

Economic Development

Recommendation # 1: Continue to nurture and support a proactive Economic Development Commission.

- Provide for implementation of recommendations as proposed by Economic Development Commission in June 1, 2010 report (*Appendix i*)
- As other reports are developed ensure they are given full consideration.

Public Services

As the population increases, the demand for public services will rise. Responsibility will fall on governing boards now and in the future to continually assess this demand and ensure that the services in place accommodate the needs of the citizens. The following recommendations from the Economic Development and Public Services committee will serve as a guideline for governing boards to use as they see fit to help accomplish this task.

1. Work to ensure that law enforcement/emergency services grow proportionately with increase in population

- Diversity within agencies should mirror diversity in the community
- As population continues to change, assessment of services offered by the departments and community needs should be evaluated
- See that all departments within law enforcement/emergency services agencies are housed in facilities that increase departmental efficiency
- Explore ways to increase response efficiencies

2. Ensure that salaries for law enforcement agencies are competitive with those in surrounding counties

3. Improve communications coverage throughout Macon County

- Upgrade current 9-1-1 equipment as needed
- Locate new or improve existing telecommunications towers so that no area in the county is without emergency communication capability

4. Support volunteer services in Macon County

- Provide incentives for volunteers

- Increase funding as needed for mandatory training requirements

The Economic Development and Public Services Committee acknowledge the excellent service that the Public Water and Sewer Systems provide to the citizens of Macon County. As Macon County experiences future growth, it is imperative that each of the systems remain capable of supporting the population. The committee makes the following recommendations to ensure that these systems remain adequate in the future.

Public Sewer:

1. Take steps to ensure the sewer system is at adequate capacity in advance of need.

- At 70% capacity, begin planning for future expansion or construction of new facilities.
- At 80% to 90% of full capacity, based on the growth rate in effect at the time, begin to secure funding and implement the expansion plan or construction of new treatment facilities.

2. Consider impact that future extensions of the sewer system will have on the rural character of Macon County.

- Extend sewer system only to those areas capable of supporting commercial or large scale residential development.

Public Water:

1. Investigate and pursue establishment of secondary water sources.

2. Take steps to ensure the water system is at adequate capacity in advance of need.

- At 70% capacity, begin planning for future expansion or construction of new facilities.
- At 80% to 90% of full capacity, based on the growth rate in effect at the time, begin to secure funding and implement the expansion plan or construction of new treatment facilities.

3. Consider impact that future extensions of the water systems will have on the rural character of Macon County.

- Extend public water only to those areas capable of supporting commercial or large scale development.

Land Use and Environment

1. The County Planning Board should be authorized by the Macon County Board of Commissioners to begin work on an ordinance governing construction and development on slopes.

- This ordinance should be based on principles recommended by the Slope Development Strategies Subcommittee of the Macon County Planning Board, which presented recommendations to the planning board at the February 2010 meeting.
- The Slope Movement Hazard Maps are very valuable tools and should be utilized in county planning and in developing a Slope Development Ordinance to minimize the probability of future development-related slope failures.

2. The county should consider developing an ordinance aimed at minimizing the affects of stormwater runoff.

- The ordinance should be based on best management practices and should take into consideration the following:
 - Culvert placement and design should be such that erosion and concentrated flows are minimized.
 - Lot sizes should be larger as slope increases.
 - The percent of disturbed area allowed on lots should be controlled.
 - The percent of impervious surfaces allowed on lots should be controlled.
 - Requirements for vegetative retention and type of vegetation should be established.

3. The county should regulate all construction involving land disturbance for residential and commercial construction in the following ways:

- The County should incorporate construction standards into all existing ordinances, as well as in future ordinances dealing with land disturbance. The standards should regulate cut and fill slopes over a certain vertical height and steepness. All constructed slopes over a certain vertical height should be regulated.
 - Placement of fill material should meet minimum criteria:
 - The area upon which the fill is to be placed should be stripped and grubbed, and all vegetative matter should be removed.
 - A bench should be constructed at the toe of the fill.

- The fill material should be free of organic material and vegetative matter.
- Fill material should be placed in lifts
- Fill material should meet compaction standards

1. Maintain and improve the quality of surface and ground water in Macon County through proper management of point and non-point pollution sources.

