



OUR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION, AND UPWARD MOBILITY

Introduction

Economic development, educational attainment, and upward mobility of the county's workforce are all linked. For one of these components to grow and strengthen in the future, all three of these components must be addressed.

Recent economic and planning efforts have shed light on the strengths of the region and county, such as continued economic and population growth; and have also revealed disparities that limit the upward mobility of vulnerable communities, in particular people of color that live in and around Asheville and other parts of the county.

Growing the local economy, advancing educational attainment, and improving upward mobility of the most vulnerable members of the Buncombe community will require partnership efforts and a multi-pronged approach. Planning efforts conducted in recent years, including the AVL 5X5 Plan and AVL Greater, provide the groundwork for regional, coordinated action.

This chapter provides information on data and trends related to economic development, education, and upward mobility, summarizes recent planning initiatives relevant to these topics, and shares example case studies that shed light on place-based approaches to economic development that have been successful in other similar communities in Vermont and California.



Growing the local economy, advancing educational attainment, and improving upward mobility of the most vulnerable members of the Buncombe community will require partnership efforts and a multi-pronged approach.

Photo courtesy of Buncombe County

OVERVIEW OF TRENDS & PLANNING INFLUENCES

Employment

- The unemployment rate in the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Madison Counties, is lower than North Carolina and the United States overall (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020).
- In the Asheville MSA, jobs that saw the greatest increase in the past year were in the mining, logging, and construction fields; information field; and leisure and hospitality fields.

Employment by Industry

- The healthcare, tourism, and manufacturing industries make up the majority of Buncombe County's economy (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2020). This does not include public institutions, such as those employed by school districts or local government.
- Buncombe County's top 5 industries by payroll amounts are 1) healthcare and social assistance; 2) manufacturing; 3) retail trade; 4) accommodation and food services; and 5) professional, scientific, and technical services.
- Healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, and retail trade make up more than 50% of the employment in Buncombe County.

Income and Wages

- The median annual household income in Buncombe County is \$52,207, which is lower than North Carolina and the United States overall (US Census, 5-year, 2019 American Community Survey)
- Approximately 48% of the population has an annual household income less than \$50,000. This

figure does include retirees as well as lower income workers.

- The highest median annual incomes are in the following occupations: management; architecture and engineering; healthcare practitioners and technical; computer and mathematical; and life, physical, and social science occupations.
- The lowest annual median wages are found in food preparation and service-related positions; personal care and service; farming, fishing, and forestry; building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; and sales and related positions.

Poverty

- In Buncombe County, 12.2% of all people and 7.5% of all families have an income below the poverty level (US Census, 5-year 2019, ACS).
- Buncombe County has a slightly smaller percentage of the population with an income below the poverty level compared to North Carolina and the United States.

Upward Mobility

- Equity is an organizational value and a foundational focus area for Buncombe County.
- Upward mobility is the ability to improve your social or economic position. In many cases, upward mobility is contingent on educational attainment. Income, poverty, educational attainment, and upward mobility disparities provide a starting place for making upward mobility more equitable for all members of the community.
- In addition to goals around housing, justice, and wellness, the Racial Equity Action Plan has identified goals of improving equitable economic drivers and providing equitable workforce opportunities.

Educational Attainment

- Of the population 25 years and over, 91.1% of the population has a high school education or higher.
- Approximately 23% of the total population

only has a high school degree or equivalent. About one-quarter of the population has a bachelor's degree and 15% have a graduate or professional degree (US Census, 5-year 2019, ACS).

- There is an almost four percentage point difference between women and men who have a bachelor's degree (26.6% versus 22.8%, respectively).
- In Buncombe County, median earnings for a high school graduate are \$26,869, compared to \$41,977 with a bachelor's degree or \$51,337 with a graduate or professional degree. The median earnings for those with less than a high school degree equivalent are \$19,902.
- The wage gap undermines educational attainment for women, as men report higher annual incomes compared to the same educational attainment. For women, the median earnings are \$19,526 less with a graduate or professional degree, \$11,857 less with a bachelor's degree, and \$6,626 less with a high school degree.
- While 93% of the white population in Buncombe County has a high school education or higher, 60% of those of Hispanic or Latino origin report having a high school education or higher. By comparison, the high school education or higher rate is 90% for the Black population, 86% for the Asian population, and 88% for those that identify as two or more races.
- Approximately 43% of the white population has a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the Black population (17.8%), Hispanic or Latino population (19.5%), Asian population (51.10%), or those who identify as two or more races (28.3%).

Partners and Planning Initiatives

- The Economic Development Coalition and the AVL 5X5 Plan provide economic direction for Asheville and Buncombe County, including five targeted strategies and targeted industries for recruitment.
- The AVL Greater planning initiative offers a series of strategies for coordinating growth and economic advancement of the Greater Asheville Region (including Transylvania County) that can be leveraged in this planning effort.

- Tourism is a major foundation of Buncombe County's local economy and can be leveraged to support economic development of other industries.
- There are also opportunities to think differently about tourism and the form it takes in Buncombe County, as identified in the following case studies.

