

Land Use & Transportation

"To achieve excellence should be a struggle."

Joe Riley, Mayor of Charleston, SC

"There is no better defense of property rights than a good plan, implemented. Good planning assures everyone, not just the moneyed or powerful, equal treatment in the development process."

Robert Manly, testifying before the U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution

Introduction

The pattern of a city is defined by the street system. In successful plan after successful plan, from the design of Washington, DC to that of Seaside, FL, the basic street network forms the foundation for the ultimate development of the

city. Land use and transportation cannot – and should not – be separated. Asheville is no different than other cities, with land use and transportation closely linked. Originally a bit tenuous, with development dependent upon natural features as well as accessibility, this linkage has become more intertwined in the past 50 years. Development of all types closely follows the location of roads as evidenced by the pattern of Asheville's development during the past 30 years.

As development activity follows roads, the traffic generated by the development necessitates road improvements. The road improve-

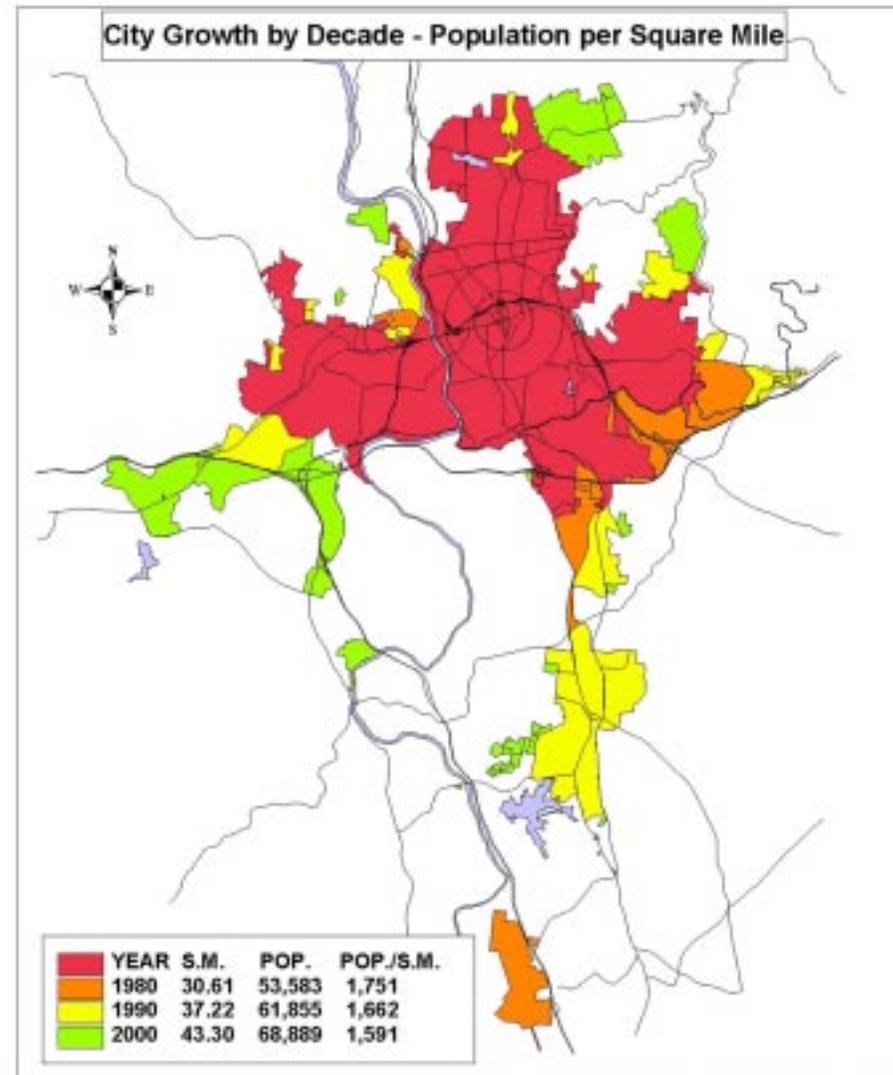
ments encourage more development, which places a burden on the roads, creating a seemingly unending cycle. This cycle typically results in low-density development spread out along transportation corridors that are overburdened at peak hours. This pattern of development, which has been the dominant pattern since the 1950s, leads to a sprawling city that inefficiently consumes resources (land and money) and is costly to provide with urban services.

At its most basic level, an ideal transportation system will efficiently move cars, trucks, and buses, and provide those vehicles with a high degree of mobility throughout the region, and will provide access to residences, employment, shopping, schools, and activities. But the transportation system can and should do much more for a community. The system should promote economic development – not only by providing mobility – but also by promoting a high quality of life. Thoroughfares and streets in Asheville are the public realm, and perform an important civic function. Whether by auto, by bus, by bike, or on foot, the streets are the places where we connect with our community, conduct our business, and interact with our

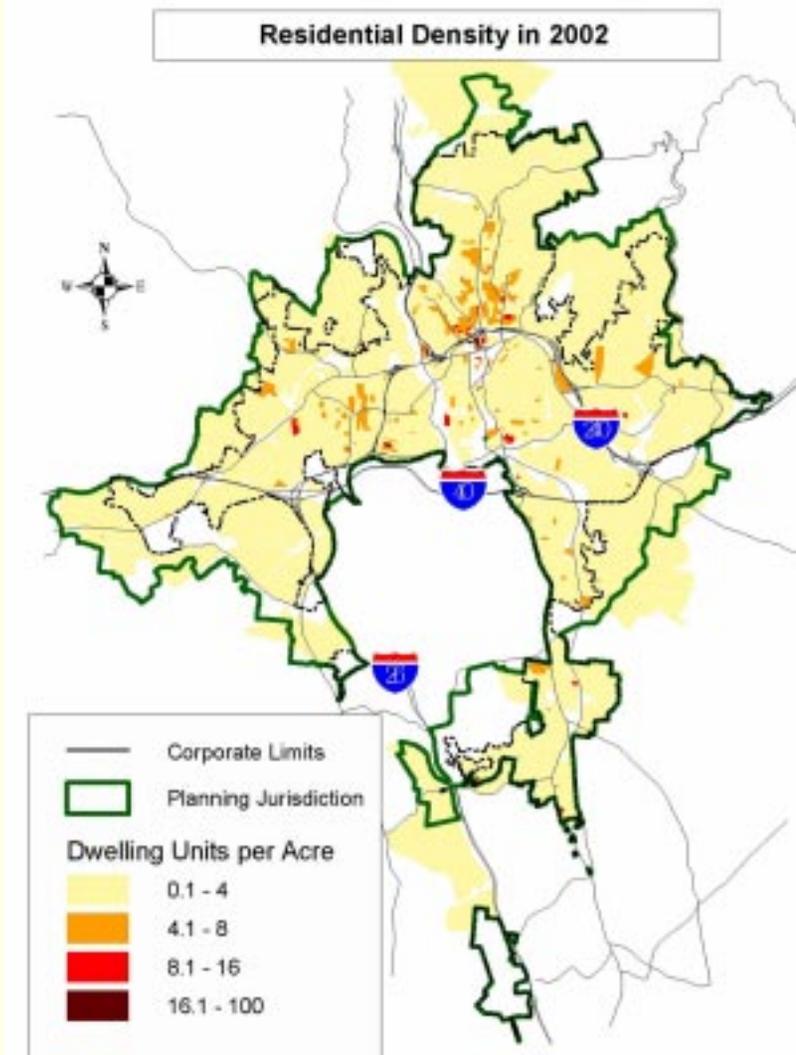


neighbors. The look and feel of these corridors help define our community. The transportation system also provides the framework for the development of the community. Land uses needing easy access locate along streets that can provide the level of access required to assure the success of the land use.

