

Steering Committee Handbook

Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan 2043

2021
Planning & Development Department



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Overview of the Comprehensive Plan

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan (hereafter referred to as ‘The Plan’) is a document created by local governments and residents to determine what the focus and vision of the community should be over a long-term, 20 year period. The Plan looks at the relationships between land uses, infrastructure, such as roads and utilities, and community needs, and can impact how and where a community grows over time. It seeks to include broad, equitable, and diverse public engagement from residents across all areas of the county.

A Comprehensive Plan is a requirement by the state for a local government to have Zoning regulations. It also provides a broad tool to help communities identify how they want to prioritize resources and future planning efforts. The Plan can be used as a guide for the County in budgeting and policy decisions, drafting regulations, and creating 5-year Strategic Plans.

Some examples of questions that The Plan will seek to answer include:

- How, where, and what type of growth is happening around the County?
- What areas are best suited for future growth, and what should that growth look like?
- What areas should be preserved, conserved, or protected, and how?
- What kind of environmental, health, safety, and other challenges might the County face, and what are some ways to address those?
- How can equity, multi-generational needs, accessibility, and other issues be addressed?
- Where should critical facilities and recreation opportunities be located?
- What are the goals for economic development and tourism?
- Are there neighborhoods that require more detailed small area plans?

What is included in a Comp Plan?

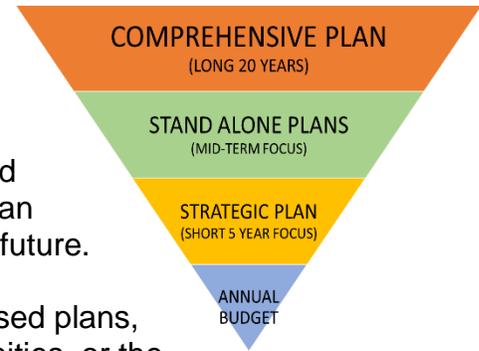
A Comprehensive Plan develops goals, policies, and actions, includes a needs assessment, and identifies gaps or conflicts between current ordinances or policies, and recommends changes. It can identify opportunities for collaboration and the need for additional or more detailed small area or targeted plans.

The Plan can address a number of components including:

- Transportation
- Affordable Housing
- Hazard Mitigation/Resiliency
- Sustainability/Environment/Conservation
- Aging Population
- Other demographic trends
- Early Childhood/Youth Population trends/Multigenerational Needs
- Equity
- Land Use/Development Trends
- Critical Facilities/Concurrency Management
- Economy and Industry
- Emergency Management/Public Safety
- Farmland/Food
- Infrastructure
- Tourism
- Nodes/Small Area Plans
- Parks/Greenways/Healthy Community

Other Plans and Ordinances

The 20 year Comprehensive Plan is the central guiding document for the County to refer to when creating 5-year Strategic Plans, medium-term stand-alone plans, and annual budgets. By referencing the goals and priorities outlined in The Plan, other medium and short term planning activities can stay aligned with the communities vision and guidance for the future.



The Plan may also identify the need for more detailed, or focused plans, such as the creation of small-area plans for individual communities, or the need for targeted plans, such as for Hazard mitigation or Recreation. The Plan may also support existing plans by identifying the need for updates or additional research or changes. County Staff will look to the priorities outlined in The Plan to help draft or make changes to regulations and ordinances to better align those tools with The Plan goals.

Why prepare a Comprehensive Plan?

The Comprehensive Plan will identify a long-range vision for the future, and identify broad goals, policies, and strategies for how to achieve that vision. The information contained in The Plan can then be used by the County to develop policies and priorities, make budget decisions, apply for state or federal funding, develop land use plans, strategic plans, and other planning documents, amend ordinances, and provide guidance to Boards and Committees. Over time this has the ability to impact how and where a community grows, what it looks like, what services and amenities are available, how resilient it is in terms of preparing for and responding to challenges, and more. The Plan is also a requirement of the state in order to have Zoning regulations.

How will the Comprehensive Plan be created?

Over a roughly two year period starting in the Fall of 2021, County staff will work with community residents, topic experts, local leaders, groups, and stakeholders to create The Plan through a significant public engagement process. That process will include a variety of ways for residents to provide input and be involved, including in-person and virtual events, meetings, focus groups, surveys, and other opportunities. The goal is to reach all residents of the county in a way that is inclusive, whether that be by meeting residents where they live or work, coordinating with community liaisons, or taking different schedules, languages, and accessibility needs into account to help people access the planning process.

A Steering Committee of 23 local residents from various background will work with staff throughout the process to provide their insight and expertise, give feedback on the process and documents, and act as a sounding board.

A planning Consulting firm, Clarion Associates, will provide professional services to the County and help guide the process. They will also develop a robust public engagement plan. Past planning efforts, the history of the County, available data, and current land use tools and regulations will be included in their evaluation. A needs assessment will be developed which identifies gaps or conflicts between current Ordinances or policies and recommended items. With ongoing input from residents, Committees, and County Boards, staff and the Consultant will create a draft plan to present to the Board of Commissioners for final review and adoption.

Timeline

The planning process officially begins in August with the hiring of the planning consulting firm, Clarion, and the first meetings with County Commissioners and the Steering Committee through September. Clarion has identified four phases of the process, including Project Launch, Establishing Vision and Goals, Developing Policies and Strategies, and Plan Adoption around April of 2023.



