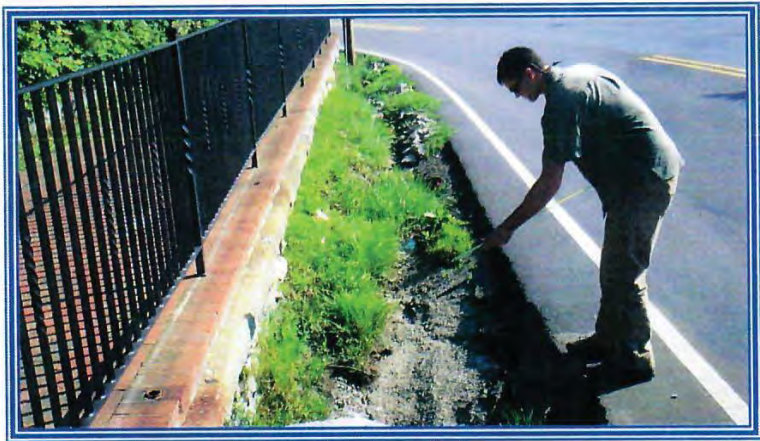


18-inch Drop on Downstream Face of the Fourth Street Culvert

Town of Highlands North Carolina
Stormwater Master Plan

Fourth Street Trunk: A new stormwater trunk in 4th Street from Mill Creek to Church Street should be installed. This system, at its outlet to Mill Creek, would provide drainage for the majority of the CBD and should be designed to accommodate at least the ten-year storm event and if possible the twenty-five-year storm event. The system would consist of approximately 1450-feet of pipes and culverts, ranging in size from 18-inch diameters to 48-inch by 60-inch box culverts, with inlets and catch basins, capable of effectively collecting and routing runoff, and water quality structures, capable of removing fine solids and other pollutants from the way-stream, strategically located along the trunk. If possible the lower end of the system should maintain a shallow slope to help reduce the velocities of the discharge and the shear stresses on the channel.

Estimated Cost: \$800K to \$900K.



Existing 4th Street Stormwater Conveyance



Existing 4th Street Stormwater Conveyance



Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Fifth Street Trunk: A new stormwater trunk in 5th Street should be installed. This system would route water in 5th Street from Church and Oak Streets and continue down Oak Street to 4th Street, where it would connect to the proposed Fourth Street Trunk. Like the proposed Fourth Street Trunk, this system should be designed to accommodate at least the ten-year storm event and if possible the twenty-five-year storm event. The system would consist of approximately 1150-feet of pipes, ranging in size from 18-inches to 42-inches in diameter, with inlets and catch basins, capable of effectively collecting and routing runoff, and water quality devices, capable of removing fine solids and other pollutants from the way-stream, strategically located along the trunk.

Estimated Cost: \$525K to \$550K.



Existing 5th Street Stormwater Conveyance



Existing 5th Street Stormwater Conveyance

Town of Highlands North Carolina
Stormwater Master Plan

Open Channel at Episcopal Church: The existing urban channel that appears on the north side of Main Street and runs along the new addition to the Episcopal Church should be re-routed. The channel drains the 4.63 acres of commercial development between Main and Smallwood Streets and the proximity to the church is causing damage to the structure. Approximately 300-feet of 24-inch to 30-inch RCP with at least one structural pre-treatment water quality device is recommended.

Estimated Cost: \$125K to \$130K.



Drainage Channel Adjacent to Episcopal Church



Stormwater Impact Area at Episcopal Church

Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Other Collection System Projects: These projects are also recommended to improve the collections, conveyance and treatment systems in the Mill Creek portion of the CBD. Generally consisting of 18-inch diameter pipe with inlets and cross drains, these projects, because of their small size, could be reserved for the Town's Work Crews or bundled into a larger project.