The strong link between transportation and land use dictates that these two issues be considered together as we plan for the future development of Asheville. Transportation planning must be as much a part of the total urban planning process as land use planning. The transportation system and the land use pattern must be designed to support the overall goals of the community, whether these goals are physical, economic, or social. **The Asheville City Development Plan 2025** recognizes the link between land use and transportation, taking into consideration the impact of decisions and policies in one of these areas upon the other. This section will review land use and transportation patterns and identify goals and strategies that will help to achieve the community envisioned by residents who participated in the public forums conducted at the beginning of the comprehensive planning process.



Land Use



Map 9

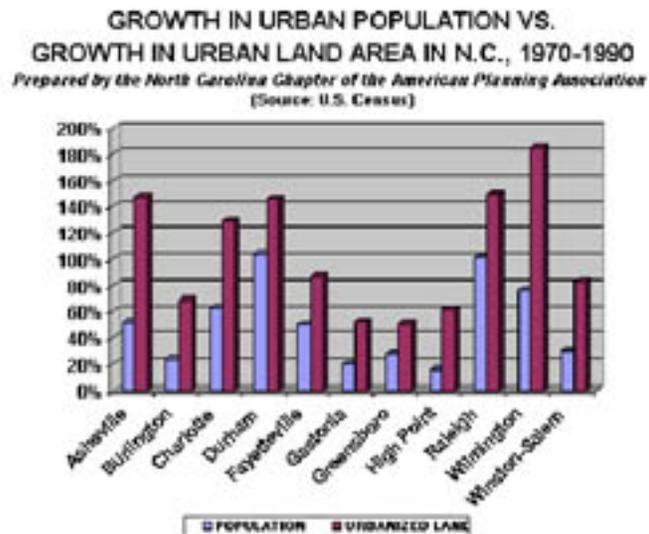
Introduction

As noted in the introduction, the distribution and location of land uses in Asheville have been heavily influenced by the transportation system. Although the City's transportation system has played a major role in determining the land use pattern, other factors have also influenced development. The sprawling pattern that has served as the dominant template for Asheville's development during the past 50 years has been partially codified by zoning and other land use regulations. Until recently, the City of Asheville's zoning standards required large front setbacks for all uses. The official reason for the large setbacks was to provide adequate room for widening of streets to accommodate more traffic. Commercial and office uses were not permitted in residential areas and, although residential uses were permitted in commercial and office districts, market forces prevented this mixture of uses. In fact, areas that were zoned for mixed uses often changed from residential to non-residential uses (see the discussion in the insert "The Need for Well-Defined Policies"). Areas zoned as single family did not permit multi-family uses, even on such a limited scale as permitting

accessory apartments. Many of the older neighborhoods zoned as single family still incorporate a variety of land uses, with a significant number of multi-family developments. The image of a homogeneous neighborhood, and the perception that this is the ideal has led to a low public opinion of multi-family uses and the attempt to limit, or at least hide, these uses. Subdivisions served by dead end cul-de-sacs with no requirement for any type of connection to neighboring land uses is a standard development template that is permitted, if not endorsed, by City regulations. Recent changes in zoning requirements and other development standards address many of these issues, but many other changes are needed to alter the dominant development template.

In addition to the sprawl encouraged by development activity following transportation corridors, natural features also play a role in the area's development pattern. The steep topography and flood areas found in Asheville result in lower density development due to the inability in many cases to develop contiguous tracts. The impact of these development determinants on the City's growth pattern is

significant. During the period 1950 to 1990, Asheville's urbanized area grew 4.8 times faster than the population. During the period 1970 to 1990, Asheville's urban area grew 2.8 times faster than the population. As this graph indicates, these statistics rank Asheville near



the top of the most sprawling cities in North Carolina. Not only does our development pattern result in the City spreading out to use more land, the land that is developed is often used inefficiently. In many cases, particularly



along commercial corridors, the land is more valuable than the improvements (buildings) on the land. (Map page 119.)

Asheville's predominant development pattern for the past 50 years cannot be sustained. This pattern is auto-dependent, single use, discontinuous, low-density new development continually occurring at the edge of the City. This pattern has resulted in traffic congestion, lower air quality, separation of non-residential uses from residential uses, loss of open space, strip commercial development, and lack of connectivity between subdivisions. The issues associated with a sprawl development pattern have transcended traffic and loss of open space to include a number of economic, social, and environmental issues (see the insert discussion "What is Sprawl?"). The impacts of this development pattern on the quality of life of Asheville residents argue for a redirection in the way we manage our growth.

In addition to the less tangible costs of sprawl, the financial costs cannot be maintained if the City is to remain financially healthy. The cost of extending public infrastructure (streets, water, sewer, and schools) to serve develop-

ment that is spread out at a low density over a large area cannot continue to be borne by all residents. The health costs are increasing yearly, as Asheville's and the region's air quality continues to decline in large part due to pollutants emitted by automobiles. The time spent in traffic by residents commuting to work, going shopping, or running errands makes the area less attractive as a place to live or do business, ultimately affecting the quality of life on which our economic development program is based. Much of Asheville's allure as a place to live, work, and play is due to the fact that the City is not like "everywhere else." If the City continues to grow in the same way that has made other urban areas unattractive and led to a wide variety of problems, Asheville itself may well become less attractive.

The popularity of the Asheville area as a place to live means that we will have to accommodate a significant amount of growth during the coming decades. In order to effectively use our resources and to maintain our quality of life, we must redirect our pattern of growth. Existing infrastructure must be used more efficiently, land must be developed more intensely, commercial corridors must be fully

developed, and a range of development options must be made available to citizens. The challenges facing us are many, but with a shared determination to create a great community for all, the citizens of Asheville can create a City that honors our past while providing for sustainable development in the future.

Historic Land Use Patterns

An aerial view of Asheville displays a variety of development patterns that have evolved over time. Downtown Asheville and surrounding neighborhoods that developed before the dominance of the automobile are dense and have an interconnected street system. Uses are mixed and easily accessible with streets and sidewalks providing a range of transportation options. The greatest mixture of uses is found in Downtown Asheville, where everything from offices to retail outlets to residential uses can be found. Downtown has and continues to serve as the heart of the City, providing goods and services to residents and visitors. The roadways that intersect in Downtown Asheville and radiate out from it provide connections to the rest of the City, providing

What is Sprawl?

Sprawl is discussed in a research paper entitled “Wrestling Sprawl to the Ground: Defining and Measuring the Elusive Concept”, with a couple of definitions identified for this pattern of development. One definition is “Continuous low density residential development on the metropolitan fringe, ribbon low density development along major suburban highways, and development that leapfrogs past undeveloped land to leave a patchwork of developed and undeveloped tracts.” The authors provide a conceptual definition of sprawl as “a pattern of land use in an urban area that exhibits low levels of some combination of eight distinct dimensions: density, continuity, concentration, clustering, centrality, nuclearity, mixed uses, and proximity.” A more understandable definition of sprawl defines it as a pattern of development that includes:

- Large-lot subdivisions that lack a connected street system;
- Separation of shopping, jobs, and services like parks and schools from where people live;
- Strip commercial development;
- Construction in areas that require extension of public services; and
- Superstores rather than locally owned businesses.

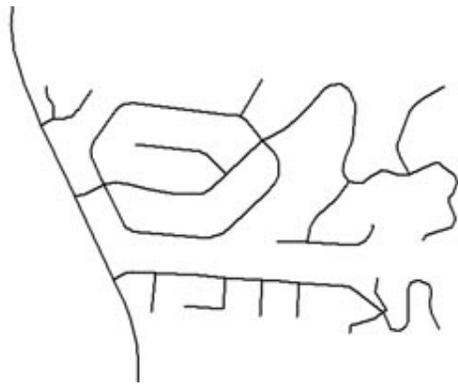
While precisely defining sprawl may be a task best left to academicians, the impacts of this development pattern are easy to see. Some of the costs associated with sprawl include:

- Loss of open space;
- Traffic congestion and air pollution;
- Urban disinvestment;
- Crowded school classrooms outside the core area;
- Service costs of new development exceeds revenue; and
- Loss of community character.

