

# GROWNC REGIONAL PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# Together We Create Our Future

**The GroWNC region is one of the most diverse and beautiful areas in the country. The clear waters and rich landscapes are part of a critical system of unparalleled natural resources.**

These assets, from an economic, environmental and cultural perspective, are the competitive advantage that attracts businesses and residents to the area.

From the high quality waterways to the productive farms and forests, the natural environment fuels the economy and inspires the region's culture. Protecting and enhancing these resources is critical to ensuring that the mountain economy and community thrives.





## Creating a regional plan for local prosperity

The GroWNC planning process provides the platform for local governments, businesses, non-profits, citizens, and others to realize unprecedented regional coordination on jobs, energy, housing, transportation, resources, and other interconnected issues. **This fosters more prosperous communities through new quality jobs, smart infrastructure investments, diverse economic development strategies and critical resource protection.** Through GroWNC, the region will have a clearly defined framework and set of implementation strategies to develop the policies and investments necessary to sustain and enhance the economy and quality of life in our mountain communities.

### PLANNING PROCESS

- 1** **COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH STRATEGY**  
Creating a strategy to guide the public engagement process
- 2** **BUILDING ON PREVIOUS EFFORTS**  
Updating data, reviewing existing plans and studies, and developing the land use model
- 3** **IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS**  
Studying existing economic development, housing, transportation, land use, energy, health natural and cultural resources conditions
- 4** **REGIONAL GROWTH SCENARIOS**  
Developing & testing scenarios to compare with the “business as usual” trendline to gauge potential trade-offs
- 5** **RECOMMENDATIONS & STRATEGIES**  
Developing a set of recommendations and strategies that support the region’s vision of the future
- 6** **IDEAS TO ACTIONS**  
Creation of a set of tools to guide implementation

### GROWNC WORKGROUP TOPIC AREAS & STUDY AREA

- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Economic Development |  Energy             |
|  Housing              |  Health & Wellness  |
|  Transportation       |  Natural Resources  |
|  Land Use             |  Cultural Resources |

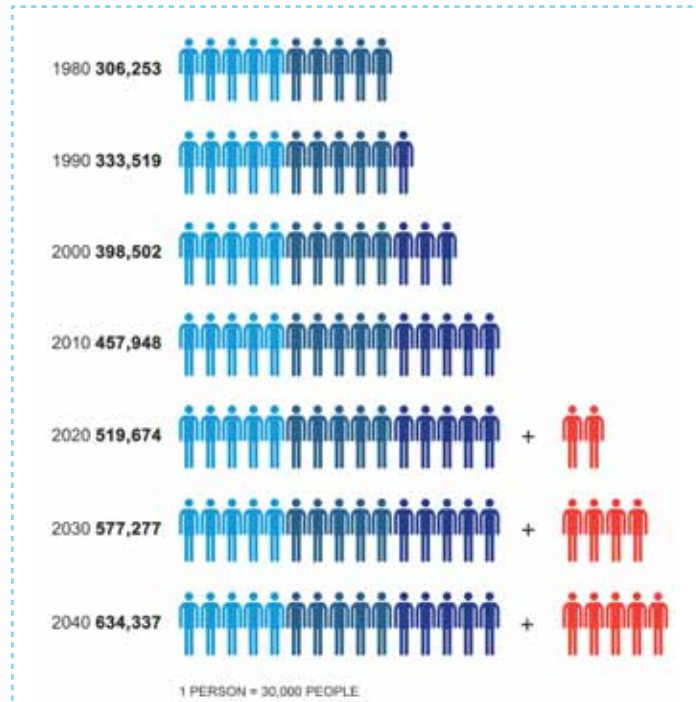




The GroWNC study area, which includes Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania counties, sits in the westernmost portion of North Carolina.



**Growth presents many opportunities and challenges**



**Figure #1:** Population Growth. By 2040, the population of the GroWNC region is expected to increase to more than 630,000 people.

WHAT WILL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT LOOK LIKE IN **30 YEARS?**

Where will we live, work and go to school? How will growth impact the region's natural resources? Can the existing systems of infrastructure support additional people, houses, jobs and cars? **These are all important questions that deserve answers. Through GroWNC we can begin to answer some of these questions.** GroWNC is a 3-year project to develop a framework of voluntary, locally-implemented, market-based solutions and strategies to ensure that as the region continues to grow, the effects of this growth have a positive impact on the region and communities. It is funded by a \$1.6 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The Land-of-Sky Regional Council serves as the grant administrator and coordinating agency for this planning effort.