Place-Based Economic Development: Case Studies

- Place-based economic development is a method of economic development which focuses on leveraging the unique place-based features and assets of a locality.
- The approach often seeks to strengthen existing businesses, attract new businesses and investment, support the ability of residents to compete for employment opportunities, and enhance quality of life (which is valued by both businesses and residents).
- Three case studies provide examples in other communities of place-based tourism development focused on agritourism, arts and culture, and outdoor recreation.
- In each of the communities, tourism development has been accompanied by efforts to protect and enhance the assets which attract visitors to the area, thus advancing multiple community goals.
- The case study of El Dorado County, CA, demonstrates how agritourism can support the local economy, encourage the preservation of agricultural lands and open space, and protect regional heritage and quality of life.
- The case study of Bennington County, VT, demonstrates how promoting a vibrant arts and culture scene can support economic development and align with the comprehensive planning goals of the region and county.
- The case study of Bishop, CA, demonstrates how economic development efforts can protect and support community and natural assets, like outdoor recreation.

FINDINGS FROM ANALYSIS

The economic development of Buncombe County can be analyzed using many different economic indicators. In this section, we summarize the unemployment rate, total employment, employment by industry, and tourism. In addition, airport activity, the residential housing market, and the commercial real estate market can provide indicators for the economic development of Buncombe County. These are reviewed in more depth in the Land Use, Housing, and Transportation Chapter.

Employment

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, May 2020) reports that the unemployment rate in the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Madison Counties, is 3.2%. In comparison, the unemployment rate for North Carolina and the United States are 5.6% and 5.3%, respectively. The unemployment rate in the Asheville MSA was lower in 2019 (3.07%) and is trending downward after reaching 7.94% during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was a total of 193,100 non-farm jobs in the Asheville MSA, a 3.0% 12-month increase, as of December 2021. The jobs with the greatest 12-month percentage increase in December 2021 were information (6.3%); mining, logging, and construction (6.3%); and leisure and hospitality (13.6%),

Employment by Industry

The healthcare, tourism, and manufacturing industries make up the majority of Buncombe County's economy. Buncombe County's top 5 industries (by annual payroll amounts) are 1) health care and social assistance; 2) manufacturing; 3) retail trade; 4) accommodation and food services; and 5) professional, scientific, and technical services, as shown in the graphic on the next page (BLS May 2020). This does not include public institutions, such as those employed by school districts or local government.

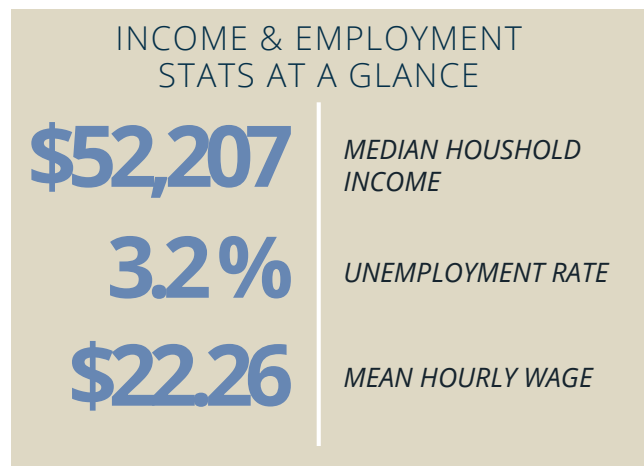
The top 5 industries when analyzed by the highest number of employees are 1) health care and social assistance (25,704); 2) accommodation and

food services (19,803); 3) retail trade (18,923); 4) manufacturing (13,546); and 5) the category of administrative support and waste management & remediation (6,411) (BLS May 2020). Healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, and retail trade make up more than 50% of the total annual payroll (52.4%) and the number of employees for Buncombe County (52.2%). Healthcare and social assistance employees comprise 20.8% of the total number of employees in Buncombe County, while accommodation and food services make up 16.1% and the retail trade employees represent 15.3% of the number of employees.

