

MECKLENBURG COUNTY COMMUNITY STORY

Volume 2: Comprehensive Plan Background Report

Adopted 02.10.2025



MECKLENBURG 2044
Planning for what matters





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PART 1: HISTORY OF MECKLENBURG COUNTY

Early History
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History of Mecklenburg County



Photo source: KerrLakeGuide.com

Early History

Due to the presence of water and its abundance of natural resources, including the Roanoke River valley in Southern Mecklenburg County and the Meherrin River in the north, Mecklenburg County has long been a suitable place for human settlement. Evidence suggests that humans began settling in Mecklenburg at least 13,000 years ago with tribes of Native American hunter gatherers residing along the Meherrin River.

Occoneechee Native Americans

By the 1600s, the Roanoke River Valley was populated by the Occoneechee Native Americans, who lived on a four mile long island at the confluence of the Dan and Roanoke Rivers, near present day Clarksville. The Occoneechee raised corn and traded

deerskin and furs up and down the east coast using the Roanoke River for transport. They were so influential that their language was commonly used in trade and they served as an intermediary between Europeans and other Native American tribes.

In 1676 Nathaniel Bacon convinced the Occo-
neechee to join his militia to attack a rival tribe, the
Susquehannocks. After the attack, Bacon turned on
the Occoneechee and attacked and killed the Occo-
neechee Chief and hundreds of tribes-people. The
local population of Occoneechee were decimated
by Bacon and his militia. These events were the
initial stages of what would later become known as
'Bacon's Rebellion.'

The surviving members of the Occoneechee Tribe
fled the area and settled near present day Hillsbor-
ough, N.C. Today, the descendants of the Occo-

• **1600s** The Occoneechee Native Americans have a successful trading post along the Roanoke River.

• **1676** Nathaniel Bacon and his militia attack and kill hundreds of Occo-
neechee in an event
known as 'Bacon's Rebel-
lion'.

1600s

neechee are part of the Occoneechee Band of the Saponi Nation and live in Alamance County, North Carolina. Much of the land once occupied by the Occoneechee in Mecklenburg was flooded by Kerr Lake Reservoir.

Becoming Mecklenburg County

Early White settlers in present day Mecklenburg County were primarily English, but there were also Scots, Welsh, French, Irish, and German immigrants that came to the area in the early 1700s. Settlers grew grain, cotton, and tobacco in the fertile plains along the Roanoke River.



Mecklenburg County Courthouse. Photo source: sovahomefront.org.

Due to population increases within the area, the Virginia General Assembly divided Lunenburg into three Counties: Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, and Charlotte Counties. Through this action, Mecklenburg County was officially established on March 1, 1765. Mecklenburg County was named in honor of Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, consort of George III. The original government of Mecklenburg County consisted of 13 members.

• **1730s** Chase City is initially settled.

• **1765** Mecklenburg County is established.



• **1790** Boyd Tavern is constructed and served as the original jail and courthouse.



1700s

Establishment of Towns

When Mecklenburg County was established, Richard Swepson was given responsibility for building the courthouse, jail, and tavern. The building now known as Boyd Tavern is believed to have served as the original jail and courthouse building.



Boyd Tavern. Photo source: sovahomefront.org.

Alexander Boyd Sr. married into the Swepson family in 1794 and the family deeded 480 acres of land, including the tavern, to Boyd. Alexander Boyd Jr. divided this land to create Boyd Town, which was later shortened to Boydton. The Virginia General Assembly chartered Boyd Town in 1812. Shortly thereafter in 1818, a bill incorporating Clarksville was passed by the Virginia General Assembly.

One of the first settlements within Mecklenburg County was the area that would become Chase City, which was first settled in the 1730s as part of Lunenburg County; however, Chase City was not officially incorporated until 1873. South Hill was established in 1892 with the arrival of the Atlantic and Danville Railroad, but was first known as Ridgefork or Binford's Fork.



1870 Map of Mecklenburg County. Source: Library of Congress.

La Crosse was originally known as Piney Pond and became incorporated in 1901 after the first Seaboard Air Line train passed through town on May 30, 1900.

Civil War and Reconstruction

Virginia voted to secede from the Union in April of 1861 and the Civil War officially began the same year at the battle of Fort Sumter. Throughout the war, Mecklenburg County played an active role in support of the Confederacy. The County sent nine companies to fight for the Confederacy, Clarksville served as a regional depot to support Confederate forces, and Boyd Tavern was a recruiting and enlistment station for the Confederate Army.

No battles took place in Mecklenburg County during the war, but the County was on the path of the Wilson-Kautz raid, which traveled through present day Chase City and “Sheridan’s Raiders,” members of Sheridan’s Union army traveling from North Carolina to City Point Virginia.

Black Residents in the Civil War

At the start of the Civil War, the majority of the population in Mecklenburg County were Black. According to the 1860 census, the total County population was 20,096 and 12,420 were enslaved laborers, held by 760 households. Enslaved laborers accounted for 62% of the population and there were 898 freed-Blacks living in Mecklenburg at the time.

During the Civil War, many Black residents of the County were forced to labor for the Confederacy. In August 1861 all freed African Americans between ages of 18 and 50 were drafted for service to the Confederate government, and the Confederacy required Mecklenburg County to provide 300 able-bodied enslaved males between the ages of 18 and 45 to build fortifications in Richmond.

The Civil War ended in 1865 and in June of that year, General Sherman’s peacetime army passed through Mecklenburg County returning from North Carolina to travel to Washington, D.C. for decommissioning.

The Reconstruction Era constitution mandated the provision of the first statewide public education system for all races. By 1871, there were 20 schools for Black residents within Mecklenburg County, most of them offering primary-level education.

Agriculture and the Economy

Since the 1700s, the local economy of Mecklenburg County has centered around agriculture. The earliest farmers depended on the rivers to ship cash crops of corn and tobacco to regional markets; however, the pooriness of Mecklenburg County’s soils compared with soils in other regions of the South prohibited

farms in the 1700s and early 1800s from competing with large plantations, such as those found in North Carolina and Tidewater Virginia.

Tobacco became even more of a staple of the South-side Virginia economy after the Civil War. Clarksville was home to the oldest flue-cured tobacco market in the world. The first tobacco inspection station in the County was established in 1793.

The number of plantations in the County grew with the advent of Bright Leaf Tobacco, which was introduced to the area by Robert Jeffreys in 1888. Bright Leaf Tobacco thrived in Mecklenburg County and was more suited to its thin, sandy, soils. Bright Leaf Tobacco improved the economic situation for impoverished farms in the County that previously struggled to grow other crops. Over the years, tobacco has been the most important cash crop in the County.



Red Fox Tobacco Farm. Photo source: Virginia DHR

By 1908, South Hill had the third largest flue-cured tobacco market in the state and Tobacco farming continued to be prosperous for this region until the 1930s, even through the Great Depression.

Beginning in the late 1800s, crop diseases began adversely affecting tobacco crops and plagued farmers until disease resistant strains were developed in 1940s.

Since the 1950s, tobacco has seen a steady decline in Mecklenburg County, but this mirrors a national decline. In 1950 there were over 3,000 tobacco farms but in the 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were just 26 tobacco farms in Mecklenburg County. Nevertheless, Virginia remains a top tobacco-producing state, and Mecklenburg County is the second-largest producer in the Virginia today.

Transportation

Transportation networks have been shaping settlement patterns in Mecklenburg County since early populations of Native Americans who relied on the County’s rivers for travel and trade.

Human-made transportation networks came to Mecklenburg in the in the first half of the 1800s, when the Roanoke Navigation Company built a canal and made other improvements to the Roanoke River that allowed bateaux to carry tobacco and other commodities into North Carolina, where steamboats transferred them via the Dismal Swamp Canal to Norfolk.

In the 1830s, the first stagecoach line opened in Boydton. It ran from Belfield (present-day Emporia) to Halifax and was extended to Danville in 1834 with a stop at the Boydton Hotel.

Boydton-Petersburg Plank Road was one of the first hard surface roads in Mecklenburg County, built between 1851 and 1853. The road was an all

• **1800ish** Roanoke Navigation Company builds a canal to allow tobacco trade along the Roanoke River.

• **1821** Clarksville is incorporated.



• **1834** Boydton is incorporated.



• **1855** The Roanoke Valley Railroad becomes the first railroad within Mecklenburg County.

• **1861-1865** Mecklenburg County sends nine companies to fight for the Confederacy in the Civil War.

• **1873** Chase City is incorporated.



• **1888** Bright Leaf Tobacco is introduced to the County which increases profitability of tobacco farms.

• **1892** South Hill is incorporated.



1800-1850

1850-1900

weather toll road that significantly increased the transport of crops to market and carried stagecoach traffic between Boydton and Petersburg. By 1860, the road was declared unsafe due to heavy wear, untreated lumber, and the collapse of the Meherrin River Bridge. Later on, Boydton-Petersburg Plank Road became US 1, a US highway that extends from Florida to Maine.



The Atlantic and Danville Railroad. Photo source: Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society.

In 1855, the Roanoke Valley Railroad began operations in Mecklenburg. The railroad ran from Clarks-ville southeast to Ridgeway, NC where it met the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad. It was the first railroad outlet in Mecklenburg County, but was short lived, after it became a casualty of the Civil War.

By the end of the 19th century, there were three major railroads in the County: the Richmond and Mecklenburg Railroad completed in 1884, which became part of the Southern Railway system in 1894; the Atlantic and Danville Railway completed in 1890; and the Richmond, Petersburg, and Carolina Railroad.

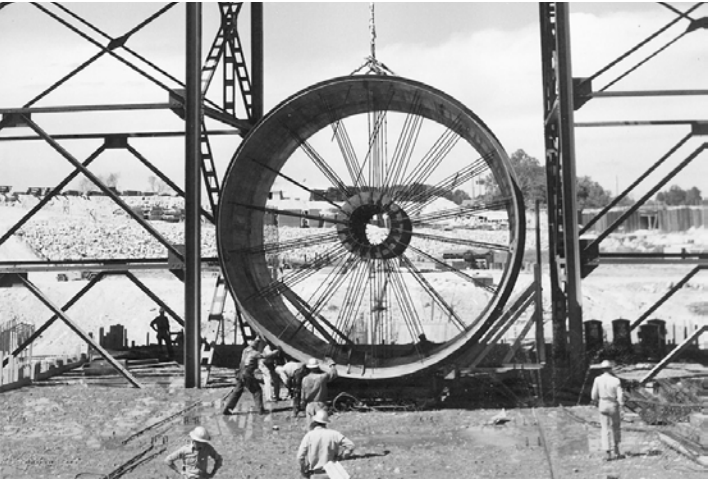
In 1900, the Seaboard Airline Railroad opened railroad tracks running north-south through the County, parallel to St. Tammany Road, that provided rail connectivity between Atlanta and Richmond. This rail line became surplus after the Atlantic Coast Line was incorporated into CSX, and the railroad’s “A” line offered a straighter path south towards Florida.

Modern Day Mecklenburg

Reshaping the Roanoke River

In 1940, a major flood of the Roanoke River, often referred to as the ‘Great Flood,’ caused extensive damage totaling \$5 million in river communities within Virginia and North Carolina. As a result, local politicians and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers secured funding for and constructed the John H. Kerr Dam as a flood control measure for the river.

Construction of the John H. Kerr Lake dam began in 1947 and took five years to complete. Over 12,000



Construction of Kerr Dam took place between 1947-1952. Photo source: KerrLakeGuide.com

workers worked around the clock to construct the dam, which was completed and dedicated in October of 1952. The name of John H. Kerr Dam and Reservoir was in dedication to the North Carolina Congressman who was instrumental in obtaining funding for its construction.

Lake Gaston Dam, which is located in Thelma, North Carolina was constructed along the Roanoke River by Dominion between 1960 and 1963 for energy production. Lake Gaston is in the southeastern portion of Mecklenburg County, near Bracey.

In 1968, the state began leasing the land of Occo-neechee State Park adjacent to the Kerr Lake Reser-voir providing a recreational amenity for residents and visitors. The park offers a boat ramp, trails, and camping.

Modern Transportation Network

Paved roads came to Mecklenburg in the 1930s, with US 1 becoming the first paved road though South Hill. In the 1960s, US 58 was established as an east to west route to Virginia Beach. It followed the route of the Atlantic and Danville Railroad, bypassing small towns like Boydton, which affected small businesses. I-85 was constructed through the County between 1965 and 1970, providing a 4-lane interstate between Richmond and Montgomery, Alabama. In 2005, a four-lane widening of US 58 was completed, which included the Clarksville bypass

In 2003, the County and its regional partners devel-oped a vision for the Tobacco Heritage Trail (THT), a multi-use, non-motorized trail system through Southern Virginia. The first segment of the trail was

constructed in 2004 between La Crosse and Brodnax and an additional section has since been constructed east of Boydton.

In 1987, CSX removed the railroad tracks between Petersburg, Virginia and North Carolina, known as the “S-Line”, but retained ownership of the right-of-way. In 2019, CSX agreed to sell the abandoned portion of the S-Line right-of-way to the Common-wealth of Virginia. Virginia and North Carolina are in the planning and design phases of establishing the Richmond-to-Raleigh (R2R) high speed rail corridor along this route, which will run from Raleigh to Washington, D.C.

Economic Diversification

While agriculture continues to be a mainstay for Mecklenburg’s economy, the County has taken recent steps towards diversifying its economy to bring in new jobs and tax revenue. In the early 2000s, the County took proactive steps, investing in infrastructure and developing industrial parks. Due in a large part to this work, the County has been able to attract high caliber technology companies such as Electronic Data Systems (EDS), which came to Clarksville in 2008, and Microsoft, which estab-lished its first data center near Boydton in 2010.

Mecklenburg’s rural lakeside setting and its position between Richmond and Raleigh give the County all of the elements for a thriving future. Through smart planning and investment, the County can continue to be a leader in rural economic development and can continue to elevate quality of life for County residents.

•1900 The Seaboard Airline Rail- road begins service, which later becomes known as the ‘S-Line’.

•1901 La Crosse is incorporated.



•1901 South Hill is incorporated.



•1915 Brodnax is incorporated.



•1940 The ‘Great Flood’ of the Roanoke River.



•1952 Kerr Lake Dam is completed and dedicated.



•1963 Lake Gaston Dam is completed.

•1968 Occoaneechee State Park opens.



•2004 The first segment of the Tobacco Heritage Trail is constructed.



•2019 Virginia acquires the right of way for the Future Richmond-to-Ra-leigh rail service..

1900-1950

post 1950

History of Schools and Education

Pre-Civil War Era Education

Details about pre-Civil War education in Mecklenburg County are scarce. However, it is likely that formal education began in the 18th century with small, individual schools established throughout the County. During this time, Black children in Mecklenburg and throughout the South were denied the right to a formal education due to slavery.

Post-Civil War and Segregation Era Education

Beginning in 1869, the Reconstruction Era constitution mandated the provision of the first statewide public education system for all races. Early education for African Americans took place in homes and churches before purpose-built schools.

By 1871, Mecklenburg had 20 schools for Black students, most of them offering primary-level education. During the 1870-1871 school year, 1,366 Black and 757 White students enrolled in 20 Black and 22 White schools; the lopsided student to school ratio was indicative of the unequal access to schools afforded to Black children.

One of the longest serving primary schools for Black students was the Averett Graded School founded by George D. Wharton in 1882. It served as the local primary school until 1940. The original school was little more than a small two-room log house but it was expanded many times over the years.

The first public school in the County (the “two-room school”) opened in Chase City in 1885 to educate White children. The earliest documented site of a public elementary school for the County’s African

American children was True Reformer’s Hall, where 1st through 7th grade classes met beginning in 1915.

There were four high schools in Mecklenburg County that served Black students during this era: The Thyne Institute, Mecklenburg County Training School, East End High School, and West End High School.

Thyne Institute, established in 1872, was the first secondary school in the County for Black students. It was a private, tuition-funded facility and was in operation until 1946 when the County School Board purchased it and later converted it to the Chase City Elementary School. While the building no longer stands, it still the site of Chase City Elementary.

Mecklenburg Training School was the County’s first public high school for Black students. It was established in South Hill in the 1920s, serving 200 students its first year. The school burned down in 1942.

West End High School, the second public high school for Black students, opened in September of 1935 in Clarksville. A fire destroyed the building in the early 1950s and in 1951, the USACE purchased the school site and surrounding land for the development of Kerr Lake Reservoir. The County built a new West End High School in 1953 and the last class graduated from the school in 1969. After desegregation, the building became Bluestone Middle School.

East End High School replaced Mecklenburg Training School and served Black students in eastern Mecklenburg County. The school was built in 1953 outside of South Hill on what is now Dockery Road. East End High School started with an enrollment of 450 students in 1953. After desegregation, the school was converted to Park View Middle School.

Chase City High School was the first “modern” school building built in the County. The school served White high school students from 1908 to 1955. Beginning in 1955, White students attended two new County high schools: Bluestone and Park View High Schools, serving the west and east ends of the County.

In 1991, the original Chase City High School building was rehabilitated for use as apartments for seniors. Other original school buildings that have been adaptively reused in the County include John Groom Primary School, (originally John Groom Elementary, serving Black students before desegregation) which is used today for apartments. The original South Hill High School, which later became South Hill Elementary, is used today for apartments and a restaurant, and the original Clarksville High School is today occupied by an arts center, a radio station, and the Clarksville police department.

Desegregation and Modern Schools System

Following the Brown versus Board of Education decision in 1954, Mecklenburg County was one of the Southern districts to resist desegregation. The County maintained separate schools for Black and White students until the late 1960s, when federal pressure and court orders forced integration.

County schools fully desegregated in 1970. Reports of integration in Mecklenburg County were that it was a fairly smooth process. Students attended the newly desegregated and consolidated Mecklenburg County School System consisting of seven elementary schools (La Crosse, South Hill, Buckhorn, Palmer Springs, Boydton, Chase City, and Clarksville), a Primary School (John Groom) and two middle and high schools (Park View Middle and High and Blue-

stone Middle and High Schools).

Today, the County is in the process of rebuilding and modernizing each of its school facilities. The new consolidated Mecklenburg County Middle and High School campus opened in 2022. The County is currently in the process of rebuilding Clarksville Elementary School.

Post-Secondary Education

Post-secondary education came to Mecklenburg County in 1832, when Randolph-Macon College was established in Boydton. Randolph-Macon is the oldest Methodist-affiliated college still operating in the US. It was named for politicians John Randolph of Virginia and Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina.

In 1868 Randolph-Macon College moved its campus to Ashland, Virginia, largely due to economic difficulties from the Civil War and the loss of railroad access. The vacated buildings later housed a freedmen’s school, as well as the Boydton Academic and Bible Institute, with the partial purpose of training African American preachers and teachers. The school was in operation until the mid-1930s.

In 1872 the Mecklenburg Female Institute/College opened in Boydton; however, it was short-lived and the institution financially collapsed in the late 1870s.

Today, Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC) offers post-secondary courses at the Estes Community Center in Chase City and the Advanced Knowledge Center in South Hill. The off-campus locations offer college level classes including dual enrollment opportunities for high school students, career pathways, and local workforce training programs.



Thyne Institute, established 1872. Source: South Hill Enterprise



Original Chase City High School, established 1908. Source: VA DCR



Original South Hill High School, built in 1931. Today the building has apartments and a restaurant. Source: Apartments.com



Original Randolph-Macon College, established in 1832. Source: Sovahomefront.org

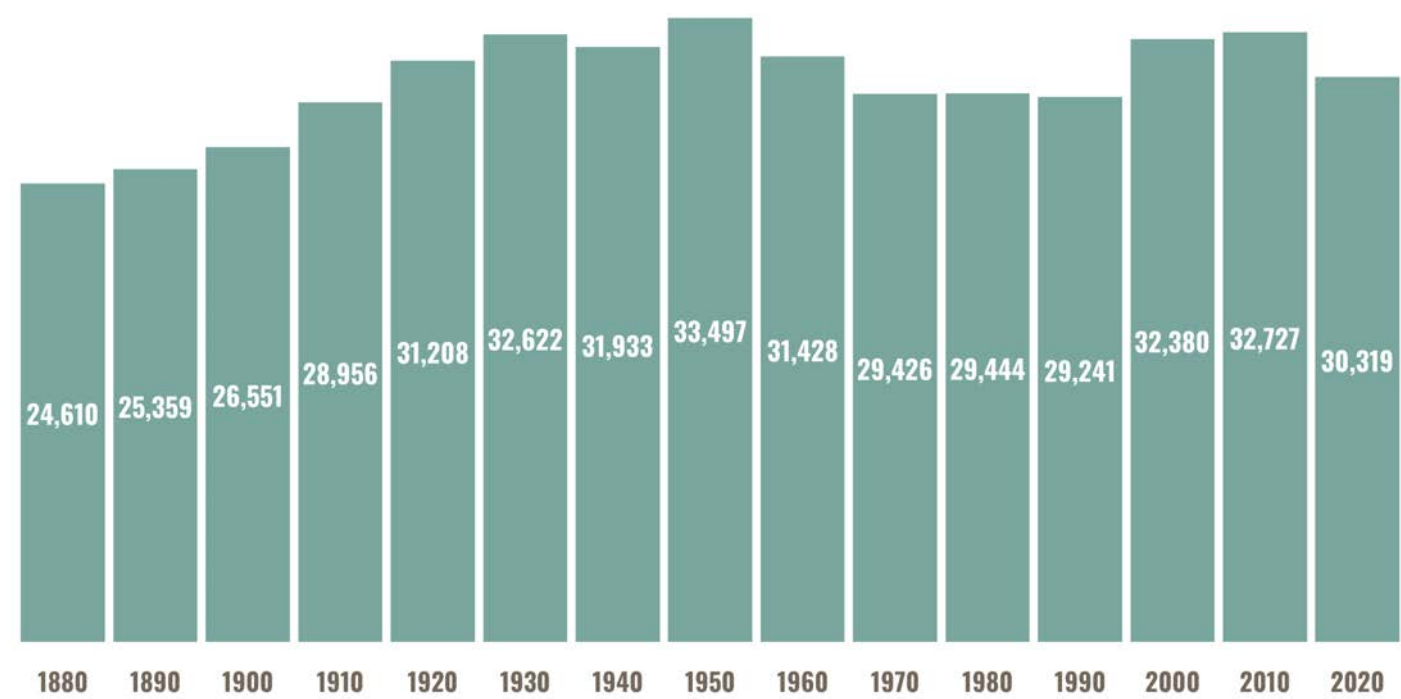


PART 2: MECKLENBURG COUNTY TODAY

People & Demographics
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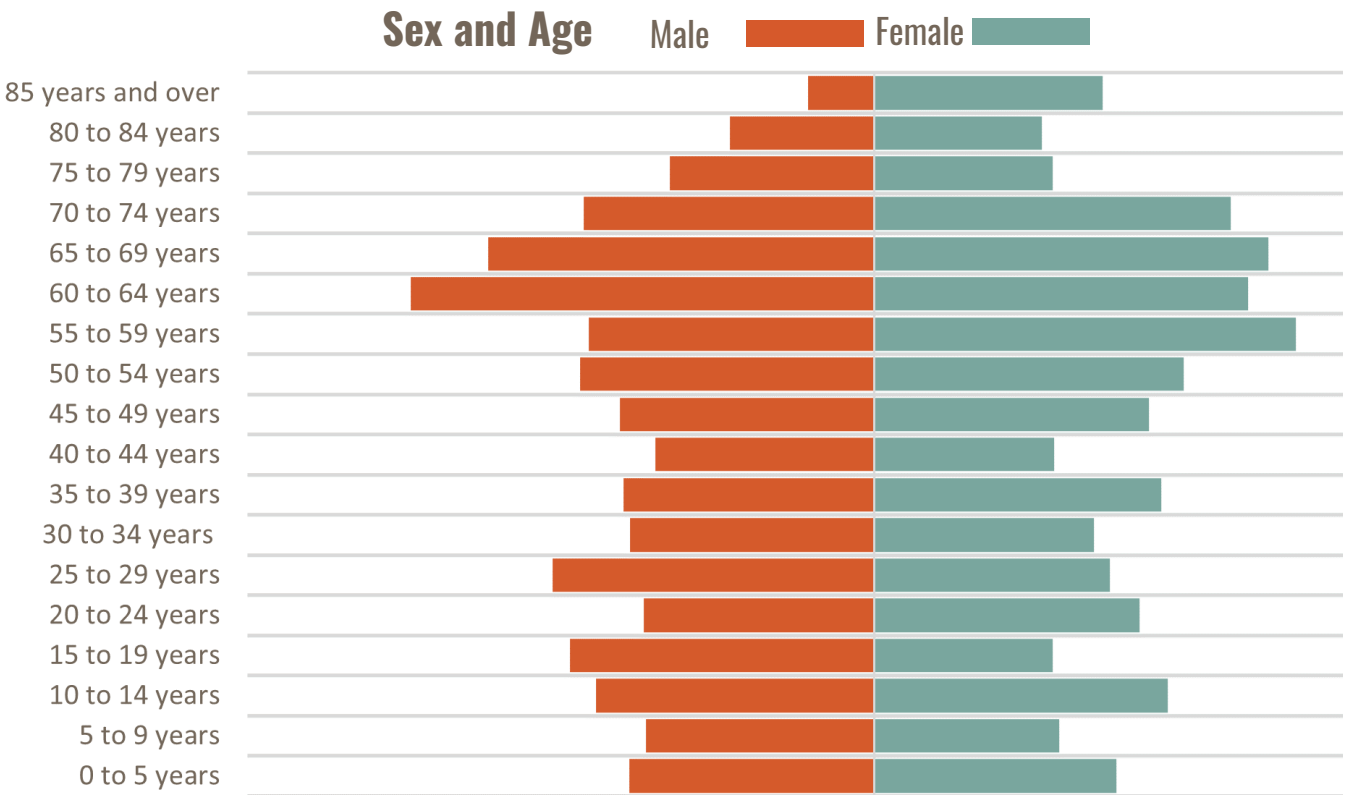
People & Demographics