- Meet or exceed State and Federal standards for potable and discharge water.
- Protect groundwater by restricting septic tank systems to appropriate land forms and soil types.
- Meet or exceed state standards for septic system installation and inspection
- Regulate well density and impacts on sensitive groundwater recharge areas.
- Steer future development towards “soft” approaches to storm water management.
- Design drinking and waste-water systems to accommodate “worst case” scenarios for supply and demand.
- Encourage participation in State and Federal stream-bank restoration and vegetation retention programs. (NC Watershed Enhancement Program)
- Incorporate GIS technology to verify and manage wells, onsite wastewater systems, and resources for future planning.

2. Discourage development which will have unacceptable effects on water quality.

- Coordinate development with appropriate Federal, State(s) and Metropolitan Agencies to insure minimum impact on ground and surface systems and adequate water and waste water capacity.
- Strictly regulate the location of activities that would adversely impact surface and ground water systems and/or their recreational function, scenic beauty or biological health.

1. Ensure that the Economic Development Commission includes agriculture in its economic development plans for Macon County.

- Consider a central farmer’s market/distribution point for products produced in Macon County
- Consider making County economic development incentives more readily available to agriculture related businesses.

2. Consider hiring a County employee to serve as an organizing agent within the agricultural community to promote profitable agriculture. The agent will help “brand”, market and distribute Macon County agriculture products and develop a “farms to school” program where County schools serve locally produced food in cafeterias.

3. Promote agriculture education

- Agriculture classes in County schools
- Encourage SCC, NC Cooperative Extension Service and NC Agricultural Department to offer classes in:
 - Identifying new products and marketing strategies
 - Business planning and management
 - Grant writing
 - Estate planning and other legal issues relevant to farmers
 - Agricultural technical advice including sustainable forest management

4. Promote farmland preservation

- Consider establishing a farmland protection fund
- Promote voluntary agricultural districts
- Ensure that the Present Use Valuation taxation program is fully utilized to best protect farmland.

- 1. Allow communities to petition the Board of Commissioners for the establishment of a local planning area.**
- 2. Consider Impact on rural character in all development decisions—of roads and bridges, of schools and other public facilities; commercial and residential.**
- 3. Support communities in their efforts to preserve their rural, historical, and cultural heritage.**

Education and Recreation

First 5 years (2011-2015)

- 1. Identify and resolve all past due maintenance requirements that create safety and/or major repair issues if not done in a timely manner. (See Appendix(s) ii&iii)**
- 2. Fund preventive maintenance programs to reduce the cost of repairs.**

- 3. Identify, create and fund a publicity entity that will provide clear information to the public on why and how taxpayer investment dollars are needed and spent for education and recreation projects.**
- 4. Start looking now for possible land sites in the Nantahala area for a new school that may be needed within the next decade.**
- 5. Upgrade Franklin High School to bring it into the 21st Century as part of a longer range plan to expand the facility to accommodate projected growth over the next 20 years. *(See detailed recommendations on two options and the estimated cost impact in Appendix ii).***
- 6. Create a dedicated funding source for Education and Recreation. A sales tax dedicated for these quality of life programs will be the less costly way to fund them since the population of Macon County around the Franklin area doubles each summer and the population in Highlands increases by 8 times due to tourists and second home buyers. Therefore the costs to the year round citizens of Macon County will be lower than if the funding was to come from an increase in real estate taxes.**
- 7. Begin lobbying for State and Federal changes in educational programs to allow more local flexibility in planning the school year, method of teaching and technologies used.**
- 8. Create a technology review committee that will update the sub committee, the School Board and Commissioners annually on changes, opportunities and effectiveness for utilizing virtual teaching technology and methods at the lower grade levels (K-12 and below).**
- 9. Obtain funding for the new building at Southwestern Community College.**

Second 5 Years (2016-2020)

- 1. Identify methods for expanding Highlands K-12 school and/or enhancing its capacity by using a hybrid virtual learning program. Both Nantahala and Highlands could benefit from utilizing for example, an English teacher at Franklin High School who could teach via virtual technology to all three schools at the same time.**
- 2. Depending upon the demographics in the Nantahala area, begin the planning to build a new K-12 school there or review how a hybrid virtual learning program can enhance the effective capacity of the current school.**

- 3. Either begin the planning for a new High School for the Franklin area or expand the existing facility along with enhancing the effective capacity by using virtual learning technologies and methods.**
- 4. Begin construction of a new recreational center which can become a convention center/basketball courts/community meeting center/indoor swimming pool complex preferably in cooperation with a business partnership.**
- 5. Continue to have a standing sub committee review demographics and trends and make planning modifications for the master plan.**

Third and Fourth 5 Year Segments (2020-2030)

- 1. Continue to have the sub committee look at demographic, trends and virtual technology to identify needs for expansion and/or acquisitions to create new capacities or efficiencies for schools and recreation.**
With all the uncertainty, it would be difficult to plan beyond a 5 to 10 year range at the current time.