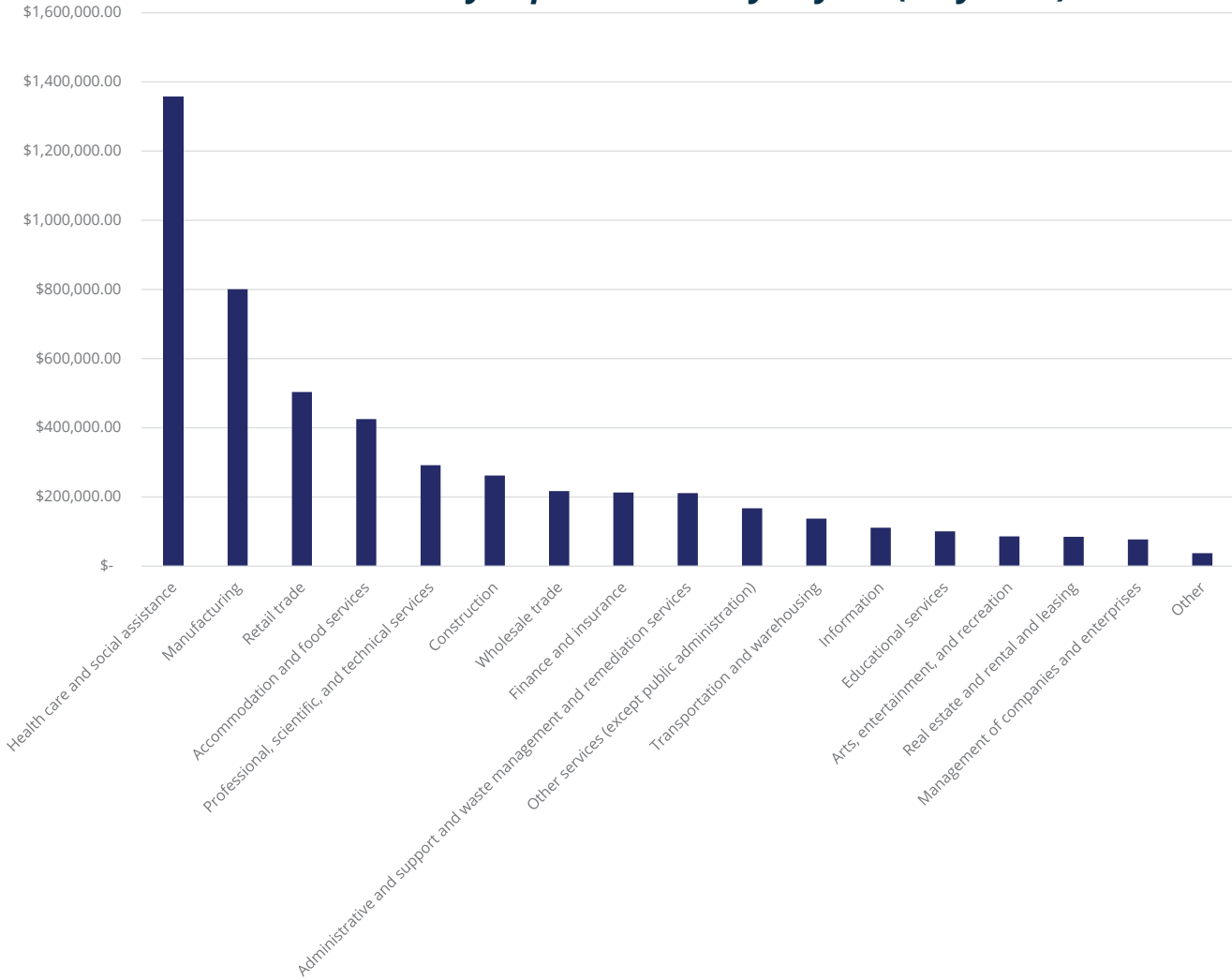
Income and Wages

The median annual household income in Buncombe County is \$52,207 (Census, 5-year, 2019 ACS). In comparison, the median household income is \$54,602 for North Carolina and \$62,843 for the United States. Approximately 19% of households in Buncombe County have an annual household income of \$50,000 to \$74,999, and 14.9% have an annual household income of \$35,000 to \$49,000 (in 2019 inflation-adjusted dollars). Approximately 48% of households have an annual household income less than \$50,000. (See graphic on next page.)

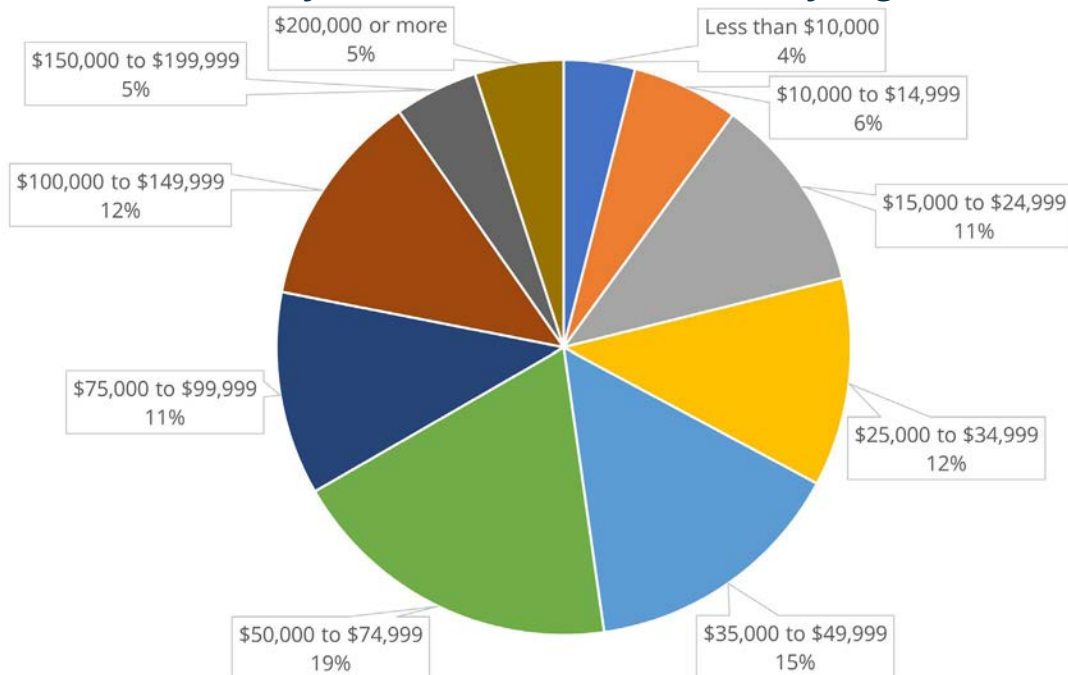
The BLS provides wage information by occupations. The chart on page 74 visualizes the mean hourly wage by occupation across 3 geographies: the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area, the Mountain North Carolina Nonmetropolitan Area, and North Carolina. The Asheville, NC Metropolitan Statistical Area includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, and Madison Counties. For a regional comparison, the Mountain North Carolina Nonmetropolitan Area includes the following counties: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Jackson, Macon, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey.