Population Over Time



Source: Decennial Census

Sex and Age



Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Population Change

Looking back over the past 140 years of census data in Mecklenburg County, you can see trends and two distinct periods of population change. In the early years between 1880 and 1930, the County experienced steady growth with an over 30% increase during this period. The population peaked in 1950 at 33,497. This growth is likely attributed to the success of the tobacco markets, the railroads coming to the County, which spurred the settlement and growth of South Hill, and the potentially higher birth rates of the time.

In the years since 1950 the County has experienced a period of stagnation and decline. Following 1950, the population underwent a 10% decline by 1970. This period likely coincided with local declines in the tobacco industry as well as national trends like rural-to-urban migration and changes in agricultural practices which caused consolidation and increase in farm sizes with fewer farmers.

Since 1970, the County saw another period of stagnation, followed by modest growth in the 2000s, peaking at 32,727 in 2010. The decline between 2010 and 2020 can largely be attributed to the closure of the Mecklenburg Correctional Center, which caused a dip in population from the loss of over 700 inmates. The Correctional Center also employed over 300 people, which may have caused additional out-migration.

According to 2022 American Community Survey data, the population estimate was 30,367, which suggests the County may be continuing a period of modest growth when accounting for the loss of population and jobs associated with the prison closure.

Age, Race, and Sex

Mecklenburg County is split relatively evenly between male and female residents. The median age of 48.4 years is significantly higher than the national average of 38.8 years and the Virginia median age of 38.5 for the same year. This is likely due to the high number of retirees taking advantage of the County's lakes, inexpensive real estate, and low tax rates.

The County is mostly White but more than a third identified as Black (33.2%) or two or more races (4.22%) and most speak English at home (95.5%).

Median Age

48.4
Years old

Race Distribution

60.75%
White

33.22%
Black

4.22%
Two or more races

Languages Spoken

95.5%
Speak English at home

2%
Speak Spanish at home

Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Housing, Income, and Education

Housing Types

71%
Single unit detached homes

20.7%
Mobile homes

Household size

2.36 people
Avg size of owner-occupied

2.25 people
Avg sizes of renter-occupied

15.9%
Live alone

17.1%
Have children under 18 living at home

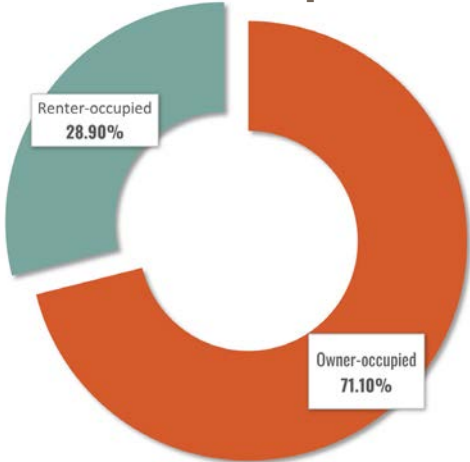
Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Housing Summary

The majority of homes in Mecklenburg County are single family homes and mobile homes (71% and 20.7% respectively, or 91.7% of the total). In addition, the majority of homes are owner-occupied (71.1%). A quarter of all residents moved into their homes between 2000 and 2009, which is an indication that many residents have been long-term residents of the County.

According to 2021 American Community Survey data, about a third of homes in the County are considered 'vacant'. A home is considered vacant if the home-owner has a primary or usual residence elsewhere. A high percentage of 'vacant' homes (approximately 2/3) are used for seasonal, recreational, or other occasional use. This underscores the significant role of tourism in the region. Additionally, temporary workers on industrial construction projects likely also contribute to this trend.

Owner- and Renter-Occupied Homes



Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Housing Costs

Mecklenburg County has been experiencing a significant increase in the cost of housing, particularly the cost of renting. January 2024 data from the Zillow Observed Rent Index (ZORI) shows an asking rent of \$1,072 per month, but ZORI data isn't available for previous months in this area. However, census data offers some insight. The median rent in Mecklenburg County climbed nearly 14% from 2017 to 2022, reaching \$784 in 2022. While ZORI and census data measure different aspects of the market (asking

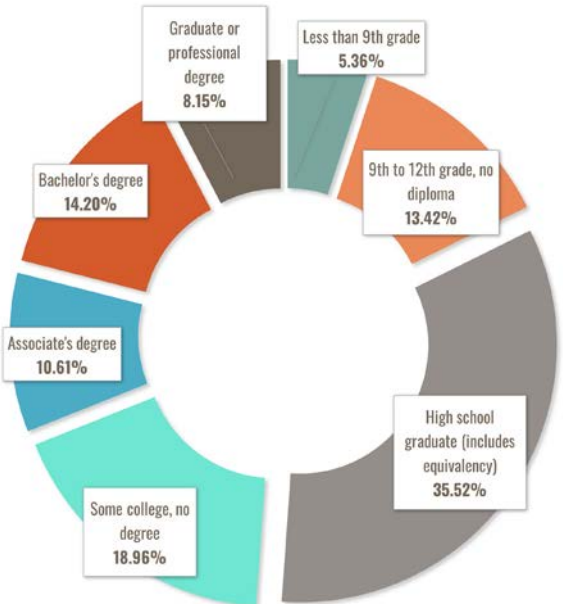
rents vs. median rents), it's reasonable to suspect that rent increases have likely continued since 2022. When measuring the cost of housing as a percentage of household income, there is a disparity in the County. More than 50% of homeowners with mortgages spend less than 20% of their income on housing costs, which is an indication that many homeowners are able to easily afford the cost of housing. However, nearly 20% of homeowners with a mortgage are considered cost burdened and spend 35% or more on housing costs. Renters are the most cost burdened group, with over 40% of renters spending 35% or more of their household income on rent.

Income & Education

Within Mecklenburg County, there is a strong correlation between education and income. Overall, educational attainment in the County skews lower than the national averages. In Mecklenburg, 20.92% have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the national average of 33.1% (2022 ACS data).

In Mecklenburg County, the poverty rate is highest for those with less than a high school diploma at 35.8%, which is significantly higher than the county's overall poverty rate (17.9%). Conversely, those with a bachelor's degree or higher have the lowest poverty rate at 6.5%. This suggests that lower educational attainment might limit economic opportunities and highlights the importance of investing in education initiatives as a measure to reduce poverty.

Educational Attainment



Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Housing Costs

\$157,800
Median home value, 2022
Source: 2022 American Community Survey

\$315,000
Median sold home price, 2024
Source: 2024 Realtor.com

\$784/mo.
Median rent, 2022
Source: 2022 American Community Survey

\$1072/mo.
Typical asking rent, 2024
Source: ZORI Mecklenburg County Jan 2024

Income & Poverty

\$46,378
Median income

17.9%
Live below the poverty level

40%
Of renters are cost burdened

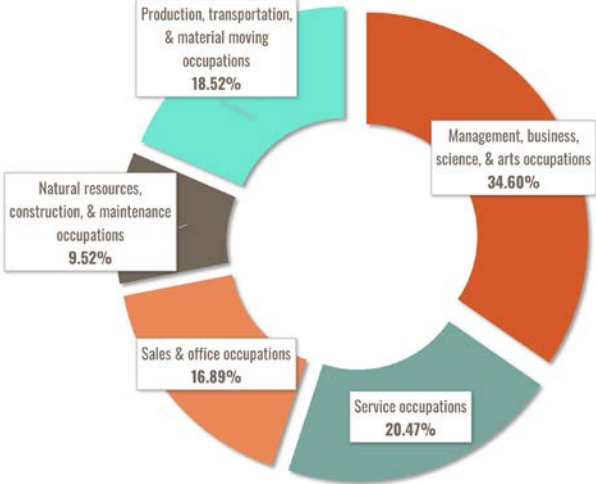
Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Employment & Commuting

Major Employers:

- » Nipro Pharma (Glass vials)
- » Nucor Group (Steel buildings)
- » Rex Materials of Va. (Refractory products)
- » Virginia Homes of Boydton (Modular homes)
- » One Jeans Group (Distribution Center)
- » Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative (Electrical services)
- » Microsoft Data Center (Data Storage)
- » Parker Oil Company, Inc. (Wholesale – oil)
- » TECfusions (Data Storage - Clarksville)
- » Southern Textiles (Commercial linen cleaning services)
- » VCU - Community Memorial Health Center (Healthcare)

Occupation



Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Employment

Mecklenburg County has a diverse job market with a mix of white-collar, service, and blue-collar professions. The largest share of the workforce (34.6%) falls within management, business, science, and arts occupations, suggesting a significant presence of white-collar jobs. Over 30% of residents work in production, transportation, and natural resources/construction/maintenance, which also shows a strong manufacturing presence in the County.

The service sector holds a considerable portion (20.47%) of local occupations, which is likely a direct reflection of the local tourism market. According to the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the County had 788 jobs directly related to tourism in 2022. Visitor spending has been on the rise in the County, up to 106.2 million dollars of spending in 2021, which is a 5% increase from the previous year.

The healthcare and education sectors combined represent a smaller portion (16.43%) of the workforce. The lower presence of healthcare and education jobs compared to other categories might indicate a need to attract more professionals in these fields to meet local needs.

In recent years, the growing sector of local jobs related to emerging industries, like data centers, have offered additional opportunities for residents to earn a living wage and career-ladder job opportunities within the County. Currently, Microsoft employs

about 450 employees and 300 contractors in the County, with plans for significant expansion in the future that is expected to add hundreds of additional jobs, both directly and indirectly. Recently, M.C. Dean opened an office in South Hill, which will serve as a base for nearly 600 employees who work on local data center projects. Continuing to diversify local industries and investing in skills development and training programs that are aligned with emerging industries will continue to empower residents to access better job opportunities.

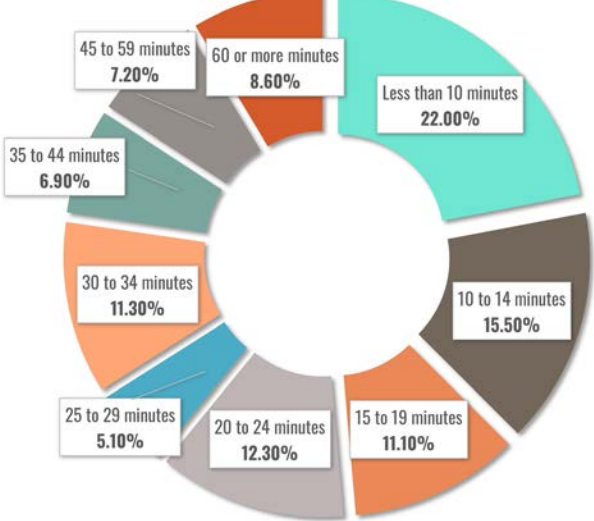
Commuting Patterns

Commuting alone by car is the overwhelming mode for County residents (81.6%). Commuting by public transport (0.3%), walking (0.8%), and biking (0%) are extremely limited. These statistics are not surprising, when considered alongside the County's WalkScore® (0 out of 100) and BikeScore® (19 out of 100). These scores are an indication of the limited infrastructure available for walking and bicycling and the far distances between County destinations.

Most workers commute to jobs within the County (75.2%), but 8.5% are commuting out of state, which correlates to the 8.6% of County residents who commute 60 minutes or more for work.

In 2021 there were 5,407 workers who were commuting to the County from other places and about 8000 workers were commuting to areas outside of Mecklenburg for work. Engaging with the County's workforce can help the County understand the barriers for living and working in Mecklenburg.

Commute Time



Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Commuting Patterns

81.6%

Drive a vehicle alone

6.5%

Work from home

8.5%

Work out of state

25 minutes

Mean travel time to work

Source: 2021 American Community Survey

Walk & BikeScore®

0

WalkScore® (car-dependent)

19

BikeScore® (minimal bike infrastructure)

Based on a random location in Mecklenburg County.
Source WalkScore.com ®

Peer Communities Comparison

Who are our peers?

Comparing Mecklenburg County to similarly situated communities in Virginia can help paint a picture of how the County is performing and helps create a more informed long-term vision for the community. Conducting a peer analysis helps the County to assess its strengths and weaknesses relative to peers and can support data-driven decision making.

For this peer analysis, we examined four Counties in Virginia that have a rural context with dispersed towns, similar to Mecklenburg County. We intentionally chose Counties that have slightly higher populations than Mecklenburg County so that the analysis

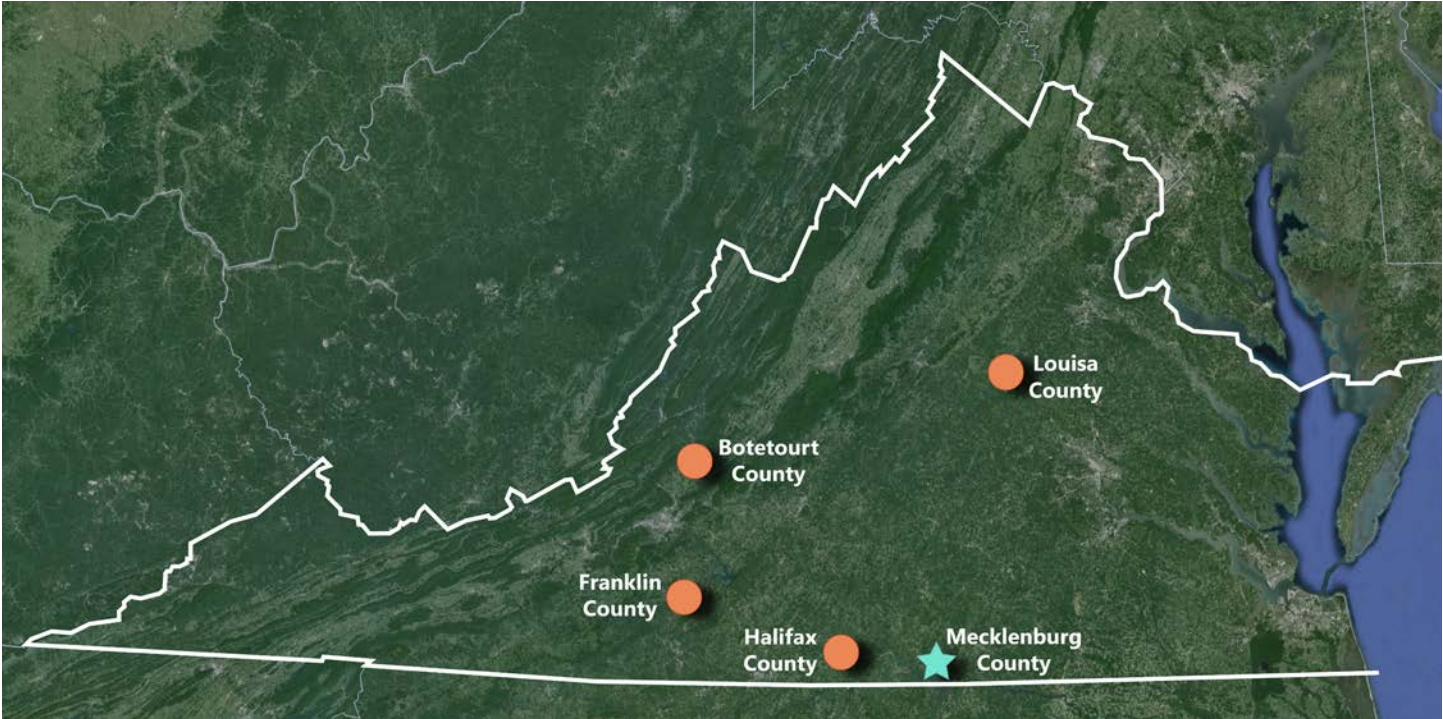
is aspirational in nature. Comparing the County to aspirational peers that are further along in their growth trajectory and may have additional amenities and services available to residents can help Mecklenburg with benchmarking and identifying areas for future improvement.

In the following tables we compare Mecklenburg to Botetourt County, Franklin County, Halifax County, Louisa County, and Virginia as a whole. We compared metrics related to age, income, housing costs, and commuting patterns. Understanding how Mecklenburg compares with these other Counties can help to identify areas for improvement and help set policies for the future.

Population & Age

	Virginia	Mecklenburg County	Botetourt County, VA	Franklin County, VA	Halifax County, VA	Louisa County, VA
Total population	8,582,479	30,248	33,542	54,829	34,022	37,136
Median age (years)	38.5	48.4	47.1	48.1	46.6	44.9

Peer Communities Map



Median Income & Poverty

	Virginia	Mecklenburg County	Botetourt County, VA	Franklin County, VA	Halifax County, VA	Louisa County, VA
Median Household Income	\$80,615	\$46,378	\$72,941	\$59,667	\$45,962	\$70,974
Percent below poverty level	9.9%	17.9%	6.7%	13.3%	14.7%	10.8%

Population & Age

Overall, Mecklenburg County has the lowest population among the listed counties, with 30,248 residents. Mecklenburg County has the highest median age, at 48.4 years, indicating an older population compared to the other peers.

Income & Poverty

When comparing income and poverty, Mecklenburg County faces both lower income and higher poverty compared to the other Counties. Of its peers, Mecklenburg County also has the second lowest median income (\$46,378), being only a few hundred dollars

higher than neighboring Halifax County (\$45,962). The median income in Mecklenburg County is significantly lower than the Commonwealth as a whole (\$80,615) and much lower than the other peer Counties.

Mecklenburg County also struggles with the highest poverty rate among the group (17.9%). It is nearly double the state average (9.9%).

Housing Costs

For housing trends, Mecklenburg had one of the lowest increases in rent over the time period studied (4.20%). However, when 2022 data is considered, Mecklenburg County's rent change is much higher

Home Value and Rents

	Virginia	Mecklenburg County	Botetourt County, VA	Franklin County, VA	Halifax County, VA	Louisa County, VA
2021 Median gross rent	\$1,326	\$719	\$831	\$758	\$692	\$1,046
2017 Median gross rent	\$1,166	\$690	\$898	\$660	\$595	\$932
2017 to 2021 rent change	13.72%	4.20%	-7.46%	14.85%	16.3%	12.23%
2021 Median home value	\$295,500	\$146,200	\$242,600	\$181,400	\$120,300	\$239,300
2017 Median home value	\$255,800	\$125,300	\$220,000	\$176,900	\$110,800	\$212,900
2017 to 2021 median home value change	15.52%	16.68%	10.27%	2.54%	8.57%	12.40%

(13.6%) and is more in line with the state median increase (13.72%). This suggests that Mecklenburg is currently experiencing a significant increase in rent, similar to some of the peers and the Commonwealth.

The 2021 median home value in Mecklenburg (\$146,200) was significantly lower than both the state average (\$295,500) and most of the peer Counties, with the exception of Halifax County (\$120,300). Home value change in Mecklenburg between 2017 and 2021 (16.68%) was much higher than its peers, and slightly higher than the Commonwealth’s average (15.52%). Current sales data, summarized on previous pages also suggest that home values are continuing to rise.

While Mecklenburg did offer some of the most affordable housing options among the peer Counties, the rate of change may indicate that housing affordability in the County is quickly declining.

Commuting Patterns

Mecklenburg County boasts the lowest mean travel

time to work (24.9 minutes) compared to the peer Counties and to the Commonwealth. It also has a higher rate of people who work and live in the County (16.8%) compared to the peer Counties, but it has a lower rate than the Commonwealth as a whole (27.2%).

Mecklenburg County’s percentage of people who drove alone to work (81.6%) is similar to its peers, but is lower than the Commonwealth as a whole (72.7%). It has the lowest rate of carpooling (6%) and working from home (6.5%) when compared to the Commonwealth and its peers.