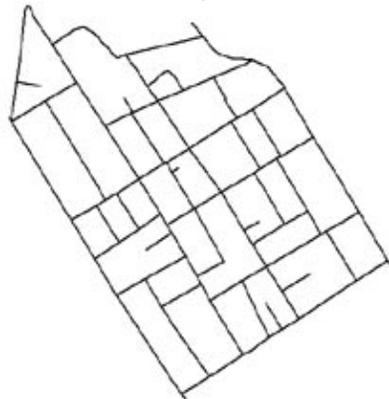
Wrestling Sprawl to the Ground, Defending and Defining the Elusive Concept

lifelines for the flow of people into and out of Downtown.

Arterial Street Development Pattern



Connected Street Development Pattern



The older neighborhoods surrounding Downtown are home to single family residences, multi-family dwellings, and neighborhood shops and offices. These neighborhoods were linked historically to Downtown by numerous street connections but, in most cases, these links were severed by the construction of the I-240 expressway around Downtown. While many of these neighborhoods continue to be stable residential areas, the residential integrity of some has been eroded by changes of use from residential to non-residential and demolition of homes for road improvements and urban renewal projects.

After a period of stagnation and deterioration that began in the 1960's, the older neighborhoods close to Downtown are experiencing rejuvenation as people see the value of living in walkable neighborhoods close to Downtown with its mix of activities and opportunities. The development template common in these older neighborhoods used land very efficiently while providing numerous connections to surrounding properties.

Radiating out from Downtown are the commercial corridors (Merrimon Avenue, Tunnel Road, Patton Avenue, Hendersonville Road, and, on a smaller scale, Charlotte Street and Broadway). Most of these corridors saw their prime development in the 1960's and are in need of redevelopment that takes advantage of the existing infrastructure and more efficiently uses the land along the corridors. The portion of Tunnel Road around the Asheville Mall and the portion of Hendersonville Road south of Rock Hill Road continue to experience significant development but the development typically is not interconnected, leading to increased traffic congestion.

Most new commercial and large office center

development is occurring at nodes located at interstate interchanges. The commercial developments at I-240 and Tunnel Road, I-240 and Fairview Road, I-40 and Smoky Park Highway, and I-26 and Brevard Road constitute the bulk of recent commercial activity in the City. The interchanges of I-40 and Sweeten Creek Road and I-40 and Hendersonville Road are the locations of large regional office developments. These locations provide easy vehicular access and visibility for the tenants. In encouraging continued development and redevelopment at these nodes, better connectivity must be required in order to preserve the traffic carrying capacity of the road systems serving the areas.

In many ways, West Asheville is a smaller version of Downtown Asheville. The commercial core of West Asheville located on Haywood Road near its intersection with Brevard Road has a dense development pattern and a mix of uses that serves as the West Asheville downtown. On both sides of Haywood Road are residential areas developed with a mix of single family and multi-family residential uses. Schools, churches, and parks complement the retail and service uses located

in close proximity to the residential uses. These neighborhoods are interconnected with a street system that provides many options for traveling from one location to another.

On the edge of the older neighborhoods are the neighborhoods developed prior to World War II, including Malvern Hills, Colonial Heights, and Oakley. The development of these neighborhoods recognized the role of the automobile but did not surrender to its dominance. While the uses are primarily single family residences, they have interconnected street systems that make it easy to get from one location to another without placing the entire traffic burden on one street.

Starting after World War II and becoming common after the 1960s was the isolationist pattern of residential development. One entry into the neighborhood, large lots, and no

Architect's Views on Sprawl and Smart Growth

"The towns of today can only increase in density at the expense of open spaces which are the lungs of a city. We must increase the open spaces and diminish the spaces to be covered. Therefore, the centre of the city must be constructed vertically."

LeCorbusier, The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning

"The outcome of the cities will depend on the race between the automobile and the elevator, and anyone who bets on the elevator is crazy."

The Chrome-Plated Nightmare (Television Program, May 27, 1974) From The City, James A. Clapp

sidewalks are features that characterize this pattern. While there are a few exceptions to this pattern in post World War II residential development, most of the residential development that has occurred in Asheville since 1950 exemplifies this pattern. As has been noted, this development pattern makes inefficient use of limited land. As we identify templates for future development, we must ensure that a range of development options is available to all while maximizing the use of existing infrastructure and efficiently using our limited land.

Recent development is incorporating some of the characteristics of older, more traditional urban development. Traits that characterize these developments include interconnected street systems, sidewalks and/or walking trails, single family and small scale multi-family residential uses, small commercial and office uses easily accessible to residential areas, and less parking that relies upon the accessibility of different uses to reduce the dependence upon the automobile for making all trips. Examples of this type of development include Artisan Park located off Haywood Road, and Biltmore Town Centre in Biltmore Park located off Long Shoals Road.



Biltmore Park Town Center

As Asheville has grown and developed, institutions located in the City that serve residents of and visitors to the City and region have grown to meet the needs of the growing region. These institutions include public non-profit institutions (Mission-St. Joseph's Health Center, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville-Buncombe Community Technical College) and private institutions (Grove Park Inn and Biltmore Estate).

These institutions not only provide services for residents and visitors, they are also a significant economic force, providing jobs and job training programs for thousands of residents.



Each of these institutions has undertaken significant expansion during the past 10 years and is planning additional expansion and growth during the next 5 to 10 years to better serve residents of and visitors to the region. Past expansion has included construction of new buildings, renovation of existing facilities, and, in the case of Mission-St Joseph's, consolidation of campuses. All these institutions have received notice for the quality of the programs and services they provide, bringing recognition not only to themselves but also to Asheville and the region. Mission-St Joseph's and UNCA have recently completed master plans for their campuses and facilities. The master plans provide direction for the growth of these institutions during the next 5 to 10 years. The Grove Park Inn is currently preparing a master plan for the use of its property. In developing plans and policies for the City of Asheville's development, the need of these important institutions to grow to meet the increasing needs of residents and visitors must be acknowledged.

The Need for Well-Defined Policies

As policies are developed to implement the goals identified in this plan, we must be aware of all the potential results of the policies. This awareness will help assure that the policies actually achieve the goals we hope to accomplish. Some examples of policies that had results other than the goal intended serve to remind us of the importance of reviewing policies carefully.

The area bounded by Chestnut Street on the north, Woodfin Street to the south, Central Avenue on the west, and Charlotte Street to the east provides an example of how a neighborhood can change over time. The changes experienced by this neighborhood are the intended and unintended results of policies and actions by different actors. Developed at the turn of the 20th century, the neighborhood consisted of primarily single family dwellings that provided easily accessible homes for Downtown workers. The neighborhood remained fairly stable until the 1960's, with some of the larger homes converted to multi-family uses. Change started occurring more rapidly in the 1960's, instigated by road improvements. Woodfin Street was upgraded and widened to improve access around the edge of Downtown. As a result of this improvement, the change from residential uses to non-residential on this edge began. This change was exacerbated by the construction of the I-240 Expressway. The construction of the expressway eliminated some of the connections between the neighborhood and Downtown and resulted in more noise, making the area less desirable for residential uses. In the late 1970s a change in the zoning of the area codified and gave a stamp of approval to the land use changes underway. The area was zoned R-4, a residential classification that permitted office uses, in an effort to promote mixed uses. However, the R-4 development standards placed no limit on the number or location of non-residential uses nor did it require a mix of uses on individual properties. With this zoning change, the convenience to Downtown, and the low real estate costs, the conversion of residential uses to office uses began in earnest. In this former residential neighborhood there are currently two single family homes, one apartment building, one residential group home, and one mixed-use building with residential uses located above retail uses. The offices located in these former homes are generally a good use of this land, but the goal of creating a mixed-use area was not achieved due to the lack of standards clearly linked to the goal. As we develop policies for Asheville's future, we must be cognizant of the impact of market forces on these policies and how the policies affect the accomplishment of our goals.

“Most of the monarchies of Europe were really destroyed by their greatest and most ardent supporters. It was the most reactionary people who tried to hold onto something without letting it develop and change.”