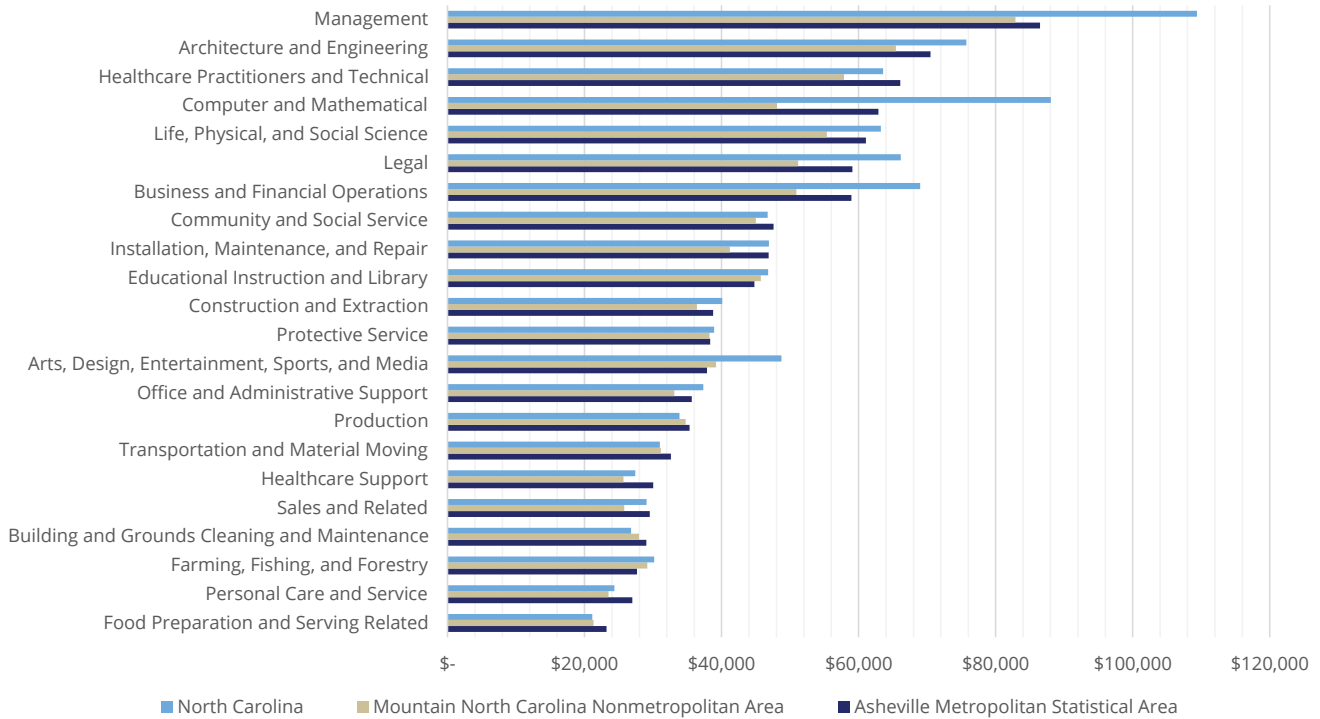
Buncombe County Top Industries by Payroll (May 2020)



Buncombe County Annual Household Income by Segments (2019)



Median Annual Income by Occupation



In the Asheville MSA, the highest incomes (by median annual income) are found in the following occupations: management; architecture and engineering; healthcare practitioners and technical; computer and mathematical; and life, physical, and social science occupations. Management, architecture and engineering, computer and mathematical, and life, physical, and social science occupations report a higher mean hourly wage than the region but lower than the state. Healthcare practitioners and technical occupations report higher wages than both the region and state medians.

The lowest annual median wages are found in food preparation and serving related positions; personal care and service; farming, fishing, and forestry; building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; and sales and related positions. Farming, fishing, and forestry is the only one of these categories where the Asheville MSA reports lower hourly mean wages than the region and the state. The rest of these occupational groups—food preparation and serving related positions; personal care and service; farming, fishing, and forestry; building and grounds cleaning and maintenance; and sales and related—all report higher median annual wages than both the region and the state.

Poverty

In Buncombe County, 12.2% of all people and 7.5% of all families have an income below the poverty level, according to the U.S. Census. The table below compares Buncombe County to North Carolina and the United States. Buncombe County has a slightly smaller percentage of the population

Percentage of Families and People Whose Income in the Past 12 Months is Below the Poverty Level			
	Buncombe County, North Carolina	North Carolina	United States
All families	7.5%	10.6%	9.5%
All people	12.2%	14.7%	13.4%
Under 18 years	17.2%	21.2%	18.5%
18 years and over	11.0%	12.8%	11.9%
18 to 64 years	11.8%	13.8%	12.6%
65 years and over	8.6%	9.1%	9.3%

Source: U.S. Census, 2019 5-year estimates

with an income below the poverty level when broken down by age categories as well.

Educational Attainment

The following graph and tables show a picture of the educational attainment of the population in Buncombe County. Of the population 25 years and over, 91.1% of the population has a high school education or higher. Overall, 3% of the population has less than a 9th grade education, with more men (3.7%) falling into that category than women (2.3%). Approximately 23% of the total population has only a high school degree or equivalent. About one-quarter of the population has a bachelor's degree and 15% have a graduate or professional degree.

We see a higher rate of 9th to 12th grade (without a high school diploma) for men compared to women (6.2%, 5.8% respectively). There is an almost four percentage points difference between women and men who have a bachelor's degree (26.6% versus 22.8%, respectively). In comparison, the percentages of men and women with a graduate or professional degree are closer.

