

LAND USE PLAN 2022



CANTON
NORTH CAROLINA

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A special thank you to the citizens and stakeholders of Canton who took their time to engage with project team to ensure this Plan helps guide the Town in the right direction.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Town of Canton is comfortably nestled in the Smoky Mountains of Haywood County. Its visitors and residents enjoy proximity to the City of Asheville as well as natural amenities such as trails and parks. At its core, the Town reflects its origins in wood, water, and steel. Construction of the Champion Fibre Company Mill caused an explosion of the Town's early population. The mill processed lumber for wood pulp and intended to utilize the Pigeon River to transport products. However, upon discovering that the river was not an efficient transportation method, construction of railroad lines began. This establishment of industry and connectivity nurtured the Town and thus, Canton was truly born through industrial development.

Today, visitors and residents can still enjoy the calm waters of Pigeon River and hear the freight cars transporting goods from the iconic plant. However, this Town's story is far from complete. Future park creation, new land development requests, recent and historic flooding events, and emerging economic opportunities require that the Town of Canton be proactive in its planning and development. Land use decisions must work to improve the built environment of the Town rather than constrain it.

The Town's past was associated with wood, water, and steel. Ingenuity, creativity, and holistic planning will guide its future.



Purpose

Land Use Plans are important documents for municipalities in North Carolina. Broadly, their intent is threefold:

- Fulfill the N.C.G.S. § 160D-501 requirement to “adopt and reasonably maintain a comprehensive plan or land-use plan” as part of adopting and applying zoning regulations. Having a Land Use Plan is required to maintain and enforce zoning requirements.
- Function as a reference for Town’s governing body in deciding text or map amendments. N.C.G.S. § 160D-605 requires a consistency statement to be made affirming that a development proposal aligns with the goals of the Town’s adopted plans.
- Establish a future vision for the Town and outline actions to achieve that vision. Evaluating existing conditions, incorporating public involvement, identifying areas for improvement, and establishing next steps for the Town guides Canton from where it is today into its promising future.

Process

The land use planning process in Canton involved a number of coordinated and deliberate actions to better understand the history and dynamic of the Town as well as determine what goals the citizens, staff, and governing body hope to achieve in the future.

1. Project Kickoff - Town leadership met with the consultant to initiate the project and evaluate notable opportunities and obstacles. Discussion of ongoing and future projects also allowed the project team to develop a guiding snapshot of the Town’s current land use conditions.
2. Background Research and Analysis - The project team reviewed demographic and population data extending as far back as the 1930’s to understand any notable trends over the Town’s history. Recently adopted plans, reports, ordinances, and policies were also evaluated to understand planning intent and areas to include mutually beneficial outcomes between the Land Use Plan and the other Town documents. Broadly, the Town of Canton was analyzed at a regional level to understand its current place and function within Haywood County.
3. Coordination with the Steering Committee - The project team heavily relied on the input and assistance of the Steering Committee. This committee was made up of Town

residents, leaders, and stakeholders. Throughout the project, the Steering Committee provided input on draft chapters, helped develop the unified vision of the Land Use Plan, and analyzed feedback from public engagement efforts to steer the direction of Plan development so that it remains a product of Canton citizens.

4. Public Engagement - The project team developed physical and digital surveys, conducted a public workshop, and met with the Planning Board and Board of Aldermen/women to receive input on both community needs and recommendations. Throughout this time the Steering Committee received updates and summaries of community input, in turn working with the project team to make additions and adjustments as necessary.
5. Visioning and Goal Setting - The project team worked with the Steering Committee to review the Town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (also known as SWOT Analysis) and utilized its finding to draft a singular vision for the Town and provide supporting goals for vision achievement.
6. Development of Implementation Items and Future Land Use Map - Implementation items and the Future Land Use Map were developed through an iterative design process including the project team's expertise, comments and guidance from the Steering Committee, as well as expert local knowledge from the general public.
7. Plan Finalization- The project team worked with the Steering Committee to incorporate any outstanding elements prior to going before the Town's Board for consideration and adoption.

While Plan development incorporated many steps over its development, the Land Use Plan at its core is trying to answer three key questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we get there?



In the next Chapters, we will be reviewing emerging trends in historic data, evaluate previously adopted plans, look into the Town's role in the greater region, and review the work done during public outreach. Together, these elements will help answer the first question, "Where are we now?"

CHAPTER 2: DEMOGRAPHICS

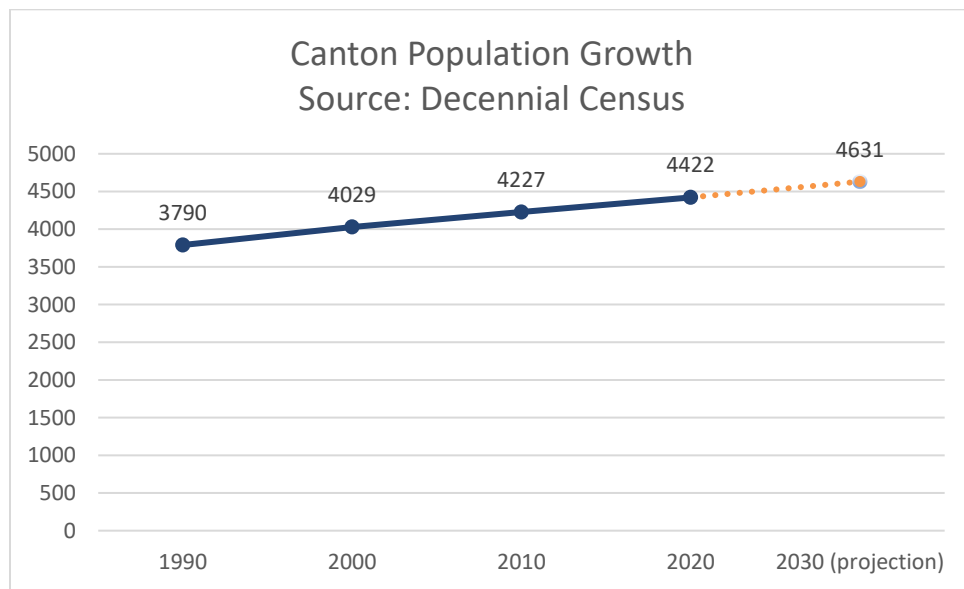
Canton has changed over time. One of the key tasks in understanding the current state of a community is analyzing its demographics and population to identify trends in historic data as well as future projections. The following demographic data was obtained from the American Community Survey and the Decennial Census, two products of the United States Census Bureau. Although this data is static in nature, a trend analysis will allow the Town to make informed decisions based on trends that may impact the delivery of services over the next ten to fifteen years.

Population

(Source: Decennial Census)

The Town of Canton's population has grown gradually over the past 30 years. In 1990, 3,790 citizens lived in the town. The Town's population growth occurred slowly in the 2000's and boomed in the 2010's, increasing by 6.3% and 4.9%, respectively. Between 2010 and 2020, the population continued to grow, reaching 4,227 residents, a 4.6% increase from 2010. On a regional scale, the growth in Canton has paralleled the growth in Haywood County. The County's population significantly increased by 15.1% between 1990 and 2000, 9.3% between 2000 and 2010, and 5.2% between 2010 and 2020. The Town of Canton has grown at a slower but more consistent rate between 2000 and 2020. Population projections for the Town continue this upward trend with an estimated 2030 population of 4,631 residents.

The linear growth indicated by the historic and current data represents a stable Town population. Planning efforts can assume that Canton's population will not drastically increase or decrease over the next 10-15 years, allowing for clearer understanding of the Town's needs in 2030.

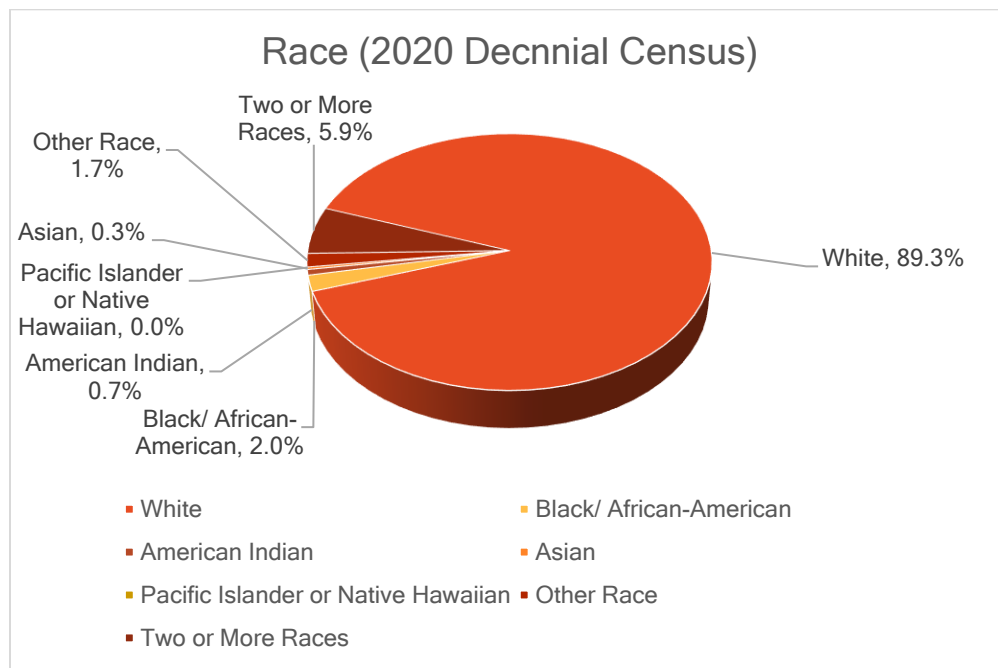


Race & Ethnicity

(Source: Decennial Census)

The Town of Canton has a slightly more diverse population make up than the regional area in 2010. White residents comprise of 93.3% of the Town's total population. Black residents represent 1.8% of the population with 4.1% of the Town's residents being Hispanic. Persons who identify with two or more races represent 2.3% of the population. American Indians represent 2.3% of the population and Asian residents represent 0.3%.

Minimal changes were noted in the Town's population since 2010, including a slight increase in the Black and Hispanic populations, who experienced 0.2% and 1.7% increases, respectively. Persons who identify with two or more races saw an increase of 3.6%. American Indian and white residents saw a decrease in population, experiencing 1.6% and 4% decreases, respectively. Compared to Haywood County which consists of 91.7% white residents, the Town and the County are both experiencing a slight increase in diverse populations.

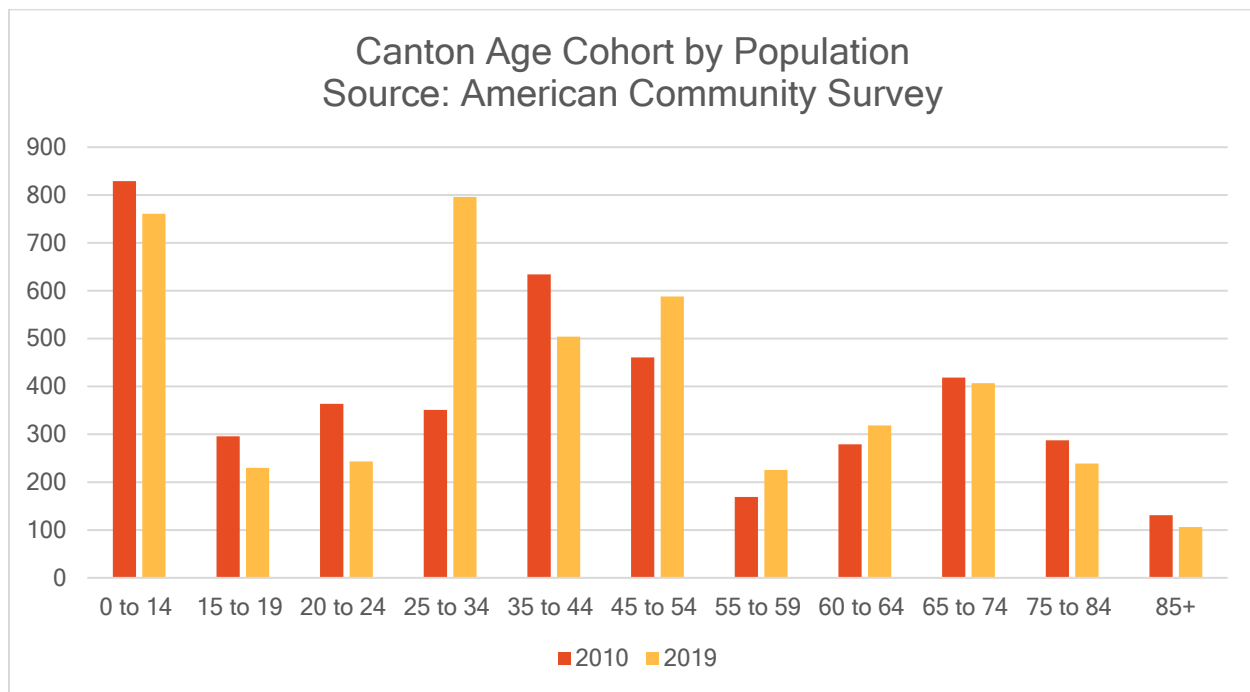


Additionally, both the Town and County saw a slight increase in Hispanic/Latino ethnic groups. Canton increased 1.7% from 4.1% in 2010 to 5.8% in 2019. Similarly, Haywood County increased from 3.1% in 2010 to 4.6% in 2019 representing a 1.5% increase overall.