## Building a diverse community of support

Understanding the distinct values of the mountain communities today ensures that this plan, implemented in accordance with the recommendations, supports and advances those priorities over the long term. The GroWNC plan was developed through extensive public outreach.



Meetings were held online, in classrooms, places of worship, community centers, homes, and even in livestock markets throughout the five counties.

Thousands of residents worked together during every phase of the project to develop a plan that ensures that as the region continues to grow it does so in a way that respects and promotes the values and assets of GroWNC communities.

### WHAT DO YOU LOVE THE MOST ABOUT LIVING HERE?

sense of community wildlife  
 friendly people outdoor recreation  
 public health CLIMATE  
 scenery parks trails MOUNTAINS  
 natural resources natural environment  
 art & culture roads are beautiful rural  
 close to family quiet CHURCHES  
 NATIVE neighbors schools diversity  
 rich history HOMESTEAD people know and help each other  
 MY HOME I was born here weather  
 IS HERE caring people



## Vision for the Future

From community input it was clear that participants in GroWNC were concerned with how their region was growing and changing.

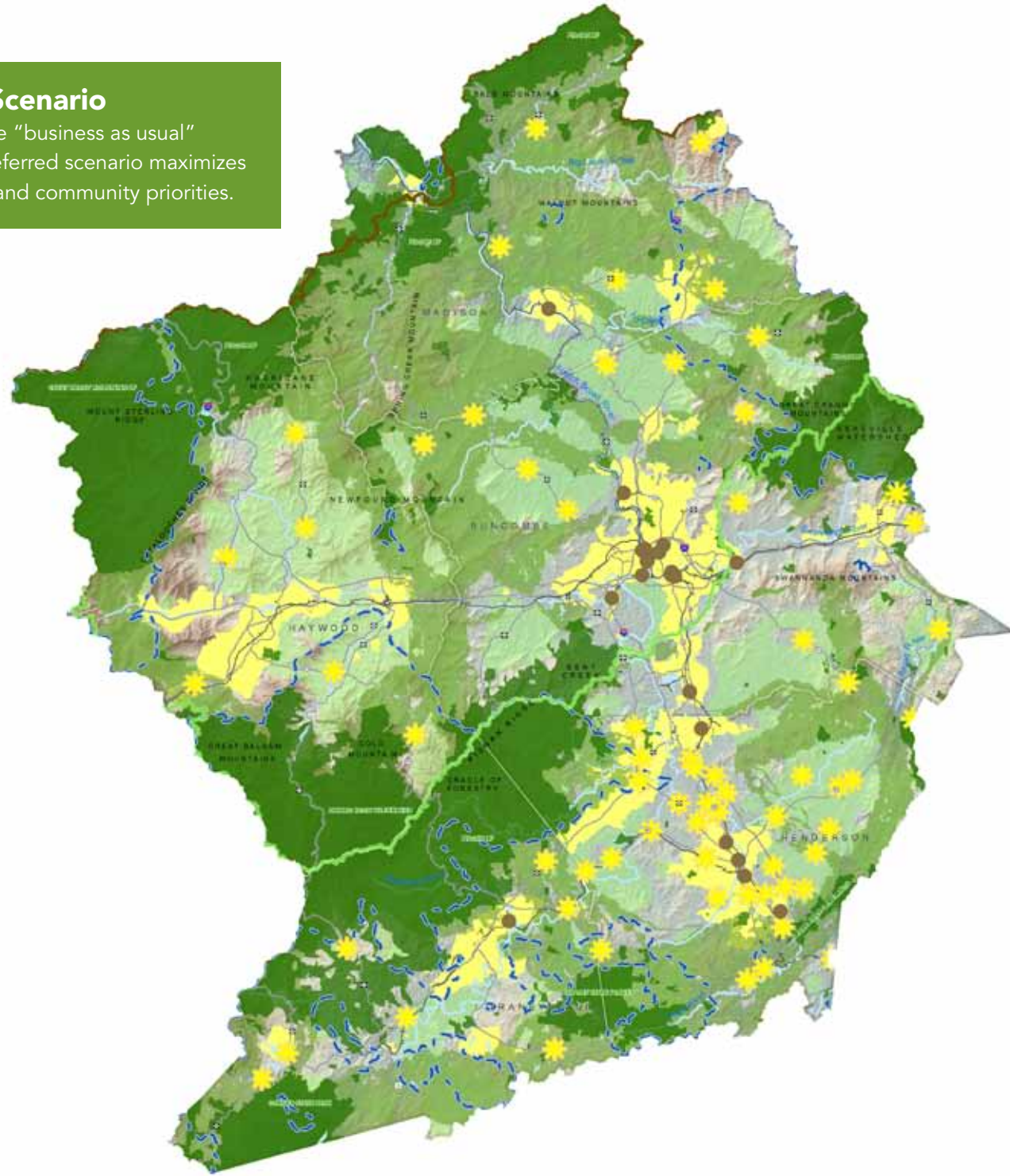
Through a process called **scenario planning**, participants defined **a new path forward** to ensure that as the region grows, it remains a place for **existing** and **future generations** to live, work, play and thrive.