Educational attainment correlates with income. In Buncombe County, the median earnings for a high school graduate (in 2019 inflation-adjusted dollars) are \$26,869, compared to \$41,977 with a bachelor's degree or \$51,337 with a graduate or professional degree. The median earnings for those with less than

a high school degree equivalent is \$19,902. However, the wage gap undermines educational attainment for women, as men report higher annual incomes compared to the same educational attainment.

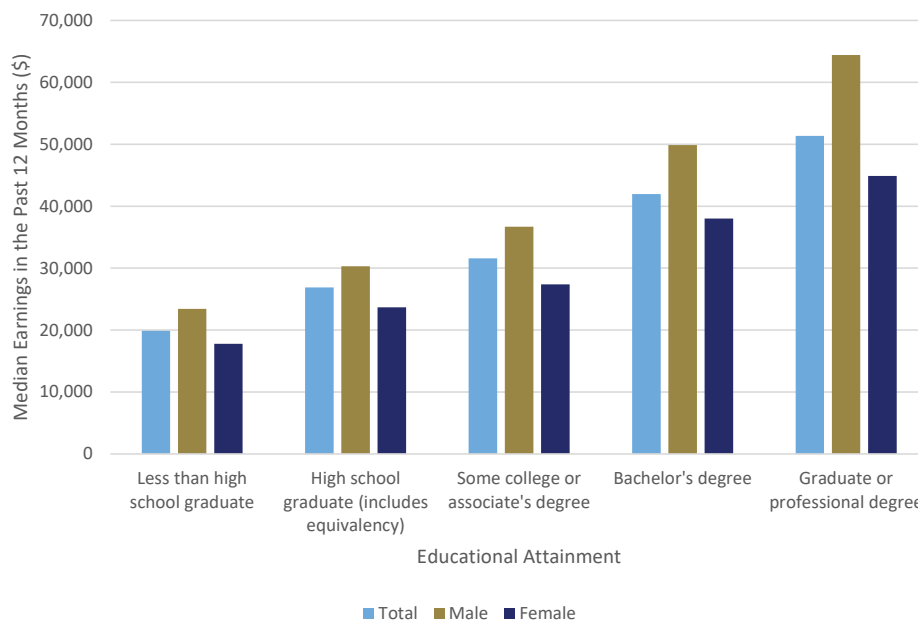
Women report \$19,526 less in median earnings with a graduate or professional degree, \$11,857 less with a bachelor's degree, and \$6,626 less with a high school degree.

Educational disparities persist by race and ethnicity. While 93% of the white population in Buncombe County has a high school education or higher, 60% of those of Hispanic or Latino origin report having a high school education or higher. In comparison, the Black population reports that 90% have a high school education or higher. Approximately 86% of the Asian population and 88% of those that identify as two or more races have a high school education or higher.

When we narrow the focus to a bachelor's degree or higher, the Buncombe County population experiences similar disparities. Approximately 43% of the white population has a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the Black or African American population (17.8%), Hispanic or Latino population (19.5%), Asian population (51.10%), or those who identify as two or more races (28.3%).

Buncombe County Median Earnings by Educational Attainment

(2019 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars, U.S. Census 2019 5-Year Estimates)



Educational Attainment by Male/Female (% of Total Segmented by Achievement Level)			
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Less than 9th grade	3.0%	3.7%	2.3%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	6.0%	6.2%	5.8%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	23.2%	25.0%	21.7%
Some college, no degree	18.6%	19.0%	18.4%
Associate's degree	9.0%	8.5%	9.6%
Bachelor's degree	24.8%	22.8%	26.6%
Graduate or professional degree	15.3%	14.9%	15.7%
<i>Source: U.S. Census (2019) 5-year estimates</i>			

Educational Attainment by Race and Ethnicity (% of Total Cumulative by Achievement Level)		
	<i>High School Graduate or Higher</i>	<i>Bachelor's Degree or Higher</i>
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	100.00%	0.00%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	93.00%	42.80%
White alone	91.50%	41.80%
Black alone	90.00%	17.80%
Two or more races	87.80%	28.30%
Asian alone	86.40%	51.10%
American Indian or Alaska Native alone	81.00%	23.40%
Some other race alone	67.50%	15.30%
Hispanic or Latino Origin	60.00%	19.50%
<i>Source: U.S. Census (2019) 5-year estimates</i>		

Upward Mobility

Based on Buncombe County’s Racial Equity Action Plan, equity is the state of being just, impartial, and fair. For example, the plan defines racial equity as being achieved “when race can no longer be used to predict life outcomes, and outcomes for all groups are improved.” Equity is an organizational value and a foundational focus area for Buncombe County, and the vision from the County’s Racial Equity Action Plan is: “Systems, policies, and practices that support equity for all people and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion.” At the intersection of economic development and equity is upward mobility and educational attainment.

The Racial Equity Action Plan 2025 was formed in early 2020 by the Buncombe County Equity & Inclusion Workgroup. The Racial Equity Action Plan outlines goals to address disparities in race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and more.