Maple – 4th to 5th: 600-feet of pipe 6 inlets, 3 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$120K to \$150K

Pine – 4th to 5th: 500-feet of pipe 6 inlets, 3 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$110K to \$135K

Oak – 4th to 3rd: 400-feet of pipe 4 inlets, 3 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$80K to \$110K

Main – 4th to 3rd: 800-feet of pipe 10 inlets, 4 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$165K to \$200K

Main – 4th to 5th: 500-feet of pipe 8 inlets, 4 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$125K to \$150K

Church – 4th to 3rd: 250-feet of pipe 4 inlets, 2 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$65K to \$85K

Church – 4th to 5th: 550-feet of pipe 8 inlets, 4 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$135K to \$160K

4th – Church to Spring: 250-feet of pipe 4 inlets, 2 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$65K to \$85K

5th – Church to Smallwood: 200-feet of pipe 4 inlets, 2 Water Quality Structures
Estimated Cost:\$60K to \$75K

Estimated cost for all Small Collection System Projects: \$925K to \$1.15M.



Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Main Street – Runoff Reduction Improvements: This project would reduce impervious surface by adding heavy landscaping for the 1200-feet of Main Street between 3rd and 5th Streets. This portion of Main Street is almost completely impervious with an approximate 100-foot wide Right-of-Way supporting sidewalks on each side, two lanes of traffic and three rows of parking. This project would replace much of the impervious areas with pervious pavement, paver walks on infiltration bed, tree plots and planted areas, to reduce the impervious coverage and the amount and rates of stormwater runoff. One concept could include the following:

- A ten-foot wide landscape median planted with oaks, maples and walnut trees providing a high canopy to intercept the rainfall and shade the pavement underneath,
- Two twelve and a half foot standard asphalted travel lanes, one on either side of the landscaped median,
- Angled on-street parking stalls on both sides with pervious pavement rather than asphalt.
- A five-foot wide landscape buffer, planted with shrubs, dogwoods, crepe myrtles and other under-story ornamental trees,
- Seven-foot wide brick paver sidewalks set in a sand and gravel bed to allow infiltration,
- Large underground cisterns or oversized pipes that would collect and store rain water from small events for future irrigation of the planted medians, street cleaning or other non-potable uses.

This proposed system could potentially reduce the amount of runoff produced by 25% from the current levels and reduce peak discharges to more natural levels. This would also lead to a potential reduction in pipe sizes on the Fourth and Fifth Street Trunks and a corollary reduction in cost. One draw-back is the loss of between 65 to 70 parking spaces in a downtown with limited parking options. In order to maximize the available space in the CBD the Town should consider building a Parking Garage to offset this loss.

Estimated Cost: \$1.25M to \$2.5M.



Main Street between 3rd Street and 4th Street

Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Highlands Recreation Park – Stormwater Treatment Facility: This project would develop the underutilized portions of the Highlands Recreation Park into a Stormwater Treatment Facility, (SWTF). The SWTF would be blended into the park with a natural design of ponds with waterfalls, open fields planted with wildflowers and walking trails. The final product would appear to be a nature preserve and a visitor to the park would have little idea that a water treatment facility was busy at work.

This facility would utilize a number of treatment options in series and the Treatment Train would consist of the following options:

- a) Multiple water quality treatment structures to remove gross solids, sands and heavy sediments,
- b) A series of water impoundments to manage the runoff rates, and provide settling for finer sediments,
- c) A series of wetlands for nutrient uptake and further treatment of stormwater runoff,
- d) Waterfalls and cascades to provide aeration,
- e) Stream Restoration along Mill Creek to provide macro invertebrate habitat

In addition to the stormwater treatment the following enhancements can also be included:

- a) A walking trail through and around the park,
- b) Interruptive signage along the walking trail to educate visitors on the workings of the stormwater treatment facility,
- c) Benches and picnic areas

This project could address the ongoing sedimentation problem in Mirror Lake along Cullasaja Drive and efforts to remove the sediment in Mirror Lake should be coordinated with this proposed project. Consideration of the expansion of the park in the future should include acquisition of land from Highlands Recreation Park to Mirror Lake, focusing on flood prone areas along Mill Creek.

Estimated Cost: \$3.0M to \$6.0M. (based on the size and scope of the final design)



Town of Highlands North Carolina
Stormwater Master Plan

Upgrade Stormwater Collection Systems – Monger Creek Basin

Projects in the Monger Creek Basin should begin construction at the outlets to Monger Creek and work their way upstream. An overall plan for the ultimate build-out in the basin, including all the options the Town wishes to pursue should be considered before beginning detailed design.