Age

(Source: American Community Survey)

Since 2010, the Town of Canton's age distribution has slightly shifted. In 2010, the population of residents aged 65 and older represented 19.9% of the total population; however, in 2019, they represented 17% of the population. The median age of residents decreased by 0.4 years from a median of 40.6 in 2010 to 40.2 in 2019. This median age is younger than Haywood County which had an estimated median age of 47.6 in 2019. Citizens under the age of 18 experienced a slight decrease in population share from 23.7% in 2010 to 21.7% in 2019. Though many changes were minimal in Canton, there was a substantial change in the age 25 to 34 years age group which saw a population share increase from 8.3% to 9.7% in 2010 and to 18% of the population in 2019.



This data reflects the changing in the population groups as we see increases in those 25 to 34 and 45 to 54 but decreases in those 24 and under. Another trend to note is the decrease within the 65 and older population. Canton's location just over 7 miles from the Haywood County Regional Medical Center is an important feature, especially for those with families and the elderly. In light of these changes, planning efforts must be considerate and inclusive of all age groups and abilities.

Housing

(Source: Decennial Census & American Community Survey)

Since 2010, Canton has removed approximately 77 housing units, a 3.6% decrease in the housing stock. When looking at supply and demand, the occupancy rate of the Town increased to 92.4% in 2020, meaning the decrease in stock did not have an adverse effect. The vacancy rate also trended positively as there was a 5.2% decrease in the number of vacant units resulting in only 7.6% of the housing stock being vacant in 2020. This is drastically different from Haywood County which has 22.1% of its housing stock vacant and the State average of 11.6% vacancy in 2019. In 2010, the balance of owner-occupied and rental housing sat around 68.8% and 31.2%, respectively. Owner-occupied housing accounted for 59.1% of the Town's housing stock in 2019, while in the County, it accounted for 73% of all housing stock. There seems to be a downward trend of owner-occupied houses and an upward trend of renter-

occupied houses within the Town as renter-occupied housing saw a 9.7% increase from 2010 to account for 40.9% of all housing stock.

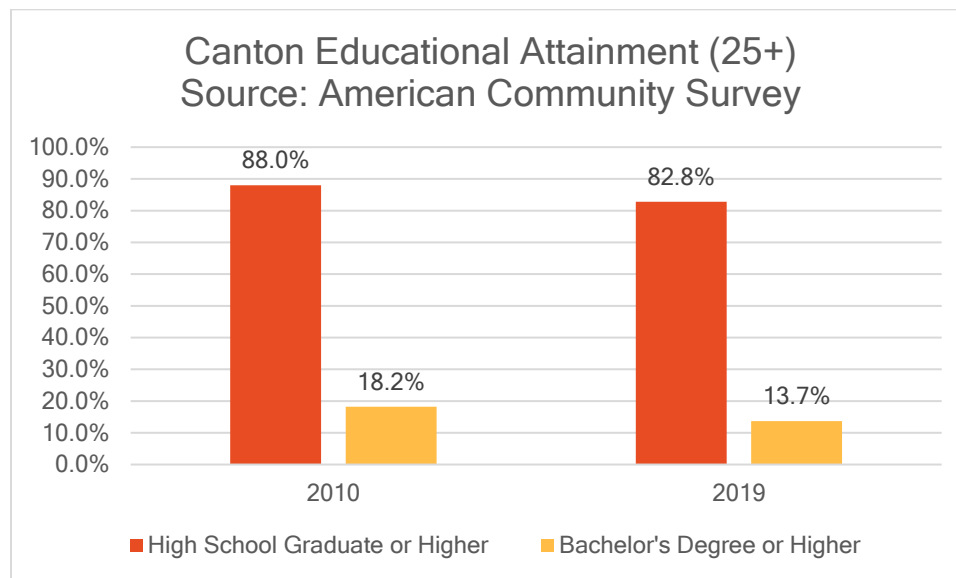
Canton has experienced some slight changes in household dynamics. From 2010 to 2019, it saw a 7.3% decrease in households that are constituted of families. In 2019, 60.4% of households were family households, leaving 39.6% of households comprised of non-family members. The decrease in households that consist of families is seemingly contradictory to the 5.5% increase of households with people under the age of 18. This middle population of persons under 18 not living with family could mean a number of things like foster care, group homes, etc.

Canton has experienced a decrease in housing stock as well as a decrease in vacant units but also an overall increase in occupancy. This indicates that people want to be within the Canton municipal limits, especially considering the large vacancy rate of the County. Notably, there are more renter-occupied household in the Town as well as more households with persons under the age of 18. Also, there was a decrease in households with families as well as a notable increase in households that are non-family. This represents interesting planning challenges and opportunities for the comprehensive plan. This plan shall address the utilization of the Town's housing stock while recognizing the implications of the increasing number of non-family households and those households with those under 18.

Education

(Source: American Community Survey)

Educational attainment is a measure of education received for citizens 25 years or older. From 2010 to 2019, high school or higher educational attainment decreased from 88% to 82.8%, a 5.2% decrease. Furthermore, 13.7% of citizens possessed a bachelor's degree or higher level of education in 2019, a 4.5% decrease from 2010. Educational attainment is greater in Haywood County where 88% of residents have graduated from high school and recipients of bachelor's degrees or higher degrees make up 26.0% of the County's population.



Though the County is experiencing an increase in the educated population, the Town is seeing a decrease. Higher levels of education may create more opportunities for employment in specialized industries and increased incomes. Future planning efforts must identify ways to attract educated professionals to Canton.

Employment and Income

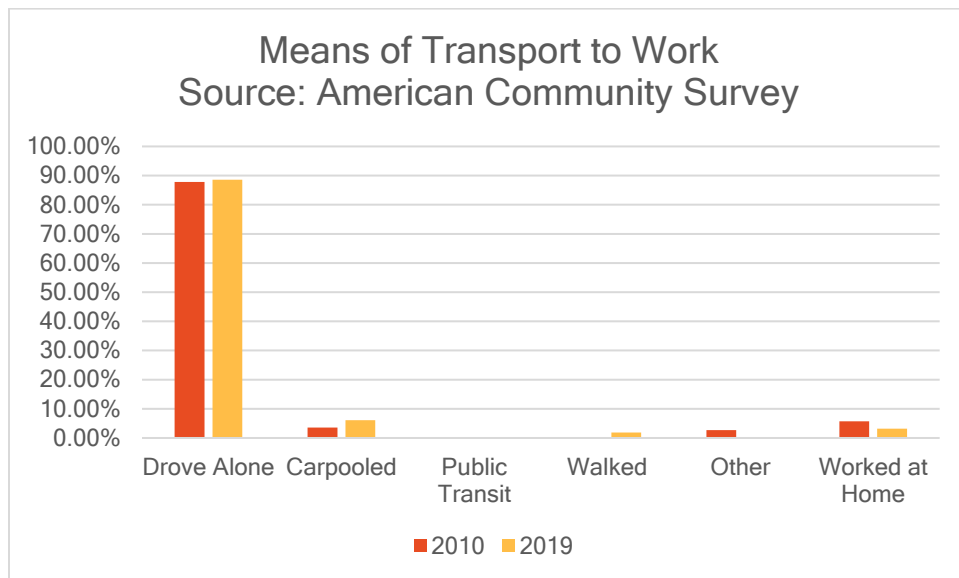
(Source: American Community Survey)

Employment among citizens aged 16 years or older has decreased slightly from 2010 to 2019. 76.5% of this group was employed in 2019. Resident income has improved from 2010 to 2019 with a median income increase of \$7,048 inflation adjusted dollars to \$44,107. Income levels remained relatively stable in 2019 apart from three key groups; “\$10,000 to \$14,999” which decreased 6.5% to 2.8% of the median income, “\$35,000 to \$49,999” which increased 10% to 24.5% of the median income, and “\$100,000 to \$149,999” which increased 6% in 2019 from 2.7% in 2010. Compared to the County, the median income of Canton is \$7,552 less than the region. It is important to understand and the community’s context in the region prior to determining plan objectives to maximize project/policy feasibility. Seeing a decrease in the lesser earning salary and increases within a middle salary range and six-figure salaries in addition to increasing education attainment indicates that Canton citizens, on average, have increasing levels of disposable income that can be reinvested into the community.

Commuting Characteristics

(Source: American Community Survey)

The number of workers (16 years and over) increased slightly from 3,383 in 2010 to 3,483 in 2019. During the same period, the percentage of people who drove alone to work increased from 87.8% to 88.6% and carpool increased from 3.6% to 6.1%. People working from home and taking public transportation to work have seen decreases, from 5.7% to 3.2% and 0.3% to 0% respectively. There was also a decrease of mean travel time to work from 21.1 mins in 2010 to 20.3 mins in 2019. This data does not include the most recent Coronavirus pandemic in which many across Canton and the County may have been required to work from home. The American Community Survey occurs in 3 and 5 increments and may have captured just how the pandemic effected jobs and commuting to jobs within the Town and County.



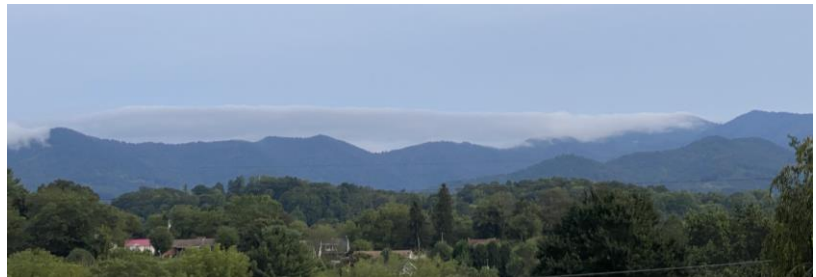
CHAPTER 3: REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Town of Canton is located near the eastern limits of Haywood County. Canton is the second largest municipality in the county, with the Town of Waynesville being the largest. Major corridors in the county include I-40, US-74, US-23, and US-276. Despite being located between Asheville and the western destinations, the Town is largely bypassed by I-40 and US-74. The Town resides about a 20-minute car ride from Asheville and a 1-hour car ride to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Medical centers and hospitals are all easily accessible along US-23 and US-74.

While the Town has experienced some growth in the past 10 years, it is occurring at a slower rate than surrounding cities and the overall County. Young professionals are being drawn to amenities and opportunities of larger communities with restaurants, breweries, and recreational activities.

According to the Haywood Chamber of Commerce, the top five employers in the county are:

1. Haywood County Schools
2. Evergreen Packaging
3. Haywood Regional Medical Center
4. Ingles Markets, Inc
5. County of Haywood



Notably, these top employers are either located within the Town or within a short driving distance.

Public schools within and around Canton are managed by Haywood County Schools. County schools ranked 10th among the state's 115 school districts based on the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's annual performance composites.

The County's topography makes it susceptible to flooding events, notably the recent damage caused by Tropical Storm Fred. Flood zones coupled with steep slopes limit the development potential of the region.

CHAPTER 4: PREVIOUS PLANS & STUDIES

The Town of Canton’s comprehensive plan can be understood as the next step in a lineage of long-range plans and reports that have helped guide the Town’s growth throughout the years. These documents work to build upon one another and thus must be considered during the creation of this comprehensive plan. This plan will integrate the goals and findings of the previous works and coordinate them in a way that drives holistic improvement throughout the community. Please refer to the following plans for additional details; a brief synopsis of their takeaways is provided herein.

Chestnut Mountain Nature Park Master Plan 2020

Waynesville 2035 Planning with Purpose 2020

Canton Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan 2019

Southwestern NC Economic Development District A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2018

Haywood County Affordable Housing Strategy (Draft) 2017

Bike in Beds: How to Maximize Bicycle Tourism in Haywood County and WNC 2015

Subdivision Regulations 1977

Zoning Regulations 1977

Chestnut Mountain Nature Park Master Plan

(Adopted 2020)

The Chestnut Mountain Nature Park Master Plan represents an ambitious undertaking to protect approximately 450 acres of parkland east of the Town. Adopted in 2020, this plan lays the foundation of the park’s function and benefits as well as providing a three-phased implementation plan. The plans cite wildlife conservation, development of a regional recreation hub, and economic development as the primary driving factors of the project. It is projected to cost a little over \$1.6 million in total with various funding partners or mechanisms contributing to each phase. Chestnut Mountain Nature Park is anticipated to have hiking, playgrounds,

biking, and educational opportunities in addition to passive recreation facilities. The park first opened in April 2022.

Impact on the Land Use Plan

This plan is an important element of understanding the Future Land Use needs of the Town. Establishment of a regional park located just about one mile outside of the Town core allows for future Town recreational developments to focus on organized sports or youth facilities. Organized sports are not anticipated to be provided at the park, and youth facilities will remain important for those without access to the park.

The park also serves as an environmental resource that advocates the benefits of conservancy. Flooding and storm events have greatly impacted development in the Town and further education of conservation can help alleviate future development pressures. The plan seeks to preserve on-site wetlands and utilize stormwater control measures to reduce run-off.

Additionally, success of the regional park will bring visitors directly into the Town of Canton. Retail and hospitality-oriented businesses are expected to see increased activity upon the completion of the park, ensuring that downtown development remains commercially driven.



Waynesville 2035 Comprehensive Plan

(Adopted 2020)

The Waynesville 2035 Comprehensive Plan represents a similar endeavor being undertaken by this Plan. Waynesville staff worked with consulting firms and stakeholder groups to produce this replacement of their previous 2020 comprehensive plan. Like other long range planning endeavors, the 2035 Comprehensive Plan holistically evaluates the Town and greater region.