*Prince Phillip - quoted by John Pearson,
The Selling of the Royal Family; 1986
From Power Quotes by Daniel B. Baker (1992)*

Future Development Pattern – The Smart Growth Alternative

Asheville’s development patterns provide

us with development templates for the future and present challenges that must be addressed in order to effectively manage the City’s development over the next 20 years. Our vibrant Downtown, stable neighborhoods, successful redevelopment projects, and community commercial areas offer strategies for guiding the City’s development. Lessons learned in dealing with issues associated with these successes must be translated into policies to guide development for the next 20 years. Challenges confronting the City must be identified and addressed to ensure that today’s challenges do not become the problems of the future. These challenges include limited land for development, the physical constraints of topography and floodplains, the inability to improve many of our roadways, the inefficient use of land along many commercial corridors, protection and enhancement of neighborhoods, and the need to make a variety of

housing types available to all residents, among others. Goals and strategies for guiding the City’s future development must build on the successes of the past and address the challenges presented by our natural and built environment.

As we develop goals and policies for guiding future development, a range of choices must be made available to current and future residents of Asheville. Different lifestyles, income, and interests result in the desire for different types of homes. For some people an apartment in Downtown Asheville is the correct option, for others a home in an older neighborhood within walking distance of the commercial development on Haywood Road in West Asheville provides the home of choice, while others choose a home located in a newer subdivision convenient to the services and jobs in south Asheville. Policies and strategies developed to implement the goals identified in this plan must assure that a range of options are available that will meet the housing needs of all residents regardless of lifestyle, income, and interest.



Asheville's future development pattern should be based upon the Smart Growth policies adopted by City Council in 2000. These policies call for a more efficient use of land and other resources to provide opportunities for a larger proportion of the region's population. Comments provided by citizens at the public forums held to obtain input on the future of Asheville clearly indicate a desire for more efficient use of our resources, infill development, and wiser use of existing infrastructure. Development in the City over the next 20 years should incorporate mixed uses that provide citizens with the opportunity to live and work in the same area. Areas within the existing urban fabric that are vacant should be targeted for compatible infill development that takes advantage of existing infrastructure. Promotion of transit and other alternatives to the automobile will be important to reduce the need for road system improvements. We must assure that new development is sustainable, with buildings and sites designed to serve the community for generations rather than for a decade. Protection, preservation, and enhancement of existing neighborhoods must be as much a part of our development pattern as promoting new construction.

The development pattern must acknowledge the link between land use and transportation. The success of our transportation system in moving people efficiently through the City is dependent upon the arrangement of land uses. The City can no longer afford to have land uses fully segregated by type, resulting in people driving long distances to their jobs or to access every day services. The arrangement of land uses must not only provide for viable alternative modes of transportation, it must also use land and infrastructure resources more efficiently. Asheville's tendency to sprawl during the past few decades has resulted in traffic congestion, higher infrastructure costs, and the increased isolation of residents from those uses that provide for their daily needs. Given the economic and political costs incurred by road improvement projects, we can no longer assume that all traffic problems can be fixed by widening an existing road or constructing a new one.

"Many people hold internally inconsistent preferences, such as the desire for low density and the desire to reduce auto dependence. Conflicting preferences suggest that neither traditional neighborhood design nor conventional suburban development may be the housing consumer's ideal."

Housing Policy Debate, Volume 12, Issue 4

“Smart Growth is growth that happens in somebody else’s neighborhood.”

*John McClure; commenting at
Asheville City Council Meeting;
February 11, 2003*

As we plan for Asheville’s future development, we must be cognizant of the following facts:

- Asheville is limited in land for development;
- Our natural resources, particularly the mountains, and our historic resources play a major role in defining the City of Asheville and must be protected;
- Efforts must be made to preserve sensitive areas, such as steep areas, flood plains, and other unique natural areas, as well as limited agricultural lands and open spaces;
- Existing road systems must be used more efficiently due to the constraints on building new roads and widening existing ones;
- Mixed use redevelopment and infill development efforts must be concentrated on corridors where land values are greater than the value of the improvements on the land;
- A minimum residential density of 8–16 units per acre is necessary to support transit;
- Development must be located in those areas where infrastructure exists or can be easily provided;
- Residents and visitors must be offered viable transportation options for moving around

the City;

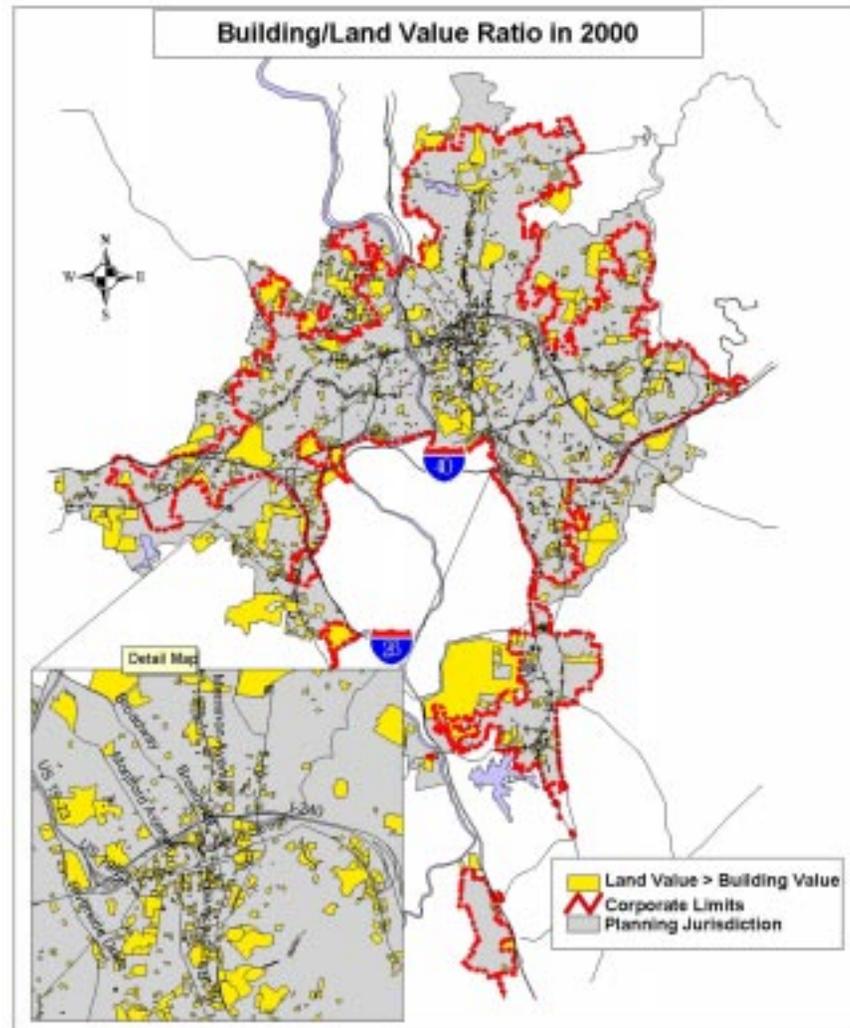
- Past development has left scattered undeveloped sites in developed areas. The development of these vacant lots offers opportunities for increasing density without changing the character of the area and should be a high priority;
- Throughout the City are older buildings that are no longer used as originally intended. Codes should be flexible enough to promote adaptive reuse of these structures;
- Strong neighborhoods within walking distance of Downtown strengthen Downtown;
- Nodes located at the intersections of interstate highways and major arterials provide easily accessible locations for large commercial, office, and employment developments;
- Major institutions, including Mission-St. Joseph Health Center, AB Tech, UNCA, and the Grove Park Inn, contribute significantly to the vitality of Asheville and the region. Plans for the future must accommodate the future development of these institutions.



The following quotes from *A Pattern Language* (Christopher Alexander, et al; 1977) illustrate other facts that must be taken into account in our planning.