Monger Creek Stream Restoration: Monger Creek, with the exception of the area currently under development upstream of 4th Street and the Rabbit Hole, is primarily a natural mountain stream in good condition until just downstream of 3rd Street. Downstream of this point, runoff from development on both sides of the Creek and encroachments into and the removal of the riparian buffer are severely impacting this stream. In some instances parking lots and structures are built right to the edge of the stream and there are many pipes segments that channelize the stream. Given the current state of Monger Creek in this area and the limited space, three options may be considered for the 1000-foot section of stream between 1st Street and 3rd Street.

- Option 1: Restore the riparian buffer and create a natural stream with pools and riffles and wetlands by obtaining private property to be set aside in a preservation area.
- Option 2: Channelize and pipe the stream, utilizing water quality treatment structures to address water quality concerns.
- Option 3: A targeted blend of Options 1 and 2 installing the best option based on the suitability given the current conditions.

Estimated Cost: \$250K to \$1.5M (based on the option(s) selected and the number of features desired)



Isolated Water Quality Pocket Pond along Monger Creek near 2nd Street

Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Stormwater Treatment Facility - Dillard Street and Highlands Plaza: The development of the Regions Bank at Dillard and Spring Street has left an area along Monger that could be used as a regional Stormwater Treatment Facility (SWTF). Similar in concept to the proposal for the Highlands Recreation Park but smaller in size this SWTF would look natural blending into the surrounding area and effectively treating the quality and quantity runoff from the CBD in the Monger Creek watershed and the 77 acre basin upstream.

By building a weir in front of the existing culvert under Highlands Plaza significant reductions in peak discharges can be expected for smaller storm events with moderate reductions for larger events. Structural water quality devices would be added to the pipes draining the surrounding streets to remove the gross pollutant load before passing the runoff through at least two constructed wetland fore-bays to remove finer sediments and provide pollutant uptake. Finally this project should incorporate the isolated water quality pocket pond upstream, developed by the UCWA, stream restoration and re-establish the riparian buffer along Monger Creek.

Walking trails along the ponds and wetlands with benches, and interpretive signage would enhance this half acre pocket park/treatment facility.

Estimated Cost: \$500K to \$2.5M (based on the size and scope of the final design and the possibility of land acquisition)



Area for Potential Park/Stormwater Treatment Facility



Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

First /Dillard Street Trunk: A new stormwater trunk in 1st/Dillard Street, from Monger Creek to just short of Oak Street, should be installed. This system would discharge into the proposed SWTF and should be designed to accommodate at least the ten-year storm event and possibly the twenty-five-year storm event. The system would consist of approximately 950-feet of pipes and culverts, ranging in size from 15-inches to 30-inches in diameter, with inlets and catch basins, capable of effectively collecting and routing runoff, and structural water quality treatment devices, capable of removing fine solids and other pollutants from the way-stream, strategically located along the trunk.

Estimated Cost: \$375K to \$400K.

Second Street Trunk: A new stormwater trunk in 2nd Street, from Monger Creek to Main Street, should be installed. This system would also discharge into the proposed SWTF and should be designed to accommodate at least the ten-year storm event and possibly the twenty-five-year storm event. The system would consist of approximately 700-feet of pipes and culverts, ranging in size from 15-inches to 36-inches in diameter, with inlets and catch basins, capable of effectively collecting and routing runoff, and structural water quality treatment devices, capable of removing fine solids and other pollutants from the way-stream, strategically located along the trunk.

Estimated Cost: \$425K to \$450K.

Third Street Trunk: A new stormwater trunk in 3rd Street, from Monger Creek to Main Street, should be installed. This system would discharge into the Monger Creek and should be designed to accommodate at least the ten-year storm event and possibly the twenty-five-year storm event. The system would consist of approximately 800-feet of pipes and culverts, ranging in size from 15-inches to 36-inches in diameter, with inlets and catch basins, capable of effectively collecting and routing runoff, and structural water quality treatment devices, capable of removing fine solids and other pollutants from the way-stream, strategically located along the trunk.

Estimated Cost: \$450K to \$475K.