Upward mobility is the ability to improve one’s social or economic position. In many cases, upward mobility is contingent on the neighborhood where someone grows up. A study conducted by Harvard Professor Nathaniel Hendren (2018) assessed neighborhood impacts on intergenerational mobility by studying more than seven million families who move across commuting zones and counties in the U.S. The report found that “neighborhoods in which children grow up shape their earnings, college attendance rates, and

fertility and marriage patterns.” The report goes on to state “the outcomes of children whose families move to a better neighborhood—as measured by the outcomes of children already living there—improve linearly in proportion to the amount of time they spend growing up in that area, at a rate of approximately 4% per year of exposure.”¹¹

This report suggests that upward mobility is determined by factors such as neighborhood segregation by income and race, income inequality, school system quality, and violent crime rates. Within the Asheville Metropolitan Area, the research found that Buncombe County is one of the most difficult places for a child in poverty. Children living in families with income less than \$30,000 in Buncombe County will earn less than the national average in adulthood, ranking toward the bottom of the list compared to other counties across the United States.

The authors of this and other similar studies state that while upward mobility is often limited for children of color, this is not specifically due to race directly, but instead to the systemic discrimination that people of color face in our country.

Addressing income, poverty, educational attainment, and upward mobility disparities provide a starting place for Buncombe County to improve the lives and well-being of residents.

Buncombe County's Equity and Inclusion Workgroup has identified the following existing initiatives that support more equitable economic opportunities, excerpted here:

- **Mountain Community Capital Fund (MCCF):** Partnership with the City of Asheville and Community Financial Development Institutions (CDFIs) to provide loan guarantees to historically marginalized small business owners.
- **One Buncombe Individual and Small Business Relief:** Partnership with local governments, private and nonprofit sectors. Individual assistance and small business loan/grant relief to COVID-19 impacted businesses. Approximately \$2M raised, 200+ business supported, and 1,000+ individuals supported.
- **Inclusive Hiring Partners:** Partnership between the Housing Authority, Chamber of Commerce, local organizations and employers to increase workforce participation and connect participants to opportunities that move individuals and their families from surviving to thriving.

- **Economic Development Incentive Program:** Economic development incentives to recruit or retain companies. Since 2020, creation and retention of 1,000+ jobs with average wages ranging from \$21.00 to \$36.00 per hour.

Partners and Planning Initiatives

Buncombe County's economic development strategies are organized and implemented through a 27-year public-private partnership - the Economic Development Coalition for Asheville-Buncombe County (EDC). The partnership is funded by Buncombe County, the City of Asheville, the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce and other private investors through the AVL 5x5 Campaign.

AVL 5X5 2025 - Economic Strategic Plan

AVL 5X5 2025 is a five-year economic development strategic plan for Buncombe County. This plan sets out a series of implementation steps for achieving economic sustainability defined as economic development that is good for people, good for place, and good for prosperity. This plan sets out



Image courtesy of Buncombe County (Asheville Tourist Game)

five key strategies:

1. Nurture local growth in sectors where we have a homegrown competitive advantage with a focus on economic mobility.
2. Recruit new growth with a focus on community well-being.
3. Fast-track startups with a focus on the "Startup Gene."
4. Integrate and strengthen our workforce systems with a focus on purpose built community pilot.
5. Develop industrial sites and buildings with a case study focus on Black Mountain Commerce Park.

Target Industries

Relevant to the comprehensive plan effort is the identification of target industry groups through the AVL 5X5 planning process. These target industries are identified for recruitment to Buncombe County and include:

- Advanced manufacturing (e.g., automotive, aerospace, food, beverage, etc.)
- Life science (biotech and medical devices)
- Outdoor products

- Professional office and information technology

When preparing the Future Land Use map for the 2043 Comprehensive Plan, it will be important to include opportunities for development of these targeted industries.

The Plan also addresses the need to rethink upward mobility for the county's workforce and states that "Research is making it clear: if we want better economic outcomes for our next-generation residents, we must work to provide jobs to their parents and neighbors. This insight is novel and will require new partnerships and innovative, shared models of success. We can do more to diversify and expand the work-ready talent pool for Buncombe County employers. The EDC must continue to build meaningful connections and networks to historically marginalized populations in our community through partnerships with the Asheville Housing Authority, UpSkill WNC, and others."

Creating better access from neighborhoods that have limited upward mobility to employment centers, workforce training opportunities, and access to capacity building for entrepreneurship

What is the purpose of those outcomes?



Source: EDC Board Meeting July 2019

From the EDC Board Meeting, July 2019, the above word cloud identifies the purpose of achieving economic sustainability in Buncombe County.

are ways the County and its partners can plan for improving upward mobility of its workforce.

AVL Greater

In 2019, a regional planning initiative - AVL Greater - was conducted for the Asheville Metropolitan Statistical Area and Transylvania County. Spurred by the expected increase in growth in this region, this planning effort focused on creating a vision for the region and exploring tools that enable and challenge the region to think critically about how to intentionally shape for the future for the region. It identified the following six trends that are impacting Greater Asheville:

1. Residents are getting priced out of housing
2. Shrinking middle class
3. Growing population
4. Growing total employment
5. Budget gap in the public sector
6. Jobs are expected to grow especially in selected industries

This effort resulted in development of four key strategies to coordinate planning for the region:

- **Leadership Matters:** Committing to a shared vision among leaders, growing the next generation of leaders, regional leadership, a balanced scorecard of performance
- **Growing Up:** Land use and transportation planning, affordable housing, and paying for growth
- **Economic Mobility and Shared Prosperity:** Working block by block with marginalized neighborhoods, focusing on improving educational achievement in the first years of school, and growing the region's portfolio of economic development and tourism (instead of competing over existing resources)
- **A Place for People:** focusing on authentic inclusiveness and belonging for people of color, retirees, and young families

These strategies are important foundations for considering development of the new 2043 Comprehensive Plan.

