



**2006**  
**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE**

**PREPARED BY**  
**BOONE AREA PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**BOONE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

**March 20, 2006**

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# 1.0 Executive Summary

## **The Need for Planning**

Even though the estimated population of the Town of Boone has grown slowly in recent years, the town has become more and more a regional educational, retail, and medical center. As the surrounding counties' populations have grown, Boone's significant service sector has become an integral part of this growing regional economy. Appalachian State University's student population has increased over the last decade and the University may add more students over the next decade. Watauga Medical Center has expanded significantly especially in its outpatient services to the region. Tourism has been and continues to underlie a part of Boone's service sector that now serves more seasonal and permanent residents in the region.

This continued growth is placing significant pressure on the natural and built environments of formally rural areas. Quality of life issues are of great concern to the residents of Boone and surrounding areas. It is clear that now, more than ever before, major planning efforts are necessary in order to properly prepare for the continued growth that we most certainly will experience. Fortunately Town civic leaders and area residents have long been committed to a planning program that has helped guide the development of the community. In 1992, recognizing the need to prepare a comprehensive vision for the future of Boone, the Town Council appointed a fourteen member Steering Committee made up of area citizens and charged them with responsibility for guiding the preparation of a long-range plan. Assisting the Steering Committee in accomplishing this task was the town planning department and the planning firm of Glenn Harbeck Associates (GHA).

The 1993 Boone Comprehensive Plan has been a policy oriented document that establishes a foundation for on-going planning to the year 2010. The plan allows for reasonable flexibility in the direction and rate of growth of the community while working to establish sound planning objectives. To ensure that the document maintains its relevance as conditions change, the Plan was to be updated periodically so that it would reflect contemporary concerns and issues. Beginning in 2002, the Town Council directed that a serious review of the Comprehensive Plan be conducted to find out what changes should be made in the document and to assess the effectiveness of the policy and action item statements of the Plan. As a part of this review, the Growth Strategy Map was to be updated to reflect changes in development patterns since 1993 and to anticipate changes that may occur over the next decade.

## **Study Area**

The study area for the Boone Comprehensive Plan includes the existing town limits, the extraterritorial planning jurisdiction, and the area surrounding the town that is expected to come under the influence of growth and, thus, town policy over the next ten to fifteen years. The Growth Strategy Map identifies the planning area, the existing extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ), and a possible future ETJ or at least areas that will influence the Town's development patterns. That map has been revised to reflect current and expected conditions for the next five to ten years. Because of significant recently finished and expected road improvements, this map will have to be reviewed when the community has a clearer image of the probable effects of the widening and straightening of two major arteries into Watauga County. When US 421, a main

east-west artery, was widened, the roadbed was shifted in some stretches. That shift has left a paved roadway from which through traffic has been diverted. Those stretches of former two-lane US highway have become attractive locations for commercial or dense residential redevelopment that would use the road as a local connector.

### **Functions of the Plan**

The Comprehensive Plan texts, the narratives and policies, are designed primarily to guide the physical development of the town and its environs for the next fifteen years. In addition, the Plan performs several important functions for local government, private development interests, and the general public. These functions are briefly described as follows:

#### ***Source of Information***

Research conducted in support of the plan provides useful information on existing physical, environmental and socio-economic conditions and trends of the Boone area. In some instances, this information is contained in the narrative to the Policies. For the 1992 plan, supplemental information was presented in reports prepared under separate cover by geography and planning students at ASU. For this plan revision certain critical factors such as planned water and sewer service areas, areas of steep slope, and areas of special flood hazard were examined using working maps and appropriate graphics for the purposes of preparing the Growth Strategy Map. During 2004 and 2005, the Town of Boone commissioned separate documents to describe the current rental housing situation and an evaluation of the town's water system to determine whether the water system should be expanded. These documents included professional projections for these facets of the community. There have also been studies to determine whether there should be policy changes with respect to development on steep slopes. There has also been a task force to determine policies to decrease the friction between the residents of single-family neighborhoods and college students who are occupying domiciles in these neighborhoods. All these working groups have assembled appropriate information to determine recommendations.