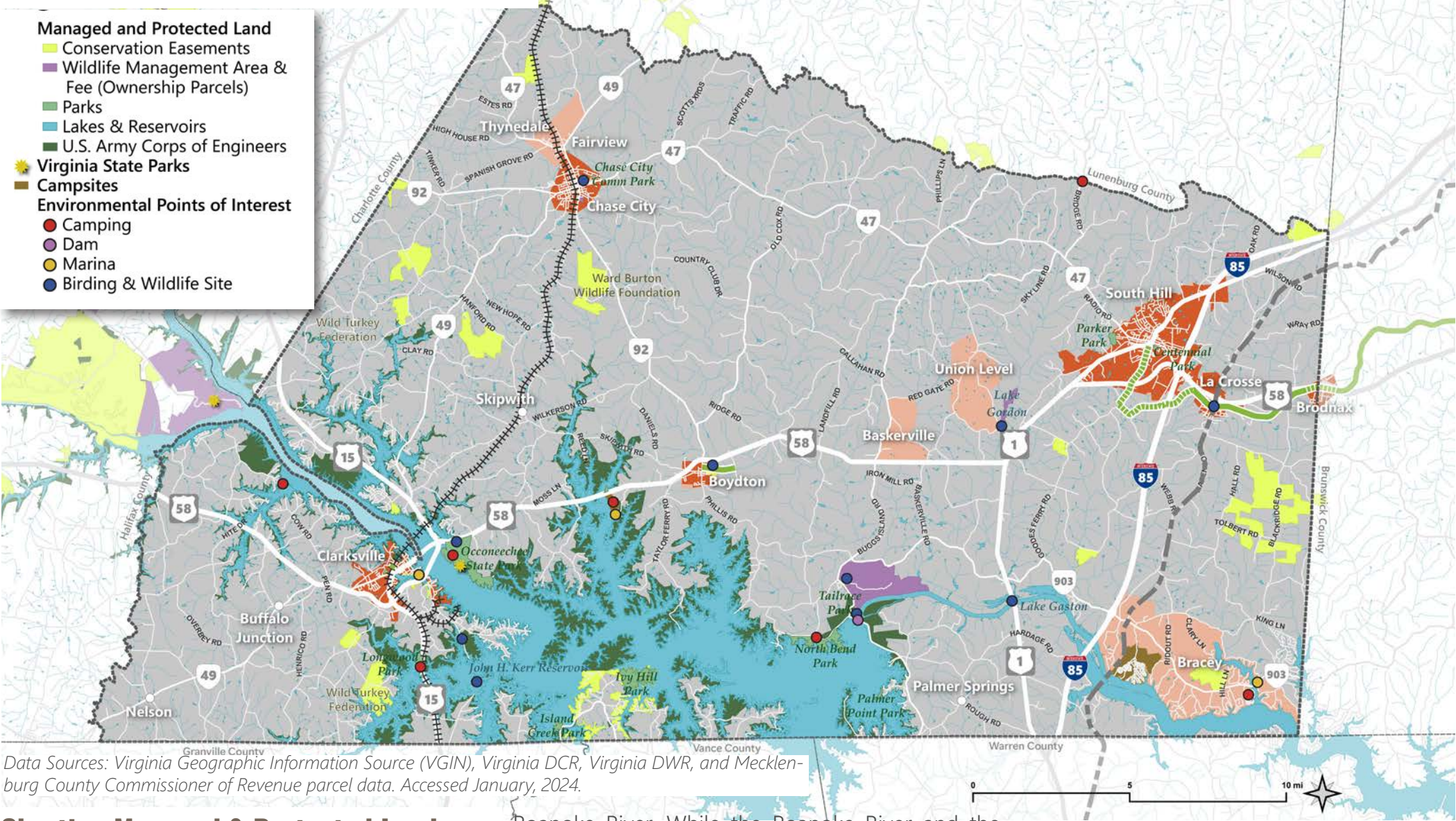
Overall, the County is similar to its peers in commuting trends, but lags behind the Commonwealth’s average for certain markers, much of which can be attributed to the rural setting of Mecklenburg County and the peer Counties. Focusing on policies to increase rates of carpooling and increasing local jobs can further reduce commute times and commute costs for County residents.

Commuting Trends

	Virginia	Mecklenburg County	Botetourt County, VA	Franklin County, VA	Halifax County, VA	Louisa County, VA
Drove alone to work	72.7%	81.6%	84.2%	80.6%	80.8%	78.7%
Carpooled to work	8.5%	6.0%	6.2%	6.7%	8.8%	10.5%
Walked to work	2.2%	0.8%	0.6%	1.5%	0.7%	0.6%
Worked from home	11.4%	6.5%	7.6%	9.7%	6.6%	9.1%
Worked in place of residence	27.2%	16.8%	4.4%	8.6%	12.5%	1.6%
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	28.2	24.9	26.2	31.0	25.4	35.3

Natural & Environmental Resources

Protected Land & Recreational Resources



Charting Managed & Protected Land



Colors correspond to map legend

Water Resources

Water resources have always been a defining aspect of Mecklenburg County, dating back to the Occaneechee who established a trading post along the

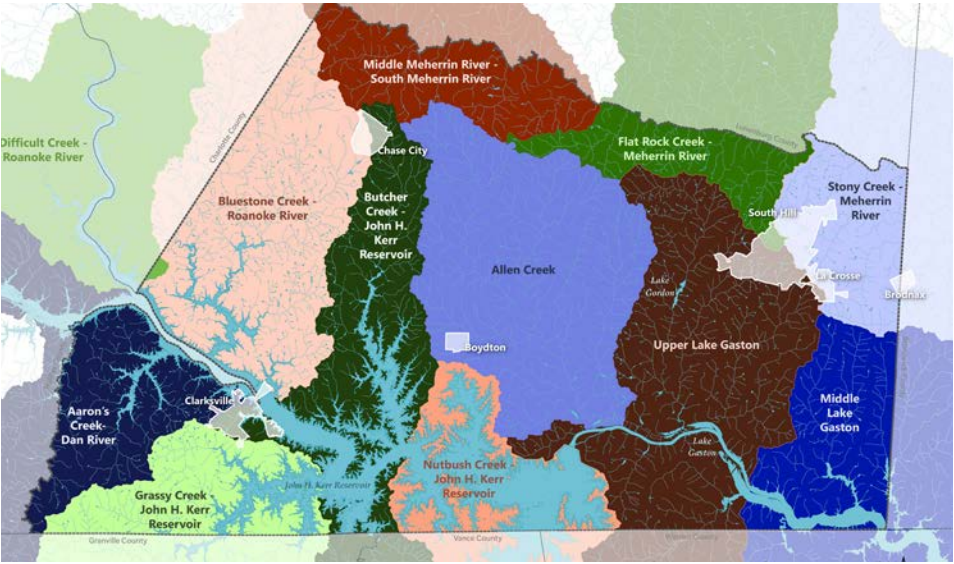
Roanoke River. While the Roanoke River and the surrounding land have been dramatically transformed by construction of the Kerr Lake and Lake Gaston Reservoirs, these features remain prominent features of the County's landscape, culture, and economy.

Kerr Lake Reservoir is the largest lake in Virginia and North Carolina, covering 78 square miles of the County's land with approximately 850 miles of shoreline. The Reservoir is managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and serves various purposes including flood control, hydroelectricity,

water supply, and recreation, including boating, swimming, and fishing.

The USACE manages much of the land surrounding Kerr Lake. Overall the USACE manages approximately with approximately 55,754 acres of total land surrounding the lake. Of those 55,757 acres, approximately 33,000 acres are within Mecklenburg County. The USACE manages land for multiple

County Watersheds



purposes including recreation, project operations, and flowage easements.

A second reservoir, Lake Gaston, is partially within the southeastern portion of Mecklenburg County, just east of Kerr Lake Dam. Lake Gaston is a hydroelectric reservoir owned and managed by Dominion Energy. The lake covers about 20,000 acres and the water level varies between 197 and 204 feet, with water levels determined in collaboration with USACE. Lake Gaston is also a popular recreation destination for activities such as fishing, boating, and wildlife observation.

The majority of the County drains to the two reservoirs. The northernmost portion, however, drains to the Meherrin River, which ultimately feeds the Chowan River Basin.

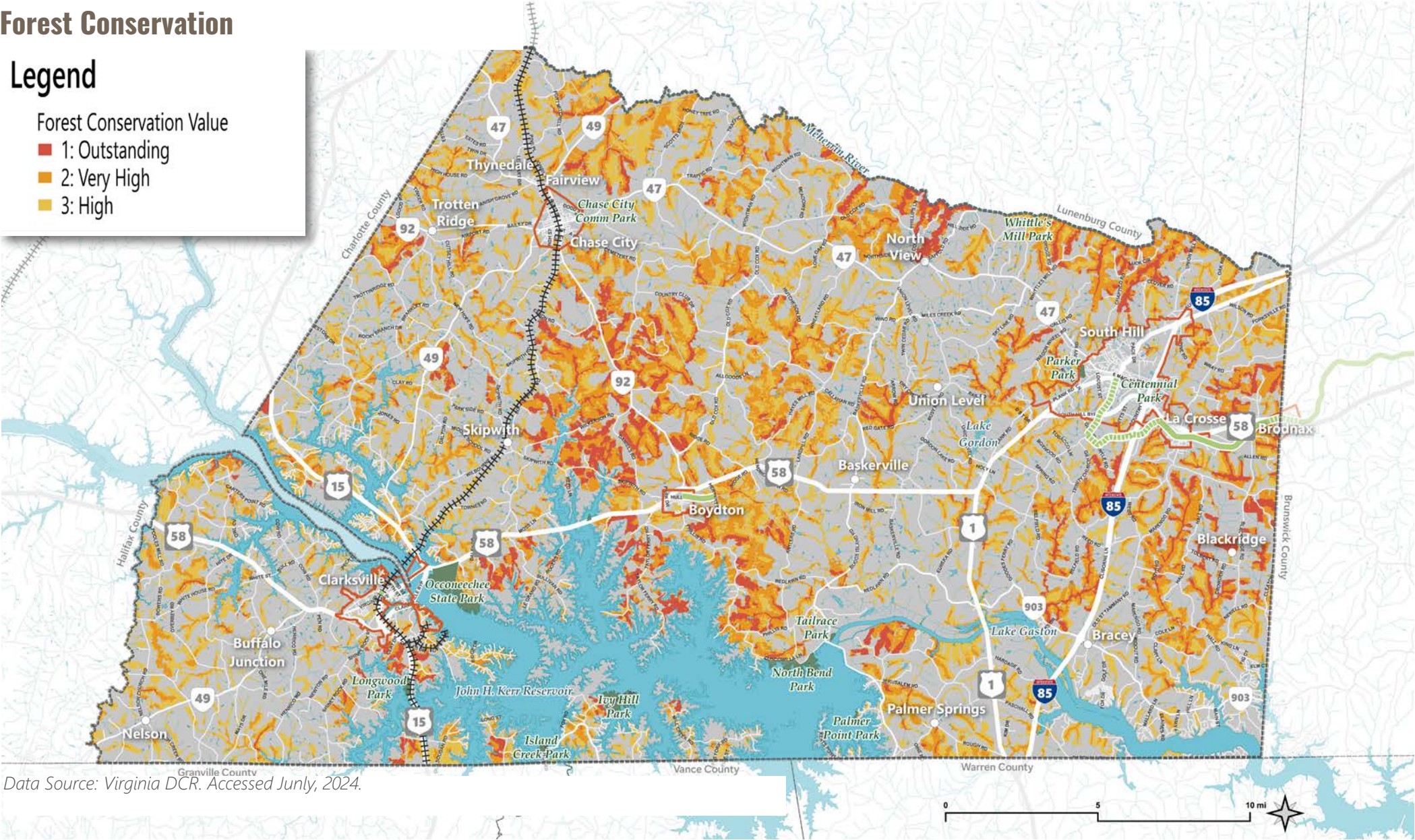
Other Managed and Protected Lands

Outside of the USACE managed lands, there are over 11,000 acres of managed and protected land in the County. About 8,400 acres of County land is within conservation easements, which are voluntary agreements between a landowner and a qualified organization to permanently restrict certain uses and types of development. The amount of land within conservation easements has nearly doubled since 2012 (4,800 acres of conservation easements in 2012).

The remaining protected land is wildlife management areas and parks, some of which are owned and operated by USACE or the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). In addition, there are numerous publicly and privately owned recreational resources within the County including camping sites, marinas, and birding & wildlife sites. Overall, conserved lands (including the lakes) make up about 21% of the County's land area.

Forest Conservation & Ecological Cores

Forest Conservation



Data Source: Virginia DCR. Accessed Junly, 2024.

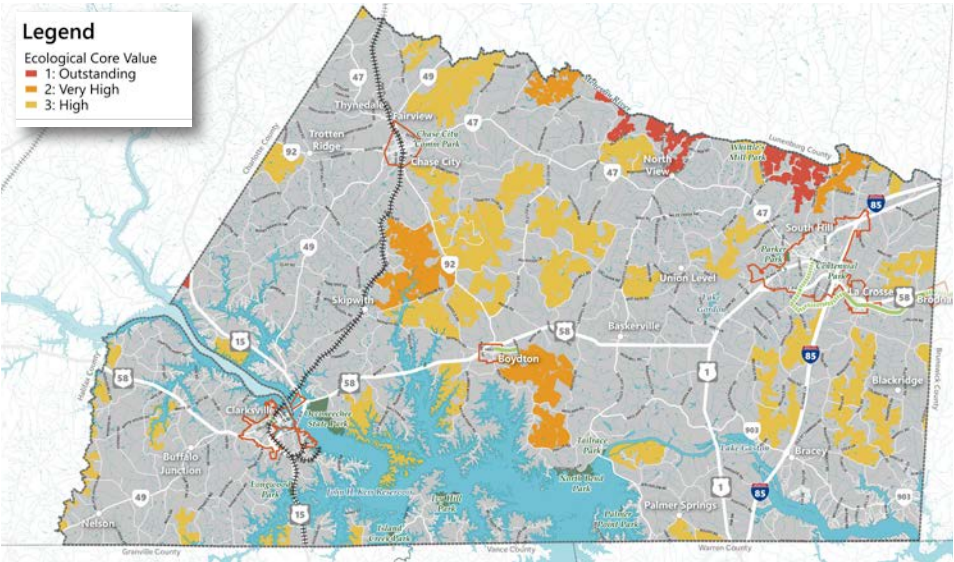
Forest Conservation

Forestland conservation in Mecklenburg County holds both economic and ecological importance. The Commonwealth’s timber industry is a major economic driver, contributing \$21 billion annually and supporting 2% of Virginia’s gross domestic product (GDP). Forests are also essential for recreation, tourism, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity. The Virginia Department of Forestry’s (VDOF) Forestland Conservation Program aims to mitigate the impacts of increased suburban sprawl and land

parcelization, both of which threaten forests. The County can use VDOF’s tools, such as the Forest Conservation Value (FCV) model, to protect its highest quality and potentially most vulnerable forests. The FCV model, which was used to create the map above, is focused on the conservation of large contiguous blocks of forestland. Larger forests help store carbon and provide essential habitats for wildlife. Forestland also plays a vital role in protecting water resources, particularly the County’s lakes and rivers, such as the Meherrin River and John H. Kerr

Reservoir. Forests act as natural buffers that protect water quality by regulating water flow, reducing sedimentation, and purifying freshwater supplies. Watershed integrity is essential for sustaining biodiversity and ensuring clean water for both ecological and human needs. The map above illustrates the highest value forest conservation lands across Mecklenburg County,

Ecological Cores



Data Source: Virginia DC, accessed July 2024.

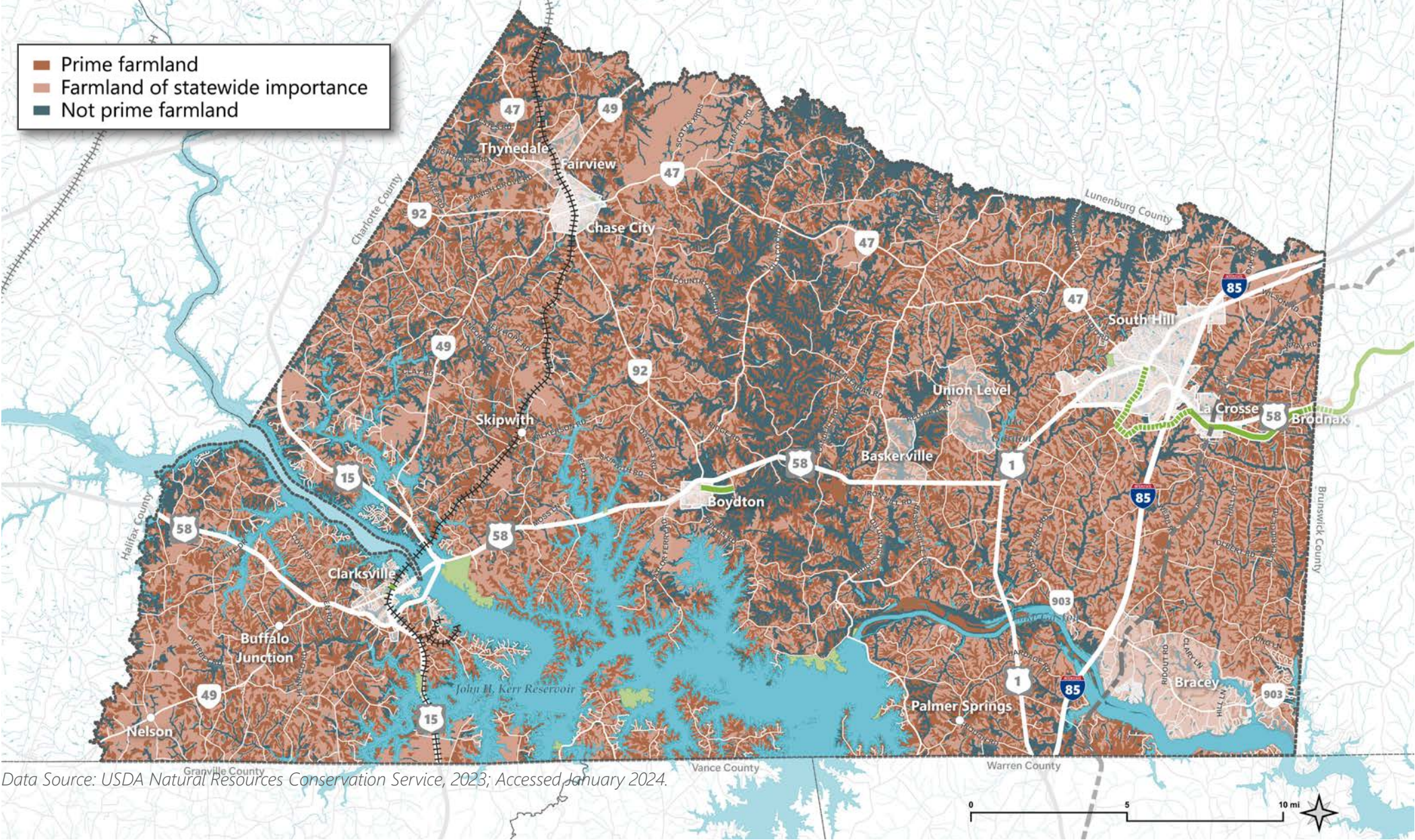
highlighting areas of forest conservation value ranging from “High” (in yellow) to “Outstanding” (in red). The map shows concentrated zones of high conservation value, particularly in areas around Boydton, Lake Gaston, and the John H. Kerr Reservoir. The clusters of conservation areas around bodies of water further demonstrates the importance of forestland when it comes to protecting water resources.

Ecological Cores

The Virginia Natural Landscape Assessment (VaNLA) is a landscape-scale analysis that maps and prioritizes important natural lands across the Commonwealth. By using satellite imagery, VaNLA identifies large, unfragmented cores of natural land of at least 100 acres in size. These cores are important because they provide habitats to a wide range of species, from forest-dwelling organisms to those that depend on marsh and maritime environments. The cores are symbolized by Ecological Integrity scores, which measure their value in maintaining ecosystem services such as air purification and water filtration.

The Ecological Integrity scores reflect each core’s contribution to the ecosystem. Larger and more biologically diverse areas, as well as cores that contribute to water quality, typically receive elevated scores, highlighting the importance of preserving these areas for both ecological health and human benefits. The map above depicts the ecological cores across Mecklenburg County, with significant clusters around Chase City, Boydton, and areas near John H. Kerr Reservoir as well as along the Meherrin River bordering Lunenburg County. The concentration of cores near water bodies again points to the critical role that natural areas play in protecting and preserving water resources.

Agricultural Resources



Prime Farmland

Much of Mecklenburg County is considered Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance, as shown in dark and light red on the map above. Prime Farmland is designated by the USDA as the best soil for food production, based on factors like productivity, soil quality, and irrigation potential. Farmland of Statewide Importance refers to land that is important for the state’s agricultural production, but does not meet the criteria for Prime

Farmland. For example, the soil in these areas may not be as high-yielding as Prime Farmland, but it should be capable of producing high yields of crops when treated and managed using best practices in farming methods.

Agricultural Economy

Farming runs deep in Mecklenburg County’s DNA. This is reflected by its rich agricultural history and its continued prominence within the economy; however, the County has seen a significant decline in

the number of farms and the amount of land dedicated to agriculture over the past several decades. Since 1950 the amount of land dedicated to active agricultural production has decreased by approximately 65%. Another notable trend over time is an increase in farm size: in 1950, the average farm size was 87 acres, while in 2022, the average farm size was 318 acres.

Farming products have also evolved over time in Mecklenburg County. Historically, tobacco has been the dominant crop, but due to reduced demand, acreage in tobacco farms and total tobacco production have significantly declined. While Mecklenburg County remains one of the top producers of tobacco in Virginia, the total production has decreased nearly 60% since 1950, as shown in the table below. Today, soybeans and forage are the top crops and make up significantly higher proportion of the County’s land than the other crops.

Mecklenburg County Crop Acreage, 2022

Crop	Acreage
Soybeans for beans	17,601
Forage	14,796
Wheat for grain	3,420
Tobacco	2,153
Corn for grain	1,881
Vegetables harvested for sale	101
Land in orchards	91

Data Source: USDA Census of Agriculture.