Tourism Development Authority

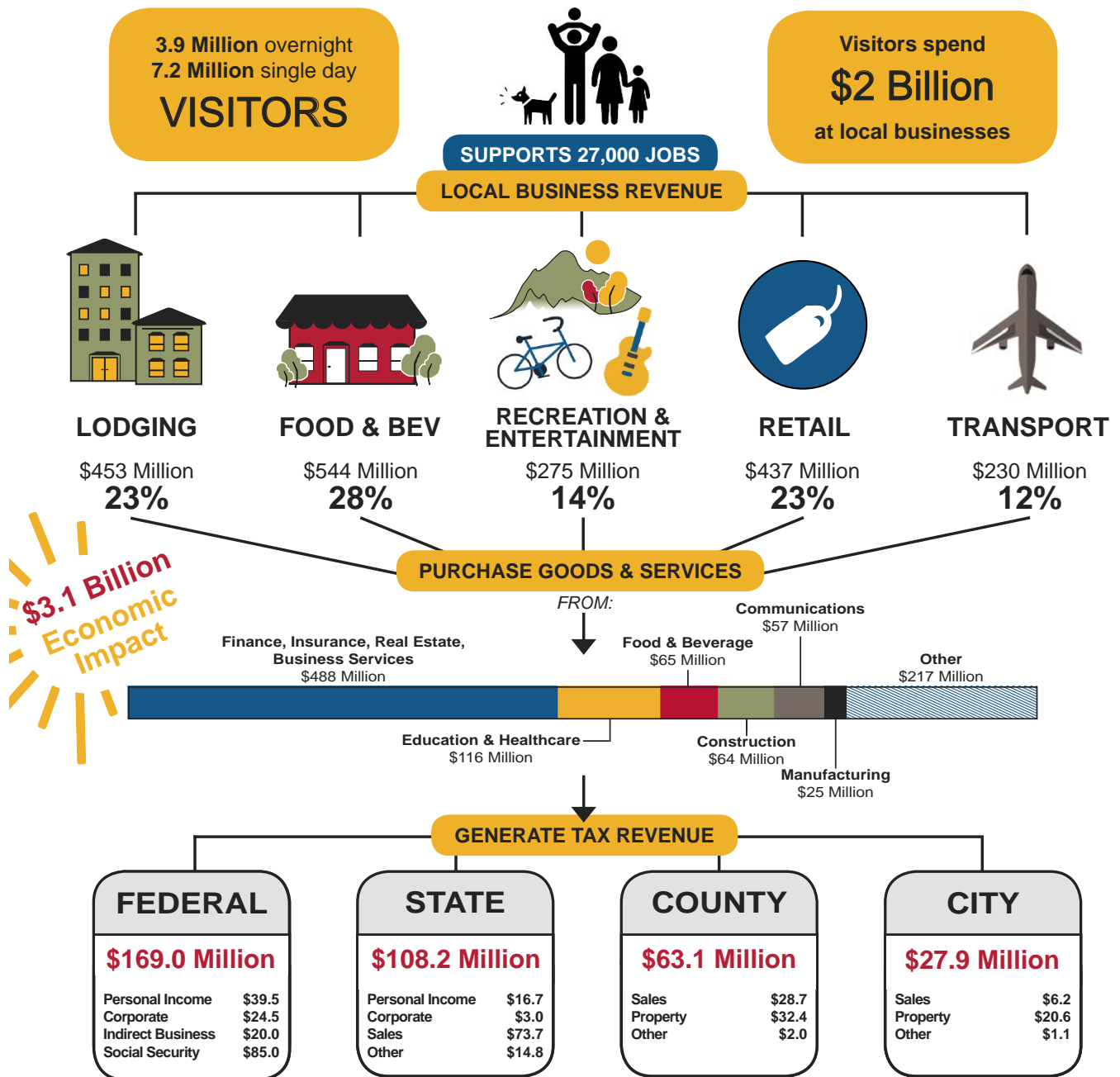
Due to its picturesque landscape, arts and culture, and bucolic setting, the greater Asheville region has long been a tourist destination. Recent years have seen an

uptick in tourism and expansion of related industries (lodging, food and beverage establishments, recreation, entertainment, retail services, etc.)

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) is focused on furthering development of travel, tourism, and conventions in the county through state, national, and international advertising and promotion. The TDA consists of 11 members: 4 appointed by the Asheville City Council, 4 by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners, 1 by the Chamber of Commerce, 1 member of the Asheville City Council, and 1 member of the County Board of Commissioners.

Recent estimates of tourism activity show that visitors spend \$2 billion at local businesses and in turn generates federal, state, county, and city tax revenues. For every \$1 the TDA invests in tourism advertising, another \$43 is spent at local businesses plus \$3 of sales tax.

Looking to the future, tourism will continue to be an important part of the county's local economy. Along with diversification in targeted industries identified in the AVL 5X5 Plan, tourism is a foundation of the economy that can drive economic development in other sectors. How future tourism development is shaped is an important consideration of the 2043 Comprehensive Plan. The following set of case studies from other tourism communities provide food for thought for Buncombe County.