Your Role as a Steering Committee Member

Your role as a Steering Committee member is crucial to the success of the Comprehensive Plan. You have been selected because of your knowledge of the community, expertise in a focus area, interest in the future of the county, and/or willingness to help create a new vision for the next 20 years.

Plan Development:

You will be asked to provide perspective and insight on information gathered as well as feedback on draft policies and implementation actions. Your insight will help shape guidelines for growth, addressing community needs, and long range priorities. As a Committee member you will act as a sounding board for the residents of Buncombe.

Learning and Sharing Information:

Over the course of the planning process you may be introduced to new ideas about development, demographic trends, new technology, and other information. You may also find other ideas that you wish to share with the Committee and staff. We ask that you bring an open mind and an understanding that this process is collaborative and requires that we seek to hear all voices, and together as a group consider the best path forward for all residents of the county.

Networking, Recruiting, and Support:

Steering Committee members can advocate for The Plan by telling residents about planning activities, upcoming events, or providing information about the purpose and potential impact of The Plan. Members may also be asked to brainstorm and identify specific community members to participate in focus groups or other activities based on expertise, affiliation, or lived experience.

During the public engagement phase, Members may be asked to volunteer at virtual or in-person public events to assist with answering questions, facilitating conversations, or organizing activities with residents. Staff will keep up to date on the latest guidance about COVID protocols when planning events. Throughout the process, the County's Planning Department staff will provide support and guidance for the Committee and can be contacted with any questions.

Time Commitment

At the first Steering Committee meeting, Members will discuss optimal future meeting dates and times. Initially, the Committee will meet once a month, and due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings will continue to be held virtually until further notice.

Please be aware that as we progress further into the planning process, subcommittees may form around certain focus areas. This could increase the time commitment for those who choose to be involved in subcommittees.

Meeting Attendance:

Meeting attendance is vitally important to the success of the Committee and the planning process. We ask that you make attendance a top priority since each member brings a unique perspective that will be crucial to our mission. That being said, we understand that there are extenuating circumstances. If you are not able to attend a meeting please email Haylee.Madfis@BuncombeCounty.org or call 828-250-4865 in advance.

Steering Committee meetings are open to the public and they will be recorded. A zoom link will be made available on the County website for those who would like to attend. The meetings will be located at 200 College Street in downtown Asheville if and when we are able to hold in person meetings. Please contact us with any technical concerns or limitations that you have with accessing virtual meetings.

Meeting Etiquette and Values:

1. **Decision making through collaboration:** The Steering Committee will function as a workgroup and will reach its decisions/recommendations through consensus.
2. **Active participation:** Members are expected to attend meetings and participate.
3. **Everyone gets a chance to share their views:** The group can discuss reasonable time limits on how long individuals speak; the goal is to create a culture in which everyone is able to participate.
4. **Respect:** Listening is a sign of respect; interrupting people is discouraged. Questions and differing viewpoints will be heard when it is your time to speak.
5. **Advocacy:** Outside of meeting times Committee members are Comprehensive Plan ambassadors. Help your family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues get involved and have their voices heard.

Organization and Management of the Plan

The role of the Consultant

Clarion Associates has been hired by the County to provide professional planning services for the creation of The Plan. You can learn more about Clarion on their website: <https://www.clarionassociates.com/>. You can also see some of the work they have completed in other North Carolina towns by searching online for plans for the following cities: Charlotte, Davidson, Fayetteville, and Kannapolis.

The County has signed a contract with Clarion, which includes a detailed list of basic services that the consultant will perform. These services include:

- Project management
- Data analysis and research
- Meeting facilitation
- Community outreach and engagement
- Drafting documents, reports, and recommendations

The consulting team will be leading some of the Steering Committee meetings throughout the two year planning process.

The role of the Public

Public participation is an essential component of a high quality, meaningful Comprehensive Plan. Inclusive and well attended public participation is necessary to determine the vision of a community. Residents of the county will be asked to provide their ideas, share their

experiences, and give feedback through every phase of the planning process. The goal is to reach every resident of the county through in-person, virtual, and hybrid activities. Activities may include informal pop-ins at community events, meetings-in-a-box, texting, paper and online surveys, focus groups, community meetings, and public hearings.

One of the first things that the Consultant will do is develop a detailed public engagement plan. That plan, in addition to engagement software, will allow the County to track participation levels to ensure that there is sufficient representation from all geographic areas of the county, demographics, and so on. Targeted outreach can occur to any groups who are found to have low participation levels to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to share their views. The public will also have time to review the draft Plan and provide ongoing feedback on the final document.

Final adoption

Final adoption of The Plan is anticipated to happen in early to mid-2023. After extensive public engagement, the County will host a number of public work sessions and hearings with the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners to review the draft Plan. Once final revisions have been made, the Commissioners will adopt The Plan.

What happens after it's adopted?

After The Plan is adopted, Buncombe County can refer to the document when making decisions about budgets, additional planning activities, and when drafting or making changes to ordinances. A full review of existing ordinances is often the next step after a Comprehensive Plan is adopted. The purpose of that review would be to identify areas that are out of alignment with the Plan's guidance and to make changes to those ordinances so that they reflect what the community has decided.

Planning Department Support

The Buncombe County Long Range Planning Division staff includes:

- Gillian Phillips, Division Manager, Planner III, AICP
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