#### ***Guidance for Government Decisions***

When the Boone Town Council adopted the 1993 Plan, it had a policy foundation for guiding decisions regarding development proposals, subdivision reviews, rezoning requests, capital improvements, ordinances and other matters. Changes in organization and wording that will continue to provide that foundation will be made to this document.

#### ***Preview of Government Actions***

Business decisions of the public in general, and developers in particular, are easier to make when the probable outcome of government decisions are understood; the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan increase the predictability of government actions.

#### ***Public Participation in Managing Growth***

Steering Committee work sessions and town meetings conducted during the 1993 Plan's preparation helped to ensure the Plan expresses the desires of the area's citizens. Once the adopted plan was disseminated, it was designed for use by the public on an on-going basis. During this review and revision, public meetings were held so the citizens of the town could review the proposed changes to the Plan and make suggestions about the wording of the policies and action items along with the priority for addressing each policy.

### ***Components of the Plan***

The Comprehensive Plan consists of four parts. First, the “Objectives for the Boone Comprehensive Plan” set forth the overall direction and emphasis of the plan in several key areas. Second, an overall Growth Strategy Map is provided to translate urban growth policies into specific land areas within the planning study area. Third, specific growth Policy Statements and an accompanying narrative are presented which reflect the concerns and issues expressed by area citizens during the public involvement process. Finally, Action Agenda items assign suggested implementation actions to the various policy categories. These action items state specific courses of action the Town can pursue to implement the stated policies.

### **Highlights of The Plan’s Findings**

#### ***The Local Economy***

When the 1993 edition of this plan was written, it was noted that “Boone’s economic base had been experiencing a steady shift away from its traditional industrial and agricultural sectors.” The service sector, represented most strongly by Appalachian State University, the Watauga Medical Center and the tourist industry, has been the dominant force in the local economy. The service sector has become even more significant in the total economy as regional retail trade (retail trade is estimated to be nearly 14 per cent of the local economy) has increased in importance along with growth in education, medical, and food and accommodation components of the service sector.

#### ***Transportation***

Transportation issues received a high level of attention from area residents attending town meetings for the 1993 Comprehensive Plan. Boone’s geographic position in a relatively narrow, elevated valley floor with surrounding mountain ridges severely limits opportunities for new road construction. Even so, Boone has historically been a cross-roads community for the region, with a number of roads converging on the town with the rugged terrain discouraging the widening or straightening these US Highways to modern standards. Furthermore, these topographic constraints limit the ability of town planners to design a thoroughfare system based on parallel or systematic north-south and east-west traffic corridors. As a result, the few main travel corridors in the area are strained to their limit, particularly during peak tourist periods and during the academic year at ASU. During the last several years, US 421 from Winston-Salem to Boone has been widened so the whole route is now four lanes with most of the highway being divided four lane and significant stretches are limited access divided highway. The major route from the south, US 321, is being widened and that route will be four lanes from Lenoir to Boone within five years. The street system within the Town of Boone is compact and extremely congested because the topography of the town will not allow further major widening or the creation of alternate routes. The North Carolina Department of Transportation continues to explore options to create a by-pass road around Boone so the roads within the valley could become more effective as town streets.

#### ***Sewage Treatment***

The Jimmy Smith Waste Water Treatment plant completed an expansion in 1998 that was designed for a maximum capacity of 4.82 million gallons per day. Currently the facility is treating 2.48 million gallons per day with average flows and the maximum daily flow was 9.01 million gallons in September 2004. The wet weather max flow in the design is 12.05 million

gallons per day. The Public Utilities Department continues to complete repairs and replacements to reduce inflow and infiltration into the wastewater system.