Infographics courtesy of Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

PLACE-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Place-based economic development is a method of economic development which focuses on leveraging the unique place-based features and assets of a locality. These place-based assets can include the following, among others:²

- Residents and their skills
- Local architecture and infrastructure
- Academic, technical, and medical institutions
- Local and regional business and employment concentrations
- Cultural, natural, and artistic resources
- General quality of life

Place-based economic development differs from economic development strategies that involve pursuing new jobs or tax base growth without regard for location or synergies among existing assets. The approach often seeks to strengthen existing businesses, attract new businesses and investment, support the ability of residents to compete for employment opportunities, and enhance quality of life (which is valued by both businesses and residents).³

In addition to enhancing local economic health and vibrancy, place-based economic development can also strengthen an area's local identity, augment cross-sector relationships, and reinforce the capacity of a community to address challenges.⁴ The approach can also build community support and capacity for protecting and enhancing valued community assets (such as natural, historic, and cultural resources) on which the economy depends.

Tourism, as a fundamentally place-based economic activity, can be an effective form of economic development, particularly when focused on a region's natural, historic, cultural, artistic, or other unique local resources.⁵

Buncombe County has a thriving tourism economy, rooted in its multiplicity of place-based assets, (including scenic beauty and climate), natural and agricultural lands, recreational and sightseeing opportunities, cities and towns, arts and culture, history, culinary experiences, and other offerings. At the same time, opportunities may exist to further cultivate tourism as a place-based economic development effort in parts of Buncombe County which desire more economic vibrancy or opportunities. The unincorporated parts of the County offer different tourist opportunities than the City of Asheville, such as agro-tourism.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Overview

To become a more equitable community, vulnerable residents in Buncombe need better access to education and strategies that result in upward mobility and wealth creation. The Buncombe County Racial Equity Action Plan and the AVL 5X5 Plan provide strategies to consider for achieving equity objectives for local residents. In addition, this section identifies approaches to support economic development through land use planning. These policy and implementation ideas should be considered for inclusion in the comprehensive plan.

Advance Education and Upward Mobility:

In addition to goals around housing, justice, and wellness, the Racial Equity Action Plan has identified goals of improving equitable economic drivers and providing equitable workforce opportunities. Initiatives aligned with these goals include:

- Expand Black business ownership in the community
- Support workforce development initiatives that address earnings and wealth gap
- Support developmental programs that increase graduation rates
- Expand enrollment opportunities and participation in early childhood education
- Strengthen educational partnerships to reduce college and career readiness gaps
- Implement equitable hiring and recruitment practices
- Create equity lens tools and other resources for all County staff
- Create Equal Employment Opportunity statement and plan for Buncombe County Human Resources, and ensure it is communicated to staff and the public

- Ensure race/ethnicity and gender makeup matches demographic data (of Census and/or population served) at every level and department of Buncombe County
- Apply Government Alliance on Race and Equity racial equity tools to all Human Resource practices, including compensation, advancement opportunities, disciplinary actions and employee engagement
- Create internal hiring and advancement opportunities via training opportunities

Additional strategies for improving economic upward mobility included in the AVL 5X5 Plan include:

- Registered apprenticeships and youth apprenticeships
- Completion of the Work Ready Communities Certification Program
- New K-16 educational pathways that embrace and teach entrepreneurship
- Strengthening and expanding work-based learning opportunities for high school, community college and regional university students for exposure to sustainable local employment
- A robust re-skilling system for middle skill jobs that leverage the customized training capabilities of the North Carolina Community College System and others
- Strategic investment in curriculum and certifications responding to the State of our Workforce Study (2018) and Target Cluster Gap Analysis (2019) developed by Riverbird Research through national partnerships with the North Carolina Chamber, Research Triangle Institute, and EMSI
- A neighborhood-by-neighborhood approach to economic mobility, employment, and job readiness
- Purpose built community pilot program to increase workforce participation for housing authority residents

Support Economic Development:

The AVL 5X5 Plan identifies the following actions for growing the inventory of suitable sites and buildings within Buncombe.

- Partner with stakeholders to undertake a comprehensive study of lands in the county and identify the top 10 most promising sites for future industrial development and/or commerce parks to attract advanced manufacturing employers.
- Partner with stakeholders of Buncombe County and Asheville to undertake a study of urban and riverfront lands and identify the top 5 most promising sites for infill, redevelopment, or new development necessary to attract Corporate Office & Technology employers.
- Build a real-time inventory of all land suitable for future development in alignment with existing plans and future government planning objectives.
- Develop a broad public/private strategy that will bring new sites to market that have promising transportation access, proximity to current and future economic corridors, robust utility service, labor draw, community synergies, etc.

Endnotes

1 *The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility I: Childhood Exposure Effects*, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 113 (3). <https://scholar.harvard.edu/hendren/publications/impacts-neighborhoods-intergenerational-mobility-i-childhood-exposure-effects>

2 "Framework for Creating a Smart Growth Economic Development Strategy: A Tool for Small Cities and Towns," US EPA Office of Sustainable Communities, Smart Growth Program. January 2016. <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/framework-creating-smart-growth-economic-development-strategy>

3 *Ibid.*

4 "Place-Based Economic Development Models," California State Assembly, Committee on Jobs, Economic Development, and the Economy. <https://ajed.assembly.ca.gov/content/place-based-economic-development-models#:~:text=Place%2Dbased%20economic%20and%20community,physical%20and%20civic%2Fsocial%20environment>

5 "Complete Communities Toolbox: Attractive, Inclusive, Efficient, Healthy & Resilient Places | Placemaking", University of Delaware. <https://www.completecommunitiesde.org/planning/inclusive-and-active/placemaking-intro/>