- “Bus stops must be easy to recognize and pleasant, with enough activity around them to make people comfortable and safe.”
- “Nobody wants fast traffic going by their homes.”
- “Mark every boundary in the City which has important human meaning – the boundary of a building cluster, a neighborhood, a precinct – by great gateways where the major entering paths cross the boundary.”
- “Exaggerated zoning laws separate industry from the rest of urban life completely, and contribute to the plastic unreality of sheltered residential neighborhoods.”

Cognizant of these factors, we can formulate goals and strategies to guide Asheville’s development for the next 20 years.



Transportation

"Get used to being stuck in traffic. Get a climate controlled car with a stereo, tape-deck, player, telephone, fax machine, and even a microwave oven, and commute with someone you really like."

Anthony Downs, Stuck in Traffic, 1992

Introduction

Asheville has always enjoyed a high quality of life and relatively low levels of traffic

congestion on our streets and highways. Traffic congestion in Asheville is not yet at the levels of larger urban areas, but the continued growth of Asheville and the surrounding region are beginning to burden the transportation system and congestion will likely become more of a part of our way of life.

The way we build our transportation system will have a far-reaching impact on the way the region grows, the character of development, and the quality of life for Asheville citizens. There are critical choices to be made about the transportation system – whether to continue “business as usual” or whether to look to new approaches to moving people and goods. As we look to other areas that have experienced rapid growth in recent decades, we are able to ask the question – what do we want our transportation system to look like? Do cities like Knoxville, Raleigh, Greensboro, Charlotte and Atlanta provide good role models for Asheville?

Or do we need to look to other cities to find guidance for our transportation decisions?

Most people agree that we need to provide a balance of transportation choices, and that our transportation system should provide good access and mobility for all transportation modes – cars and trucks, buses, bicycles, and for pedestrians. We must use our limited financial resources wisely and coordinate transportation decisions closely with land use plans. As we look to other growing cities for guidance, we begin to see that conventional transportation solutions do not always produce the best long-term outcome. We will have to carefully focus on the improvements that will best serve the community over the long term. Effective transportation solutions will require a new way of thinking about the role of transportation systems in our community. Through our transportation decisions, we can address objectives in a wide range of disciplines including economic development, air quality, aesthetics, mobility, access, and transportation choice.

Constraints on adding new roads and widening existing ones (other than I-26 and the proposed Riverway) means that Asheville must



make the best use of its existing corridors. This implies a need to concentrate on multi-modal transportation options from a transportation strategy standpoint and on a nodal development pattern from a land use strategy standpoint.

Development Patterns and Transportation

Transportation decisions have a far-reaching impact on growth and development patterns. Similarly, land use patterns impact the transportation system in an equally profound way. This impact is evident at two very important levels. On the large scale, growth patterns and density of our region influence the demand for transportation services, the distance and time it takes to travel, and the ability of citizens to travel by means other than the automobile. On a much smaller scale, the type of development adjacent to the roadways will impact traffic flow and safety, and it will also impact the ability to provide attractive transportation facilities for transit riders, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

Planners and citizens have long recognized the need to coordinate land use and transportation planning. The actual coordination of land use

and transportation decisions will not be easy. It will require diligence and at times some tough choices. But with a vision in place, transportation and land use decisions should provide the following:

- Downtown's importance as a center for employment, entertainment, and activities.
- Development nodes such as urban villages as pedestrian and transit-friendly development.
- Preferential treatment for streets in Smart Growth zones.

The Asheville Area MPO

The Asheville Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is the transportation decision-making body for the urbanized areas of Buncombe County, including Asheville, Biltmore Forest, Black Mountain, Weaverville, Woodfin, and the Town of Fletcher in Henderson County. The City of Asheville serves as the lead planning agency for the MPO, and receives federal funding to conduct transportation planning and provide staff services.

The MPO is made up of two primary committees. The policy-making committee is the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), which is made up of two members of the Asheville City Council, one elected official from each of the other member governments, and the North Carolina Board of Transportation representative for a total of ten members. The other committee is the Technical Coordinating Committee, which is a staff level committee that provides recommendations to the TAC concerning transportation decisions.

The MPO process is designed to meet federal requirements for transportation planning. MPOs exist in all urbanized areas in the country that have a population of more than 50,000. The US Census defines urbanized areas to be included in MPOs. The 2000 census included towns in Henderson and Haywood Counties as part of the greater Asheville urbanized area. Sometime in 2003, it is likely that the MPO will expand to include the towns of Hendersonville, Flat Rock, Laurel Park, Waynesville, Canton, and Clyde and portions of unincorporated Henderson and Haywood Counties. Also, because the population of the MPO will be over 200,000, we will receive the additional designation of a Transportation Management Area (TMA). TMAs are required to meet more stringent federal planning requirements.

For the last fifty years, urban and suburban development has focused on catering to automobile travel. In some ways, this pattern has been a model of success for businesses and customers. Businesses rely on high visibility from major thoroughfares, and customers who can afford to drive cars have come to expect easy access to convenient parking. At the same time, this model of development has a downside. People often lament the loss of community character and the frustrations of driving on crowded thoroughfares. Over time, as these commercial corridors become more crowded, they become less safe and less attractive.

And what about the people that are unable to drive a car because of age, disability, or income? Their options for travel are severely limited. Our thoroughfares do not serve the needs of people who are unable or choose not to drive.

The pattern of automobile-centered development typically provides few connections between adjacent land uses, and separates buildings from the street with large expanses of parking. This pattern makes it almost impossible to walk from residential to shopping areas or from one shopping area to another. In addition, the pattern often forces cars to re-enter the main thoroughfare to move from one shopping area to another. Through development review, we should work to minimize access to major and minor thoroughfares and maximize connections between adjacent land uses.

It is time to develop a new model of success for commercial development. Automobiles still have an important place in this new model, but they are not the only design consideration. While convenient parking will continue to be a priority, it is time to explore ways to make our commercial development more walkable, easier to serve with public transit, and more reflective of the unique character of Asheville.

Concentrated pockets of more dense urban development or “urban villages” present an opportunity to provide a better transportation

Transportation Planning in North Carolina: The Importance of Land Use

The General Assembly of North Carolina recently revised the laws for transportation planning to require cities and towns to have an adopted land use plan prior to state involvement in transportation planning. This law is important for several reasons. For the first time, land use plans will be one of the basic inputs into transportation planning. This strengthens the importance of having a comprehensive plan for the City of Asheville that reflects the values and goals of the community, and considers the future of the transportation system.

system for the community. These concentrated urban developments and select locations are easier to serve with public transit, and offer the opportunity for people to park once and walk to several destinations.

As Asheville and the surrounding region continue to grow, these concentrated areas of development will serve even greater importance in the efficiency of the transportation system. Downtown Asheville will continue to serve an important role as a center for employment, entertainment, shopping, festivals, and civic functions. Concentrated “urban villages” along major corridors will support the central hub of downtown. This type of development pattern is important to the success of bus transit, rail transit, carpooling, vanpooling, and other measures that will reduce congestion on our streets and highways, and ultimately preserve our investment in the transportation system.

Streets and Highways

Automobiles will continue to be the dominant form of transportation over the next 25 years. Conventional improvements to the transporta-

tion system such as road widening, highway improvements and new roadways, will continue to be an important tool for providing mobility and access to the citizens of Asheville.

But because of our mountainous terrain and limited funding for roadway improvements, opportunities for these conventional solutions will be limited. When we do widen a road or build a new road it will be of paramount importance to make sure that the design meets all of the long-term goals of an urban community. Too often, we widen a roadway to meet the goal of serving growing traffic volumes without considering the design details that will make it function well in an urban environment over the long term. Our scarce financial resources and limited land availability will drive the need to pursue creative strategies to get the most out of the transportation system.

One of the most important components to an

“Here as elsewhere, mass transit facilities are minimal; in addition, this city has been built outward from its own center in long glittering strings of plastic, neon, glass and ersatz. Now, for miles before a motorist reaches what used to be the city, shopping centers, the fast-food joints, the service stations, the apartment and housing developments, the glass office buildings and the ugly mobile home sales lots line the roads in endless tribute to an illusory prosperity.”