Transportation and Housing

- 1. Provide safe roads while minimizing impact on the mountain landscape, environment, cultural/historical sites, and prime agricultural land.**
 - Design so the natural landscape is dominant
 - Use diverse means to achieve safety, including access management, traffic calming, accepting of slower speeds, turn lanes - not just standard widening and realignment.
 - Identify problem areas and correct using the diverse methods above
 - Provide for pedestrian and bike safety.
 - Design to avoid sprawling development, encourage development around existing commercial corridors. Retain rural character.
 - Preserve sense of place.
- 2. Recognize that development and communities, influence roads and vice versa. Coordinate planning for roads with planning for appropriate development.**
 - Include communities in decision making and respect their wishes.
 - Coordinate road design and improvements with planned and existing land use.

- Access management needs to be implemented on commercial corridors that will experience growth in the future to preserve mobility.
- Adequate access should be provided to all institutions.

3. Promote growth and development patterns that reduce trip length, emissions and congestion

- Develop multi-modal transportation planning.
- Integrate development review with transportation planning. Review subdivision ordinance for pedestrian friendly transportation (bike, transit, walking) and consider implementing.
- Encourage growth of local and regional public transportation. Support locally developed plans.
- Build streets and roads for connectivity (eliminate cul-de-sac concept, keep transportation moving).
- Improve mobility options for aging and disabled populations.
- Establish funding sources to aid DOT in funding of sidewalks and other enhancements.
- Incentives for development closer to existing commercial centers around Franklin and Highlands. Eliminate sprawl on main thoroughfares.
- Encourage and promote mixed use development.
- Create Greenway Master Plan. (explore Rails to Trails).
- Promote sustainability through making transportation choices readily available.

4. Continue to support the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) by delegating staff to the two committees, the Transportation Advisory Committee and the Technical Coordinating Committee, which sets the regional transportation priorities for Macon, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Swain and Jackson Counties.

5. Update the NCDOT Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) as the Macon County Comprehensive Plan is updated, or following any major land use changes within the municipalities or the County.

1. Improve sub-standard housing for betterment of health, safety and community

- Study existing health codes and assess for adequate and proper enforcement
- Continue and expand programs that provide for proper disposal of abandoned and unused mobile homes.
- Assess the feasibility of a minimum housing standards ordinance as set forth by NCGS 160A-441.

§ 160A-441. Exercise of police power authorized.

It is hereby found and declared that the existence and occupation of dwellings in this State that are unfit for human habitation are inimical to the welfare and dangerous and

injurious to the health, safety and morals of the people of this State, and that a public necessity exists for the repair, closing or demolition of such dwellings. Whenever any city or county of this State finds that there exists in the city or county dwellings that are unfit for human habitation due to dilapidation, defects increasing the hazards of fire, accidents or other calamities, lack of ventilation, light or sanitary facilities, or due to other conditions rendering the dwellings unsafe or unsanitary, or dangerous or detrimental to the health, safety, morals, or otherwise inimical to the welfare of the residents of the city or county, power is hereby conferred upon the city or county to exercise its police powers to repair, close or demolish the dwellings in the manner herein provided. No ordinance enacted by the governing body of a county pursuant to this Part shall be applicable within the corporate limits of any city unless the city council of the city has by resolution expressly given its approval thereto.

In addition to the exercise of police power authorized herein, any city may by ordinance provide for the repair, closing or demolition of any abandoned structure which the city council finds to be a health or safety hazard as a result of the attraction of insects or rodents, conditions creating a fire hazard, dangerous conditions constituting a threat to children or frequent use by vagrants as living quarters in the absence of sanitary facilities. Such ordinance, if adopted, may provide for the repair, closing or demolition of such structure pursuant to the same provisions and procedures as are prescribed herein for the repair, closing or demolition of dwellings found to be unfit for human habitation. (1939, c. 287, s. 1; 1969, c. 913, s. 1; 1971, c. 698, s. 1; 1973, c. 426, s. 60; 1975, c. 664, s. 15.)