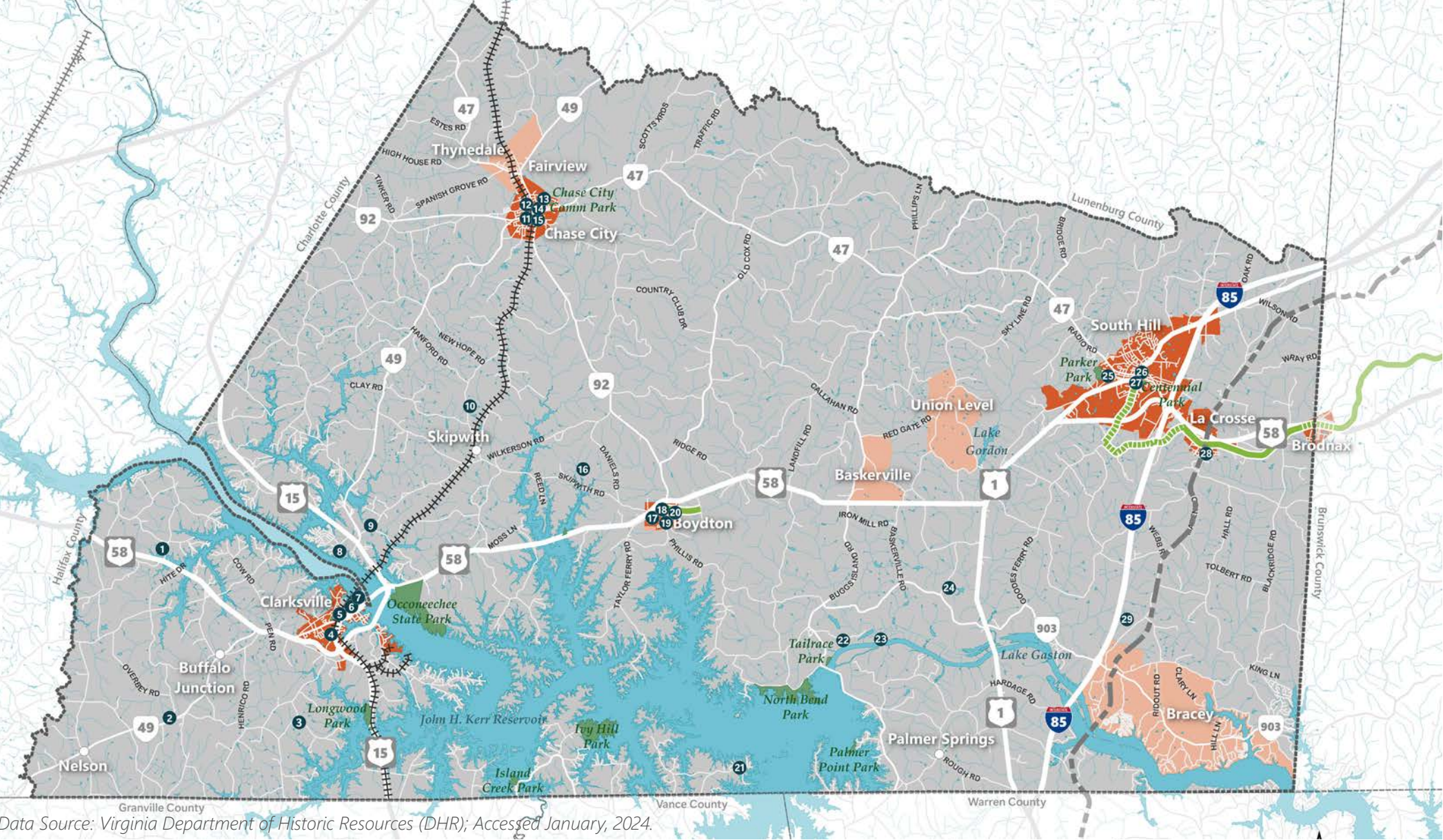
Even with the decrease in total farmland over the decades, agriculture still represents a significant share of the local economy. In 2022, the total market value of crops was \$39,235,000. Looking towards the future, it is likely that farming will continue to be an important part of the County’s economy, landscape, and culture, for decades to come and perhaps indefinitely. As such, future policies should continue to prioritize preservation of the County’s high yield agricultural resources.

Agriculture Trends Over Time

Year	Farms	Land in Farms (acres)	Average Farm Size (acres)	Tobacco Farms	Tobacco Acreage	Tobacco Pounds
1950	4,034	350,748	87	3,237	13,559	13,612,796
1974	1,291	199,851	155	881	7,181	12,813,535
2002	581	168,150	289	140	3,018	6,504,355
2017	512	141,142	276	54	5,868	13,975,695
2022	394	123,797	314	26	2,153	5,471,381

Data Source: USDA Census of Agriculture.

Historic & Cultural Resources



- 1 Buffalo Springs Historical Archaeological District
- 2 Averett School and Wharton Memorial Baptist Church
- 3 Cedar Grove Plantation
- 4 Sunnyside
- 5 Clarksville Historic District
- 6 Judge Henry Wood, Jr. House
- 7 Clark Royster House
- 8 Prestwoud Plantation
- 9 Patrick Robert “Parker” Snyder Log Cabin
- 10 Red Fox Farm
- 11 Chase City High School
- 12 Chase City Warehouse and Commercial Historic District
- 13 MacCullum More and Hudgins House Historic District
- 14 Hudgins-Rutledge House
- 15 Shadow Lawn
- 16 Rudd Branch Ridge Complexes #1 & #2
- 17 On the Hill
- 18 Boyd’s Tavern
- 19 Mecklenburg County Courthouse
- 20 Boydton Historic District
- 21 Long Grass Plantation
- 22 Elm Hill Plantation
- 23 Elm Hill Archaeological Site
- 24 Eureka
- 25 John Groom Elementary School
- 26 South Hill Commercial Historic District
- 27 Colonial Theatre
- 28 La Crosse Hotel
- 29 O.H.P Tanner House

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program intended to catalogue America’s historic and archaeological resources and to support public and private efforts to protect these resources. To qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, properties are evaluated under the Department of Historic Resources’ (DHR) criteria, which includes evaluating whether the property is associated with events, activities, or developments that were important in the past or if properties are associated with lives of important

people or achievements. DHR typically considers listing a property if it is at least 50 years old and is still relatively intact. The National Register lists 29 historic and culturally significant properties and districts within Mecklenburg County. As the map above shows, most of the DHR-listed properties are located within the towns, though some are dispersed in southern Mecklenburg County near the lakes. The diversity of these historic properties represents the rich and diverse history of the County. While many properties are former tobacco farms and plantations, there are also archaeological sites dating back to the Occo-

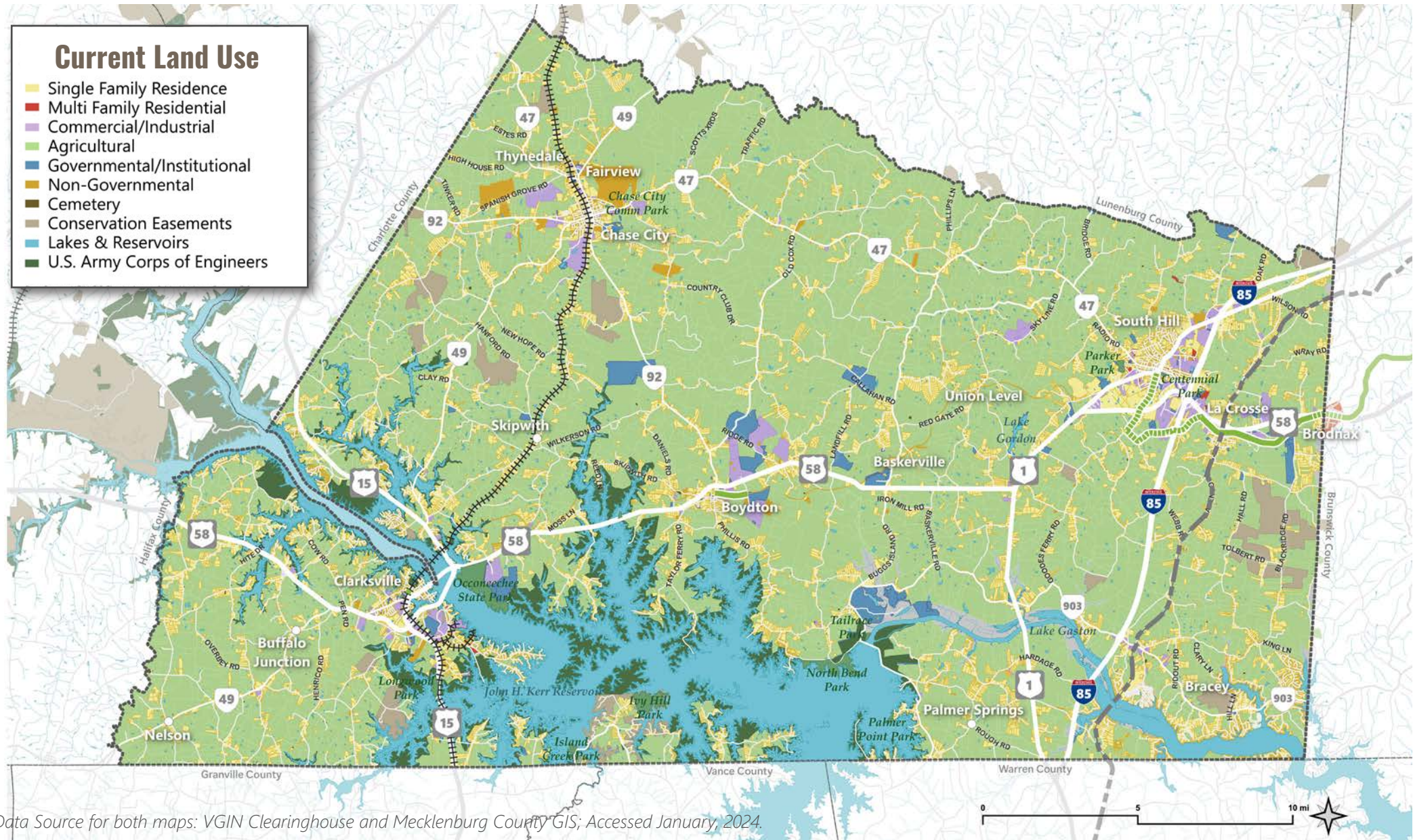
neechee Native Americans and sites representing freed Black settlements and schools. The County also has a pending application to add Park View High School to the National Register.

Agricultural Landscape

While agriculture holds a smaller share of the local economy today, agricultural heritage is still an important part of the County’s identity, both in the landscape and in the values, traditions, and resilience of its people. The County’s agricultural legacy is evident by the impressive number of Virginia Century Farms. In Mecklenburg County there are 31

Century Farms that have been owned and continually operated by the same family for over 100 years. It is important to note that not all people have been afforded the ability to own and pass down land through generations. The County should continue the work of documenting and celebrating the often-undertold stories of enslaved laborers, freed Black communities, and Native American tribes of the past and ensuring that future policies and programs are designed to be equitable for all. Doing so can help the County build a future that integrates its rural and agricultural heritage and celebrates all of its people, past, present, and future.

Current Land Use



Current Land Use Trends

The Current Land Use map and chart highlight how land in Mecklenburg County’s is currently being used, based on data from the County Commissioner of Revenue’s Office. This data, which is primarily used for tax and record-keeping purposes, is also insightful for existing conditions analysis and future planning.

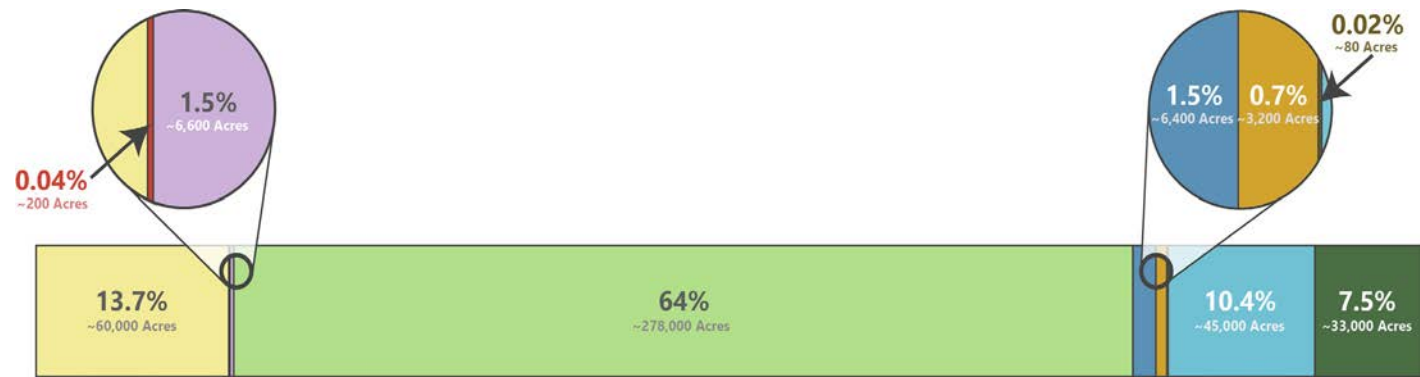
The vast majority of the County is dedicated to agriculture and water (~64%). It is worth noting that the agricultural classification also encompasses forested areas and land protected by conservation easements. The second largest portion of land is waterways and land surrounding the water that is owned by USACE. Lakes and reservoirs make up just over 10% of the County’s land area. The land surrounding the water is owned and managed by USACE and makes up just under 8% of the County’s land.

The remaining ~17.5% of the County’s land could be categorized as “developed” land. This areas consist of residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental properties. The largest portion of the developed land is used for single-family residences (~13.7%), which are defined as parcels that are less than 10 acres with a single-family house. The next largest category are commercial/industrial land (~1.5%) and governmental properties (~1.5%), which includes County-owned properties such as schools or properties owned by the Industrial Development Authority (IDA).

The remaining properties consist of non-governmental public or semi-public properties such as properties owned by an Homeowners’ Association or a church, cemeteries, and multi-family residential, which only make up about 200 acres, or .04% of the County’s total land area.

The Current Land Use Map shows some clear patterns and clusters of uses. There are clusters of single-family residential near towns, lakes, and major roadways, suggesting preferences for waterfront living, accessibility, and access to recreation and amenities. Industrial properties also seem to be clustered near towns, especially Chase City, Boydton, and South Hill.

Current Land Use by Acreage

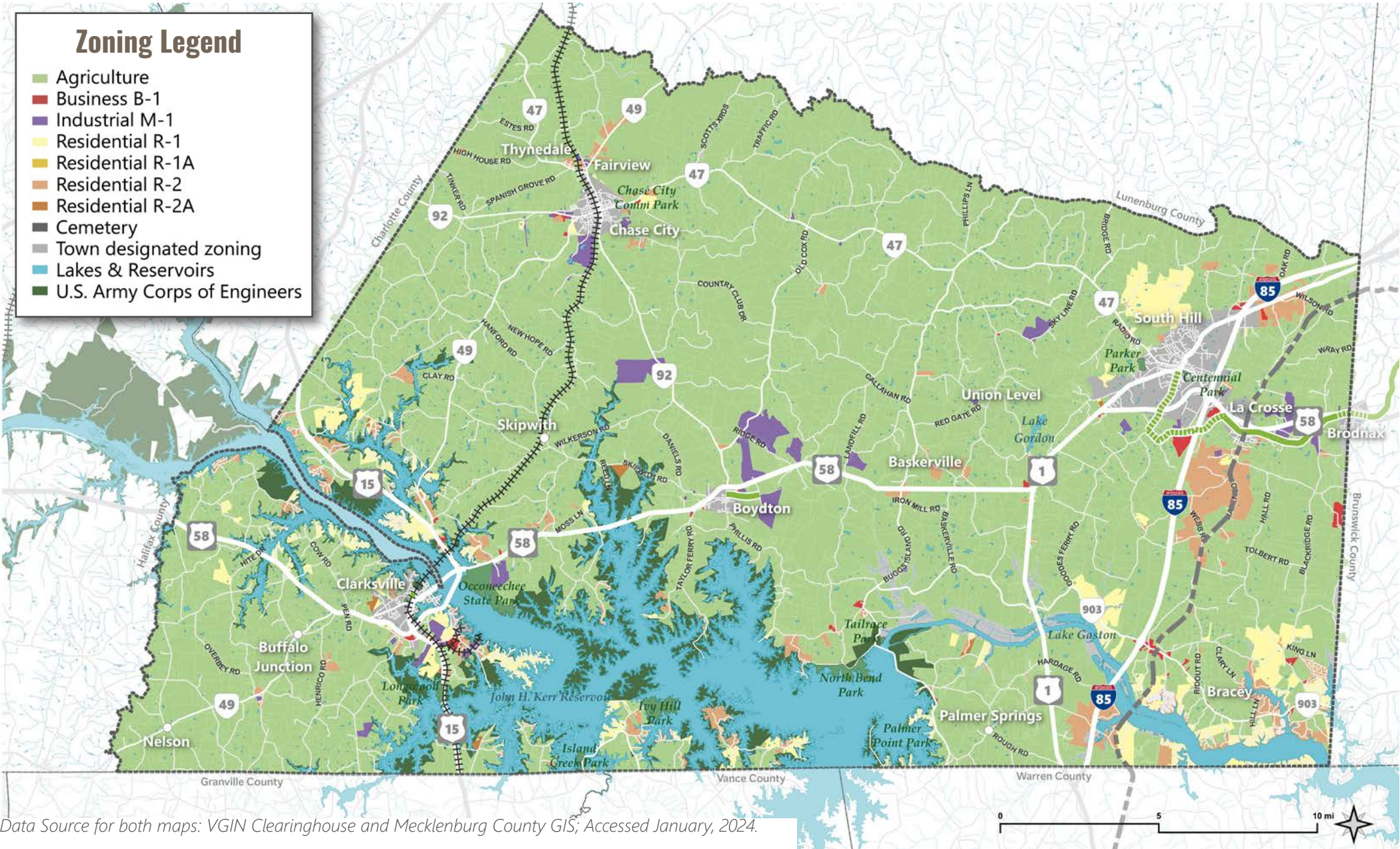


*Colors correspond to the map legend above.



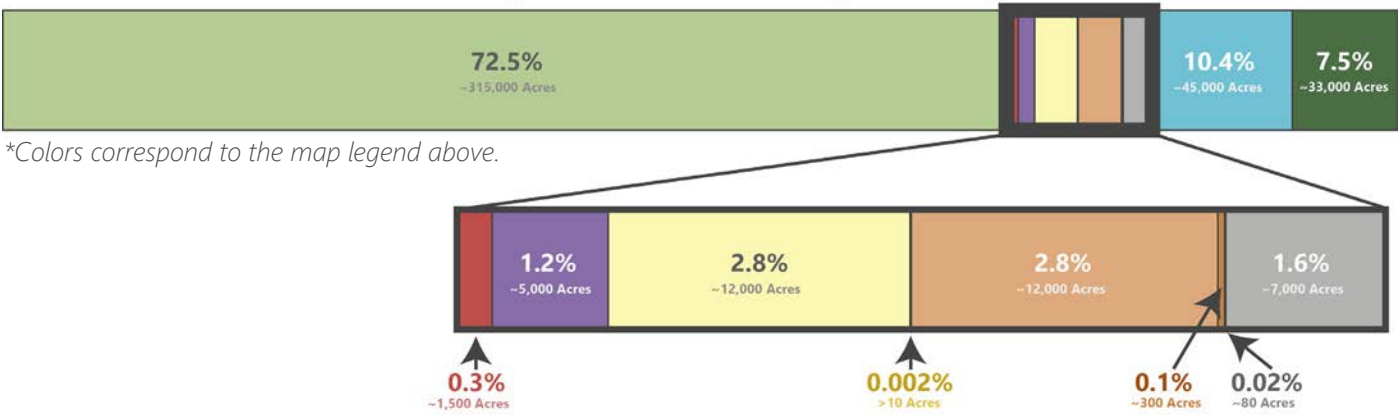
18% of the County’s land consists of reservoirs and the managed and protected land surrounding the reservoirs. Pictured above is the Kerr Lake Reservoir and adjacent USACE-managed land

Current Zoning



Zoning Districts Summary	
Zoning refers to regulations that are established by Mecklenburg County that determine how land can be used and dictate the size, height, and placement of buildings on a property. Mecklenburg County has seven zoning districts. A summary of the purpose and allowable uses for each district is provided in the table below.	
Agriculture	Areas primarily used for farming and forestry, with some low density single-family homes.
R-1 Residential	Areas for low density single-family homes.
R-1A Residential	Areas for a variety of housing types with lower densities including single-family, duplexes, town-houses, and small multi-family buildings.
R-2 Residential	Areas for medium density development with a full range of housing types such as single-family, town-houses, and apartments.
R-2A Residential	Areas for rural home sites or “mini-farms” with a minimum lot size of 5 acres.
B-1 Business	Commercial uses that have a frequent foot traffic but have lower impacts related to truck traffic and noise impacts.
M-1 Industrial	Areas where industries are permitted that may not be compatible with residential commercial or agricultural uses.
Cemetery	Existing cemeteries (no underlying zoning).
Town	Each town has jurisdiction over its own land use and zoning. The town zoning is not shown on this map.

Zoning by Acreage



Comparing Zoning and Current Land Use

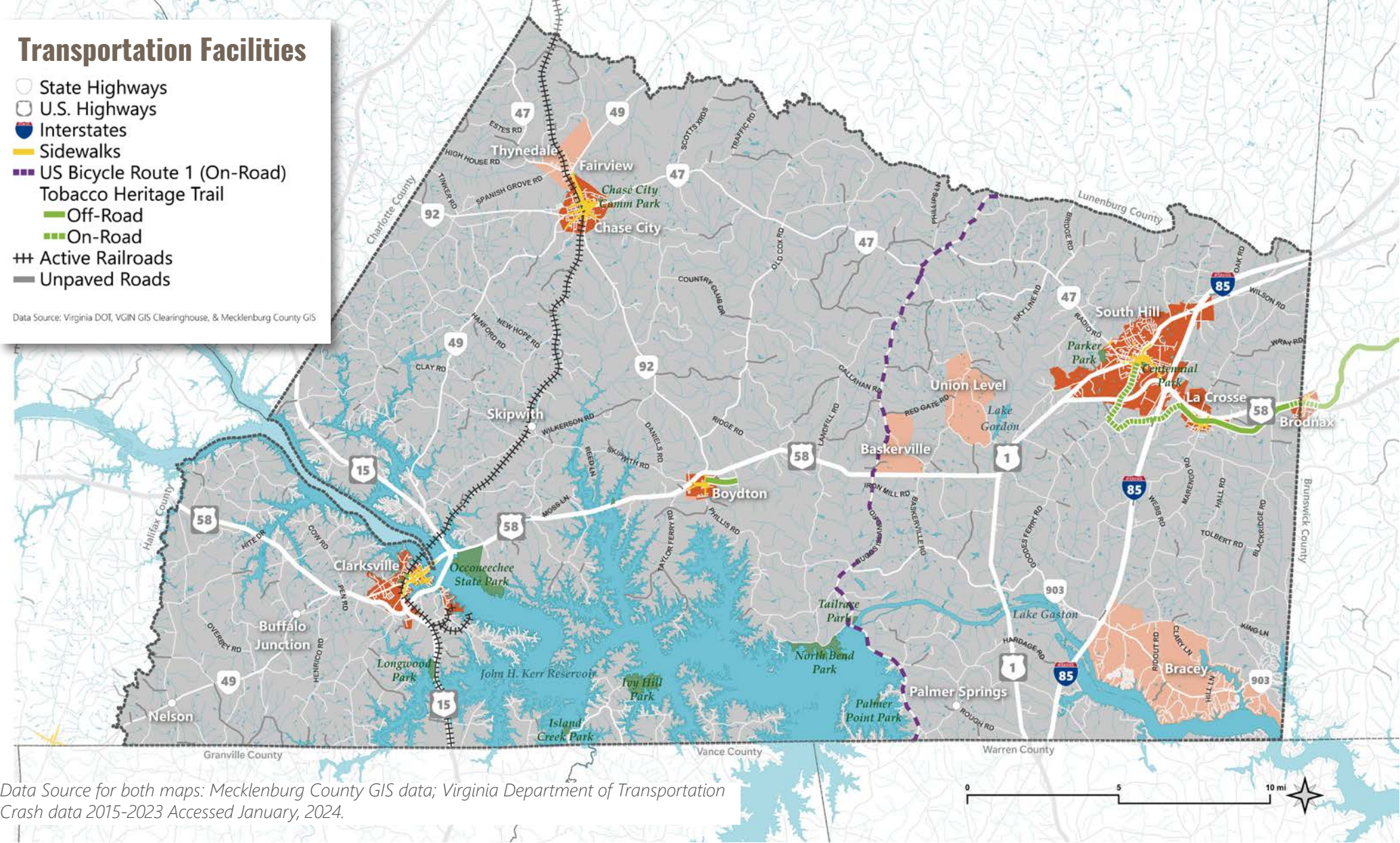
A comparison of the County’s Current Land Use Map (previous page) with the Current Zoning Map shows some areas of alignment. The majority of the County is zoned Agriculture (~73%), which is slightly more than properties that are classified as in the Current Land Use Map as Agricultural (64%), but still represents the majority of the County’s land area.