Tom Wicker, The New York Times, December 4, 1973



efficient transportation system is the traffic signal system. Asheville's traffic signals are in need of a major upgrade to modern technology in order to provide a citywide synchronized system. Hendersonville Road is a prime example of a roadway on which traffic signalization synchronization is required. The North Carolina Department of Transportation is in the process of evaluating the Asheville signal system for such an upgrade. This project should be one of the highest priorities among our transportation needs.

Other creative solutions to traffic congestion will play a part in creating a more efficient road network with limited resources. Targeted

intersection improvements, such as adding right and left turn lanes, go a long way toward preserving the capacity of the roadway. Another promising intersection option is the modern roundabout. Roundabouts present a demonstrated successful alternative to signalized intersections. Roundabouts maintain a constant flow of traffic through an intersection and can improve safety.

Because major highway projects and new thoroughfares will be difficult to implement in our mountainous area, we need to look for opportunities to make connections in our local street system. A network of interconnected streets provides drivers with more options and disperses traffic throughout the street network. Historically, many of our transportation solutions have severed connections in the local street network. In this new era of transportation, we need to look for opportunities to increase the local street connections.

Although we will never be able to create the traditional urban pattern of a grid street network due to our topography, a few key connections in the local street network will go a long way toward reducing connections on



our major thoroughfares. The Asheville subdivision regulations should be modified to include requirements for street connectivity and provisions for street stubs to adjacent properties. Improvements to the roadways paralleling the French Broad and Swannanoa Rivers could provide a scenic route connecting the eastern edge of the City with the northern edge. Access would be provided to all areas and uses along the route, including the regional shopping area around the Asheville Mall, Biltmore Village, AB Tech, and UNCA. Roadway improvements to Riverside Drive, Lyman Street, Meadow Drive, and Swannanoa River Road will be required to create the Riverway. Improvements should create a true scenic parkway with a unified design, landscaping, and provision for multi-modal use including bicyclists and pedestrians.

Traditional roadway improvements such as new construction and road widening will continue to be one of the tools for improving the transportation system. The development review process will play an important part in supporting these roadway improvements. Possible tools to support roadway improvements include requirements for right-of-way

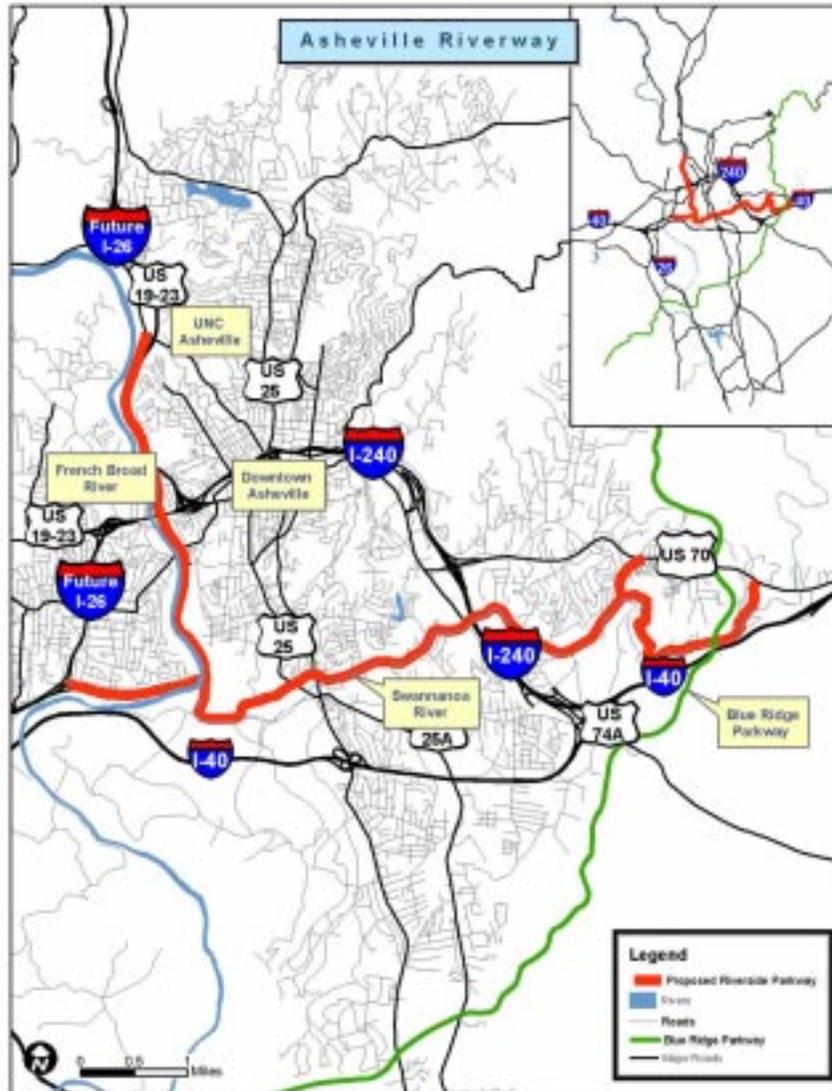
dedication in subdivisions and conditional use projects.

Travel Demand Management

Asheville's topography and diminishing land supply will make it increasingly difficult to build new roads and widen existing roads in the future. Therefore, new strategies must be pursued to reduce congestion on Asheville's streets. Programs designed to increase the number of persons in a vehicle, or influencing travel during the peak period help maximize the existing capacity of the street network. These programs are collectively known as Travel Demand Management (TDM).

The goal of TDM programs is to discourage the use of the Single-Occupant Vehicle (SOV) as the primary means of travel. Measures include carpool and vanpool programs, parking management, and employer-based programs such as flexible work hours. These programs are relatively simple to initiate but require very little investment. But other support measures will be needed to provide the incentives to carpool. These strategies include: preferential parking for shared riders, guaranteed ride home

Map 10



programs, carpool subsidies, and parking pricing.

For most TDM programs to be effective, the programs need to extend region-wide. This is especially true for efforts such as High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes, parking management and congestion management. Carpooling and vanpooling programs and employer-based incentives will all benefit from regional cooperation. Collectively, TDM strategies serve to reduce congestion during peak travel times, increase the capacity of the existing roadway system and improve air quality.

Access Management

All streets and highways serve two primary functions: mobility and access. Mobility is simply how well the road moves people from point A to point B. And access is the ultimate purpose for any trip – whether it is access to a shopping center, the doctor's office, a concert, the airport, or your house – at the end of every trip, there is a need for access. Different types of streets in the transportation systems serve different functions with regard to mobility and access. We call this the access-mobility con-

tinuum. For example, an interstate highway provides a high level of mobility, with very few opportunities for access. Access is limited to interchanges at evenly spaced intervals and there is no opportunity to access properties that are directly adjacent to the highway. At the other end of the spectrum, a residential street primarily functions as access to adjacent homes. The purpose of a residential street is not to provide a high level of mobility for through traffic.

To provide good access and good mobility requires a balancing act. Property owners and businesses must be given adequate access to make use of their property. At the same time, access must be limited to the extent necessary to preserve traffic flow. “Access Management” is the term used to describe efforts to improve

the traffic flow and safety on a roadway by controlling the access points. A successful access management plan will provide access to adjacent properties through shared driveways, access roads, and turning lanes at intersections. Access management should be a component of all new roadway improvements. For existing commercial thoroughfares, access management plans should be developed that attempt to consolidate driveways and coordinate evenly spaced access points.

Congestion and Levels of Service

One of the most fascinating and frustrating aspects of transportation planning is how quickly roads seem to get congested. Roads are built to certain traffic handling capacity standards; consequently, it is logical to assume that this capacity will someday be reached and congestion will occur. What is counterintuitive is how quickly congestion seems to occur after a long period of a road operating without congestion.



The Florida Department of Transportation has created tables for different roadway types that relate traffic volumes to levels of service. A level of service “A” represents a free-flowing traffic situation where there is absolutely no congestion whatsoever; a level of service “E” represents a situation where extreme congestion occurs on a regular basis. Examining these tables provide us with the answer to our question about why congestion occurs rapidly.