Impact on the Land Use Plan

While the Town's location related to Canton excludes many of its recommendations having direct relevance to the creation of this Plan, the 2035 Comprehensive Plan notes an opportunity for existing railroad spurs. The plan notes that the Norfolk Southern railroad lines within Waynesville contain four active spurs. It states that these lines receive no more than one or two trains a day, and that there is a possibility of these lines being decommissioned in the future. If decommissioning occurs, there is an opportunity for a greenway route linking Waynesville, Asheville, Sylva, Canton, Clyde, and Bryson City. The possibility of such a future regional connection should be continually monitored by Canton leadership.

Canton Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan

(Adopted 2019)

The Canton Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan represents a strategic partnership between the Town of Canton and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation. This plan includes a comprehensive review of existing conditions within and around the Town, documentation of robust community outreach efforts, detailed recommendations for the bicycle/pedestrian network and implementation items to be undertaken by staff and stakeholders. Cost estimates have been provided based on facility installation as well to help staff budget and benchmark network improvements.

Plan development is based on the goal to have residents and visitors choose active transportation over vehicle use. This is furthered in that Canton is already established itself as a starting point for many scenic biking routes in the region. This will only continue with the development of the Chestnut Mountain Nature Park. Daily use by both children and the elderly helps enable and empower these populations to navigate their Town without the need for an automobile. This is known as the 8-to-80 vision of the plan and sets the groundwork for a comprehensive and interconnected multi-modal network for the Town of Canton.

Impact on the Land Use Plan

The Canton Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan provides insight into future connectivity within the Town of Canton. Recommendations made as part of the Land Use Plan must work to promote and be harmonious with the vision of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan to ensure that both Plans work

to further the goals of one another. Bicycle and pedestrian connections along Old Clyde Road and Asheville Highway also provide opportunities for walkable amenities and features that strengthen gateways into the Town.

Southwestern NC Economic Development District: A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

(Adopted 2018)

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy represents the Southwestern Commission Council of Government's endeavor to develop a regional strategy for economic improvements. The plan was funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. It spans seven counties and is designed to evaluate existing conditions, prepare goals/strategies, and outline an implementation plan for future action. Four major Goals were established in the plan:

1. Build on the Region's Competitive Advantages and Leverage the Market Place
2. Establish and Maintain a Robust Regional Infrastructure
3. Create Revitalized, Healthy, and Resilient Communities
4. Develop Talented and Innovative People

Impact on the Land Use Plan

Due to the size of the Southwestern Commission's size and membership, it is difficult to extrapolate details pertaining to Canton proper. However, at a broad level the plan identifies notable trends in the region that are important to the development of this Plan and the Town. Survey results from the plan indicate that the top three infrastructure issues facing the region are:

1. Broadband/high-speed internet infrastructure and access
2. Access to natural gas
3. Recycling systems

On the other hand, the top three assets for the region were:

1. Natural amenities/outdoor recreation
2. Clean environment
3. Access to higher education

And lastly, the top three opportunities for creating healthy revitalized, and vibrant communities were:

1. Access to a variety of housing that meets the needs of all people in the community
2. Distribution of healthcare facilities throughout the region
3. Promotion of health and wellness

The Land Use Plan must work to efficiently address the challenges and opportunities of the Town. Large challenges such as internet quality and utilities will most likely need to be tackled by working directly with regional partners including Haywood County and the greater Southwestern Commission. Entities operating at that scale are able to help develop the overall network vision and work with large partners to guide implementation. On the other hand, the plan notes that region's advantages are present in the attractive natural amenities. The Land Use Plan will continue to leverage these amenities to promote Canton tourism. Housing and healthcare are indicated as future opportunities for the region, identifying that equity and access to healthcare are important consideration in the development of this Plan.

Haywood County Affordable Housing Strategy (Draft)

(Adopted June 2017)

The Haywood County Affordable Housing Strategy began in March of 2016 with the establishment of a task force by the Haywood County Board of County Commissioners. This brief document establishes the need for affordable housing within Haywood County and proposes specific Objectives and Recommendations for housing development. It cites that growth in Buncombe County and Asheville has driven movement into Haywood County to find more affordable housing. A 2017 market analysis determined that Haywood County had a demand of 1,913 rental units for tenants who make 40% - 60% of the area median income. Challenges associated with development of affordable housing units included flood zones, steep slopes, construction costs, and utility availability.

Impact on the Land Use Plan

Diverse housing options are an important element to the health of a Town. Varied housing options help ensure equitable opportunities for residents, regardless of if they require workforce housing, a starter home, or have lived in the Town all their life. Evaluation of the Zoning Regulations and infill development standards will be required to identify areas of implementation that can help promote diverse housing opportunities are available in Canton.

Bike in Beds: How to Maximize Bicycle Tourism in Haywood County & WNC

(Adopted 2015)

The Bike in Beds report was jointly developed by the Haywood County Tourism Department Authority and the Southwestern Commission. This report was designed as an update to the Haywood County 2011 Comprehensive Bicycle Plan and meant to help capture and maximize revenue generated from regional bicycle tourism.

Impact on the Land Use Plan

The report specifically notes that a greenway connection between Waynesville and Canton could attract thousands of visitors and generate up to \$1 million in annual tourism expenditures. The report also notes that construction of a greenway trail across the county could result in a one-time increase in property values for all properties within a quarter mile of the greenway. The Land Use Plan must consider the economic benefits of regional greenways and evaluate utilization of some of its lands that are difficult to develop (via steep slopes, flood zones, or otherwise) to help build this regional greenway network and tourism identity.

Subdivision Regulations

(Originally Adopted April 12, 1977)

The Town's Subdivision Regulations control the development of subdivisions within the Town's jurisdiction. These regulations were originally adopted on April 12, 1977. Since then, the ordinance has received amendments and updates as deemed necessary by the Town. Review of the ordinance reveals that prior to the 2021 amendments containing provisions required by N.C.G.S. 160D, the ordinance was last amended in September of 1993. As such, the ordinance lacks important design criteria and policies that are available 29 years later. Geometric criteria such as requiring right-angle street connections and landscaping/open space provisions are not present. This, in turn, can limit the quality of future subdivision development within the Town.

Impact on the Land Use Plan

At the time of this project's publication, the Subdivision Regulations have been rewritten based on staff, stakeholder, and consultant review. Subdivision regulations were updated with the context of this project in mind, and thus work to realize the vision of this Plan.

Zoning Regulations

(Originally Adopted March 22, 1977)

The Town of Canton Zoning Regulations were adopted on March 22, 1977. Similarly, to the Subdivision Regulations, the Zoning Regulations have been amended since initial adoption. Zoning Regulations facilitate a larger set of elements than the Subdivision Regulations and include land development procedures, zoning districts, land uses allowed, application requirements, enforcement/penalties, parking, setbacks among other important land development elements. Since Zoning Regulations are more widely used than Subdivision Regulations within the Town, the Zoning Regulations have been amended at a more frequent pace.

Impact on the Land Use Plan

While the regulations have been updated at a more frequent pace, elements such as lot dimensional requirements, permitted uses, and use standards may be prohibiting healthy growth and infill within the Town. Development of this Plan will help identify aspects of the Zoning Regulations that are prohibiting positive growth within the Town. In turn, the Plan may recommend changes within the Zoning Regulations that will work to complement the efforts of the Plan's vision.

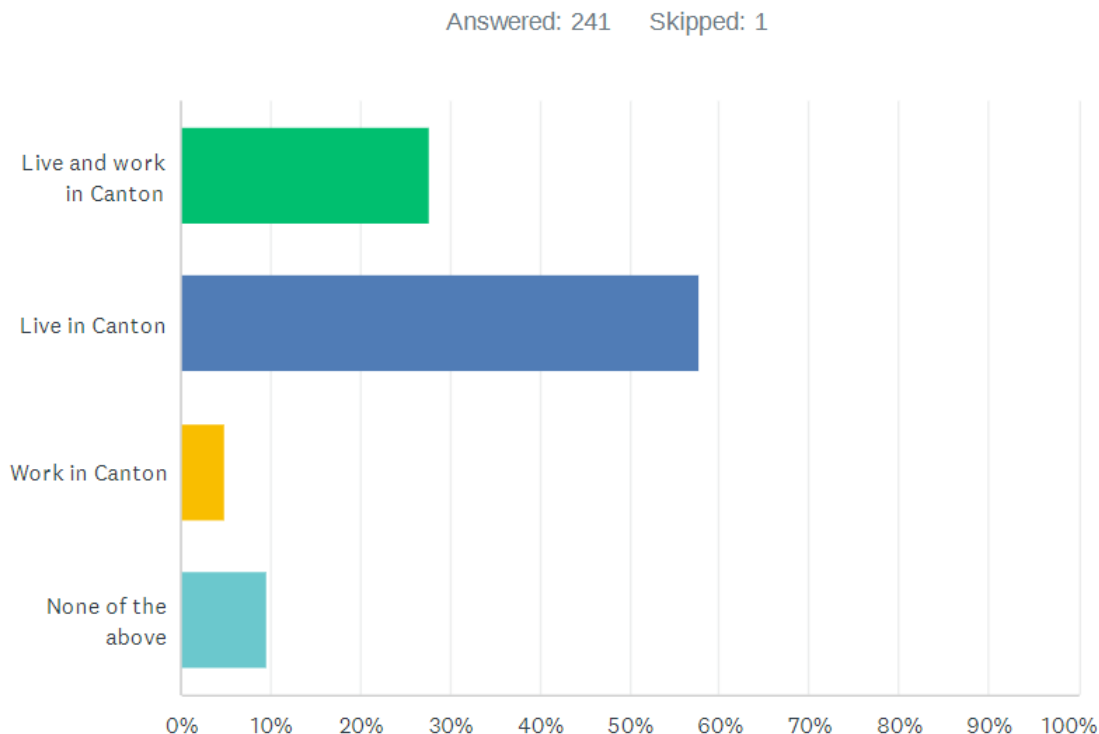
CHAPTER 5: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The most important component of a Land Use Plan is public engagement. This document is designed to guide the growth of the Town over the next 10 - 15 years. As such, it should be a document developed by those who will be most affected by it.

Survey

An online survey was launched on February 21st, 2022. The survey contained questions related to the strengths and challenges of the Town, and asked its respondents what they would like to see for Canton's future. Over the course of the project 242 stakeholders responded to the survey prior to the survey closure on April 18th, 2022. While the feedback received in the survey will manifest in the following chapters, particular attention should be made for the following responses.

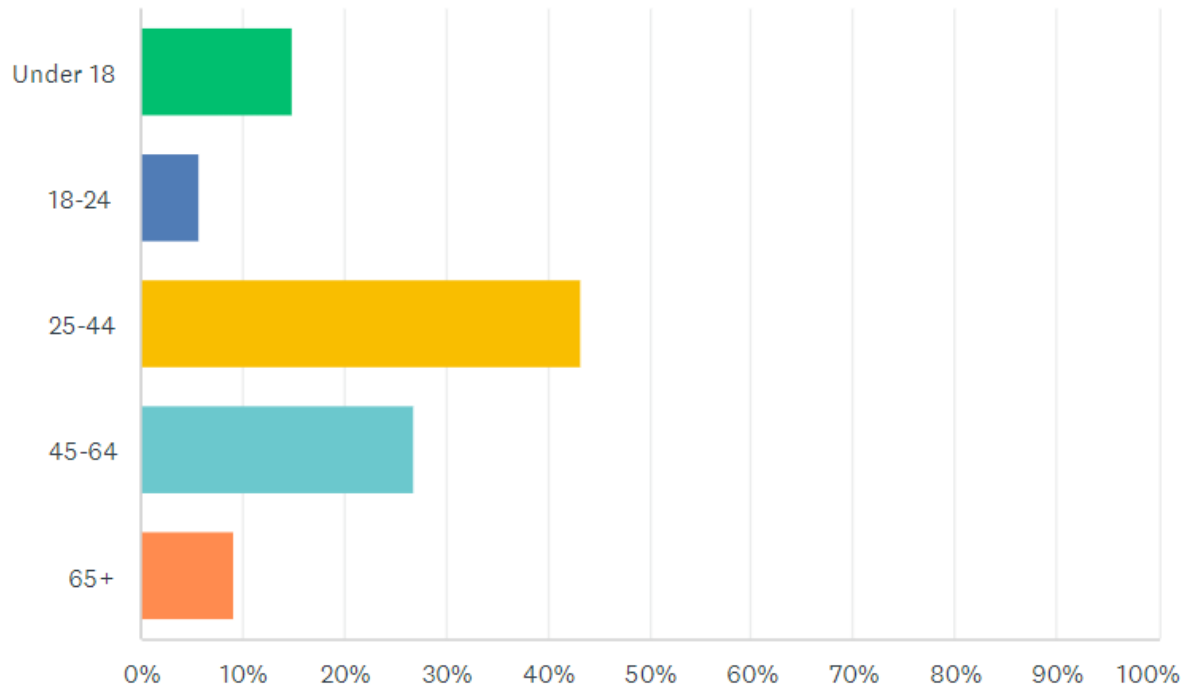
Q1 Please identify your relationship to the Town of Canton.



The majority of respondents, 57.68%, just live in Canton. 27.80% both live and work in Canton. 4.98% solely work in Canton, and 9.54% answered none of the above. This means that 85.48% of respondents live in Canton. Evaluation of survey responses must be viewed from the perspective of Canton residents, who may generally provide a more rounded and multifaceted analysis of the Town's conditions as they have a direct and personal connection.