Scenario planning is way to learn about the future. If we do nothing, and continue to operate "business as usual," we can expect a certain future for our children and grandchildren. However, what if we want to preserve more farms and forests? What if we want to direct growth to places with existing infrastructure? How will our communities develop? These are all questions we can ask and answer through scenario planning. We can start to think about alternatives to the current course of development and evaluate the potential impacts and trade-offs of future growth. By answering these questions we can develop a vision of the future.

**The Preferred Scenario represents this vision of the future.**

## Preferred Scenario

Compared to the "business as usual" scenario, the preferred scenario maximizes GroWNC goals and community priorities.



### CRITICAL WATERSHEDS

80% less impervious surface



### Rural Centers

Infrastructure investments in rural communities result in more housing and jobs.

Land use policies encourage growth in areas that are not in conflict with natural or cultural resources.

### Appalachian Trail

Viewsheds are protected.

### Blue Ridge Parkway

### PUBLIC CONSERVATION LANDS

### KEY ECOLOGICAL CORRIDORS & HABITATS

70% more remain intact

### AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY LANDS

85,000 more acres preserved

### Brownfield Sites

Redevelopment is encouraged on brownfields, old industrial sites and shopping centers.

Well-located industrial sites are reserved for job creating uses.

### LAND USE

Policies focus growth in areas with existing infrastructure



## Ideas to Actions

Regional prosperity depends on the involvement and commitment of a variety of public, private and non-profit entities. Just as each community is unique, the approach to achieving the regional vision may differ from place to place.

This is the **first time** information has been synthesized at **the five-county level** to develop a set of sound, voluntary, implementable **recommendations** and **strategies** that connect **the region's vision** with the policies, programs, projects, and plans needed at local and state levels to achieve that **future**.

The proposed recommendations and strategies provide a decision-making framework to turn ideas generated through this process into actions. The following subset of recommendations were identified as potential early implementation tasks by the GroWNC Steering Committee.

**STAY INVOLVED. BE INFORMED.**

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MAPVIEWER | interact



GROWNC WEBSITE | participate



# Early Implementation Strategies



## Business Support & Entrepreneurship

Improve access to capital for all types of businesses.

Develop a supply of highly-marketable, development-ready sites to attract companies that bring quality, living wage jobs to the region.

Develop a brand for the region's arts, cultural and heritage resources.

## Resource Conservation

Promote the use and maintenance of incentives, ordinances, and site design criteria that encourage the use of innovative stormwater management techniques.

Preserve productive farmland and soils and support farmers by providing incentives to keep farmland in use.

## Accessibility & Connectivity

Identify local funding sources to support bicycle and pedestrian needs.

Promote transit options in the region.

## Housing Choices

Adopt incentives for housing developments with an affordable component and/or located near transit, greenways, schools, and/or employers.

Implement recommendations identified in the Analysis of Impediments of Fair Housing Choice report.



## Energy Innovation

Identify tools and strategies to assist businesses and governments in identifying easily achievable tasks to save electricity and reduce environmental impacts.

Establish an economic development and recruiting policy focused on expanding local energy resources, companies, and entrepreneurs resulting in diverse sources of energy production.



## Land Use Policies

Focus growth in areas where transportation, water, and sewer infrastructure exist with particular emphasis on existing communities.

Increase public education and awareness around land-use planning and regulations, form-based codes, and related policies and incentives.



## Education & Awareness

Identify initiatives in the GroWNC online tool that have measurable outcomes.

Create a peer exchange program between local government officials to encourage cooperation and interregional coordination.



## Healthy Communities

Collect information and raise awareness of affordable home health options that allow residents to remain in their homes.

Promote and expand the use of EBT outside of Buncombe County to purchase food at Farmer's Markets.

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