The following table represents Florida Department of Transportation estimates of traffic volumes for different levels of service for a four-lane freeway in an urban area. Please note that it takes a major increase in traffic volumes to move from a level of service “A” to a level of service “B;” conversely, it takes relatively little traffic volume increase to move from a level of service “D” to a level of service “E.” Since most roads are designed to handle traffic

volumes at a level of service “C” or “D,” it does not take much extra traffic to create a congested situation.

Level of Service	A	B	C	D	E
Traffic Volume	27,800	42,800	61,100	73,800	79,300

Traffic volumes are expressed in average daily traffic – the average number of cars using the road per day.

The Importance of Design

Thoroughfares like Tunnel Road, Patton Avenue, Hendersonville Road, Merrimon Avenue, and Brevard Road collectively carry hundreds of thousands of vehicles every day. Asheville residents and visitors alike experience Asheville on these thoroughfares. These thoroughfares serve to provide mobility for through traffic, provide access to adjacent land uses, and help define the character of the community.

Unfortunately, these roadways don’t perform any of those functions very well. In many cases, the land uses along the thoroughfares have changed incrementally over time with no consideration for the functions the thoroughfares should serve. The arrangement of the land uses and the design of the thoroughfares have often resulted in a diminution of the roadways’ ability to accommodate thorough traffic and detracted from the character of the community. Improvements to existing thoroughfares and construction of new thoroughfares must place a high priority on design to assure that the thoroughfares perform the function of providing mobility for through

traffic and access to adjacent land uses while defining and contributing to the character of the City of Asheville.

Incorporating design in the development of plans for improving existing thoroughfares and constructing new ones will significantly enhance the experience of driving along the thoroughfares. Design standards that address the functions of the functions (mobility, access, and defining community character) of the thoroughfares will reduce long-term costs, as their useful life will be increased. The City of Asheville has identified certain design elements and considerations that should be incorporated in the improvement of existing thoroughfares and construction of new ones.

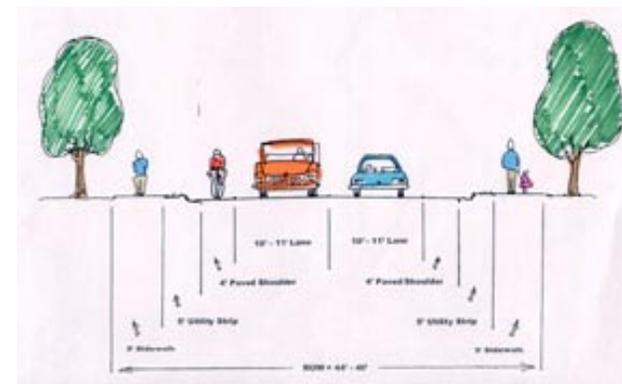
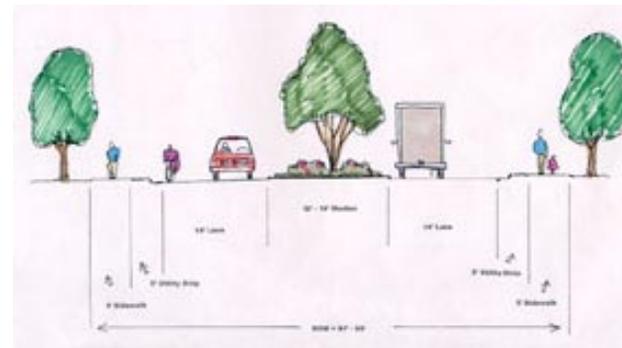
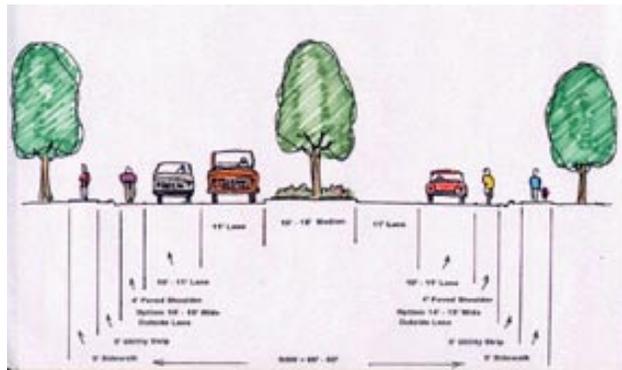
The first step in developing a street design plan is to determine the long-term function of the roadway and the desired land use pattern along the corridor. Next a street type should be applied to the corridor that is sensitive to street function. Setback requirements should be based on the ultimate design cross-section envisioned for a particular street. Setbacks should then be measured from the centerline of the street. By establishing a vision for the

roadway cross-section and the relationship to adjacent development, it will allow a greater emphasis on the design of the streetscape. This will be accomplished through more focused attention to the design of the sidewalks and street trees and their relationship to adjacent buildings.

To truly integrate land use and transportation planning, we must develop street design templates that not only address the design of the roadway, but also address the character, scale, and design of adjacent development. Preferred street design cross-sections should provide provisions for bike lanes and sidewalks and should also extend beyond the right-of-way to address items such as building setbacks, parking location, and scale and size of buildings. Creating this typology for Asheville streets will provide a blueprint for future transportation improvements and future development. The result will be a better coordination between land use and transportation planning.

Corridors that are urbanizing are often “improved” to accommodate traffic projections for a twenty-year planning horizon. But these





improvements are missing the element of a vision for these corridors that includes land use. A few basic assumptions should be in place for improving urbanizing transportation corridors. First, unless the facility is a limited access highway, it should be assumed that there will be adjacent development. Second, all developed corridors and urbanizing environments have a need for safe and attractive pedestrian facilities and consideration of bicycle transportation.

Improvements to streets and widening of thoroughfares should meet the following goals:

- Provide safe mobility and access for motor vehicles and other users of the road.
- Provide the safest design to reduce accidents and the associated costs.

Several studies found that multi-lane roads with medians have a lower crash rate than roads with a continuous center turn lane.

Georgia Study - Medians have a 15% lower crash rate
 Florida Study - Medians have a 25% lower crash rate
 Michigan Study - Medians have a 58% lower crash rate

Source: Transportation Research Center, University of Florida, 1993

- Preserve the public investment in the transportation infrastructure.
- Provide facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.
- Enhance the long-term economic vitality and appearance of the community.

Map 14 classifies the major thoroughfares in Asheville into four major categories: Gateway Boulevard, Urban/Neighborhood Corridor, Connecting Corridor, and Regional Commercial Corridor.

Gateway Boulevard - Typically includes a raised-landscaped median. Coordinated access points at select locations characterize the roadway. The design includes wide outside lanes for bicyclists, and may also include an off road greenway. Adjacent development may occur on larger parcels with few access points. Adjacent development might take the form of residential subdivisions, apartment complexes, office parks, or concentrated commercial development.

Urban/Neighborhood Corridor - The Urban/Neighborhood Corridor connects neighborhoods with each other, with employment centers, with institutional uses, and with major thoroughfares. Mixed-use structures, typically 2 to 4 stories in height, contain retail, office, and residential uses that serve and are complemented by adjacent neighborhoods. Sidewalks, streetscape and building design acknowledge and provide a safe environment for the significant pedestrian users of the urban/neighborhood corridor. The urban/neighborhood corridor may be two, three, or four lanes and might include a landscaped median or a continuous center turn lane and on-street parking.

Connecting Corridor - The purpose of the connecting corridor is to preserve the flow of traffic along major thoroughfares that connect compact centers of urban development. Connecting corridors are characterized by land uses such as offices and apartments, and should not include regional shopping destinations. Connecting corridors might be three or four lanes and may include a landscaped median or a continuous center turn lane. Connecting corridors are a high priority for access management plans.



Regional Commercial Corridor – The Regional Commercial Corridor serves nodes of regional commercial development including big-box retail and regional shopping destinations such as malls. The Corridor is characterized by an emphasis on measures to maintain traffic flow and preserve the capacity of the transportation system. Access management, effective signal timing, and turning lanes at intersections will all be important design features of the Regional Commercial Corridor.