Q2 Please indicate your age.

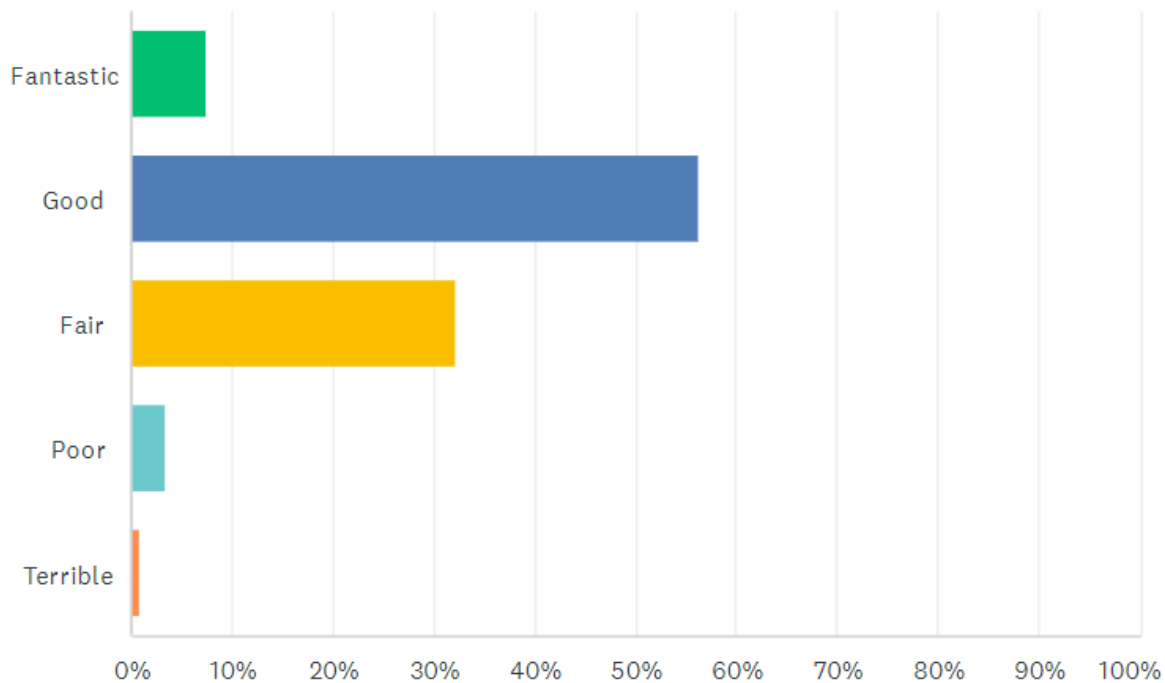
Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



Age demographics of respondents varied, with the largest number of responses coming from the 25-44 age group (43.39%). The next largest group of responses came from the 45-64 age range (26.86%). This data can indicate that the Town is mostly occupied by workforce-aged people. The 45-64 cohort being the second largest age range can indicate that “empty nesters” and recent retirees also make up a large portion of Town’s population. Demographic results in Chapter 2 reflect the same results as this poll, reinforcing the project team’s understanding that the Town of Canton is experiencing a large increase in workforce-aged residents/workers. The expanding workforce-aged and aging populations underscores the need for the Town of Canton to maintain increasing employment opportunities to satisfy labor demands while also pursuing housing and amenity options that reflect the needs of all age groups, elders included.

Q3 How would you rate the quality of life in Canton?

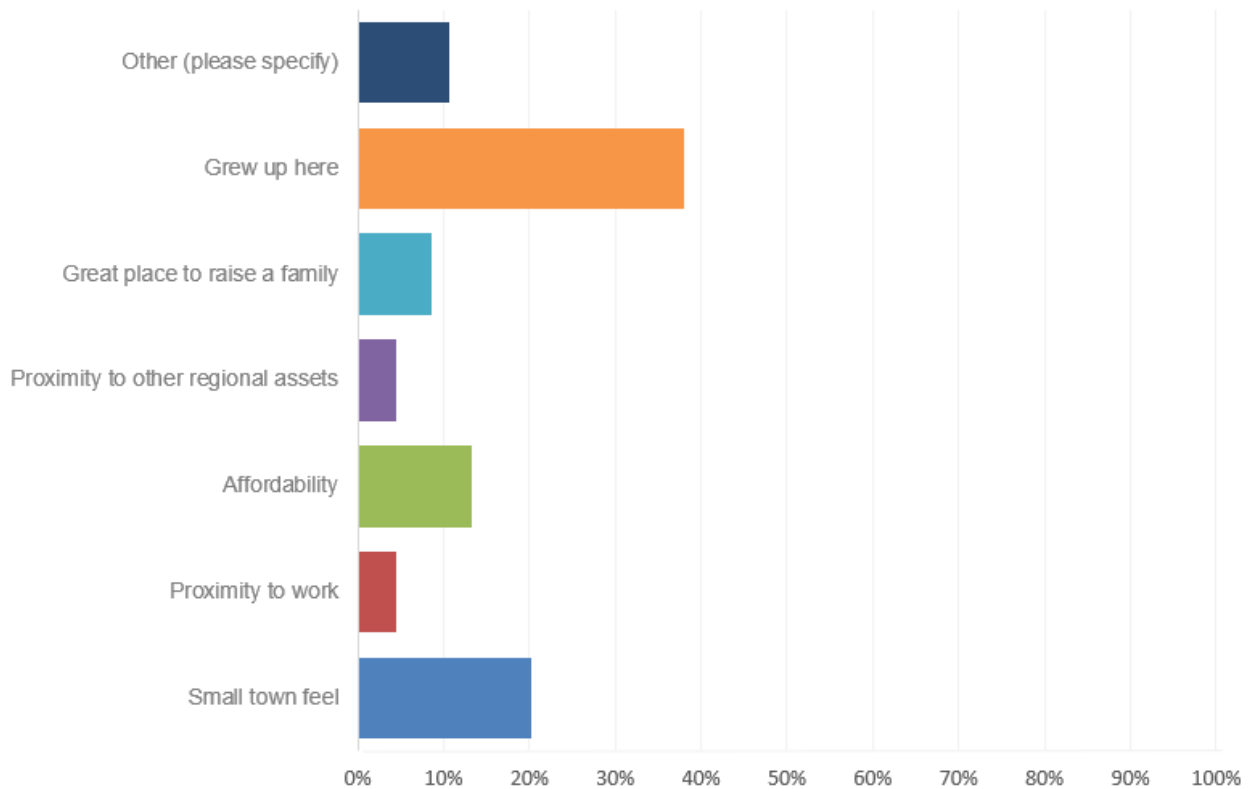
Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



The majority of responses indicate that the quality of life in Canton is good (56.20%), with the second most common answer by far being fair (32.23%). While these results are promising for the future of the Town, it must be recognized that only 7.44% of respondents stated that the quality of life in Canton is fantastic. Survey results indicate that there are a variety of Town elements that can be enhanced to further heighten the quality of life in Town.

Q4 What is your primary reason for living in, working in, and/or visiting Canton?

Answered: 242 Skipped: 0

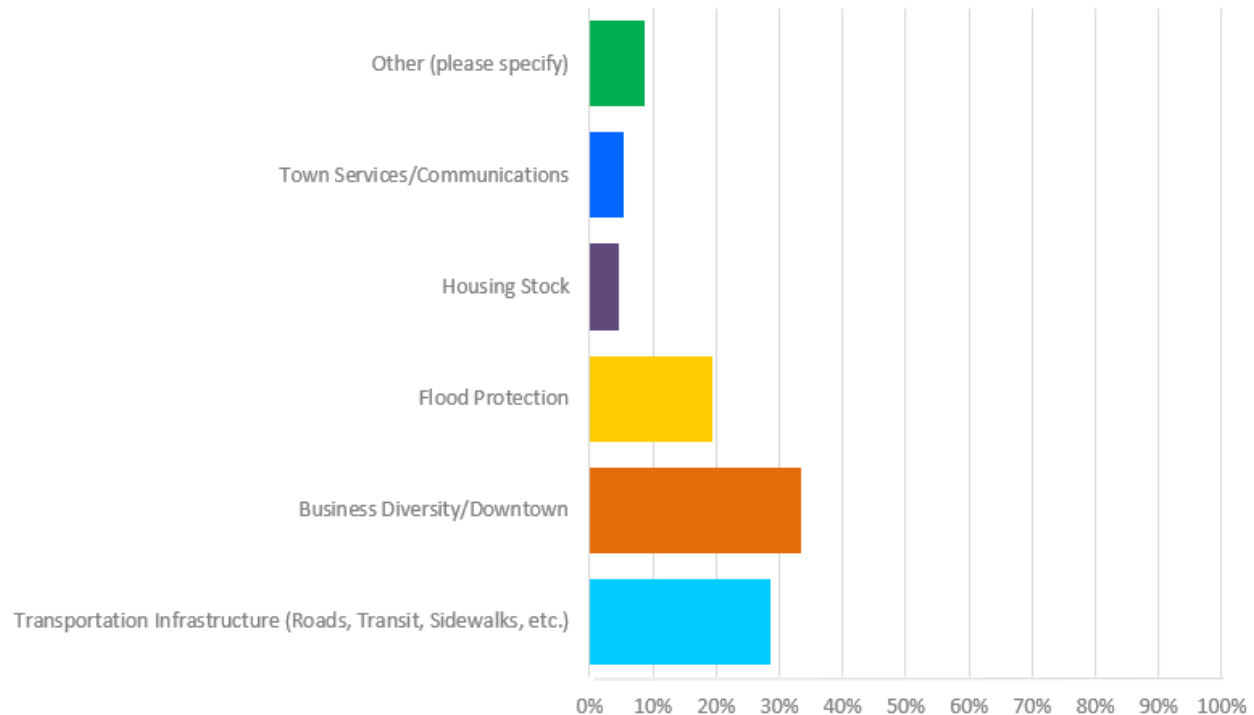


Primary reasons for living in Canton were varied. The most popular answers included having grown up here, the small-town feel, and affordability, in that order. These reasons indicate the culture of Canton being that of a town where generations of families can grow and become deeply ingrained in the community. This presents opportunities for the Town to capitalize on a population that is deeply invested in the community's success. The community's stake in the Town's success can help push challenging Town initiatives and programs towards producing meaningful and impactful change. A passionate community with a plan for the future can be a tremendously advantageous force for the Town of Canton.

Popular answers under the "other" option focused on housing, affordability, and location, namely the proximity to the mountains. Additionally, school, family, and work proved to be reasons why one would live in Canton. Two responses indicated retirement as the reason for their residence in Canton. Some respondents indicated that they live in Clyde, another nearby town. These answers fit into aforementioned categories of having grown-up here, affordability, or the proximity to other regional assets.

Q5 Which part of the Town requires the most improvement?

Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



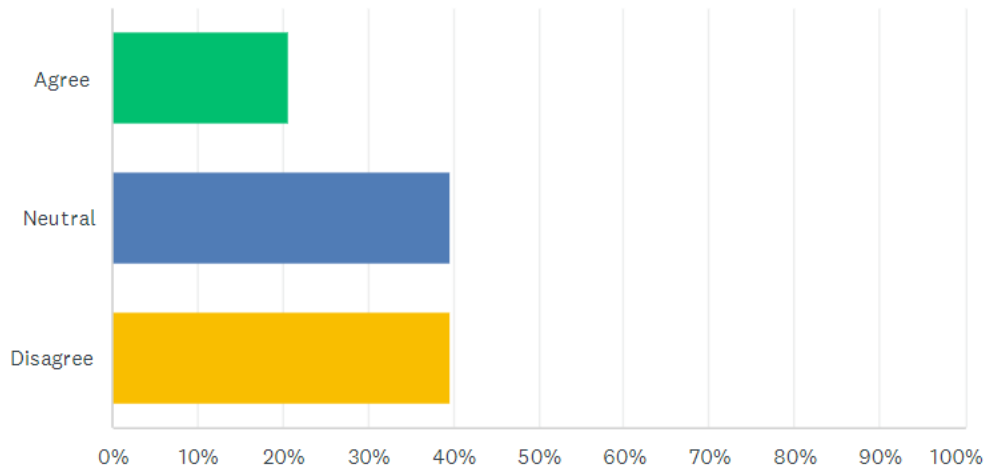
Responses demonstrate the consensus that the Town of Canton desires improvement in the fields of business diversity/downtown, transportation infrastructure, and flood protection. Smaller numbers of respondents indicated a desire for the housing stock and town services/communications to be improved. The other option provided a host of themes for improvement. Environmental and mill concerns were the most common responses in the “Other” section. Environmental concerns pertained to either a desire to improve air pollution and flooding. Additionally, increased commercial shopping options were indicated, a desire that could be incorporated into downtown development. Moreover, a desire to improve utilities relating to water and sewer lines was voiced in the responses.

Based on responses, the Town should focus planning efforts that aim to improve infrastructure related to flood protection, streetscaping, and transit, as well as the economic activity of the downtown. Many residents raised concerns over the quality of roads and sidewalks that negatively impacted their transit experiences. The steep slopes inherent to a mountain community provide context for the runoff and erosion concerns and the river to the flooding risks. Whether these be met with greater storm water mitigation or landscaping strategies, it is important to residents that the Town work to reduce the impacts of these environmental issues.

Additionally, many residents voiced a desire to see increased activity in the downtown such as programming, commercial opportunities, and improving the overall vibrancy.