A key difference is that less of the County is zoned for residential than is currently classified on the Current

Land Use Map for residential. This is largely because single-family houses are an allowable use within the Agriculture zoning district. Many of the residential parcels on the Current Land Use Map are rural home sites on properties zoned for Agriculture, some of which may also be small farms.

Another area of close alignment between the Zoning and Current Land Use Map are the Industrial parcels. Properties that have Industrial Zoning typically are classified as Industrial on the Current Land Use Map as well.

Transportation Network



County Roadways & Planning

Mecklenburg County’s transportation system plays a vital role in connecting residents and visitors to local businesses and amenities. Most roads and highways in Mecklenburg County are owned and maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). There are three U.S. highways that bisect the County: Interstate 85, a four lane north-south interstate between Richmond and Montgomery, Alabama; U.S. Highway 58, an east-west artery for Southwest Virginia running from the Cumberland Gap to Virginia Beach; and U.S. 1, a north-south

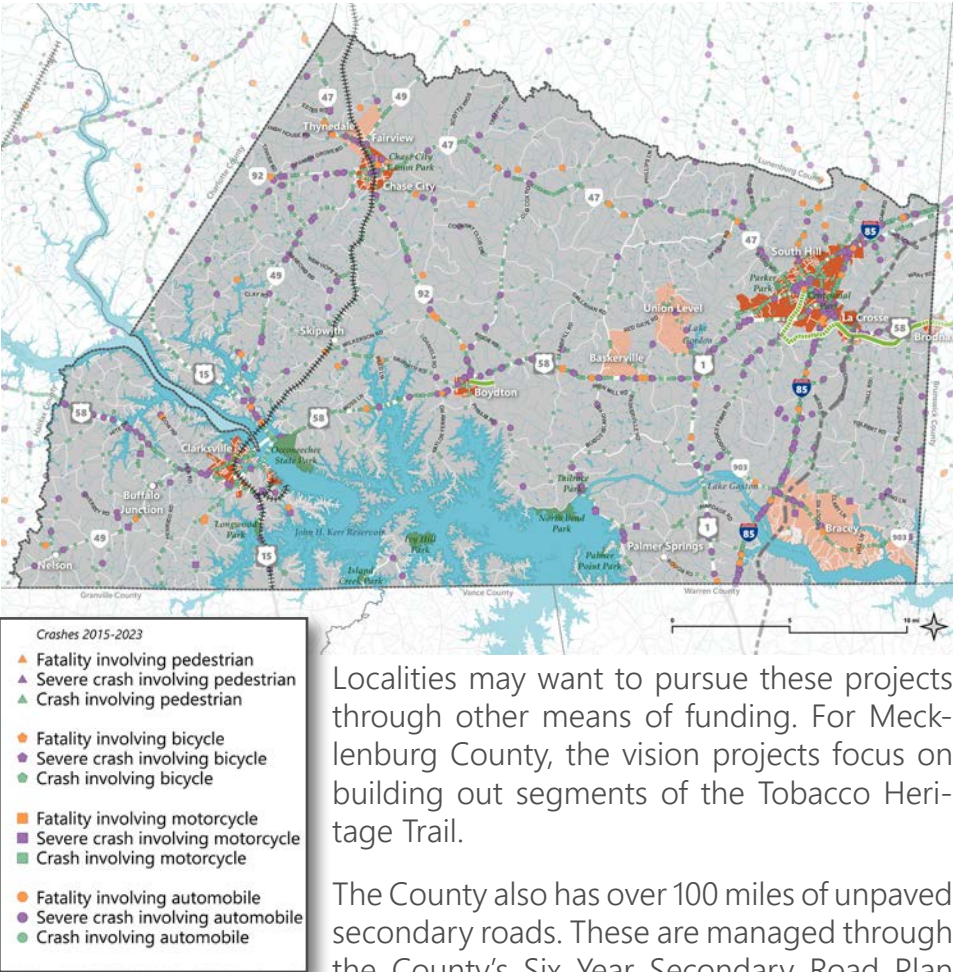
highway connecting Florida and Maine.

Mecklenburg County falls within VDOT’s Richmond Region for transportation planning. VDOT’s program guides long-term planning for the County and the Southside Planning District Commission (PDC) supports regional transportation planning through the Rural Long-Range Transportation Plan (RLRTP). This Plan, which is typically reviewed and updated every five years, lays out a vision and recommendations for the transportation networks of Halifax, Mecklenburg, and Brunswick Counties. It provides a prioritized list of transportation projects, which are

determined based on data related to safety, congestion, accessibility, and other key factors. The RLRTP helps localities like Mecklenburg and the PDC to apply for and secure funding through programs like Virginia’s Smart Scale.

The RLRTP also identifies ‘vision projects’ that might not receive high scores through the Plan’s scoring matrix, but still hold crucial importance for the region’s future.

Crash Locations & Severity



Localities may want to pursue these projects through other means of funding. For Mecklenburg County, the vision projects focus on building out segments of the Tobacco Heritage Trail.

The County also has over 100 miles of unpaved secondary roads. These are managed through the County’s Six Year Secondary Road Plan which lets the County determine the highest priority routes for future paving. Only unpaved roads that have more than 50 Average Daily Trips are eligible for VDOT funding for paving; however, VDOT funding for this program is limited and the County does not always receive funds to pave its top priority roadways.

Vehicle Crashes

Between 2015 and 2023, there were 2,921 total crashes within Mecklenburg County. Of these, 66 were fatal crashes causing a total of 74 fatalities. There were 989 crashes causing injuries, with 1,452 injuries. Only five crashes involved pedestrians over this time period, with six injuries and zero fatalities. Two of the crashes involved a bicycle with one fatality.

While the majority of crashes within the County were within and around the towns, there are a few clusters of severe crashes and fatalities along stretches of U.S. 58, especially near Baskerville, and west of Clarksville. Many of the severe crashes also occurred on I-85, which is likely a direct result of the high speeds along the interstate. The County should continue to work with VDOT and the PDC to identify safety interventions to reduce crash incidences and severity, especially within areas that have high crash incidences and a higher percentage

of severe crashes. In addition, the County should continue to work with VDOT to implement safety improvement projects identified in the U.S. 58 Arterial Preservation Plan.

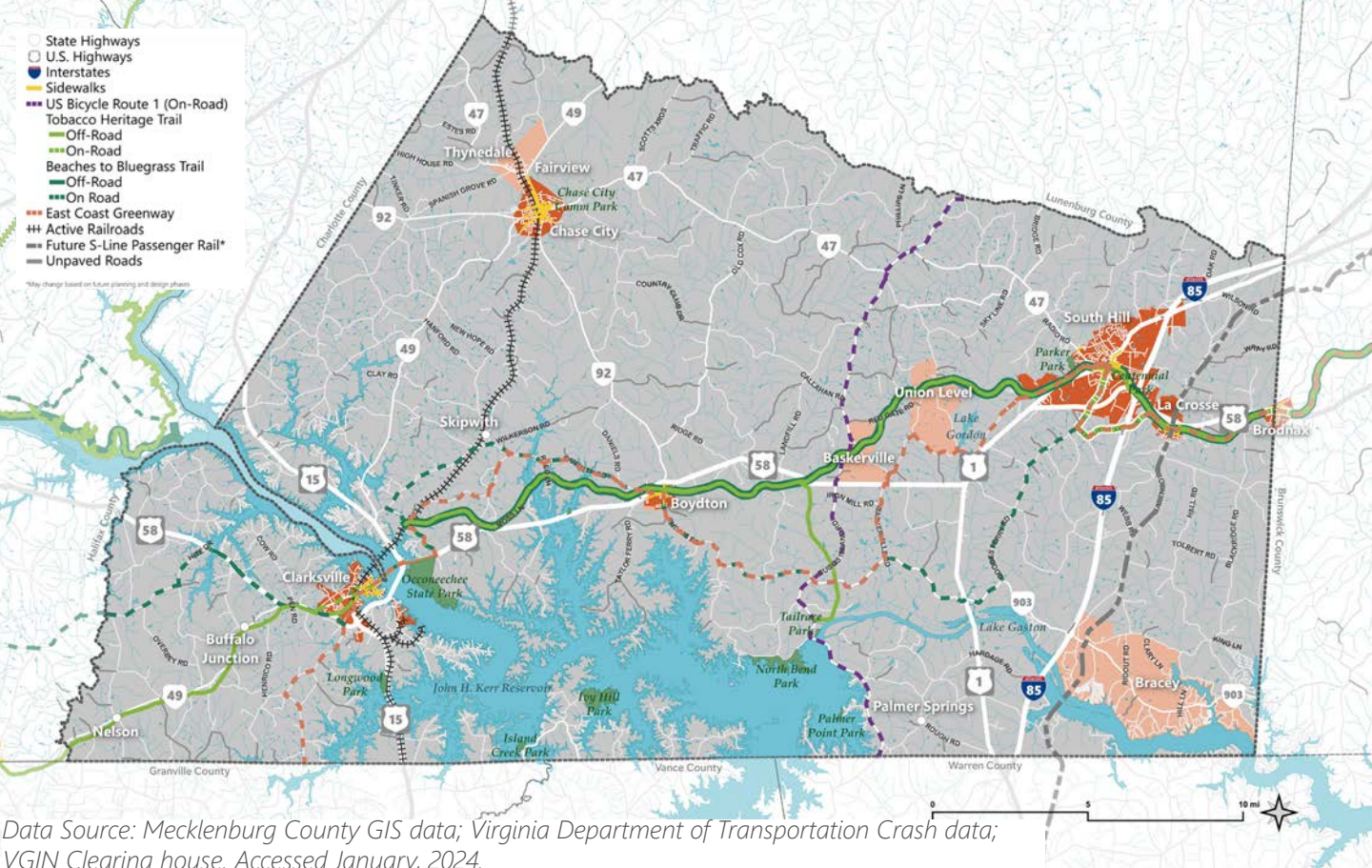
VDOT Investment

VDOT has allocated nearly \$70 million towards transportation improvements in Mecklenburg County in the 2024 Six-Year Improvement Plan (SYIP). These projects are designed to address critical local needs, including maintenance, paving, safety enhancements, and the development of multi-modal transportation options, such as trails.

The 2024 SYIP Projects include:

- » 3 State of Good Repair Projects (SGR): Two bridge replacements on US 58 and one on I-85 totaling \$55,718,357
- » 1 SMART SCALE Project improving two US 58 crossings
- » 10 Rural Rustic paving projects totaling \$3,092,000

Active Transportation Map



- » 1 Rail Crossing Project for \$ 545,922
- » The Rudd’s Creek Tobacco Heritage Trail Project for \$4,000,000

Reimagining Rail

A historic railroad right-of-way east of I-85, once known as the Seaboard Airline Railroad, is poised for a new chapter as Virginia plans to transform it into the Richmond-to-Raleigh high-speed rail corridor, providing connectivity from Washington D.C. to Raleigh, and beyond. Though the tracks were removed by CSX in the 1980s, the company held onto the land until 2019 when the Commonwealth acquired it with the vision of creating a high-speed rail link. This project has the potential to breathe new life into the dormant corridor and revolutionize transportation in the region.

The Richmond-to-Raleigh project was initially proposed in 1992 to connect major cities in the south-eastern United States with high-speed passenger rail. Mecklenburg County is within the alignment of the Raleigh to Richmond to Washington, D.C., route.

The Richmond-to-Raleigh high-speed rail corridor has the potential to provide faster travel times, improved connectivity, and a potential economic boost to the County. Route design and planning is ongoing. While final and station locations have not yet been determined, a La Crosse Station has been identified as a potential stop. Recent federal grant funding to the Commonwealth of Virginia and the state of North Carolina has reinvigorated the design phases of work and the prospect of passenger rail service could become a reality within the next decade.

Active Transportation Network

Tobacco Heritage Trail (THT)

In 2003, the Southside Planning District Commission established the Lake Country Trails Advisory Committee. The committee recommended creation of a regional off-road trail system, utilizing abandoned rail corridors. The committee suggested that a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation be established to acquire abandoned rail corridors and out of that the Roanoke River Rails-to-Trails (RRRT) was formed, and Tobacco Heritage Trail (THT) was selected as the name of the trail system, in recognition of the importance of the tobacco industry to Southside Virginia.

In 2004, the first THT segment was established between the Towns of LaCrosse and Brodnax, utilizing an abandoned rail segment that local governments had acquired in the 1970s for underground transmission lines, sewer, and fiber optics. Today, over 30 miles of off-road and 46 miles of on-road segments have been established including segments within Mecklenburg County between La Crosse and South Hill and a segment east of Boydton.

The recently updated 2023 Tobacco Heritage Trail Master Plan lays out a strategic blueprint for the Trail’s future. With a focus on bridging gaps in the existing network, the plan outlines a phased approach to construction, ensuring this cherished recreational asset continues to grow and connect communities.

East Coast Greenway (ECG)

One of Virginia’s Statewide Trails, the East Coast Greenway (ECG) is envisioned as a long-distance



Tobacco Heritage Trail segment in Boydton.

trail and bike route connecting 15 states and 450 cities and towns from Maine to Florida. In Southside Virginia, the ECG is designed to follow the THT from Lawrenceville to Clarksville and south where it enters into North Carolina. Currently, a large part of the route is on-road.

Beaches to Bluegrass (B2B)

The Beaches to Bluegrass Trail is a second statewide trail that traverses Southside Virginia. The B2B is a planned off-road multi-use trail that will extend from the Virginia Beach oceanfront to Cumberland Gap. A concept plan was completed by Virginia DCR in 2014. Similar to the East Coast Greenway, many of the segments are currently on-road. However, unlike the Tobacco Heritage Trail, the B2B allows for motorized uses.

Other bicycle and pedestrian facilities

Outside of the sidewalks within towns and the THT, few facilities exist for pedestrians and bicyclists within Mecklenburg County. While most of the County’s roadways are rural in nature, there could be areas where future sidewalks, crosswalks, and/or shared use paths could increase connectivity and provide more opportunities for walking and bicycling. As the County contemplates changes to the Future Land Use Plan, it should consider appropriate areas for active transportation investments, such as shared use paths and sidewalks to provide additional opportunities for transportation and recreation within the County.

Facilities & Governmental Services

Utilities

Water & Sewer

The Roanoke River Service Authority (RRSA) serves both Mecklenburg and Brunswick County. The authority is the largest supplier of water in Mecklenburg County, and operates a 4 million gallons per day (MGD) plant on Lake Gaston. The County is in the process of expanding this facility by up to 1.5 MGD by installing additional storage facilities, upgrading pump facilities, and installing a backup generator, which will increase the plant’s capacity to 8.36 MGD.

The RRSA operates distribution lines serving the communities of South Hill, Brodnax, Boydton, La Crosse and Chase City. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) permits RRSA to withdraw surface water from Lake Gaston. Clarksville has an independent water supply from the Kerr Reservoir. Clarksville’s permit allows up to 12 MGD withdrawal, but they are currently limited to approximately 1 MGD due to the capacity of their water treatment plant. Many of the towns have water lines that extend beyond the town boundaries and serve non-town residents.

Kerr Reservoir and Lake Gaston offer a combined safe yield of 352 million gallons per day (MGD), which far exceeds current and projected needs. Current usage of the Reservoir from the two-county “Lake County” users (Brunswick and Mecklenburg) is roughly 10 MGD. Virginia Beach has permits to withdraw up to 60 MGD per day and up to an additional 10 MGD to be allocated to Chesapeake, Virginia. Water is conveyed to Virginia Beach through a 76 mile pipeline that begins in Brunswick County.

Mecklenburg County does not have a central sewer system or treatment facility. The towns operate central waste treatment systems and facilities that serve town residents and in some cases, customers on the periphery of town. Outside of towns and their service areas, residential and commercial users generally rely on septic systems.

Solid Waste & Recycling

Southside Regional Public Service Authority (SRPSA) handles waste for 3 counties at the Southside Regional (Butchers Creek) Landfill, which is located in Mecklenburg County, about 5 miles north of Boydton on Highway 92. The landfill is projected to have a 45-year capacity.

Each town collects waste and delivers it to the landfill, while the County provides four Convenience Centers that consist of an area with dumpsters to collect items brought to the site by County residents. The centers collect household waste materials and recyclable materials. The household waste is brought to the Southside Regional Landfill. The recyclable materials are transported off-site to a recycling facility. The County is currently in the process of developing additional Convenience Centers to serve County residents.

Emergency Services

Mecklenburg County Emergency Services serves as a liaison between the EMS agencies and the volunteer fire departments. The Emergency Services department also provides planning, preparedness, and coordination of the County’s response during emergencies that may arise.

Emergency Medical Service

There are three rescue squads within Mecklenburg County. Mecklenburg County Emergency Services operates stations in Chase City and Clarksville, the Boydton Life Station, which serves Boydton and the surrounding area, and Southside Rescue Squad, serving eastern Mecklenburg County and a portion of Brunswick County.

Fire Rescue Service

Eight volunteer fire departments provide fire services in Mecklenburg County, operating in eight service districts. Each fire department receives funds from a combination of state, County, and town funding, as well as grants, loans, and fundraising efforts of the department and community. Most fire departments operate as non-profit organizations.



Mecklenburg County Middle and High School, completed in 2023. Photo source: ClevelandConstruction.com

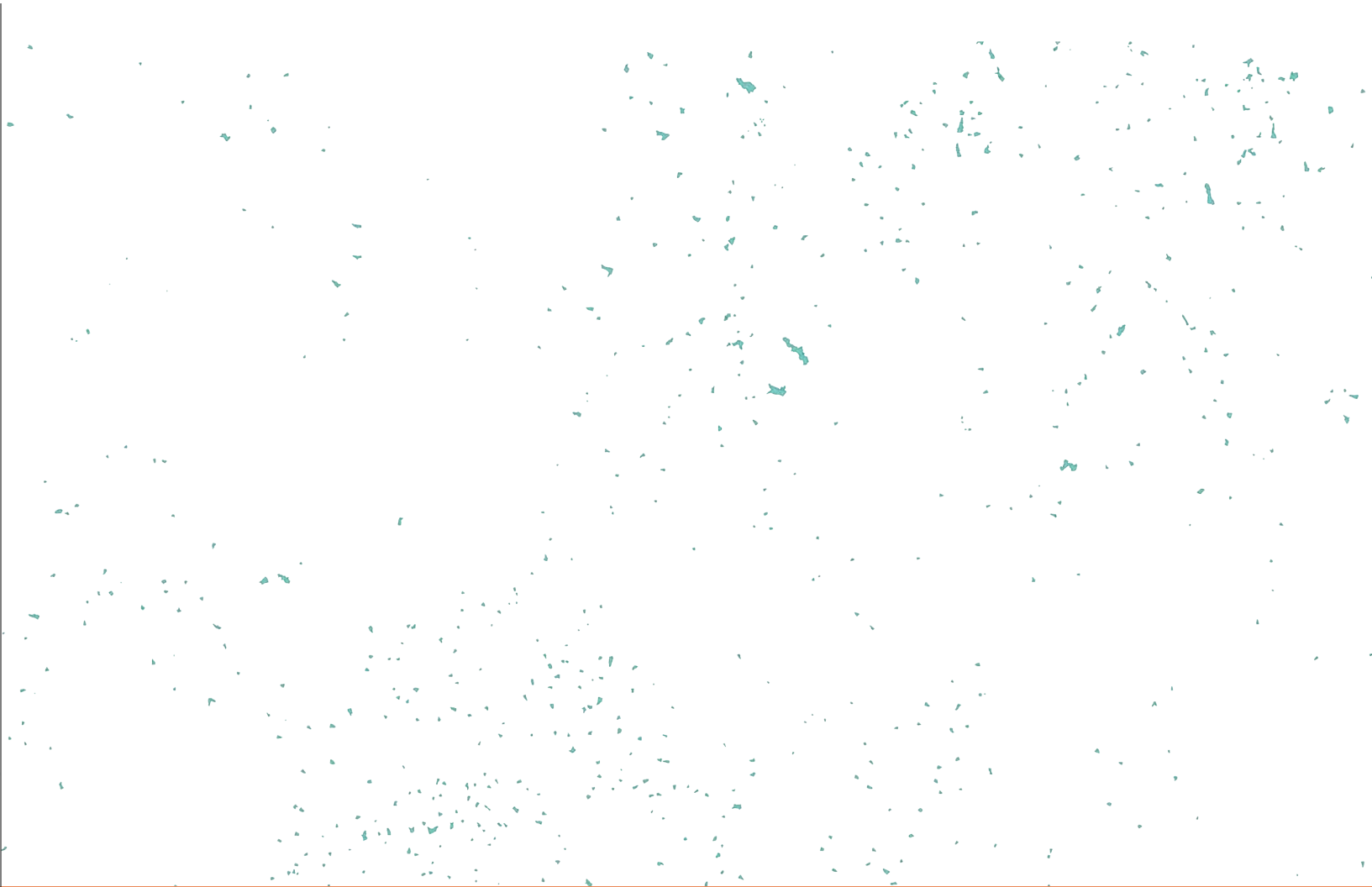
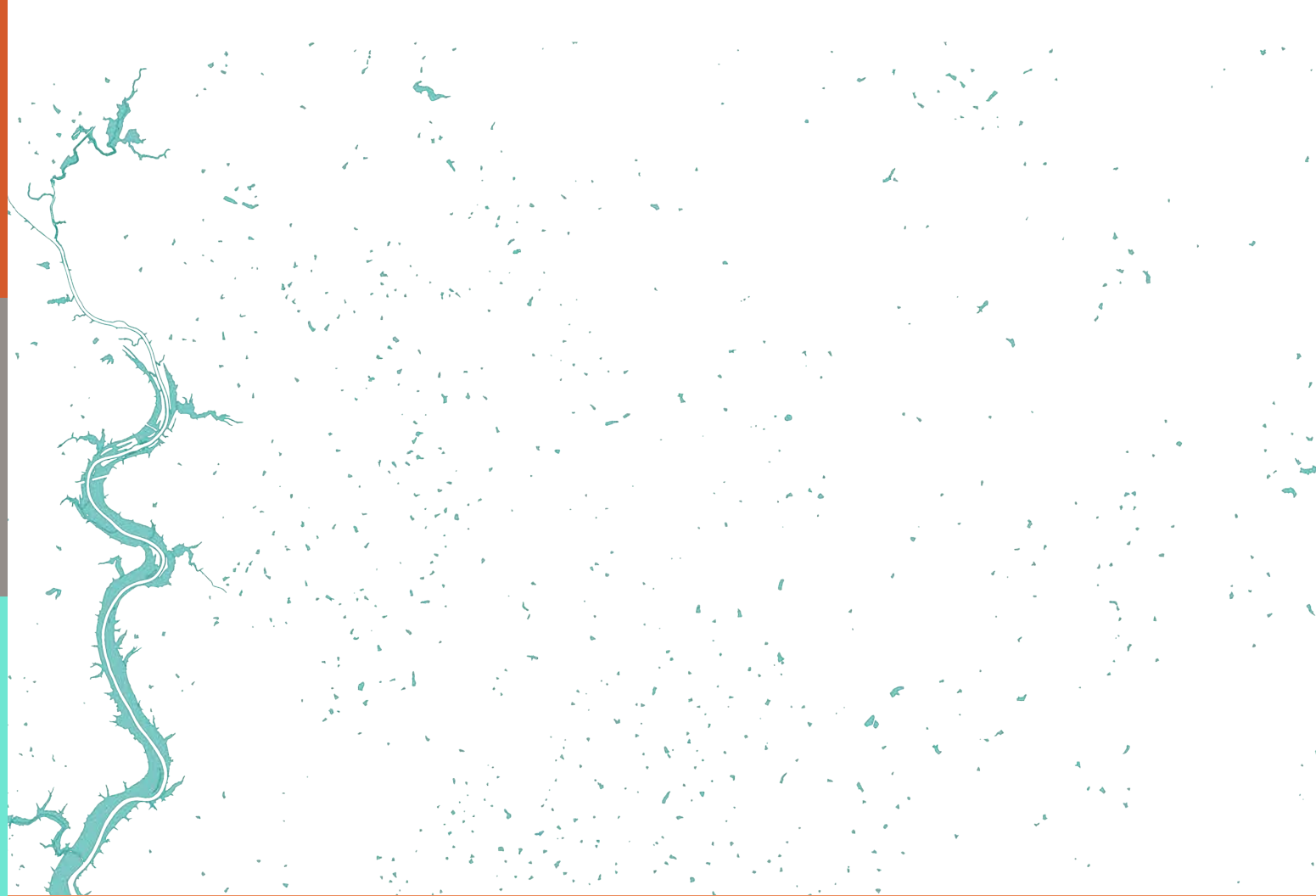
The eight volunteer fire departments are Boydton, Buckhorn, Chase City, Clarksville, La Crosse, Lake Gaston, Palmer Springs, and South Hill.