The following arterial roads in the City and its ETJ are described using this classification system.

Sweeten Creek Road

- Gateway Boulevard from Interstate 40 South to US 25
- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from Interstate 40 to Biltmore Village

Brevard Road

- Gateway Boulevard from Long Shoals Road to the Biltmore Square Mall Area
- Regional Commercial Corridor in the area of the Biltmore Square Mall
- Gateway Boulevard from I-26 to I-40

Riverway

The character of the Riverway will vary, and its design will be based on the results of the Riverway Corridor Study taking place in 2002. It is likely that the core areas of riverfront redevelopment may take on an urban character in the style of the Urban/Neighborhood Corridor and the remainder of the parkway may be designed more in keeping with the Gateway Boulevard Concept.

Hendersonville Road

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor in selected urban village locations (see map)
- Connecting Corridor for the remaining sections

Tunnel Road

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from the tunnel to South Tunnel Road

South Tunnel Road

- Regional Commercial Corridor

East Tunnel Road

- Gateway Boulevard



Patton Avenue

- Regional Commercial Corridor near Interstate 40 (exit 44)
- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor in selected Urban Village locations
- Connecting Corridor for the remaining sections

Merrimon Avenue

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from Hillside Street to Colonial Place

Biltmore Avenue

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from Patton Avenue to Victoria Road
- Connecting Corridor from Victoria Road to Swannanoa River Road
- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from Swannanoa River Road to I-40

Haywood Road

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from Patton Avenue to Ridgelawn Avenue
- Gateway Boulevard from Ridgelawn Avenue to French Broad River

Clingman Avenue

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from Hilliard

Avenue to French Broad River

Long Shoals Road

- Connecting Corridor from Hendersonville Road to I-26
- Gateway Boulevard from I-26 to Brevard Road

New Leicester Highway

- Connecting Corridor

Broadway Avenue

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from Downtown to Weaver Boulevard

Charlotte Street

- Urban/Neighborhood Corridor from I-240 to Edwin Place

Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation

In conventional roadway improvements, pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks, pedestrian signals at intersections, and crosswalks are considered as an afterthought to the design. By treating these facilities as an afterthought, these corridors become places that work well for cars, but pedestrians and bicy-

clists seem out of place. The presence of a sidewalk or a “share the road” sign does not address the true need to provide people with choices about how to travel. It is not in the interest of the health or vitality of the community to relegate pedestrians to a narrow strip of concrete between parking lots and travel lanes. In urbanizing environments, it should be assumed that pedestrian facilities and pedestrian needs should be an integral part of the design of roadways. In planning roadway improvements, if we fail to consider the long-term urbanization of the corridor, we destine the thoroughfare to be a place for cars only.

As roadways in Asheville have been improved and/or uses along the roadways have changed, accommodation for pedestrians has often not been considered. For example, Hendersonville Road was widened by the NCDOT approximately 10 years ago. No sidewalks or other pedestrian amenities were included in the improvement. There is a large elderly population along Hendersonville Road that can not access shopping and services that are located literally across the street. The danger they face by trying to cross this highway in an automobile is much less than the danger they would face by

crossing it on foot. Because they have to drive to shopping and services across the street, these residents contribute to the traffic congestion on the roadway and to the lessening of the region’s air quality.

Land use changes along Merrimon Avenue have produced an environment that is not friendly to pedestrians. Originally a two lane street lined with homes, with commercial uses located at or near key intersections, the street is now four lanes with most residential uses converted to retail or office uses. Numerous and random curb cuts, narrow (and sometimes missing) sidewalks, and speeding traffic create a dangerous environment for pedestrians. Although a large residential population is adjacent to Merrimon Avenue, few people walk along the street due to the danger to pedestrians posed by the street.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Planning

In keeping with the goals of making Asheville more walkable, and promotion alternative modes of transportation, the City of Asheville has a need to provide more facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians. The need for these

Choose An Appropriate Standard of Review

Our expectations for buildings should be modest and realistic. An such realism starts with the perspective--the standard of review--that we use to evaluate new buildings in our landscape.

We are too harsh on our architects and builders. We somehow expect each new work to be novel and full of surprise. This point-of-view does not help to create amiable cities. It looks at the wrong things. People--architects included--often speak of a building and decry it as *derivative* or *nothing special*. When questioned further, they will readily admit that the building isn't bad, really, but it's not "great work."

To wonder if a particular building is a great work is to hold it up to a flawed standard of review on two counts.

First, such an approach tends to overemphasize the purely visual; one examines the building as if it were a photograph on a wall and one talks of balances and composition and so on.

Secondly, the very nature of the question asks one to view the building as a discrete object--isolated on its own lot--not as a piece of a city landscape.

Both aspects play into the misuse--albeit ancient--of architecture as a tool of social aggrandizement, posturing and pompsity. Such an attitude may feed the hungry maw of the architecture and design press but it does little to nourish the eye or body of the would-be urban villager.

The *great work* standard is out-of-scale. Something more modest is needed.

More often than not, the important question is not whether some particular building is a great building. the correct standard of review is more this: "If this building were just about standard for the community, would we still want to live here?"

Be realistic. Does the building follow the very few basic rules of urban design? If so, grant the permit and build it.

Of course every town needs a few memorable structures of civic pride and joy: a stadium, a tower, a church or temple. But these are by practical necessity few; the majority of buildings will be (we hope) good, solid, money-making background buildings. It is only occasionally that a building--by special use or unique site--needs to be a focal point. Our cities have a long way to go before it's appropriate to use the great work standard of architectural review for everything.

Let's define our standard of greatness so that striving and self-promotion are excluded.

From City Comforts: How to Build an Urban Village; David Sucher, 1995

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans

“The Asheville Urban Area will have a network of bicycle and pedestrian routes which are safe and provide reasonable transportation options for its citizens. Individual jurisdictions within the MPO and the MPO itself will provide leadership in the promotion, education, law enforcement, and facilities development that supports the network.”

Asheville MPO Pedestrian and Bicycle Thoroughfare Plan (1999)

“The Vision for the Asheville Greenways System is a network of land and water corridors in Asheville, with greenways serving to protect and promote the qualities of these corridors, places where land connects to work, school and shops; and city connects to countryside.”

Asheville Greenways Master Plan (1998)

“Local governments, developers, NCDOT and the MPO need to help create a safe environment for pedestrians and bicyclists throughout the region. The region needs more sidewalks, bicycle lanes/paths, crosswalks and modifications in road design to improve the safety for pedestrian and bicyclists.”

Transportation Options of Western North Carolina: A Regional Plan for Mobility (2001)

“This plan identifies existing substandard sidewalks needing reconstruction, sidewalk obstacles needing removal or relocation, needed wheelchair ramps, pedestrian hazard areas, needed pedestrian crossing improvements, and needed pedestrian linkages. The total estimated cost to address all of the needs of the Pedestrian Thoroughfare Plan is approximately 38.5 million dollars.”

City of Asheville Pedestrian Thoroughfare Plan (1999)

facilities is well-documented in plans developed in recent years (see cited quotes from these plans). The City of Asheville Pedestrian Thoroughfare Plan, adopted in 1999, identified approximately 38.5 million dollars worth of pedestrian needs in the city. These needs include repairing deteriorating sidewalks, widening sidewalks, removing obstacles, adding wheelchair ramps, improving crossings and building new sidewalks.

Similarly, the Asheville Greenways Master Plan lays out a network of greenways to connect the city for recreation and transportation by bike and on foot. The first pieces of the plan are being implemented, but much more needs to be done. The need to better serve pedestrians and bicyclists is also documented in the Asheville MPO Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan and Transportation Options for Western North Carolina: A Regional Plan for Mobility Choices. The challenge in the coming years will be to develop a funding strategy to implement all of these plans. The infrastructure to move pedestrians and bicyclists is of paramount importance to the overall goals of reducing congestion, lessening air pollution, and creating livable streets.