Q6 Planning efforts should focus on preserving the status quo.

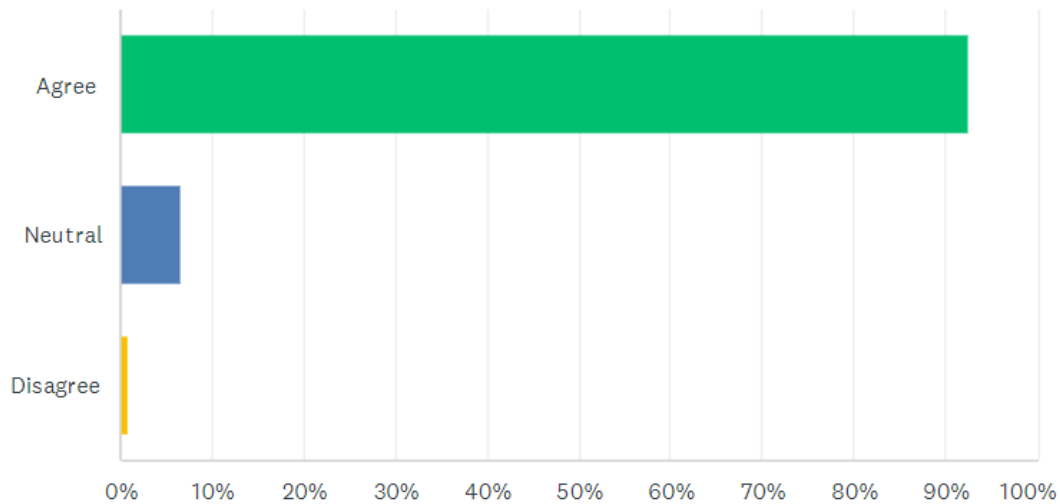
Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



Survey responses indicated that the opinion on preserving the status quo through planning efforts was split between disagree (40%) and neutral (40%). The remaining minority (20%) agreed with preserving the status quo through planning practices. Canton and the surrounding region are growing, with no indication of slowing in the future. The Vision and Goals established in this Plan are designed to acknowledge the coming growth, and work to proactively direct that change so that it works to benefit the Town. Survey responses indicate that there is limited consensus on what the Town should look like in the future. Consistent and effective public engagement will be required during Plan implementation and reevaluation to help build consensus towards this vision of the Town's future.

Q7 Flood protection is an important factor in future planning.

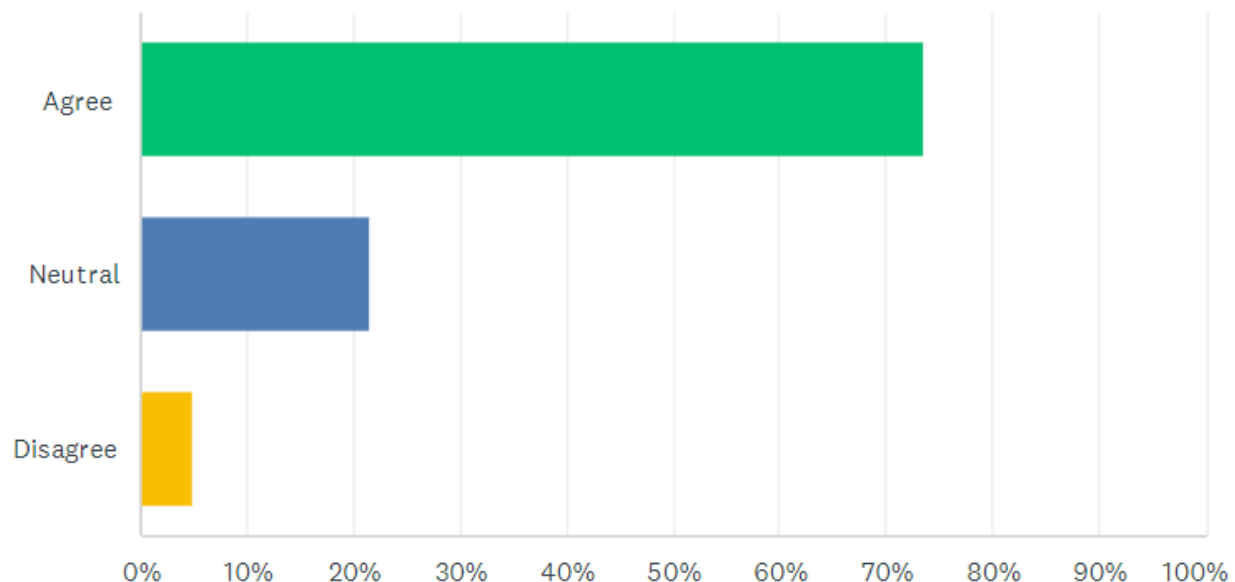
Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



Responses overwhelmingly signal that flood protection is an important factor in future planning, with 92.56% of respondents agreeing. The plans goals need to address this important factor, not only in protecting the developed portions of the Town in the floodway and revitalizing areas destroyed by floodwaters, but ensuring strategies, such as reduced impervious surfaces, are implemented with future development.

Q8 Regional tourism can benefit the Town

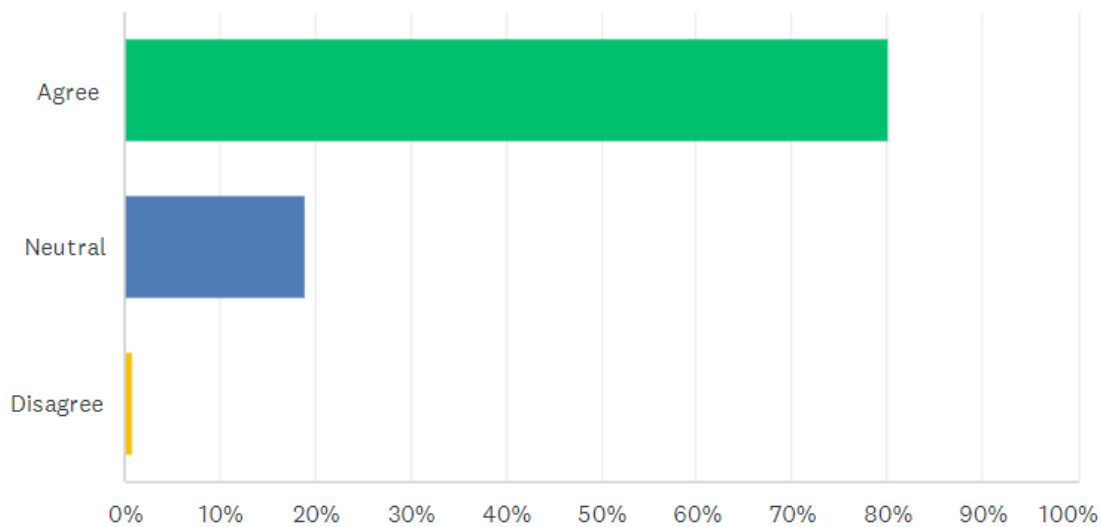
Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



73.55% of respondents agree that regional tourism can benefit the Town of Canton. 21.49% remained neutral, while 5.96% disagreed. This demonstrates support overall for increased tourism, with some in the community exhibiting reservations. Town efforts to define and implement regional tourism, such as the recently opened Chestnut Mountain Park, will be a goal of this plan. However, how to encourage tourism and yet protect the small town charm of Canton will be the challenge.

Q9 Water/sewer investments are necessary for the Town.

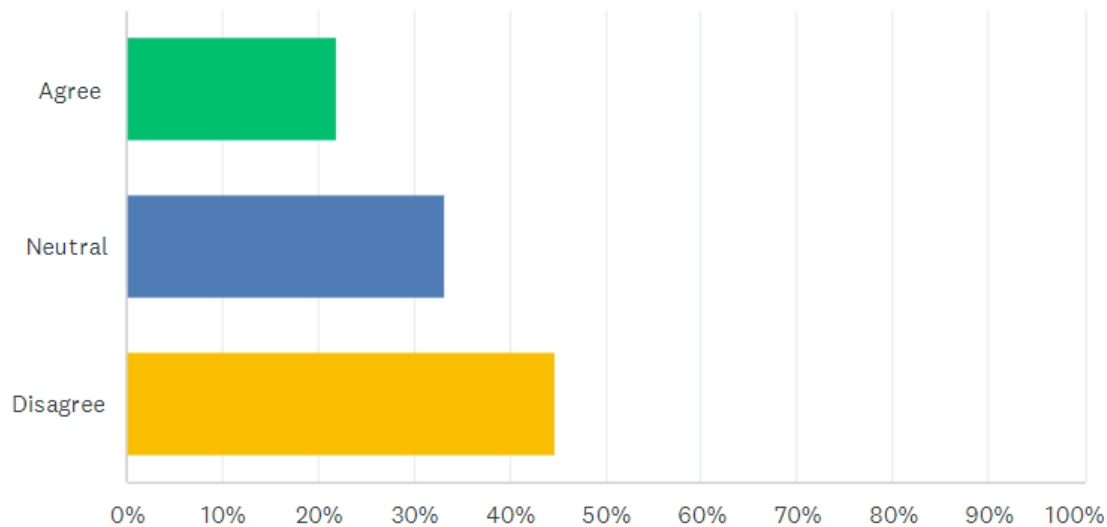
Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



80.17% believe that water/sewer investments are necessary for the Town, demonstrating broad support for improving and expanding available utilities and resources. Infrastructure investments such as water and sewer, can be difficult to quantify during daily life in Canton, particularly if the respondent has not suffered direct results of infrastructure failure. However, increasing public service fees and limited economic development can result in an unsupported network. Investment in managing these services can help guarantee excellent resident services and provide opportunities for new industries to develop within Canton.

Q10 There are housing options for all citizens of Canton.

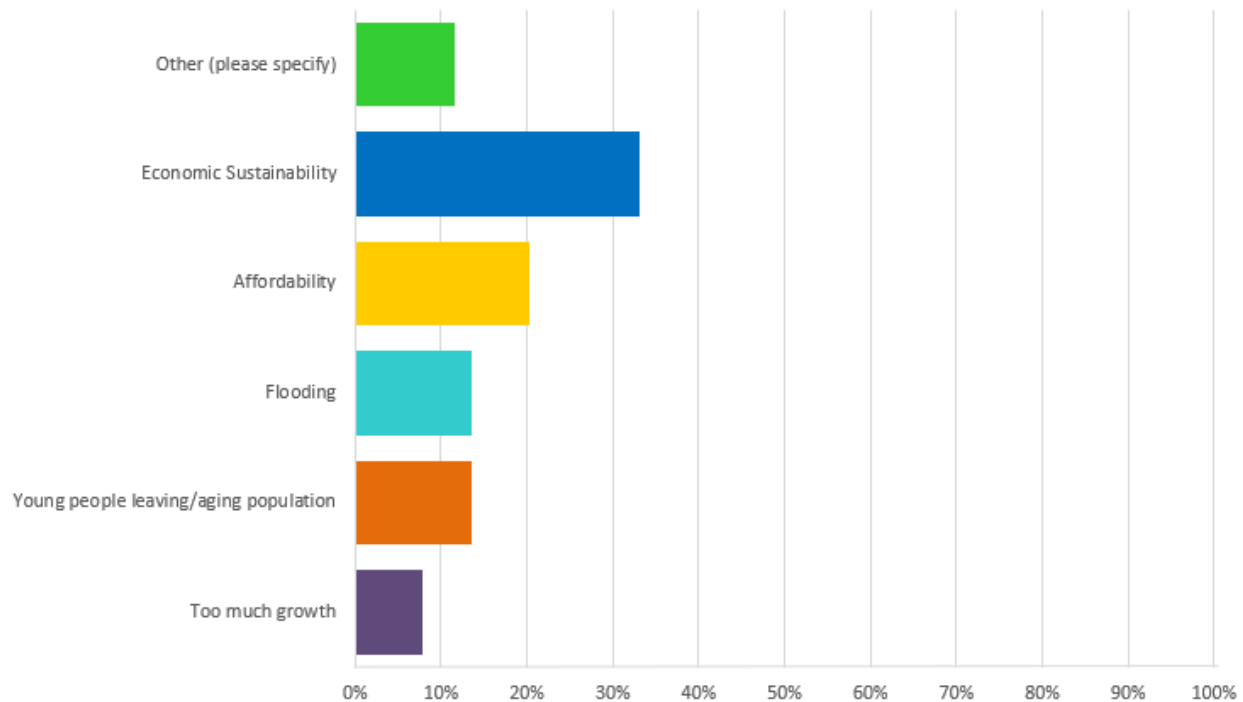
Answered: 241 Skipped: 1



44.81% of respondents believe that there are not housing options for all citizens of Canton. 33.20% remained neutral and 21.99% agreed that there are housing options for all. This response illustrates a desire for a greater increase in housing options, even though this was not a priority answer in Question 5. Additional public outreach and coordination with the project Steering Committee can further define the housing needs expressed by those who indicated their disagreement with this survey question. Chapter 4 of this plan will provide further insight regarding planning efforts geared toward housing.

Q11 What is your largest concern for Canton's future?

Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



Concerns of the Town of Canton's future were widely varied. Chief concerns included economic sustainability (33.06%) and affordability (20.25%), touching on the bread-and-butter issues of economic concerns of citizens. Youth leaving/aging population (13.64%) and flooding (13.64%) concerns ranking equally, with the least of concerns being attributed to too much growth (7.85%). As for the "other" option themes present consisted of desires for increased downtown development, open space, infrastructure, and protection of the environment. In addition, many indicated that they want proactive planning practices that provide a vision for Canton. Moreover, some believe that these planning practices should work to preserve the small-town feel of Canton. Therefore, the multi-faceted perspectives of the Town of Canton by residents must be factored into future planning efforts to ensure accurate and inclusive decision-making outcomes.

Q12 In three words, please describe your vision of Canton's future.

Answered: 226 Skipped: 16

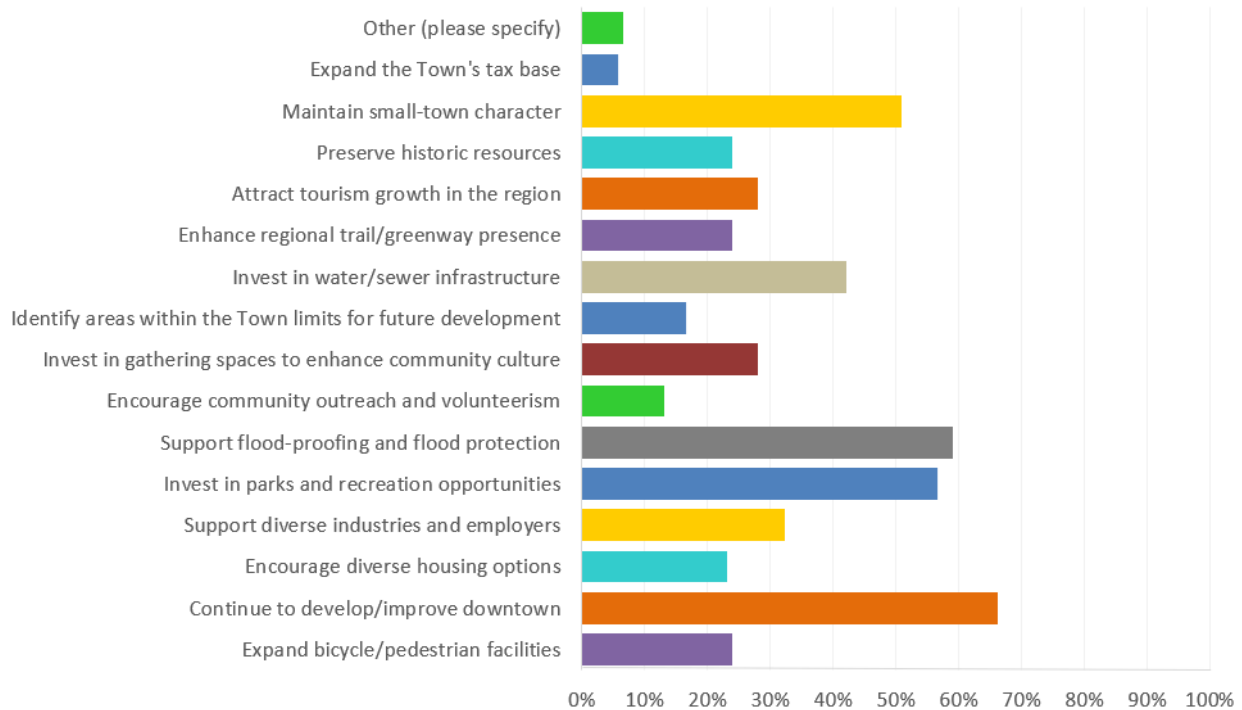
The word cloud below summarizes the primary responses provided during this question.



Echoed elsewhere in this survey, respondents primarily desire to see a future Canton with an emphasis on retaining the small-town culture that exists today. Other primary terms used related to the downtown, economic diversity/security, and safety/sustainability. The project team met with the Steering Committee to review these terms prior to the development of this Plan's Vision.

Q13 In order to achieve this vision of the future, Canton must plan to undertake goals and policies to help guide the Town in the correct direction. Please indicate the top 5 most important goals/policies for the Town of Canton.

Answered: 242 Skipped: 0



Question 13 saw a variety of responses with the most popular goals and initiatives being “Continue to develop/improve downtown”, “Invest in parks and recreation opportunities”, “Support flood-proofing and flood protection”, “Invest in water/sewer infrastructure”, and “Maintain small-town character”. These goals echo sentiments found throughout the survey and other public engagement efforts. Economic development, utility improvement, safety from flooding, and preserving the small-town characteristics of Canton all seem to share the broadest support among respondents. The “Other” section echoes these ideals with the desire to fix roads and sidewalks reinforced by concerned made about transit infrastructure in question 5.

Q14 Please include any comments or opinions you have that are not covered in the survey.

Answered: 122 Skipped: 120

Commerce, recreation, infrastructure improvement, accessibility, and downtown development were core themes of other comments provided by survey respondents. People want more to do in the way of dining, entertainment, and shopping that comes along with commercial development. This ties into recreation and the desire for outdoor spaces for families and kids to enjoy. People also want the roads fixed, with multiple mentions of potholes. Accessibility pertains to sidewalks needing repair or construction to increase safe mobility for citizens. Lastly, downtown development revolved around improving the downtown both economically and aesthetically. People want more businesses, restaurants, and stores to attract them and those on the roadways to their town. There is a developing vision for a vibrant downtown that incorporates more entertainment driven commercial activities that allow for greater opportunities for current residents and/or those in the region to invest in the community.

Q15 If there are any items within this survey that you would like to elaborate on, please include the item number and a brief comment below.

Answered: 63 Skipped: 179

Question 15 offered further concerns for housing affordability and road conditions. People are concerned about house flipping and increased wealth from Asheville pricing out current citizens. Moreover, people would like to see roads fixed and in far better condition than that are now. Additionally, many touched on a sentiment to clean up the town whether that be physically or in relation to crime and drugs.

Planning Board Meeting

Prior to the survey launch, the project team conducted a kick-off meeting with the Town's Planning Board. During this meeting, the project team worked with the elected representatives to discuss the Town and identify considerations for the planning effort. During this meeting the Planning Board initiated a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The purpose of conducting a SWOT analysis is to assist the project team in gaining a fundamental understanding of the Town, the assets it is able to leverage, the weak points it must mitigate, and the future factors which will impact the Town.

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located with easy access to Asheville/Sylva and natural amenities • The Mill • Strong Downtown • Access to I-40 • Walkability of a mountain town • Community Character and Involvement 	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdated subdivision ordinance • Aging infrastructure and maintenance of buildings • Traffic, smell, etc. from Mill • Downtown parking • Affordability and housing • Downtown is 2 US highways • Tourist homes (Airbnb/VRBO)
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bolstered environmental protection from FEMA buy-out option • Sidewalk Plan • Infill • Downtown apartments • Wayfinding • Active tourism 	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an identify due to proximity to Asheville and/or a single employer • Tourist home regulations • Public participation can be low • Life expectancy of the Mill

This assessment will be further detailed in Chapter 6 of this Plan.

Steering Committee

The project was also advised by a Steering Committee. Nine members of the Town of Canton formed the Steering Committee. The members are as follows:

- Phil Smathers
- Phillip Paxton
- Jeanne Forrest
- Jordan Tyler
- Tom Boone
- Vicki Eastland
- Carl Cortright
- Brandon Young
- Lois Simpson

The committee was consulted during the development of the plan through visioning and goal setting exercises, recommendation development, and chapter/content review. The committee met in April and May of 2022 to discuss the project vision, goals, recommendations, and the future land use map. In addition to the meetings outlined below, the Steering Committee was tasked with reviewing plan chapters and materials going before the public.

April 20 Meeting Agenda (5pm - 7pm)

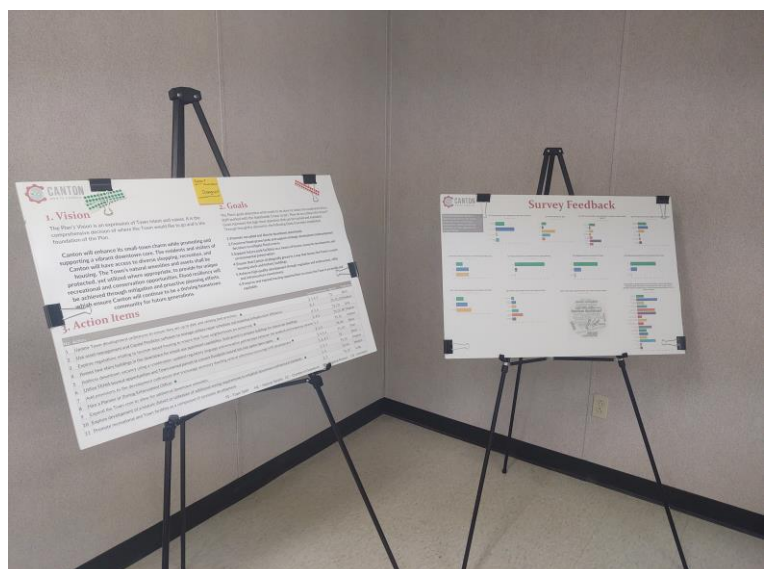
Please note that prior to the meeting, the Steering Committee was provided with a 31-page pre-meeting packet containing demographic findings, survey results collected at the time, and the Planning Board's SWOT analysis findings.

- Introductions
- Review of Planning and Zoning Basics
- Plan Content Review
- Existing Work Review
 - Background Demographic Findings
 - Survey Findings to Date
 - SWOT Analysis Findings
- Plan Development
 - Vision/Goal Findings Review and Development
 - Development of Initial Plan Recommendations
- Review of Future Land Use Plan Basics
- Review of Future Land Use Map and Designations
- Project Next Steps

Following the meeting, Steering Committee members were provided with meeting materials and the Future Land Use Map/designations for review and comment prior to the Public Workshop.

Public Workshop

An in-person public workshop was conducted on May 10th, 2022. This provided an opportunity for the general public to review draft content and recommendations developed by the Steering Committee and project team. The meeting was held on May 10, 2022 from 11am to 1pm and 4pm to 7pm. Two stakeholders attended the workshop to provide their feedback on the draft contents. The stakeholders expressed agreement with the recommendations and Future Land Use Map provided.



CHAPTER 6: STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

Background analysis, public engagement, and discussions with Town leadership have helped frame the core strengths of the Town as well as its challenges. Understanding each component helps the Town leverage its assets and identify Town elements that will require additional considerations and alternatives.

Strengths

Location - The Town's location along major transportation corridors provide easy accessibility to neighboring communities such as Asheville and Sylva as well as various natural amenities including state parks, trails, rivers, and lakes. This is a considerable benefit when considering future economic development opportunities and the quality of life. Recreation and tourism related projects, such as Chestnut Mountain Park, will capture a wider range of visitors due to proximity to regional highways. This helps bring visitors and commuters into the Town and establishes a regional identity and presence on the map.

An opportunity that is associated with additional visitors is developing and utilizing a wayfinding package for Town. Wayfinding signage further helps establish a unified identity of the Town through symbolism and design. Furthermore, wayfinding can direct visitors to municipal parking, shopping opportunities, cultural assets, and recreational facilities. Directing visitors to the locations within Town that should be showcased can lead to repeat visits and more time and money spent in Canton.

Downtown and Walkability - Canton's downtown is compact and highly walkable. The Town's sidewalk infrastructure allows for visitors to park and explore the downtown by foot. This often increases the number of stores visited during a single trip, as opposed to the conventional single-destination trips made by automobile. Residents also benefit from the sidewalk network as it can link the Town's residential pockets to the downtown and create a walkable experience from home to store.

Additional considerations and opportunities can build off this excellent downtown infrastructure. Identifying opportunities for mixed-use buildings (apartments over retail) strengthens the character and liveliness of the Town. Residents living in the downtown area foster a sense of liveliness and character of small-town americana. The Town's existing sidewalk plan offers an

opportunity to expand the pedestrian network further, connecting gaps with the adjacent neighborhoods and providing pedestrian access to recreational opportunities.

Community Character - Residents of Canton are deeply invested in protecting the Town's future image. Passionate citizens are essential for planning for a Town's future. Engaged residents help carry the vision and goals of the plan forward by holding leaders accountable, helping undertake the recommendations of the plan, and championing the culture and identity of Canton.

The Mill - The Mill (Evergreen Packaging) is a large regional employer that helps support many of the residents within and around the Town. In addition to employment opportunities, the facility's tax base supports Town services. Furthermore, the facility also manages the Town's wastewater resources.

Challenges

Outdated Ordinances - Development ordinances are the mechanisms that regulate growth within the Town. These documents are considered to be "living documents" meaning that they are updated over the years to address shifts in development needs and community desires. The Town's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance were both adopted in the 1970's. Apart from the recent updates required by the state, these documents have not been updated to address the needs of Canton today and tomorrow.

Aging Infrastructure - Infrastructure degradation is a challenge faced by many North Carolina municipalities. Rehabilitation is an expensive and detailed endeavor, requiring staff to audit facilities, develop maintenance and remediation schedules, and undertake remediation efforts. Naturally, this is a very difficult process to conduct, but an important one. The following items outline the importance of infrastructure health.

- Sidewalk degradation can lead to accessibility barriers and violations of ADA guidelines.
- Pavement condition failures result in low performing street sections that are uncomfortable and hazardous for drivers.
- Water/sewer pipe leakages causes utility attrition and yearly reductions in volume efficiency.

- Structural conditions of downtown buildings can become hazardous and costly for the Town's residents.

System inventories and audits will be required to establish a baseline understanding of these various elements. Completed inventories may then be utilized to schedule and track maintenance efforts more efficiently and help bolster the health of the Town's infrastructure.