Schools

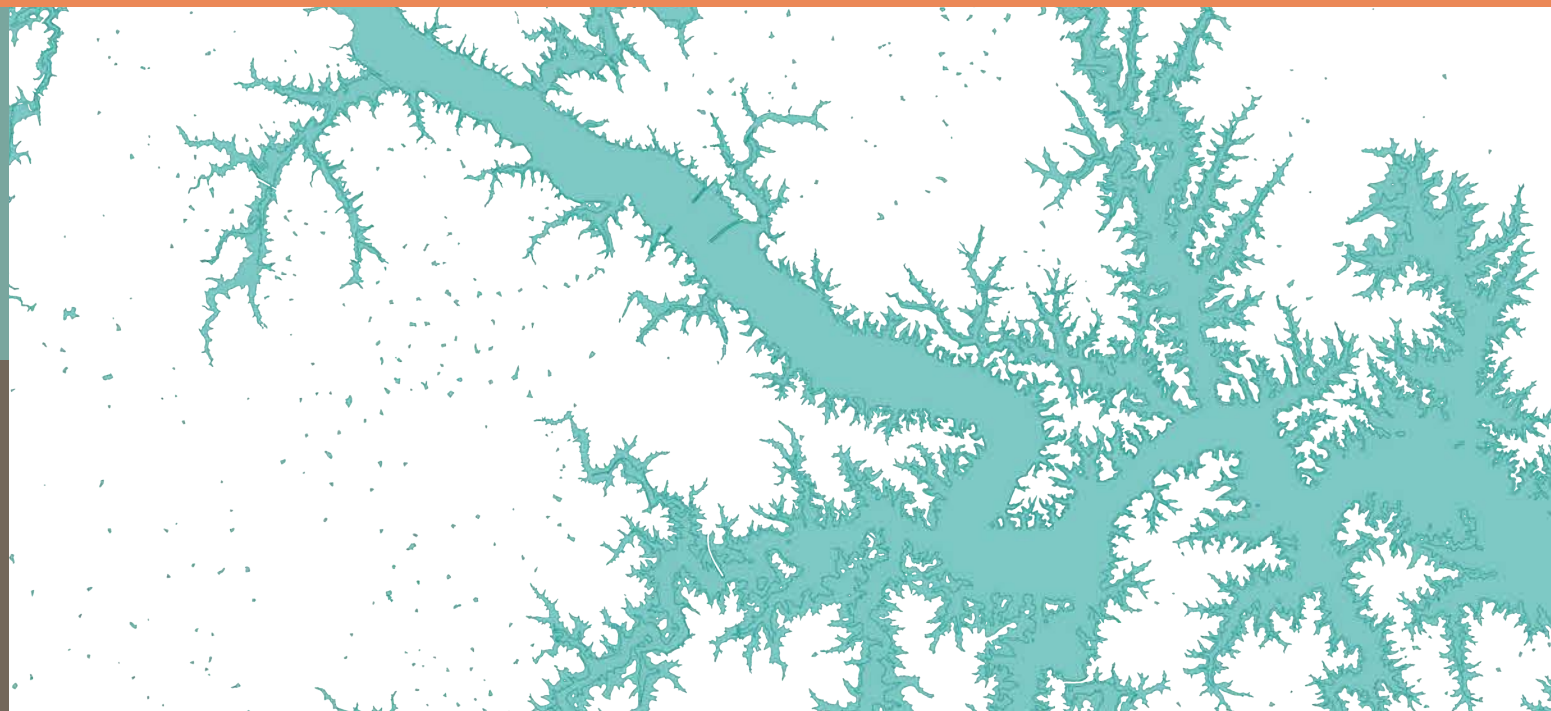
The Mecklenburg County school system serves about 4,500 students. School facilities include the newly built Mecklenburg County High School and Middle School Campus (2022) and four elementary schools (Chase City, Clarksville, La Crosse, and South Hill). With the exception of the elementary school in South Hill (2005), all of the schools are aging facilities, built between 1952 and 1961. The County is in the process of rebuilding each of the elementary school facilities. Clarksville Elementary is currently under construction and students are attending the former Bluestone High School during construction.

The County’s high school and middle schools used to have two separate schools for each: Bluestone High School and Bluestone Middle School previously serving the western part of the County, and Park View High and Middle Schools, near South Hill, previously serving eastern Mecklenburg.

In 2023 after the high and middle schools combined into one centralized facility, the County Board of Supervisors announced plans to demolish both middle schools, with plans to turn the Bluestone site into a convenience center for receiving trash and recyclable materials and the Park View property into an industrial site. The former Park View High School will be converted to apartments and the former Bluestone High School is serving as a temporary elementary school during construction of each elementary school.



PART 3: PLANNING & LOOKING AHEAD



Population Forecast
Community Engagement Summary

Population Forecast

Population Forecast

This section describes some possible scenarios for future population change in Mecklenburg County. It examines local drivers of population change, whether positive or negative, and incorporates those findings into a preferred, “most reasonable” population forecast, looking out 20 years to 2044.

The Case for Population Growth

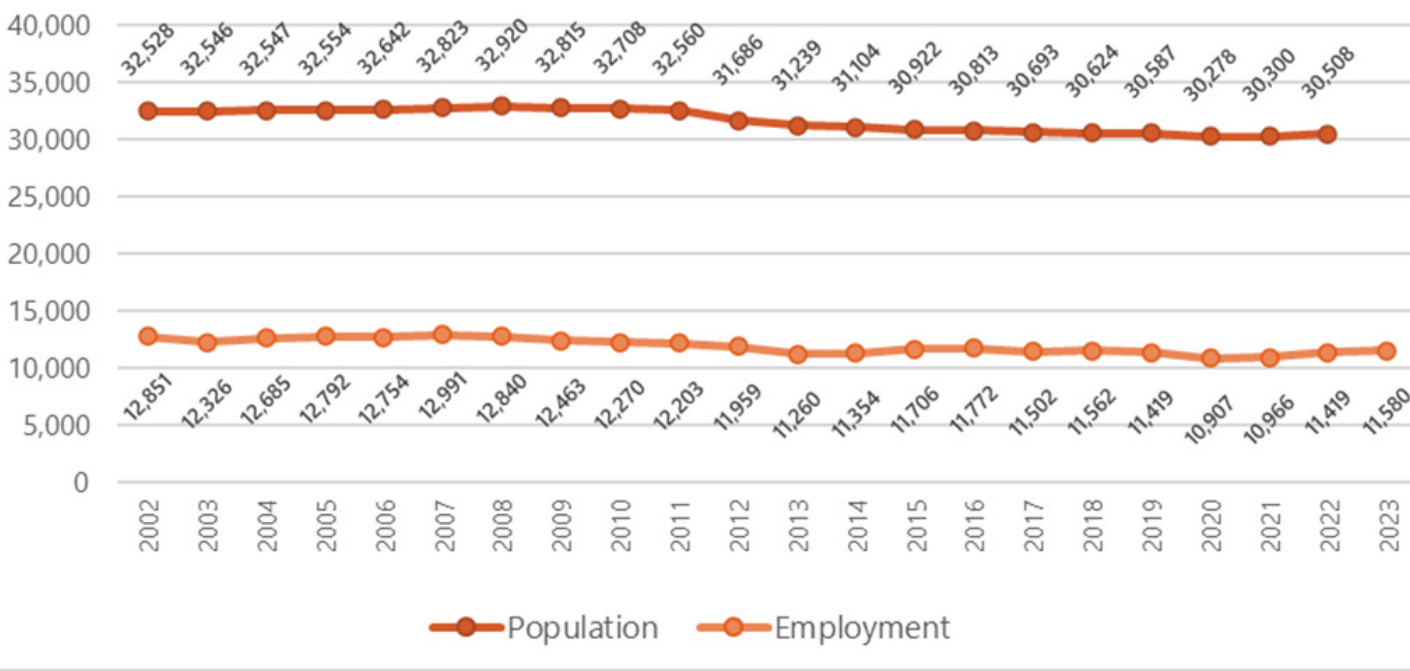
The primary evidence for population growth in Mecklenburg County is its employment sector. Historical population and employment have been highly linked in Mecklenburg County for the last 20 years. Rises in one have coincided with rises in the other, and dips in one have coincided with dips in the other. The general decline in both population and employment over the past two decades can be seen in the figure below. This is a common phenomenon in rural areas not associated with major cities,

and it is reasonable to assume that a known change in one would continue to affect change in the other.

To that end, the Microsoft data centers are expected to bring hundreds of new jobs to the County, in addition to the 450 existing jobs. It is very possible that such an infusion would lead to further induced employment in competitive or complementary job sectors. If employment growth occurs as is expected, population can be expected to rise in response.

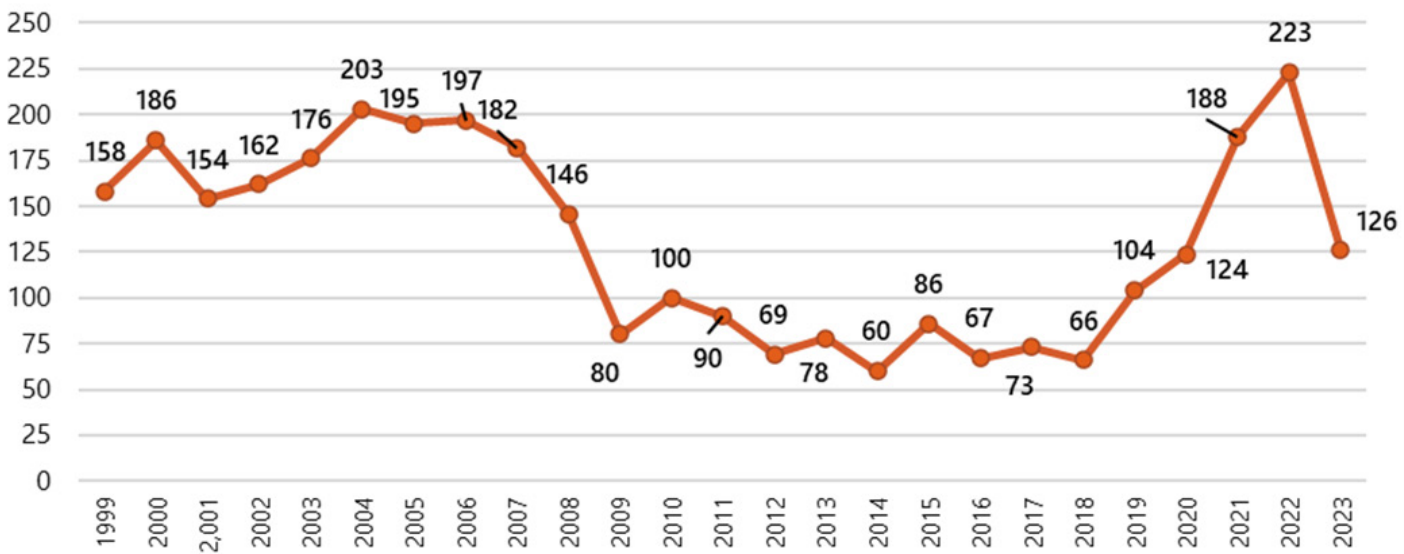
Secondarily, permitting data suggests that the private sector has already identified the growth prospects of the County and is likely to continue to target the area for more housing. Building permits have been increasing for a half-decade, including some multi-family development, reaching above 200 approved units in 2022 after barely adding 60 units in the early 2010s. Total housing units have increased by 500 in the past decade, and will continue to rise if recently permitted housing is developed.

Historical Population & Employment



Data source: US Census Bureau Population and Housing Unit Estimates and Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages; Note: 2023 employment data is through Q2 only.

Annual Building Permits Issued County-wide



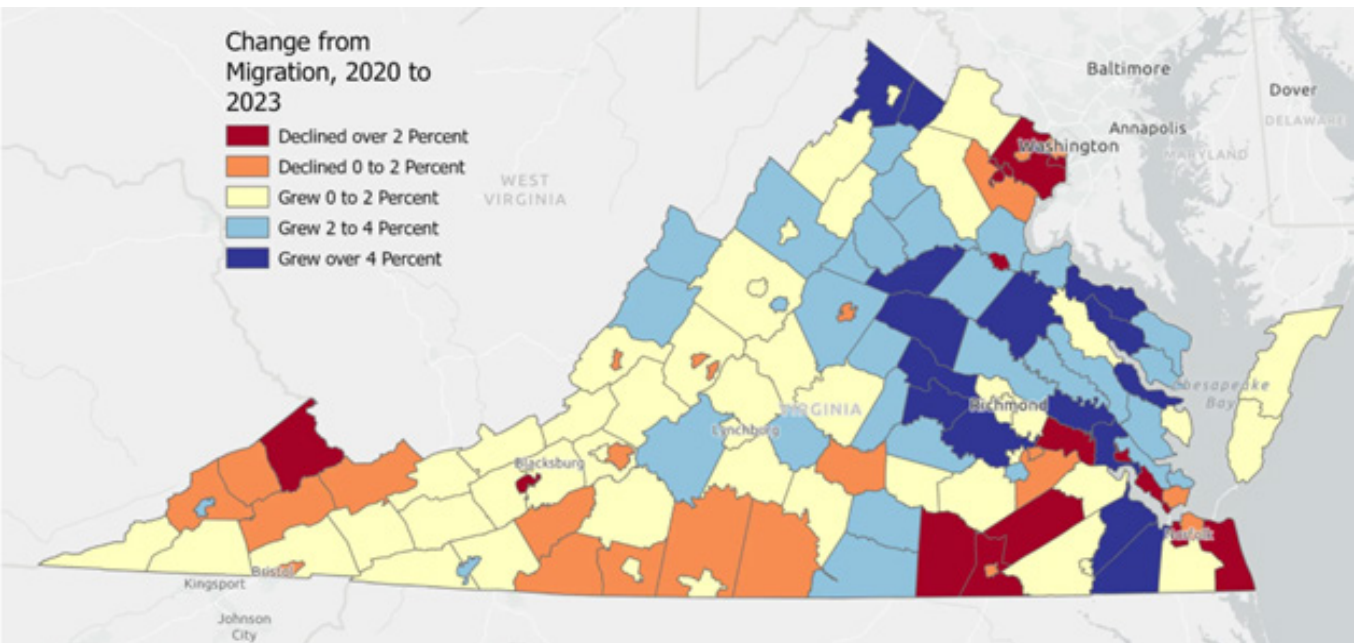
Data source: US Census Bureau Building Permits Survey

The permitting rise may relate to a newly emerging pattern of growth in Mecklenburg County. Population rose, however slightly, from 2020-2022, and county-wide employment is the highest it has been since 2016. A big part of the population growth has been from rural migration, as reported by Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, which produces annual population estimates and future projections for Virginia and its localities. They report that many rural Virginia counties are seeing an influx of new

residents. In Mecklenburg County they estimated a 2-4 percent increase in net migration (total movers into the county minus total movers out) since 2020.

A related phenomenon is the increased popularity of in-town living in Mecklenburg County, another positive sign for future growth. While the County's population as a whole has declined the past decade, the population in Mecklenburg's towns has gone up. The total population in the towns of Chase City,

Migration Changes in Virginia, 2020-2023



As appeared in the Cardinal News, January 29, 2024



The map above shows the envisioned 'Richmond-to-Raleigh route, which bisects the eastern portion of the County, where CSX rail lines once existed. The Richmond-to-Raleigh high-speed rail corridor could include a future station at La Crosse, but final station locations have not yet been determined. Source: Virginia Department of Transportation.

Clarksville, and South Hill was estimated at 8,650 in the latest Census estimates (year 2022), an increase of 7% since 2017. There is also additional growth happening in Bracey, which has grown by nearly 400 people in 10 years. Given the locational benefits of lake access, and the additional quality of life benefits in and around Mecklenburg County's Main Streets, these places have the potential to attract new residents and continue their positive growth trajectory.

Finally, the Richmond-to-Raleigh rail project has potential to increase development and spur new residents. The Richmond-to-Raleigh high-speed rail corridor aims to provide passenger rail service on the former CSX S-Line Corridor between Richmond and Raleigh. While several years away from final design, approval, and eventual implementation, there has been some consideration of a potential station in La Crosse. The possibility for commuter

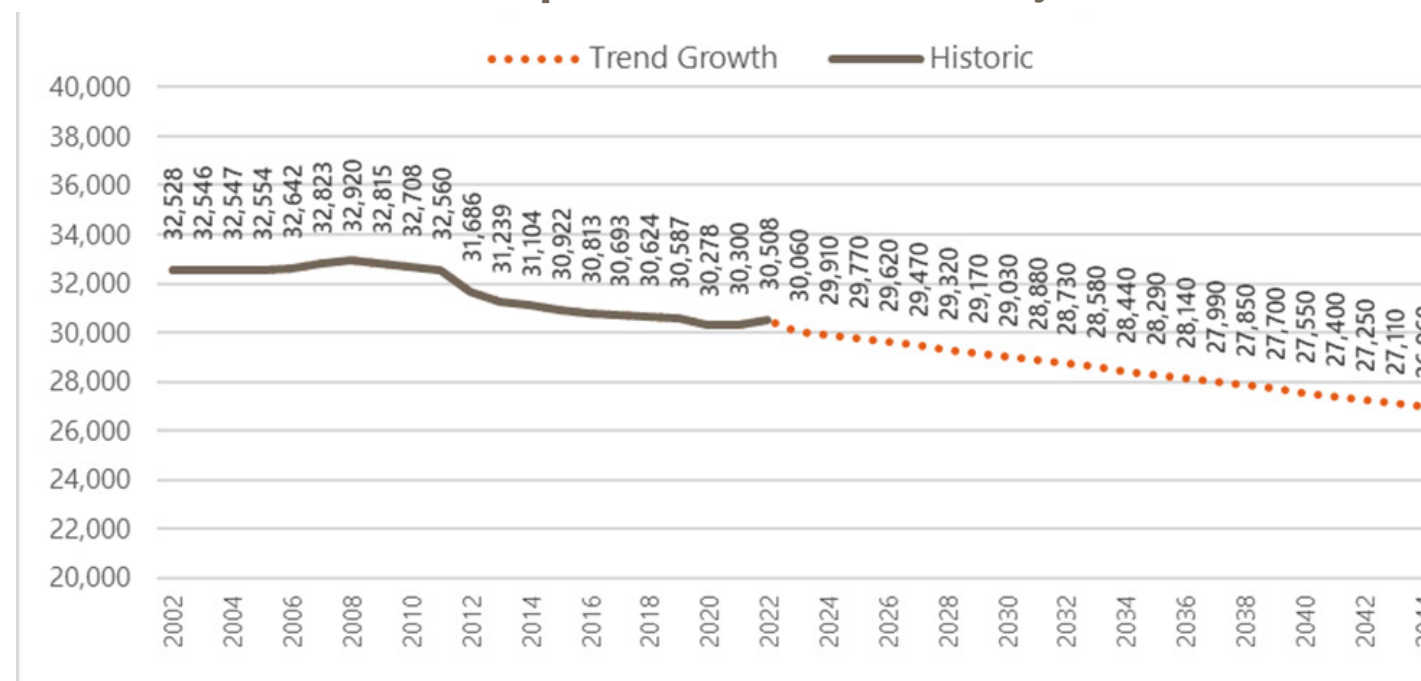
travel from Mecklenburg County to Richmond or Raleigh could be an impetus for commercial and residential development in the station area during the latter years of this Plan's time horizon.

It is worth noting that the County and town population counts do not account for the transient population associated with ongoing construction of industrial sites and data centers within the County. Many construction workers reside in the County for months at a time, staying at local hotels or rental housing, and rely on County and town facilities and services, yet are not considered permanent residents and therefore do not show up in population counts.