2. Promote high density and cluster housing in areas where this development can best be accommodated.

- Encourage public and private partnerships to expand water and sewer.
- Encourage mixed use development that integrates residential and commercial facilities to meet the daily needs of residents and reduce the need for travel.

3. Promote a variety of housing opportunities for all ages and income levels.

- First time home buyers
- Rental home choices
- Retiree
- Assisted Living
- Affordable Housing Options
- Walkable/Livable Communities
- Custom/Luxury Homes
- Vacation Home

Healthcare/Childcare/Senior Citizens

***Situation:** The health of our County Residents is less than ideal. There currently is not a lot of funding for Prevention / Wellness. Additionally, a large group of seniors within the county want more activities than just Senior Games.*

Recommendations:

1. Create a Healthy Active Environment in Macon County by building Active Living Communities

- Add more Sidewalks as roads are upgraded
- Add Bike Trails as roads are upgraded
- Emphasize fitness whenever possible with new construction

2. Work with Chamber of Commerce on Worksite Wellness

- Encourage employers to encourage employees to be active
- Encourage employers to facilitate fitness activities prior to work, after work, and at meal breaks

3. Consider seniors when developing fitness centers and activities to facilitate healthier and longer lives for our residents

- Hire a full time senior activity director
- Continue to support senior games
- Plan for seniors at all levels, including field trips, activities and events for Alzheimer's, etc.
- Work with existing recreation facilities to promote senior health, i.e. reduced rates for seniors, etc.
- Encourage new facilities to be senior friendly, affordable and have adequate room for expansion

***Situation:** There are currently many people that are underserved medically in Macon County, even with programs provided by the Free Care Clinics, the Medication Assistance Program, the Angel Medical Center Emergency Department, Ladies Night Out and the Macon County Public Health Center.*

Recommendations:

4. Support the Free Care Clinics, the Medication Assistance Program, the local hospitals, Ladies Night Out and the Macon County Public Health Center

- Support the development of a Collaborative Network to coordinate the services being provided to the low-income, uninsured county residents by the safety net providers that currently exist or that may be developed in the future.
- Assist in writing grants and providing letters of support for any grants that are available for these services and other services that can assist the underserved medical needs of our residents.
- Commit to provide some fixed amount of dollars that can be used to provide services in any of these areas, at times when other sources are insufficient to meet the needs.

5. Work with community providers to improve quality of care by implementing management tools that ensure the use of best practices; manage high-risk patients and high-cost services; and incorporates accountability.

***Situation:** Currently there are several specialists that are routinely needed by Macon County residents that are not available in Macon County in sufficient quantity to meet those needs. These include Orthopedic Surgeons, Urologists and Rheumatologists. The need for these specialists is heightened by the current age of our residents. Angel Medical Center and Highlands Cashiers Hospital are the primary recruiters of physicians to Macon County, but many times the first year recruitment costs for a specialty can be \$400,000 or more, which is a very big commitment for anyone, but especially small hospitals.*

Recommendations:

- 6. Support local hospitals as they apply for grants and evaluate whether there is any way to financially support any recruitment efforts or other efforts they may initiate for the good of the community.**
- 7. Reduce property taxes on medical office building space used for new physicians as a way to incent recruitment of physicians.**

Overall Comments related to Seniors in Macon County:

A large group of seniors lie in the “gray area” between being “wealthy” and qualifying for Medicaid. This group of individuals is underserved. Not all seniors in Macon County are in the “second home” income bracket. Seniors, like so many others in Macon County are feeling the effects of the recent economic downturn.

Seniors (55+) account for approximately 35% of the population in Macon County. This segment of the population is significant to our county. On a national level, the senior citizen population is expected to grow significantly. By 2020 we are expected to realize a 36% population increase in people 65+ in America. (Report on Aging) We must be ready for this “silver tsunami” and realize the effects it will have on the future of our county.