The Mill - While identified as a strength of the Town, properties of the Mill's operations must be considered as challenges. Canton's opportunity to capture visitors along its proximate corridors through recreation and cultural amenities must also consider the odor and traffic generated by the Mill. Street ownership and the nature of the Mill's operation do not offer much to mitigate these challenges. Future planning efforts may identify unique mitigation opportunities, but otherwise the Town must work around these known elements.

Location and Identity - Like the Mill, the Town's location in the region may also be considered a challenge. Canton's proximity to Asheville can make defining an individual identity and culture difficult, as many may dismiss the Town as a "bedroom community" of Asheville. Additionally, maintenance work and accidents along the major corridors create detours which lead to downtown traffic issues. While the road network of Canton would be difficult to change, the Town's development with a focused character and identity can provide unique dining, shopping, and recreational opportunities to encourage passthrough traffic to stop and visit. The delicate balance of economic development, location, and character will be necessary to avoid assimilation into the identity of Asheville.

Housing Variety - To ensure that Canton is a community that everyone can call home, addressing housing options in the Town will be necessary. The Town is challenged by both floodplains and steep slopes, directing most of its future housing capabilities to infill development. With an almost 10% shift from owner-occupied housing to renter-occupied housing over the last 9 years, the Town must work to make sure that its development ordinances encourage a variety of housing products and sustainable infill options to ensure a diverse and sustainable housing stock in the future.

CHAPTER 7: VALUES, VISIONS, & GOALS

The Vision and Goals of the Plan confirm the unified intent for the Town's future. In development of the Plan vision, the Town is answering the question, "Where do we want to be?"

Values

At the center of every community there resides a specific set of values - ideals deeply ingrained within the culture of the Town - that drives its decisions, development, and image. These values function as the core foundation upon which the Town's Vision is built. Through thorough evaluation of outreach efforts and work during the public participation process, the following values have been identified to be at Canton's core.

1. **Respect** Canton's natural environment.
2. **Support** local businesses and individuals.
3. **Creation** of services and amenities for residents and visitors.
4. **Investment** in infrastructure to ensure a successful future.
5. **Identity** of the Town and its inhabitants.

Vision

The Plan's **Vision** is an expression of Town intent, as defined by the Values above. It is the comprehensive decision of where the Town would like to go and is the foundation of the Plan. The Town of Canton's Vision is:

Canton will enhance its small-town charm while promoting and supporting a vibrant downtown core. The residents and visitors of Canton will have access to diverse shopping, recreation, and housing. The Town's natural amenities and assets shall be protected, yet utilized where appropriate, to provide for unique recreational and conservation opportunities. Flood resiliency will be achieved through mitigation and proactive planning efforts which ensure Canton will continue to be a thriving hometown community for future generations.

Goals

The Plan's goals determine what needs to be done to realize the established Vision. Staff worked with the Stakeholder Group to ask, "How do we achieve this Vision?" Goals represent the high-level objectives that can be tracked and evaluated. Through guided discussion, the following Goals have been established:

1. Promote occupied and diverse downtown storefronts.
2. Conserve flood-prone lands and support strategic development/redevelopment decisions to mitigate flood events.
3. Support future park facilities as a means of leisure, economic development, and environmental preservation.
4. Ensure that Canton strategically grows in a way that honors the Town's current housing stock and historic buildings.
5. Achieve higher development standards through regulation and infrastructure investments.
6. Preserve and expand housing opportunities to ensure the Town is livable and equitable.

CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations made by this plan are designed to bridge the gap between the questions “Where are we now?” and “Where do we want to be?” by answering the question “How do we get there?”. These actions are designed to help address the major concerns and opportunities of the Town and leverage its strengths.

Update Town Development Ordinances

Identified as one of the initial challenges facing the Town, outdated development ordinances need to be addressed to guarantee compliance with federal/state laws and to ensure future development follows regional best practices. With few updates made to the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance since their adoption in the 70's, detailed examination of the documents will be required. Updating the Zoning Ordinance will also allow for the addition of infill-specific regulations that will be discussed in a later recommendation.

Notable ordinance deficiencies include the following:

- Outdated uses and use standards.
- No open space/active recreation requirements.
- Few infrastructure enhancement requirements.
- No detailed architectural standards.
- Required roadway widths are not compatible with development in/around Town.
- Inconsistency between actual and required lot dimensions.
- Few provisions regarding site layout and internal/external connectivity.
- No infill development specifics.
- Limited sidewalk development requirements.
- No landscape requirements.

Updating development ordinances usually involves a team of Town/consultant land planners that will read through the documents and make targeted edits based on regulation and best practices. This work generally occurs over the course of a year and includes interfacing with Town leadership and the public to both educate and to receive feedback.

Asset Management & Capital Predictor

The utility network (water, sewer, gas, etc.) can be thought of as the skeleton of the Town. It directs where and how the Town grows. Canton is in a unique position with its utilities; excluding

future annexations, much of the Town has been developed. This does not mean that the utility network is complete however, as aging infrastructure and weather events can damage the system. Due to the age of many municipalities in the region, underground utilities may not always be mapped or known. Additionally, inefficiencies can develop over time as material requirements are updated and best practices emerge. Town staff have indicated that portions of the water/sewer system are already experiencing large inefficiencies due to the piping layout.

The recommended solution is of two parts. Firstly, the Town should catalog all its utility assets in either Computer Assisted Drawing (CAD) technologies or Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. Depending on the network, this can be done through a combination of using existing network data and survey technologies including Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). Information such as materials, age, and dimensions will be important for future predictor software and should be collected for each network segment/element.

Secondly, the Town should utilize prediction software, such as the Capital Predictor Model. This software is used for a variety of infrastructure elements including piping, sidewalks, streets, and land development to assess infrastructure health over time and run budgeting scenarios. The program can monitor the Town's utility network and begin identifying sections that are flagged for maintenance/repair. Town staff and leadership can also run budgeting scenarios to review projected network enhancements. As a result, the combination of network attributes and budgeting information creates an effective schedule for network repairs developed at a segment-by-segment level. These granular details remove any guesswork associated with network repairs and will increase the systems efficiency over time as the software prioritizes the most inefficient elements of the system.

Neighborhood Preservation

Demographic trends analyzed as part of this plan have identified that the entire region is growing in population. While this presents the Town with opportunities to benefit from increased regional tourism, care must be taken to ensure that the Town's identity does not become only that of an Asheville suburb. The Town's capacity for new development helps in this regard, preventing large residential projects from entering Town limits simply due to lack of buildable area. However, short term housing, such as AirBnB and VRBO, could result in a highly transient population as outdoor recreation opportunities and other tourist attractions are developed in the region. Further these short-term rentals remove available housing units for residents to

commercial lodging for visitors. And while encouraging visitors and providing lodging is important in the area, the depletion of much needed housing and protection of the neighborhoods is greater.

State regulations involving short term housing are not concrete, currently. As the use/product is still a new entity to the land development and housing realm, consistent legislation does not exist. The City of Wilmington, NC had developed a hard cap of short-term housing units in 2019, but the regulation was struck down by the Superior Court. Asheville has also had a turbulent past with short term housing, establishing a ban on whole-home rentals but quickly being challenged on the regulation. It can be difficult to begin making strides towards a solution against this growth concern given the unpredictable nature of the state's legislation and judicial rulings, however the Town can look towards less contentious practices.

The Cities of Raleigh and Charlotte have taken different initiatives to regulate these uses. Raleigh regulates these uses as "Short-Term Rental" uses and have various use standards that are required to be followed as part of the owner's permit. Use standards of note include the following:

- Every short-term rental operator shall first apply for and procure a zoning permit from the City. Zoning permits must be renewed annually.
- In residential zoning districts, short term renters shall not utilize the premises for holding special events or gatherings.
- For any multi-unit living use, no more than 25%, or two dwelling units, whichever is greater, may be used for short term rental in any single building.
- Every short-term rental operator shall maintain for a period of three (3) years a list of all short-term rental lodgers staying on the premises.
- The zoning permit number authorizing the short-term rental shall be conspicuously posted on:
 - all advertisements for short term rentals, and
 - the subject property.

Charlotte's regulations appear to be focused on nuisance enforcement. Both cities have provisions discussing the ways in which a permit is revoked (the nature of the use does not comply with short term rentals, parties/gatherings occur, criminal/noise violations, etc.). These two cities demonstrate an ongoing initiative to help regulate AirBnB and Vrbo uses without overstepping their legal capabilities. Canton can use these two examples to development

similar regulations and take a step towards mitigating the potential issues that can arise from such uses.

Activating Downtown Mixed-Use

Residential mixed-use (dwellings located above storefronts) can be a viable way to enhance the downtown. It provides additional housing options where second floors are underutilized and establishes a culture of livability and permanency downtown. The Town's current ordinance does allow this use in the downtown ([9-4024(b)(42)]), however this type of development is not fully utilized. Potential developers of this type of residential unit are facing challenges of ensuring that infrastructure meets conventional housing code.

It is recommended that Town staff assess the existing two-story facilities in the downtown to understand why they can or cannot be utilized for residential purposes. For Town staff to assess these facilities, they must first conduct a comprehensive inventory of the downtown footprint. Each underutilized and abandoned building within the downtown should



be logged along with owner information. Once an inventory is established, staff should then begin planning for remediation techniques and funding sources. This includes research into both the Building Reuse and Demolition grants provided by State Rural Grants and the Federal Community Development Block Grant.

Additionally, support of housing diversity allows for new residents to set roots and become invested in the Town. Encouragement of this mixed-use can allow for young families to join the community and become future stewards of Canton. In addition to young families, workforce housing (housing affordable to households earning between 60 and 120 percent of the area median income) allows for those working in Canton to affordably live there, as well. The North Carolina Neighborhood Revitalization Program assists communities in the development of

affordable, energy-efficient housing and mixed-use developments for low- and moderate-income residents. It is recommended that Town staff explore the utilization of this grant as well.

Expansion of Town Core

The Plan has established a Future Land Use Map which has been designed to expand the downtown core. Many parcels surrounding the “Town Center” use have been designated as “Neighborhood Commercial”. This designation is designed to encourage a mixture of walkable, neighborhood serving commercial/office uses. In turn, the “Town Center” use capitalizes



on the existing downtown infrastructure to establish the Town’s core as a hub for retail, mixed-use, and lodging. This combination of uses is designed to encourage future offices and general services in the lands surrounding the downtown, while encouraging walkable restaurants, lodging, and tourism-based retail in the downtown.

Ordinance Enforcement for Downtown Vacancy

Downtown storefront vacancy is an issue occurring across the United States. Many landlords are more interested in real estate speculation than to rent property. In more rural areas, properties may be inherited by those who have no interest in upkeep or rental. However, at its core, a downtown is for residents and visitors, not the absent landlords or real estate speculators. There are several strategies developed to help fill storefronts in downtowns, each with their positives and negatives.

One of the most accessible ways that a Town can encourage the activation of downtown facilities is to aggressively update and enforce the Town’s development ordinance and building code to identify and address violations. Identification of ordinance violations and ongoing fines can either result in building improvements, active leasing of the building to cover costs, or sale of the building altogether. The challenge associated with this strategy is the ongoing inspection

and enforcement of the ordinances. Town staff will need to understand the full extent of violations/remedies offered by the ordinances and diligently follow the outlined procedures for enforcement. In cases where additional provisions are needed, ordinance updates should be drafted and adopted to expand enforcement capabilities. It is recommended that Town utilize this strategy, beginning with holistic evaluation of Town ordinances to identify enforcement capabilities and shortcomings.

Another tactic that some municipalities utilize is the development of a local historic district. This district functions similarly to a zoning overlay and can require robust architectural development standards. Owners of abandoned or empty downtown facilities may recognize that the cost of bringing the facility into compliance with the historic district may outweigh the desire to speculate on the property and or continue ownership. Historic district development is a complicated and cumbersome process, however. Development requires the establishment of a Historic Preservation Board, a variety of ordinance updates, and the creation of new procedures for the Town. A strong partnership with the local historical society would be necessary to begin exploring the implementation of the historic district.

It is also possible to explore partnerships with vacant building owners to ensure that the space is at least partially being utilized. Staff could help develop procedures for and work to facilitate short term rental of the property for pop-up shops/stalls. These stalls could hold a 15-to-30-day lease and help entrepreneurs achieve some level of storefront space while also supplementing the landowners costs of maintaining the building. Another opportunity would be to facilitate partnerships between nonprofit/volunteer organizations and the landowner to help fill storefront windows. Organizations could advertise upcoming events and volunteer opportunities through downtown storefronts which helps screen the empty interiors from view and provide an important opportunity for the organizations. Canton staff could explore these opportunities with downtown landowners to gauge interest and garner important feedback that could inform future program rollout.

Stormwater Controls & Parks

Recent flooding events have exposed the Town's environmental vulnerabilities and the consequences of land development within a floodplain. Much of the Town's core is located within floodplain, raising concerns of future flooding costs. Environmental resiliency must be a focus of all planning efforts moving forward to help mitigate future damage. Town staff have already begun this process with the development of new Town facilities further away from Pigeon River.



The Future Land Use Map associated with this Plan identifies several locations along Park Street and Pigeon River that are designated as Open Space/Recreation. These locations were identified by the project team as being vulnerable to future flooding events. Some of these locations are already developed and contain concrete/asphalt features through which water cannot flow. This is considered an impervious surface and is a main driver of flooding events. Reclaiming these properties for development as pervious, environmental buffers will help mitigate direct property damage and uphill flooding. Furthermore, the Town can utilize these properties as parks and open spaces for residents and visitors, creating a welcoming and dynamic downtown environment.