The Case For Population Decline

Historical trends would suggest the possibility of continued population decline. In 2000, county population was 32,300. The latest population total,

Historical Population & Trend Growth Projection



Data source: US Census Bureau Population and Housing Unit Estimate; trend line added.

for 2022, was 30,500. While there have been some modest gains in recent years, historical population trends have either been stagnant or declining. Meanwhile, the existing population continues to get older. Median age was 48.6, up from 45.9 a decade ago, and well above the statewide median of 39. Not surprisingly, the proportion of residents age 55 and older has risen over the last 10 years, from 36% in 2012 to 42% in 2022. By contrast the proportion of residents below age 35 – residents who are more likely to work and to bear new children – has declined a percentage point, now sitting at 36%, which indicate the County has not retained younger adults.

A simple trendline growth projection of the county's population based on the past 20 years of available data points to a 2044 population of under 27,000, a loss of 3,500 people or 12% of total population. It is important to note that the closure of Mecklenburg Correctional Center caused a 700 person drop in County population, a one-time issue that accounts for the major population drop in 2012. However, even with removing that incarcerated population from the analysis, the trend growth line would be negative, forecasting around 28,200 people in 2044.

Additionally, population projections from the Weldon Cooper Center forecast an even lower total

population for Mecklenburg County, with 25,575 people in 2045, this despite the Center's own findings of statewide rural in-migration changes.

Forecast Recommendation

While the possibility exists of stagnant growth or even population decline based on historical patterns, there is competing evidence that Mecklenburg County has more growth potential than in previous years, including new employment sectors, steady population growth in Mecklenburg's towns, new transportation infrastructure, and a trend of private and public sector investment.

There is a high degree of uncertainty in all population forecasting efforts. It is likely that the County's population in 2044 will be within 10% of where it is today. Population decline is not inevitable and the policy and investment priorities outlined in this Comprehensive Plan can help the County retain younger adults and set itself on a course for modest population increase. With these factors in place, it is reasonable to plan for a modest population increase of 10% by 2044, which would bring the County's population to about 33,700 people.

Community Engagement Summary

About the Community Engagement Process

In January 2024, the County launched a Comprehensive Plan update to provide strategic direction about the future of the County. The update process was supported by an extensive community engagement process to ensure that community members’ voices are represented in the Plan vision and recommendations.

The engagement process provided varied opportunities for in-person and online engagement within each of the four project phases. The in-person engagement opportunities were staggered over different locations, times, and days of the week in hopes of providing convenient opportunities for people of all backgrounds to participate.

The community engagement process also included a series of focus groups with invited attendance to ensure that stakeholders from various interest groups, demographic backgrounds, and individuals representing high priority topics were consulted in the process. The Engagement Overview for each phase lists the focus groups that were engaged.

Phase 1 Engagement Overview

The first round of community engagement took place in January 2024. The purpose of the first round of engagement was to:

- 1. Share information about the project goals and scope.
- 2. Learn from the people of Mecklenburg County about local assets, challenges, and opportunities.
- 3. Seek input on what should be prioritized in the planning process to inform future phases of work and an updated Comprehensive Plan vision.

The County organized four meetings as part of Phase 1:

- 1. Town Staff Focus Group
- 2. County Staff Focus Group
- 3. Community Listening Session in South Hill
- 4. Community Listening Session in Chase City

The listening sessions were open to the public and advertised in the newspaper and online.



Phase 1 Community Listening Session in South Hill, January 25, 2024.

Themes

The following themes emerged from the discussions that took place during the four meetings. They summarize the main points that people frequently made during those meetings.

- » **Maintain the County’s Rural Nature:** People value the rural landscape and natural features of the County and want to see those protected for future generations. People value many features and activities in the rural parts of the County – lakes, forests, hiking, hunting, water sports, and more. Future housing and industrial development should be carefully designed and located so these resources are protected.
- » **Restore Thriving Main Streets:** People value the County’s historic towns and Main Streets, and would like to see more opportunities for living, recreation, shopping, dining, and entertainment in these places. The County also has a need for new housing. The location of future housing is important to people, with many expressing a preference for growing in and around the towns and away from rural areas and natural resources.
- » **Continue Investing in Infrastructure:** The County has invested in water, wastewater, and communications infrastructure, which has supported economic development. Recently the County has focused investment towards improving its school facilities. Continued investment in infrastructure is important to people, especially improving wastewater infrastructure, repairing and replacing old pipes, and quality of life amenities, such as building a great trail network.
- » **Invest in Outdoor Recreation & Tourism:** There is a strong sense that the County has untapped potential with outdoor recreation and tourism. Many people said that investing in facilities such as the Tobacco Heritage Trail can draw more visitors and improve quality of life, which can help the County achieve economic development goals, such as attracting and retaining a high-quality workforce. Other tourism assets mentioned frequently include the MacCullum Moore Gardens in Chase City, Kerr Lake, and Lake Gaston.

- » **Social and Recreation Opportunities for Children and Young Adults:** Many people expressed concerns about a lack of activities for children and young adults. There is an interest in seeing more indoor recreation and entertainment options in the Towns. Also discussed were opportunities for people to socialize within the Towns and on the lakes, such as more restaurants, music venues, and parks. Some people mentioned their hope for more public places where everyone can come together regardless of age, race, income, and other factors.
- » **Support for Older Residents:** The County, like many rural places in the country, has a growing population that is 65 and older. Several people expressed their desire for more senior housing, more support services for seniors, and more social activities. The concept of older residents having what they need to “age in place” came up as a potential goal for the plan.

Town Focus Group Summary

The County met with representatives of Chase City, South Hill, Boydton, and the Roanoke River Services Authority on January 25th at the Southside PDC office in South Hill. The discussion focused on assets, challenges, and opportunities.

Assets and opportunities participants identified were:

- » **Tourism Assets:** The MacCullum Moore Gardens and Museum in Chase City, Kerr Lake and Lake Gaston, river frontage, Clarksville as a unique lakeside town in Virginia. Also discussed was the potential for the County’s tourism economy to grow.
- » **Outdoor Recreation Assets:** The Tobacco Heritage Trail and other trails (both developed and planned), the extensive lake and river frontage, Occaneechee State Park, and the Army Corps of Engineers land along Kerr Lake.
- » **Infrastructure and Resources:** These include abundant water resources, multiple electricity transmission lines, Interstate 85 with easy access to Richmond and the Triangle region, and the future passenger rail corridor connecting Raleigh and Richmond.

» **Spirit of Collaboration:** The Towns and County collaborate and have good working relationships.

Participants also identified several challenges that the Plan should address:

- » **Aging Infrastructure:** The towns have a lot of old infrastructure that needs repair or replacement, such as older water and storm drainpipes. Wastewater plants are also in need of maintenance and upgrades; the Towns maintain the wastewater systems.
- » **Growth Management:** Development is served most effectively and efficiently within the towns. It is challenging to serve new development outside the towns and extend the infrastructure new development requires.
- » **Housing Development:** The County has many builders, but few developers that would create new residential neighborhoods with the infrastructure they would require. The County does not have an entity that brings together the private and public sector to support housing development.
- » **Solar and Data Center Development:** These new industries have bolstered the County’s budget and supported substantial investment in the County’s schools and infrastructure. However, they also have impacts and compete with other land uses, such as housing, which is also a need.

Participants identified a couple of specific opportunities for the Plan:

- » **Tobacco Heritage Trail:** The trail represents an opportunity to invest in quality of life and the County’s outdoor recreation economy.
- » **Regional Collaboration on Housing:** The County has identified housing as a need. The Towns also see this need. Capitalizing on the potential for housing may require greater partnership among the local governments and between government and builders.

County Staff Focus Group Summary

The project team met with representatives of the County staff on January 26th. The discussion included representatives from the Administrator’s Office, Commissioner of Revenue, and Zoning. Participants shared the following feedback:

Community Assets

- » County has good infrastructure including transmission lines, ample water, and roadways.
- » Lots of great natural assets, especially Palmer Springs and Palmer Point Park, which are well situated and have white sands;
- » Clarksville, which is uniquely situation beside the lake.

Challenges

- » The County did not have a significant housing shortage 10 years ago. Demand has increased; housing is now a big issue.
- » Use of land near and around Kerr Lake is an opportunity, but there can be a lot of red tape with the Army Corps of Engineers processes. Attempt to add boat parking in Clarksville an example.
- » Change worries people. It is important to maintain a high quality of life in the face of change.
- » The agricultural community is concerned about the loss of land for other uses.
- » It is difficult to find qualified employees; Microsoft has shared this as an issue.



Phase 1 Community Listening Session, Chase City, January 26, 2024.

Opportunities

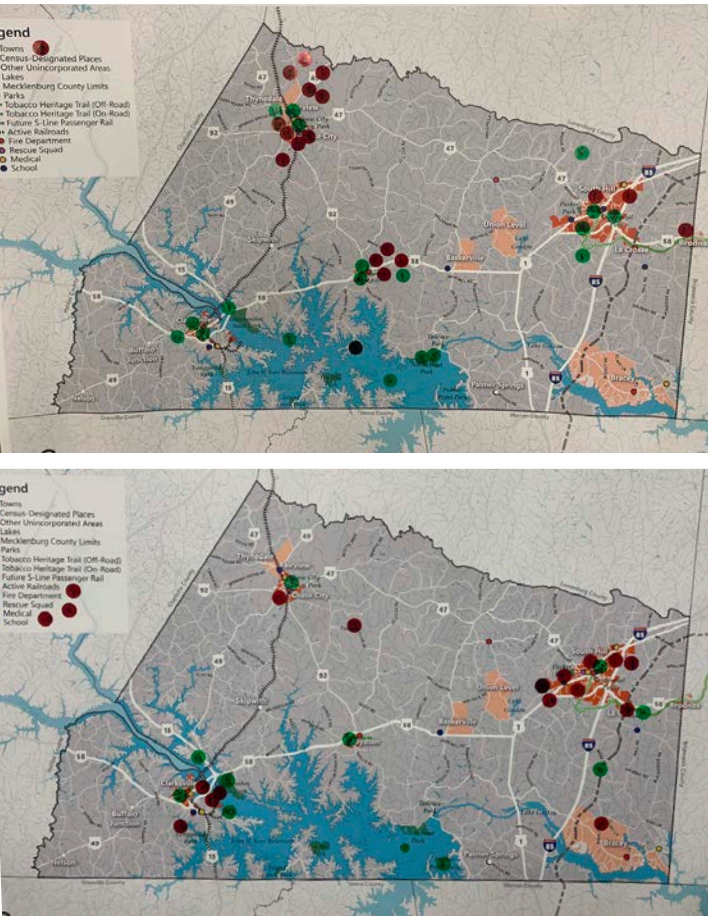
- » Create a clear plan with more guidance on how to handle future development.
- » The goal should be a well-planned community. The Plan should identify areas for change and areas that should not change.
- » Coordinate with the Army Corps of Engineers. They have a local representative that would be good to talk with as the Comprehensive Plan process moves along.

Community Listening Sessions Summary

The County held a pair of community listening sessions open to the public on January 25th and 26th in South Hill and Chase City. Both meetings followed the same format with the goal of learning “what matters most” to the people of Mecklenburg County.

County Assets and Areas of Concern

Meeting attendees provided input at a series of three stations. At the first station attendees used a County map to provide input on assets to protect and areas of concern, shown in the maps at right and listed below.



Photographs of the maps from the community listening sessions (Chase City, top; South Hill, bottom.)

Assets	Areas of Concern
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Kerr Lake/Buggs Island and Lake Gaston» Tobacco Heritage Trail» Parks including Occoneechee State Park, North Bend Park, Wildlife Management Areas, Palmer Point Park, etc.» Blueways» Water Quality Monitor Program» Colonial Center for the Performing Arts in South Hill, and the workshops they offer» MacCullum More Gardens and Museum» Farmers and Makers Market» Clarksville, which is a unique lakeside town» Prestwood Plantation» Original Randolph-Macon College site» Transportation system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» Impacts from utility scale solar farms» Impacts from data centers» Vacant downtown storefronts» Historic structures at risk of being lost (Roller Mills, Robert E. Lee Community Center, and Mecca Theatre provided as examples)» Developing more opportunities for tourism» Many streets in need of improvement» Need for additional hotel options outside of South Hill» Maintenance of the Tobacco Heritage Trail» Lack of a public pier on Kerr Lake» Improve rescue response time» Improve medical care» Restore old Bracey downtown» Power station on Country Club Road (noise)» Desire for a wider range of restaurants» More indoor youth recreation activities

What Investments Matter the Most?



Community members share their input at the Chase City Listening Session on January 26, 2024.

At the second station participants provided input on how they would like to see the County invest in the County’s infrastructure and facilities. The top 5 investment priorities indicated by attendees were:

- » Providing more indoor athletic and recreation facilities.
- » Completing portions of the Tobacco Heritage Trail and other trail networks.
- » Providing more outdoor athletic and recreation facilities.
- » New street connections or improvements to existing streets.
- » Improving and expanding emergency services and facilities (E911, fire/rescue, police)

People also provided additional ideas for investments beyond those that were included on the poster board as a voting option:

- » County water quality monitoring program.
- » Invest in non-profit organizations and tourism.
- » Expanding the trail network.
- » Planning for what to do with data centers sites if they become obsolete in the future.
- » More grocery stores, housing, and laundromats.
- » Development of Burlington site near Clarks-ville into a mixed-use community

- » Improve drinking water.
- » Public golf course.
- » More high-speed internet options in the town.
- » Public beaches.
- » After school activities.
- » Create a County Parks and Recreation Department.
- » Job training programs for young adults.
- » Additional activities for youth and young adults.
- » Use existing water and sewer infrastructure before expansion.
- » Repair and complete the Tobacco Heritage Trail, promote it, and provide a shuttle service between segments on designated days.

What Types of Places Would you Like to See More Of?

The second station also included a poster board where people provided input to the types of places they would like to see in Mecklenburg County in the future. Below are the top 3 types of places that people would like to see more of:

- » Neighborhoods with a mix of housing types that support people at all stages of life (young professionals, families, retirees, etc.)
- » Industrial and employment areas that support local jobs.
- » Mixed-use neighborhoods that have shops, homes, and community facilities within walking distance of each other.

People also provided additional ideas for the types of places they’d like to see in the future, beyond those that were included on the poster board as a voting option:

- » Aging-in-place housing options.
- » Progressive housing for seniors from independent to full care. Downtown housing.
- » Housing affordability.
- » More entertainment options for adults, such as a movie theatre.

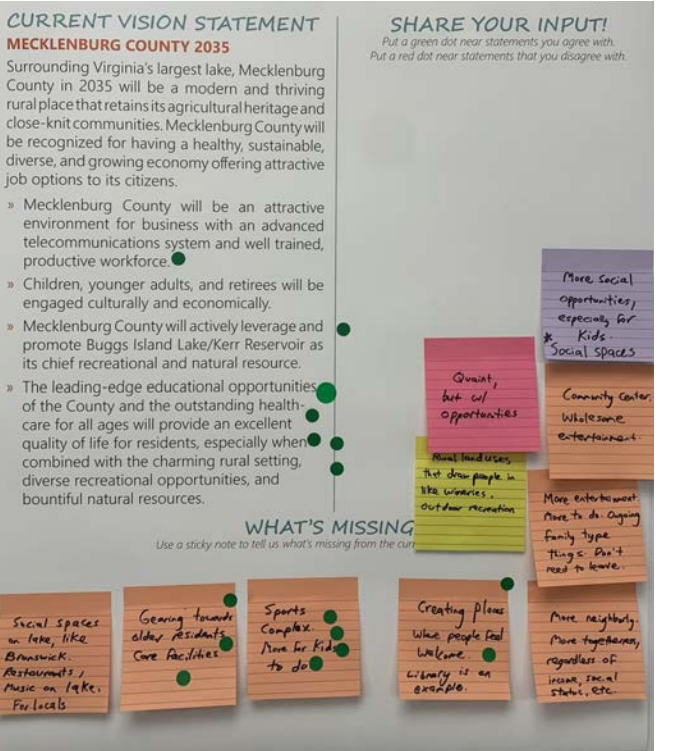
- » Full recycling center including glass and plastics.
- » Maintain rural.
- » Concerns over housing and rent costs.
- » Several concerns were also expressed about solar and data center development, including the transient nature of construction workers/contractors that stay in the County temporarily.

What is the Comprehensive Plan Vision?

The third station featured a poster with the County’s existing vision statement from the Plan updated in 2017. People placed dots next to statements they like, and suggested additions to the vision statement. The suggested additions are listed below:

- » Social spaces on the lakes for locals, such as music and restaurants. Suggested looking at what they have on Lake Gaston in Brunswick County.
- » Support for older residents including care facilities.
- » More for kids to do, including a sports complex.
- » Creating more places where all people feel welcomed. The library is a good example.
- » More outdoor recreation and rural land uses that bring people in. Wineries are an example.
- » A more neighborly County, more togetherness, regardless of income, social status, etc.
- » A community center and more wholesome entertainment.
- » More social spaces and social opportunities, especially for kids.
- » Quaint, but with opportunities.
- » More entertainment, more to do, ongoing family activities, so people don’t need to leave.
- » An arts center.
- » Prioritize environmental protection.
- » Housing for seniors, smaller household sizes, and for families that want to put down roots.

- » Solar is important for the environment, but address impacts with buffers, better design, and runoff elimination. Make sure it benefits the environment.
- » Fill vacant storefronts or remove ones that are unsafe and unusable.
- » Smart planning for solar and data centers.
- » Better water quality.
- » Everyone working together for trails – the Army Corps of Engineers, Tobacco Heritage Trail, and County – to build out the trail network.



Comprehensive Plan visioning responses from the South Hill listening session on January 25, 2024.

Community Survey

During Phase 1 the County also provided an opportunity for people to participate in a community survey. The survey was hosted on the project website and paper copies were available upon request.

The survey ran from January 6 to February 15, 2024 and included 29 questions covering topics of existing conditions, future priorities, and demographic questions. In total, 405 people participated in the survey by answering at least one question, though only

66% of participants completed the full questionnaire.

Section 1: Current Conditions

Participants were asked to rank community facilities, programs and services, and other quality of life measures in Mecklenburg County.

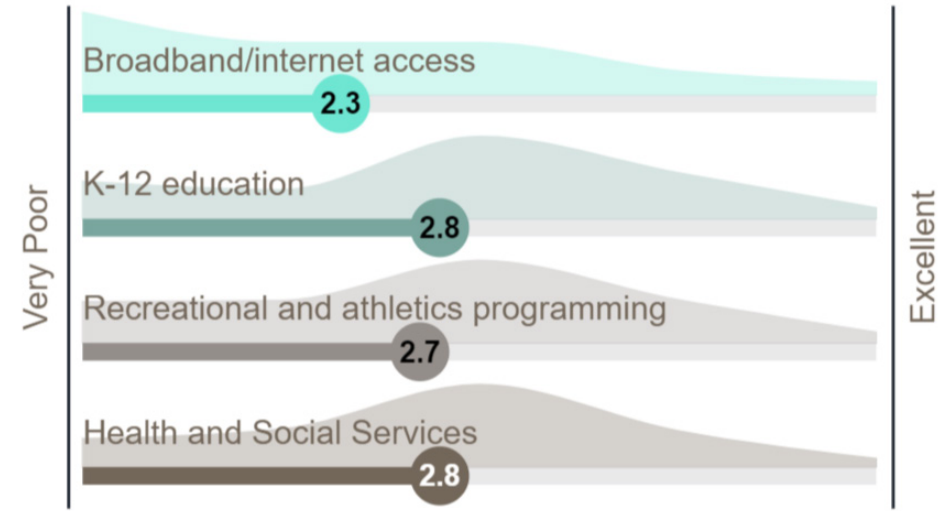
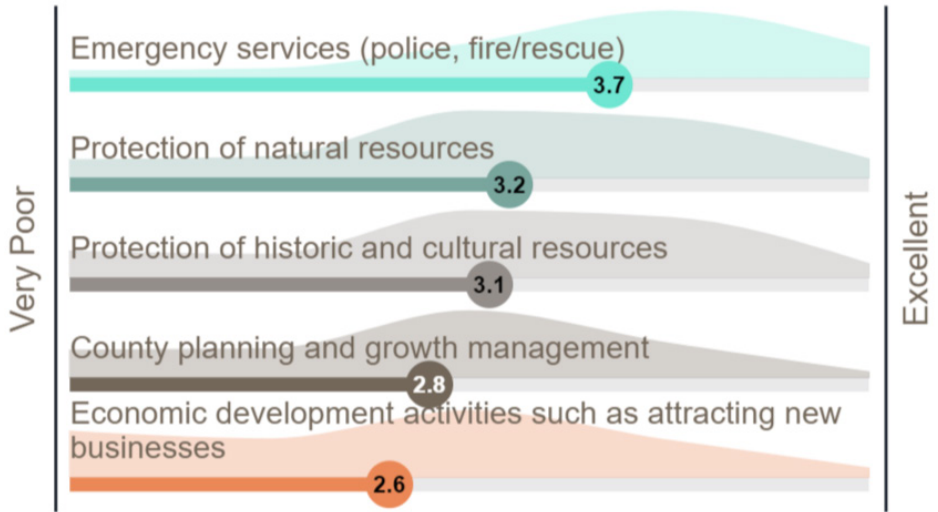
Out of five points, the highest ranking facilities were highways and primary roads (3.5), lake access (3.5), and public libraries (3.5). Secondary and unpaved roads (2.6), convenience centers for waste and recycling (2.8) and paths and trails for walking and bicycling (3) received the lowest facility scores.

Ratings for programs and services and quality of life measures are shown at right.

Participants were asked to share what additional investments they would like to see for these areas and the following themes emerged:

- » Recreational facilities (both indoor and outdoor)
- » Healthcare facilities and services
- » Affordable housing
- » Community gathering and cultural event spaces
- » Senior services
- » Youth programming
- » Internet access
- » Increased transportation
- » Increased transportation options
- » Job training
- » Recycling services and litter removal

How would you rate the following programs and services in Mecklenburg County?



How would you rate the following quality of life measures in Mecklenburg County?



Section 2: Plan Priorities and Looking Ahead

In this section, participants were asked forward looking questions about land uses, investments, housing, and transportation. A few key findings are summarized below.