Town of Highlands North Carolina

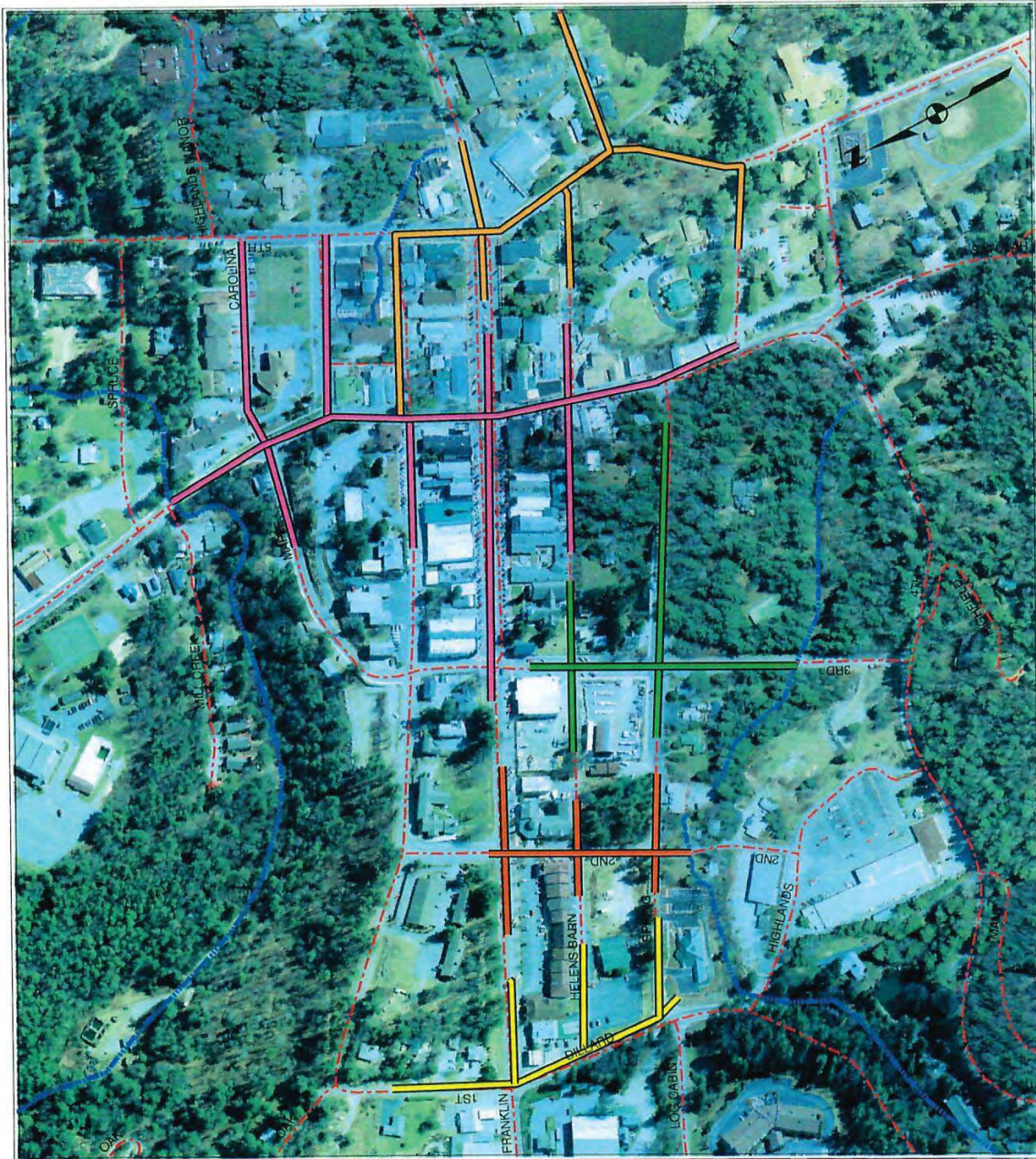


2007 Stormwater Master Plan

Capital Improvement Plan

CBD Upgrades

- First Street:
- Second Street:
- Third Street:
- Fourth Street:
- Fifth Street:



Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Spring Street – Runoff Reduction Improvements: This project would reduce the impervious coverage by adding heavy landscaping for the 1750-feet of Spring Street between 1st/Dillard Street and 4th Street. This portion of Spring Street is largely impervious with an approximate 65-foot wide Right-of-Way supporting sidewalks on each side, two lanes of traffic and angled on-street parking. This project would replace much of the impervious areas with pervious pavement, paver walks on an infiltration bed, tree plots and planted areas, to reduce the impervious coverage and the amount of stormwater runoff. One concept could include the following:

- Two twelve and a half foot standard asphalted travel lanes,
- Parallel on-street parking stalls to replace the angled stalls on both sides on pervious pavement rather than asphalt,
- A five-foot wide landscape buffer, planted with a mix of shrubs, dogwoods, crepe myrtles and other under-story ornamental trees, and large canopy trees like oaks, maples and walnuts,
- Seven foot wide brick paver sidewalks set in a sand and gravel bed to allow infiltration,
- Large underground cisterns or oversized pipes that would collect and store rain water from small events for future irrigation of the planted medians, street cleaning or other non-potable uses,
- Incorporate the existing pond on Spring Street into the project.

This proposed system could potentially reduce the amount of runoff produced from the current levels, reducing peak discharges to more natural levels. This would also lead to a potential reduction in pipe sizes on the proposed trunks in 2nd and 3rd Streets and a corollary reduction in cost. One draw-back is the loss of parking spaces in downtown with limited parking options.

Estimated Cost: \$1.75M to \$3.5M.



Town of Highlands North Carolina Stormwater Master Plan

Water Impoundment Improvements and Additions:

There are a number of lakes, ponds and other water impoundments in and around Highlands already providing a water quantity control and water quality cleansing benefits. However, with modifications to the outlet control structure and the adjacent property surrounding each impoundment additional benefits can be easily achieved. Modifications to existing impoundments coupled with the addition of new ponds could greatly reduce the peak discharges in the receiving streams, enhance the overall water quality and help to maintain the water balance within the watershed.

In order to fully develop a plan for these improvements a detailed Hydrological model should be built to fully understand the existing conditions and the collective impacts of any proposed improvements or addition of new impoundments. Since the scope of an individual project could vary greatly no individual cost estimates are given. Construction cost should be developed during the preliminary design of each project once the overall scope is defined.

Modifications to Existing Lakes and Ponds

Harris Lake: Harris Lake is located on the southern edge of the CBD on the Satulah Branch of Mill Creek. With a surface area of 3.20 acres it mitigates flows by storing runoff from the 255 acre upstream watershed. Modifications to the existing weir controlling the lake level and the amount of storage that can be provided could reduce peak discharges downstream. In addition, wetland areas around and upstream of the lake should be preserved in their natural state and protected from any type of development. Also the Town should take steps to acquire additional land for the expansion of the lake and associated wetlands.

Finally the proposed condominium development on the lake should be tightly regulated in order to preserve this lake. This development should be required to address water quality standards by storing and releasing the one-year storm over a two to four day period, as well as maintaining, if not reducing, the peak discharge rates to the natural (forested with excellent ground cover) levels or should set aside land and make necessary improvements to Harris Lake in order to achieve this.

Lindenwood Lake (Biological Station Lake): Lindenwood Lake, located east of the CBD on a branch of Mill Creek, mitigates flows by storing runoff from the headwaters of the watershed. With a surface area of 4.85 acres, it is estimated that the lake currently provides significant reductions in downstream peak discharges with the capacity to store over fifty acre-feet of water. Since the lake is situated on land owned by the Highlands Biological Station the lake and its associated wetlands are protected; however the Town should pursue an on-going relationship with the Biological Station to partner on projects and expand the land holdings of the Station.

Mill Creek Village Lake: Approximately 900 feet downstream from Lindenwood Lake, below 6th Street is a small private impoundment on the Mill Creek Village Property. This quarter acre impoundment relies heavily on Lindenwood Lake to control discharges through it and would be adversely affected if the largely undeveloped upstream watershed had any new building activity. In addition to the proposed improvements to Lindenwood Lake development in the upstream