Town staff have already worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to identify potential buyouts through the agency's Hazard Mitigation Assistance Grant programs. It is recommended that the Town work with property owners of parcels identified in the Future Land Use Map as Open Space/Recreation to put together applications for FEMA buyout programs. In turn, these properties can be designed to slow flooding and protect the Town. Furthermore, it is recommended that Town leadership diligently adhere to the Future Land Use Map so that floodplain development is reduced to the greatest extent possible.

Infill Standards & Policies

Canton's natural topography greatly limits the ability for new developments within the Town's limits. Of the limited remaining undeveloped parcels, many are located either within the

floodplain or on steep mountain slopes. Infill development offers an innovative way to reprogram developed and underutilized parcels to maximize their potential. Unlike development of vacant lots, infill development generally has all infrastructure and utility access in place and does not cost the Town additional funds to service it.

Utilization of “Mother-in-Law Suites” or similar accessory dwelling units has proven to be an effective method of infill development. Such uses allow for a secondary dwelling to be established on a lot and can also provide an opportunity for varied and affordable housing options in Town. The Town’s current Zoning Ordinance allows for accessory in its residential zoning districts. It is also recommended that the Town allow for accessory buildings in the General Business (C-2) and Neighborhood Business (C-3) zoning districts. These districts are mostly located proximate to or encompassed by residential zoning districts and would allow for further live/work opportunities. Furthermore, the Town should amend its Zoning Ordinance to encourage infill development and detail specifications for accessory dwelling units.

Additional best practice/policy recommendations for consideration are as follows:

- Modifying density requirements to account for accessory dwellings.
- Reducing lot boundary setbacks and placement requirements to account for hillside development.
- “Brownfield” policies encourage reuse of sites by limiting environmental liability of developers.
- Staff encouragement of infill utilization.
- Development of an Infill Overlay zoning district which encourages infill development where sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure already exist.
- Tax credits or other funding mechanisms to encourage infill development.

Zoning Enforcement Officer

Many of the Plan’s recommendations will require experienced staff to facilitate. As of the writing of this Plan, the Town of Canton does not have a dedicated Town Planner or Zoning Enforcement Officer. A key component of this Plan will be the hiring of staff that are experienced in North Carolina land use, case law, and development requirements. It is recommended that such staff be hired as soon as office space is available.

Amenity Development & Promotion

One consistent strength identified by the Planning Board, Steering Committee, and public outreach was the opportunity to preserve and enhance its historic and natural amenities in Town. The recent opening of Chestnut Mountain Park along with Camp Hope and the Rough Creek Watershed provide a large canvas of opportunity for the Town. Environmental tourism represents a compelling economic development opportunity for Canton. Using these amenities as a magnet for the Town will allow for support services such as retail, restaurants, and lodging to flourish. Historic Town amenities such as the Armory and The Colonial provide additional resources to keep visitors in the Town core.

Strategic capital investments in these various facilities can work to further encourage visitors. Enhancing these facilities with electronic car chargers, wayfinding, and events can greatly enhance the attractiveness of Canton's facilities. Encouragement of support services in the Town, such as lodging, breweries, distilleries, wineries, entertainment, restaurants, and retail will encourage an environment in which visitors have the desire to remain in Town after visiting the Town's parks and natural amenities.

CHAPTER 9: FUTURE LAND USES

The final component in answering the question of “Where do we want to be?” is establishing a clear vision for the use of land within the Town. The Future Land Use Map depicts this vision. This chapter identifies seven different land use classifications for the Town. Each land use has been identified to achieve various development goals of the Town. The use designations are as follows:

- Open Space/Recreation
- Residential
- Neighborhood Commercial
- General Commercial
- Highway Commercial
- Town Center
- Industrial

Open Space/Recreation

Goal

Preserve a network of natural vegetation to preserve environmentally sensitive locations and protect steep slopes and floodplains. Utilize stormwater and flood storage mechanisms to provide floodable recreational opportunities for residents/visitors.

Recommended Uses

- Open Space
- Park lands
- Stormwater Management Facilities
- Agricultural

Development Considerations

- Interconnect features through pedestrian and bicycle pathways.
- Identify opportunities for lot vegetative restoration.
- Restrict impervious surfaces to the greatest extent possible.



Residential

Goal

Encourage the development of interconnect residential neighborhoods. Ensure walkability and connection to downtown and municipal services. Identify opportunities for infill development and varied housing products.



Recommended Uses

- Attached/detached Single-Family Homes
- Apartments
- Park Facilities
- Municipal Services

Development Considerations

- Identify opportunities for accessory dwelling units.
- Ensure future infill development is compatible with surrounding residential uses.
- Encourage housing diversity and residential options.
- Future subdivisions must develop supporting infrastructure (open space, roads, sidewalks, etc.)

Neighborhood Commercial

Goal

Provide residents with convenient retail, office, and other small scale commercial uses. Usually combined with accessory dwelling units, neighborhood commercial uses are compatible architecturally with the surrounding area. Parking is minimal as walking and biking are encouraged.

Recommended Uses

- Service Retail
- Office
- Municipal Services
- Parks Facilities



Development Considerations

- Ensure development is compatible with surrounding residential uses.
- Allow accessory dwellings or mixed uses.
- Require sidewalk and bicycle parking.
- Retail or office uses must provide street front access.
- No drive-thru uses.

General Commercial

Goal

Provide residents and visitors with a full suite of services and goods that are available within the Town limits. Ensure that residents are not required to leave Canton limits to access a necessary good/service. Encourage walkability to shopping and employment opportunities from proximate neighborhoods.

Recommended Uses

- Retail
- Office
- Restaurants
- Municipal Services
- Parks Facilities



Development Considerations

- Ensure development is compatible with surrounding commercial and residential uses.
- Require sidewalk infrastructure development to build out sidewalk network.
- Development of design guidelines will help provide a uniform character and a distinct character.

Highway Commercial

Goal

Capitalize on the proximity to I-40 and other regional highways by encouraging the development of automobile-serving commercial facilities. Encourage services near on/off ramps to prevent highway traffic from impacting the Town core.



Recommended Uses

- Gas Stations
- Lodging
- Restaurants / Drive-thrus
- Automobile Sales

Development Considerations

- Require parking to be located to the side or rear of buildings.

Town Center

Goal

Enhance an iconic downtown by providing a mixture of retail, office, and residential uses. Provide a walkable experience that encourages exploration of downtown commercial uses. Establish a regional destination for recreation-based visitors.

Recommended Uses

- Retail
- Office
- Mixed-Use
- Municipal Services
- Pocket Parks



Development Considerations

- Further promote a walkable and exploratory experience with outdoor seating and pocket parks where possible.
- Regulation of hazardous or deteriorating facilities will be important to maintain open storefronts and the character of the downtown.
- Utilize floodway parcels for recreational and vista opportunities.

Industrial

Goal

Support employment opportunities and an enhanced tax base.

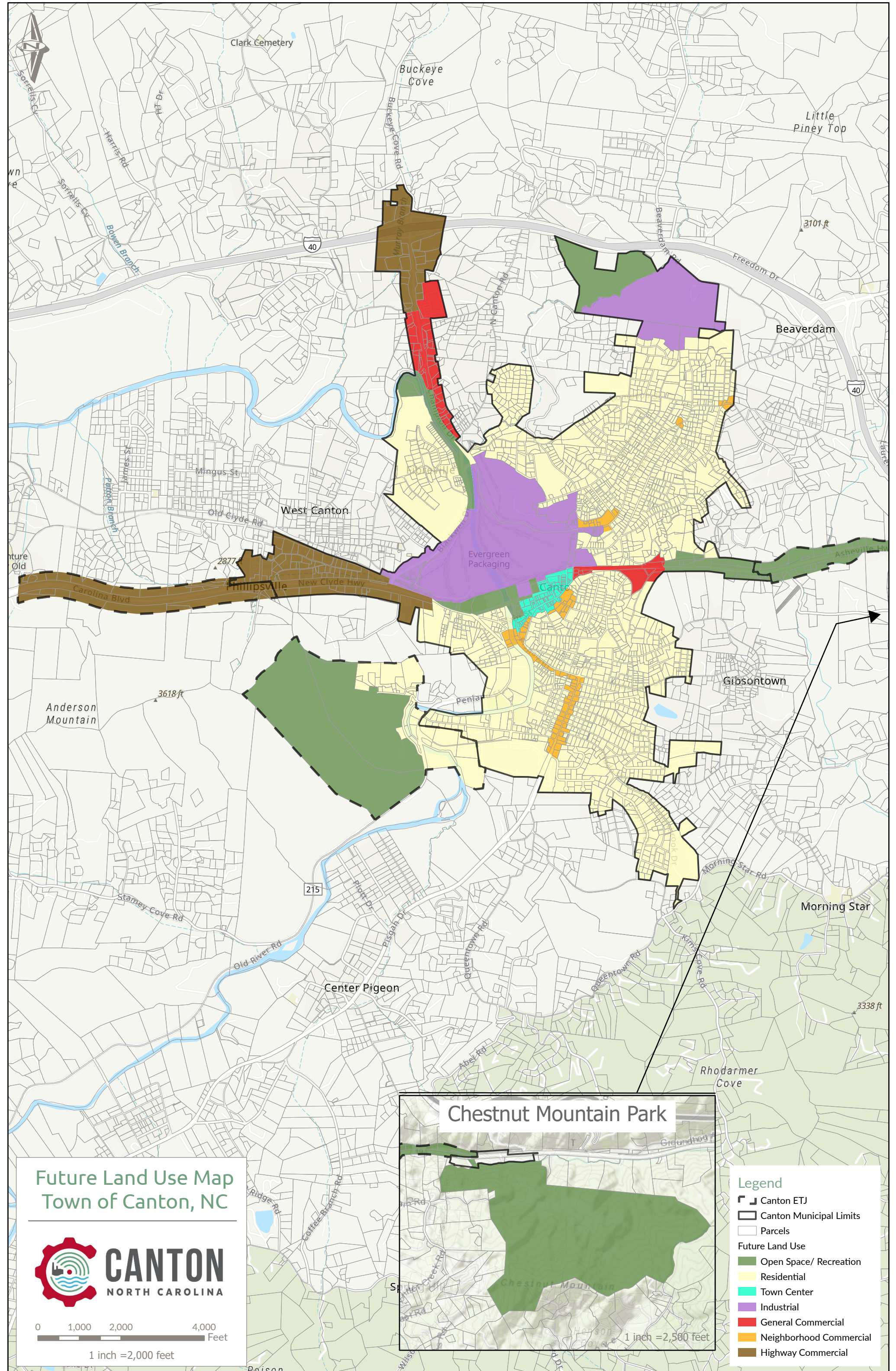
Recommended Uses

- Industrial Uses
- Wholesalers
- Storage/Warehousing

Development Considerations

- Ensure sufficient buffers between other uses and Pigeon River.





CHAPTER 10: IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Vision

Canton will preserve its small-town charm while promoting and supporting a vibrant and diverse downtown core to address the varied needs of its visitors and residents. The Town's natural amenities and assets shall be preserved improved upon for unique recreational opportunities. In addition to preservation, mitigation and proactive planning shall ensure that flood resiliency.

Goals

1. Promote occupied and diverse downtown storefronts.
2. Conserve flood-prone lands and support strategic development/redevelopment decisions to mitigate flood events.
3. Support future park facilities as a means of leisure, economic development, and environmental preservation.
4. Ensure that Canton strategically grows in a way that honors the Town's current housing stock and historic buildings.
5. Achieve higher development standards through regulation and infrastructure investments.
6. Preserve and expand housing opportunities to ensure the Town is livable and equitable.

No.	Action	Goal Achievement	Agency	Timeframe
1	Update Town development ordinances to ensure they are up to date and utilizing best practices.	2, 3, 4, 5	TS	Short
2	Use asset management and Capital Predictor software to manage utilities repair schedules and maximize infrastructure efficiency.	4, 5	TS, CC, CO	Medium
3	Explore regulations relating to tourism-based housing to ensure that Town neighborhoods are preserved.	4, 5, 6	TS, CO	Long
4	Assess two-story buildings in the downtown for mixed-use apartment capabilities. Seek grants to prepare buildings for mixed-use dwellings.	1, 4, 6	TS, CC, RP	Medium
5	Address downtown vacancy using a combination updated regulatory language and innovative partnerships between the landlord and temporary tenants.	1, 5	TS, CC	Medium
6	Utilize FEMA buyout opportunities and Town-owned parcels to convert floodplain-bound lots into parks/open space.	2, 3, 5	TS, RP	Short
7	Add provisions to the development ordinances that encourage accessory dwelling units or otherwise encourage infill development.	2, 4, 5, 6	TS, CO	Short
8	Hire a Planner or Zoning Enforcement Officer	1, 2, 4, 5	TS	Short
9	Expand the Town core to allow for additional downtown amenities.	1, 3, 5	TS, CC	Medium
10	Explore development of a historic district or utilization of additional zoning requirements to establish downtown architectural standards.	1, 4	TS, HS	Medium
11	Promote recreational and Town facilities as a component of economic development.	2, 3	TS, CC	Long

TS - Town Staff **CC** - Chamber of Commerce **CO** - Consultant **HS** - Historic Society **RP** - Regional Partners