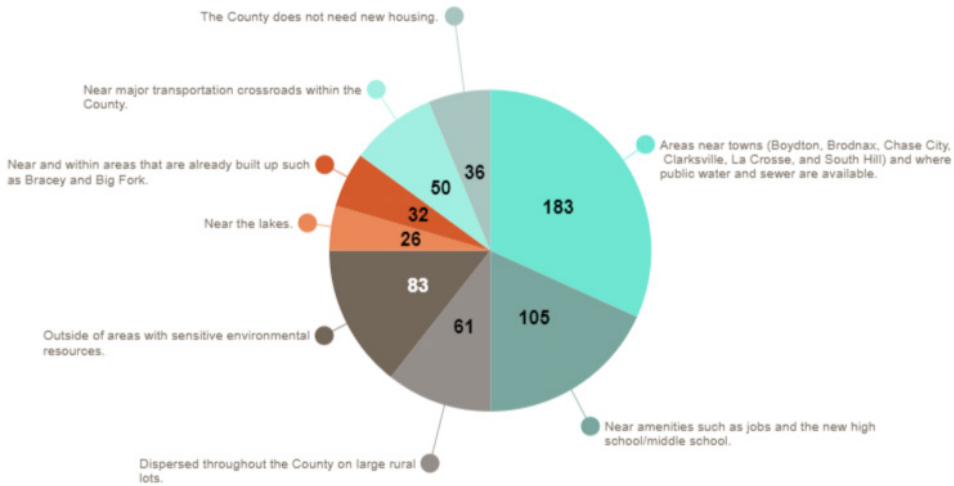
People would like to see the County prioritize the protection of resources including water quality, working farms, and natural resources. For new places and neighborhoods, people would most like to see neighborhoods with a mix of housing types, a mix of uses, more employment areas, and conservation subdivisions.

The top housing types people said are most needed in the County are single family attached housing, including smaller-sized single family homes and senior housing. Questions about where new growth should occur and feedback about siting industrial and solar facilities are shown at right.

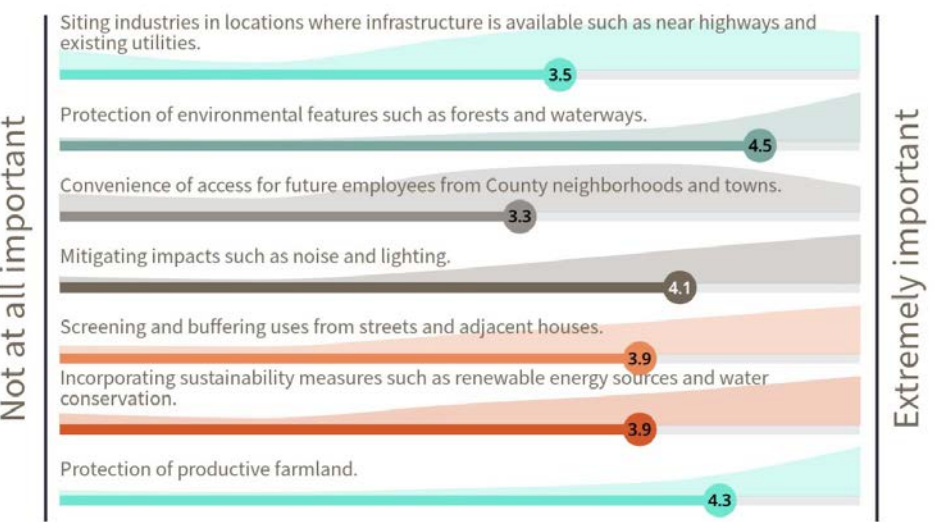
When asked about their vision for Mecklenburg County, the following themes emerged:

- » Balance between growth and protection of rural areas and natural environment
- » Investment in jobs and economy
- » Education for all ages
- » Healthcare and wellness programs
- » Housing affordability and more housing choice
- » A strong sense of community
- » Recreational amenities

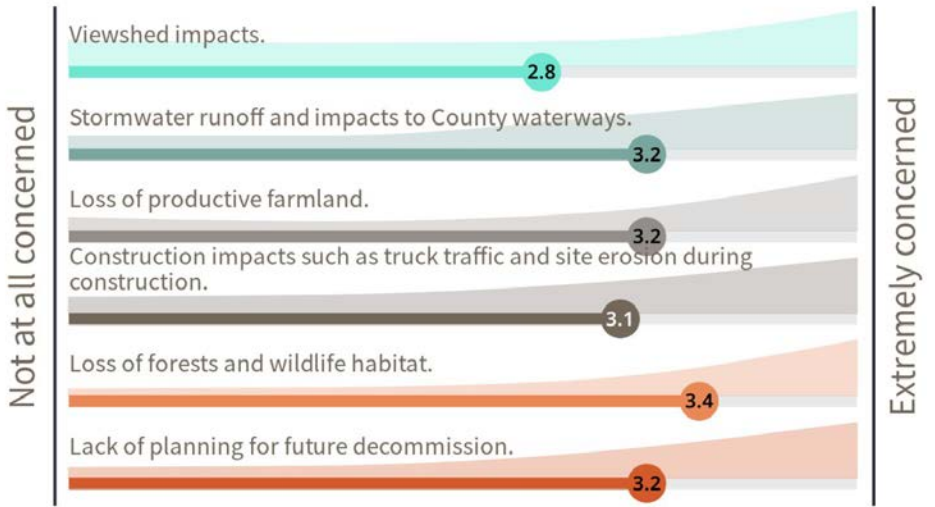
Where should new housing be located in the County?



As the County plans for future industrial land uses (such as data centers and similar industries) how important are the following considerations?



How concerned are you about the following challenges associated with large scale solar projects?



Demographic Questions

The third section of the survey consisted of optional demographic questions. These questions were designed to help the project team understand which demographic groups did and did not participate in the survey.

By in large, survey respondents tended to be older than the general population. People below the age of 25 were not well represented. In addition, most survey respondents identified as White and female, and most were homeowners, with only 17 renters completing the survey.

This information will be used by the project team to adjust engagement and outreach approaches for subsequent phases to provide opportunities to hear from younger residents, Black residents, and people who rent their homes. Doing so will help ensure that the Plan’s recommendations are meeting the needs of community members of all backgrounds.

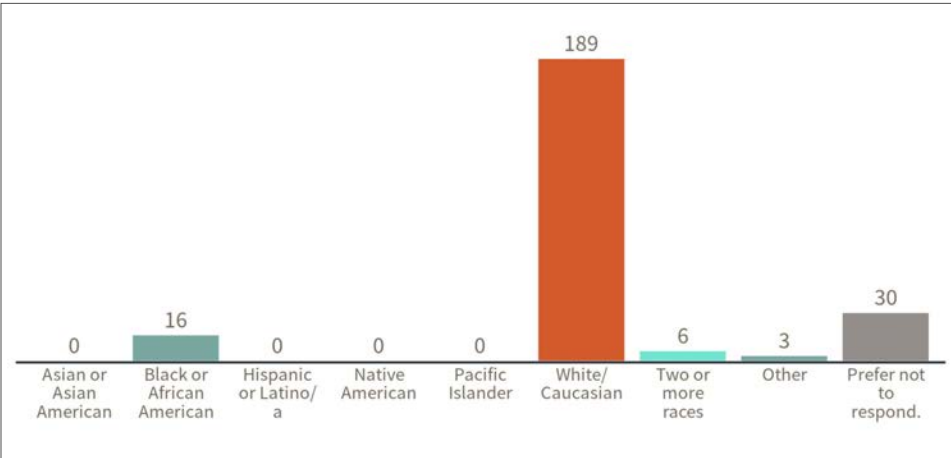
Planning Commission Work Session

At the conclusion of Phase 1, the project team held work sessions with County officials to share key findings from the existing conditions and demographic analysis as well as the results from the Phase 1 community engagement. The Planning Commission held a work session on February 29. Commissioners were asked to weigh in on the a draft Vision statement. The Planning Commission expressed their support for the Vision Statement as drafted.

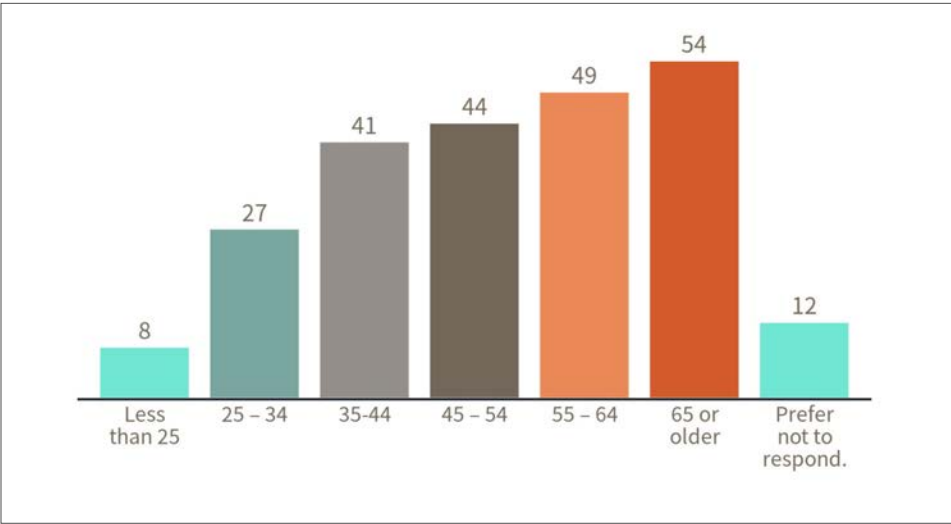
Board of Supervisors Work Session

On March 11, the project team attended a Board of Supervisors meeting to present the Phase 1 findings and hear the Board’s direction on the draft Vision and project priorities.

What race/ethnicity best describes you?



What is your age range?



The Board recommended adding content to the draft Vision, including support for small businesses, quality emergency services, and affordable housing. The Board also identified key topics for the Plan, including youth retention, agricultural support, and housing choice and affordability and age-in-place strategies.

The project team revised the draft Vision and adjusted the engagement strategy for future phases to incorporate the Board’s recommendations and address the identified priorities.



Phase 2 Community Listening Session in Bracey, May 2, 2024.

Phase 2 Engagement Overview

The second round of community engagement took place in May 2024. The purpose of the second round of engagement was to:

- 1. Explain the purpose of Land Use Planning in the Comprehensive Plan and ask for input about the future Land Use Vision.
- 2. Ask for input about the County’s existing and future transportation network and facilities.

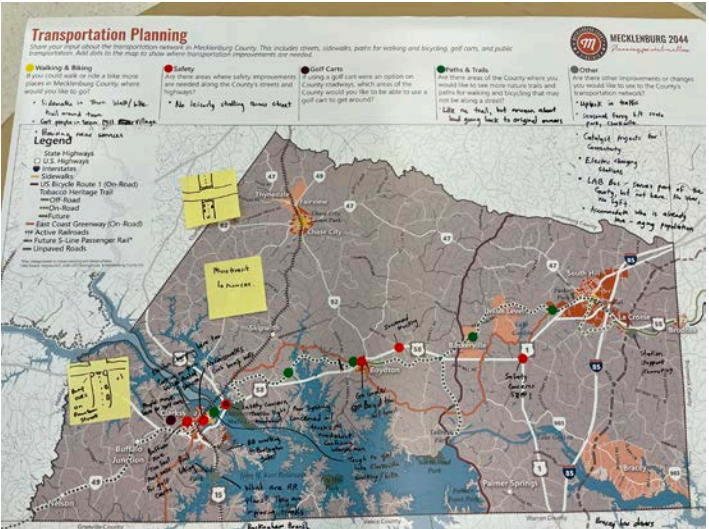
The County organized three meetings as part of Phase 2:

- 1. Community Listening Session in Bracey (approximately 40 attendees).
- 2. Community Listening Session in Clarksville (approximately 8 attendees)
- 3. Student Survey and Open House at Mecklenburg County Middle School (4 attendees and 275 survey respondents)

Each event was open to the public and the listening sessions were advertised in the newspaper, radio, and online.

Community Meeting Themes

The following themes emerged from the discussions that took place during the three meetings. They summarize the main points that people frequently



Marked-up transportation map from the Community Listening Session in Clarksville, May 3, 2024. made during those meetings.

- » **Paid fire department / first responders:** When asked “What changes or improvements to health care or educational opportunities would you like to see in the County?”, approximately half of respondents answered a variation of paid fire department/first responders.
- » **More specialized and better-quality health-care:** Participants expressed a desire for more specialized and better-quality healthcare so that they did not have to travel to Raleigh or Richmond for needed services.
- » **Infrastructure & services improvements:** Participants also voiced an interest in improving infrastructure; in particular, the need for broadband and increased hours for trash and recycling convenience centers.
- » **Housing Choices:** Attendees expressed a desire for different types of housing for different stages of life such as smaller homes, condominiums on the water, age-restricted communities, and retirement homes.
- » **Transportation safety improvements:** Several people articulated that there were roads without painted centerlines and that many roads were either unlit or lit poorly. More people would use trails, bike, and/or walk if the roads were safer.

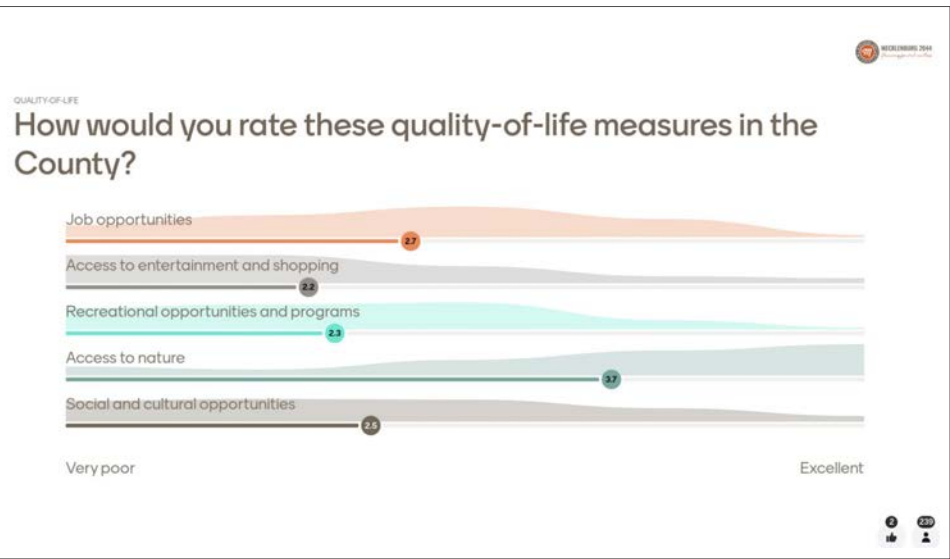
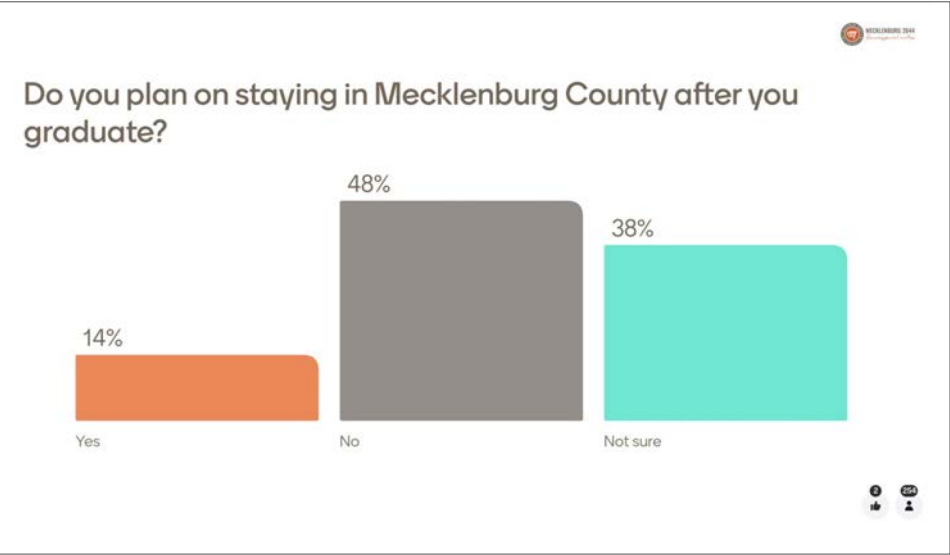
Student Engagement Summary

During Phase 2, the County also engaged students of Mecklenburg County Middle and High School. The students were offered two opportunities to participate, an online survey and an open house after school on May 7th at the Middle School. Four students and parents attended the open house and 275 students (16% of the total student body) participated in the online survey.

The survey included 17 questions covering topics of the students' vision for the future and what needs and opportunities they identified as important.

Overall, students expressed dissatisfaction with life in Mecklenburg County. They spoke to a lack of social and recreational opportunities for teens and a lack of youth-oriented spaces. Participants communicated a wish for more places to socialize such as a community center for teens, an arcade or movie theater, and more programming for sports, recreation, and educational activities. Several participants mentioned the lack of swimming pools and swim lessons, stating that they have to travel to learn to swim. One respondent stated the County has "so much water and yet so many people don't know how to swim".

Young people also wanted additional career and skills development opportunities, citing the lack of higher education options and better jobs as reasons for wanting to get away after high school graduation.



Board of Supervisors Land Use Work Session

During Phase 2, the Board held a work session at their June 12 meeting to discuss the topic of land use. The project team presented a draft Future Land Use Plan for Board discussion and feedback.

The Board generally supported the Future Land Use Plan, recommending expanded Rural Conservation Land Use to protect water resources, particularly around Kerr Lake and the Meherrin River. They also confirmed the sufficiency of the areas designated for Industrial Land Uses and a preference for avoiding additional data center sites outside of existing or approved sites.

Planning Commission Land Use Work Session

The Planning Commission held their Land Use work session on August 29. The project team presented the revised Future Land Use Plan, which incorporated feedback from the Board. The Commission expressed their support for the Future Land Use Plan and the Board's recommended changes.

Phase 3 Engagement Overview

Engagement for Phase 3 took place in late summer and early fall of 2024. The focus of this round of engagement was the Plan's implementation recommendations. The project team was seeking input on which implementation projects, or "Actions" were most important to community members.

This input was then used to identify the top priority projects that the County should pursue first after Plan adoption.

Joint Education Committee

On July 9 the project team presented the findings from the student engagement survey and some possibilities for strategies to address the issues raised by the County's middle and high school students. Strategies included a recommendation for supporting small business growth in the County's towns to bring more dining and entertainment options for young people as well as creating a public swimming beach in the County. The Committee supported the recommendations and emphasized the need for better transportation options. They noted that young people without cars should have easy access to the County's amenities and resources.

Agricultural Advisory Committee

On August 7, the project team presented the draft Future Land Use Plan to the Agricultural Advisory Committee and asked for input about rural area protection strategies. The Committee had the following suggestions, which have been incorporated into the Plan:



Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting, August 7, 2024.

- » Add more Rural Crossroads communities to the map including Blackridge, Northview, Trotten Ridge, and J.B. Jones Store.
- » Combine Parks, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Conservation Easements into a single "Protected Lands" category.
- » Include a map of prime farmland in the Plan.

Community Pop Up

The County organized a Community Pop-Up at the First Responders Benefit Concert on September 21 in Centennial Park in South Hill. This event was open to the public and was advertised via email, the County's Facebook page, and on the project website.

A wide variety of responses were received at the Community Pop-Up. Common themes included:

- » Healthcare was the top priority identified by attendees. Participants shared their desire for more healthcare facilities and services within the County.
- » Attendees expressed support for small business incentives and a pilot program for Main Street revitalization within the County's towns.



Phase 3 Community Pop-Up in South Hill on Saturday, September 21.



Sharing input on the Goals and Actions poster at the Community Pop-Up on September 21.

- » There was support for transportation planning initiatives including a Safe Streets for All Plan and a Greenways Plan.
- » Residents also wanted to see more paving of the County's unpaved roads.

Community Survey

During Phase 3, the County also provided an opportunity for people to participate in an online community survey.

The survey ran from September 20 to October 4, 2024, and consisted of seven questions asking participants about which implementation projects, or "Actions", were most important to them. In total, 40 people participated in the survey by answering at least one question, though only 89% of participants completed the full questionnaire.

Participants were initially asked to select the Vision Element they deemed most critical for Mecklenburg County. The preservation of the County's rural landscape and resources emerged as the highest priority among residents, followed closely by the desire for modern amenities and a community inclusive of all generations and backgrounds. In contrast, fostering a thriving businesses environment garnered the least support.

Subsequently, participants were asked to rank various Actions corresponding to each Vision Element.

For A Rural Place, proposed actions ranged from "adopting lighting standards in the Zoning Ordinance" to "implementing an agricultural conservation program". Approximately 29% of participants prioritized "conducting a County-wide inventory of historic resources," while 54% favored "supporting mentorship and apprenticeship programs for young farmers" as their second priority. The least prioritized action was "limiting utility-scale solar in rural areas of the County".

Regarding "Modern Infrastructure and Amenities", the proposed initiatives included "conducting a Parks and Greenways Plan" and "investing in a public beach". Investing in a public beach was the top priority for 27% of respondents, followed closely by the Parks and Greenways Plan as second priority. Conversely, "improving the US 58 BUS/US 15/VA 49 intersection" was ranked last among the seven options.

For the Vision Element "A Place for All Generations and Backgrounds", the highest-rated project was "partnering with schools and other organizations to expand programs for County youth". Meanwhile, the project "seek partnership opportunities with housing developers to increase housing supply" garnered the most votes for the lowest priority.

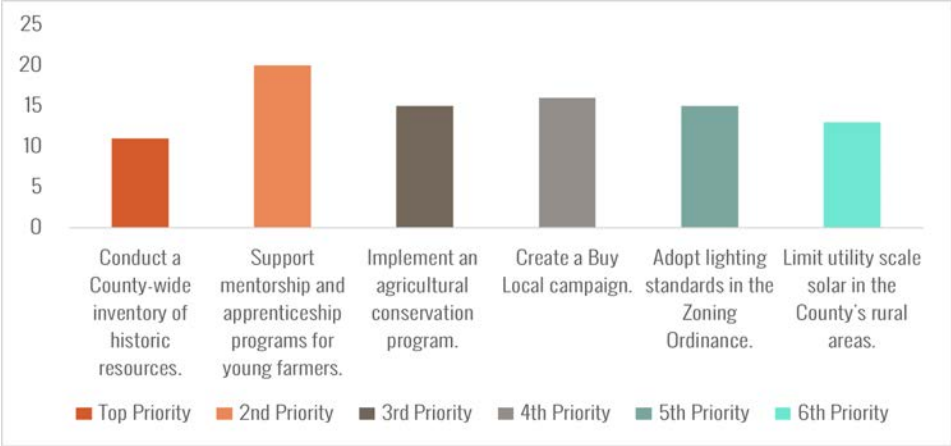
In the "Thriving Business Environment" category, 35% of participants selected "expanding access to job training for high school students as their top priority

project, with "allowing general businesses such as restaurants in the County's industrial areas" following as second priority. The least important project in this category was "investing in site readiness for designated industrial land", with over half of respondents ranking it as their lowest priority.

Lastly, under the "Vibrant Small Towns" Vision Element, 43% of participants prioritized "implementing bike and pedestrian improvements to create walkable neighborhoods", while nearly half of respondents ranked "updating the Zoning Ordinance to limit commercial uses in agricultural zoning" as the lowest priority.

Participants were also invited to provide open-ended feedback on any action items they felt were missing from the previous questions. While responses varied widely, a number of participants expressed a desire for expanded public transit options and additional recreational facilities, both indoor and outdoor. Other suggestions included increased regulation of data centers and solar installations, as well as a call for greater diversification of the County's economy.

A Rural Place



Modern Infrastructure & Amenities



A Place for All Generations & Backgrounds