***Situation:** In Macon County, there is adequate nursing home space today, but there is a shortage of assisted living facilities and independent living facilities. There are currently two or more entities evaluating Franklin as a potential site for an independent living facility. Additionally, Grandview is evaluating the possible expansion of its assisted living facility. With the shortage of independent living and assisted living facilities, many of our residents and part-time residents look to other areas of the state and nation for their home. This is a negative for both our residents as well as economically for our county.*

Recommendations:

- 8. Promote livable, senior friendly communities - the vast majority of Americans want to remain in their communities as they age (report on aging). This in turn saves them and “us”, being taxpayer’s, money in the long run.**
 - Work to make Macon County a “Livable & Senior Friendly” Community.
 - Work with developers, realtors and contractors - educate them on senior friendly housing communities.
 - Educate businesses on avenues they can explore to become “Senior Friendly.”
 - Develop appropriate housing options for seniors - Macon County’s workforce has a high number of senior citizens. This group of citizens needs appropriate housing options that are affordable.
 - i. Conduct a feasibility study for appropriate and affordable senior housing options in Macon County.
- 9. Cooperate fully with acceptable entities that are trying to add assisted living or independent living facilities in Macon County.**
 - Encourage the accommodation of water and power needs for these entities.
 - Provide tax break incentives to encourage investment by these entities into Macon County.
- 10. On at least an annual basis, the Elder Care Committee should devote a meeting to address the adequacy of senior facilities within the County.**

Situation:

Seniors in the Nantahala community would like to be more involved with the senior services that Macon County has to offer.

Recommendations:

- 11. Devote more time and hours to senior recreation in Nantahala.**

- 12. Coordinate events in Nantahala and Highlands with Senior Center in Macon County.**
- 13. Make someone from Macon County Senior Center available 2 days a month in Nantahala and Highlands.**
 - Advertise upcoming events
 - Assess needs

Encourage the local government to provide on-going support and assistance as needed for the Childcare industry in Macon County, now and in the future.

- 1. Strongly consider implementing recommendations set forth in the “Childcare in Macon County” Interim report (Jan 2010). These recommendations represent the minimum requirements for addressing the current shortage of child care capacity in Macon County.**
- 2. Ensure that the EDC makes childcare a top priority when recruiting new business into Macon County.**
 - Work with surrounding counties that have incorporated childcare mechanisms into their economic development efforts.
 - Develop financial incentives for providing childcare
 - Financial incentives are also needed to sustain the small home centers currently serving the county, to encourage the growth of new child care centers in Macon County, and to encourage individuals and businesses to become child care providers. The goal is to eliminate the current shortages in preschool child care capacity and to stimulate and maintain a healthy local childcare growth rate.
- 3. Provide on-going support for the Childcare industry in Macon County**
 - Create an endowment fund for the Macon County childcare industry in the future. Solicit public and private financial support, as well as grants to build a community endowment.
 - Use annual endowment income for purposes such as training for private childcare providers, creating new or upgrading existing facilities, and to create financial grants for new providers during the first three years of operation.
- 4. Explore the implementation of a central intake for childcare providers.**
 - Work with surrounding counties, finding out who currently uses the central intake system for childcare.
- 5. Ensure the continuation of the Childcare Issues committee**

- Childcare Issues Committee will hold meetings periodically to assess and monitor the progress of the childcare industry in Macon County, while creating public awareness of childcare issues as the county grows.
- 6. Macon County Government should work in co-operation with MPP to address future expansion needs.**
- Assist MPP in expansion needs such as adequate property location.
 - This process should be accompanied by a public education process to private childcare providers, notifying them that MPP has a niche in the childcare market, as they provide childcare to those who could not afford services in the private childcare sector.
- 7. Work to subsidize education for Private Childcare Providers in small business.**
- Many childcare providers quit not because they have lost their love for children, but for reasons directly related to their lack of knowledge in small business operations.
 - Explore Grant opportunities
 - Partner with SCC or nonprofit organization, to create and fund an educational program designed to help local childcare providers understand the financial and management aspects of running a small business, and also to understand the complex requirements of the NC child care agency requirements. Provide local grants or financial support for the child care providers who successfully complete the educational program. A part of this program will be a resource center for local providers to obtain information and technical assistance for specific business challenges for their childcare operations.

Work with State Legislators in finding suitable alternatives to current childcare licensure requirements.

- 8. Work with state Legislators in developing suitable alternatives to the Star Rating and temporary child care licensure systems that currently apply to a new business.**
- Send a formal request to our State Representatives, Senator, and the State Legislature as soon as possible requesting action to reduce the time required for a new center to obtain a temporary license and to base the provisional Star Rating for a new child care center's temporary license on the Star Rating for which it is applying instead of the lowest One Star rating currently assigned that penalizes new center's financial support under the NC Child Care Subsidy Program.