### ***Water Supply***

The Boone Water Treatment Plant has a design capacity of 3 million gallons per day and has been treating an average of 1.8 million gallons per day. Peak consumption has been measured at 2.6 million gallons per day. In 1992, the Utilities Department estimated that normal capacity for the plant should be reached by the year 2000. Recently there have been substantial requests for water use in planned residential and commercial projects; therefore, the Town has decided to seriously explore expanding the water system. The WK Dickson engineering firm has been hired to help the Town decide exactly how the water system's capacity should be expanded and find the most appropriate source of raw water. The design and implementation of any expansion will not be completed before 2008 and perhaps 2010. The preliminary reports from the engineers suggest that raw water availability may be a major constraint for the Town's development patterns.

### ***Stormwater Management***

Stormwater management is a rapidly emerging issue in many communities throughout the State, including Boone. The Environmental Protection Agency is mandating the development of stormwater policies through the NPDES Phase II program which are geared toward at improving and protecting surface water quality. The Town of Boone expects a detailed model ordinance will be promulgated by the State of North Carolina within the next year. That model ordinance and its associated regulations may necessitate revisions to the Town's stormwater management program. Many municipalities which have been previously designated by the NPDES program have developed a stormwater utility in order to meet the water quality requirements imposed by the NPDES program.

### ***Industrial Development***

Boone's competitive edge for industrial recruitment has been hampered by the community's location away from major interstate highways, rail service, and commercial air facilities. As new multi-lane roads are built into Boone, the commercial prospects of the Town and eastern Watauga County will likely change significantly in ways that cannot be specifically predicted. The demand for real estate that can be built upon at moderate cost for residential and service land uses will continue to make property acquisition for fabrication and distribution increasingly difficult.

### ***Commercial Development***

Town planners and elected officials have traditionally viewed new commercial development as one of the most challenging land uses with which to deal. Citizens of Boone have held a strong distaste for much of the strip commercial development patterns in Boone. As a result, the Town has developed specific policies and ordinance requirements which strongly discourage uncontrolled strip development. For example, the Town recently expanded the Corridor Overlay District to further protect and enhance the value of major highway corridors throughout Boone. In addition, the Town reorganized the Community Appearance Commission and tasked them with the development of commercial appearance standards to aid in the protection of Boone's community character and sense of place. Following numerous public meetings and focus groups,

Commercial Development Appearance Standards were created by the CAC and adopted by the Town Council effective January 1, 2006. The Town has also taken additional steps over the past few years to revise landscape standards, tree protection requirements and sign ordinances applicable to commercial development activities.

### ***Housing and Neighborhoods***

The structure of the Boone economy along with its significant student population within the Town's jurisdiction and the physical lay of the land have combined to strongly influence the types of housing and neighborhoods in the Boone area. Relatively high real estate acquisition costs and relatively high housing construction costs because of the terrain, combined with an abundance of students and relatively low paid service workers, have resulted in a niche market for "cheap" apartment complexes. This demand is evidenced by the large number of such complexes having been developed in the Boone area over the past decade. As a town with college students making up a significant part of its population, Boone also faces the same pressures on its single family neighborhoods, especially those near Appalachian State University, as other communities with the same demographic pattern. Parents want to purchase older, smaller homes in residential neighborhoods that can become housing for several students including the family member attending ASU no matter what the zoning. Many students do not have patterns of living that are compatible with those of families in these residential neighborhoods so there are frictions and tensions.

### ***Agricultural and Rural Development***

Statistics nationwide reveal a continuing decline in agriculture as a part of the overall national economy. The Boone area is no exception, despite recent increases in the number of Christmas tree farms and other horticulture and silviculture enterprises. While the acreage of crop land may fluctuate from year to year, the overall trend has been toward a declining agricultural base.

### ***Parks and Recreation***

Boone's recreational needs have been determined by a combination of facility shortfalls, uneven geographical distribution, and unequal access. While ASU has recreational amenities adequate to serve the University's needs, these facilities are not available to the general public. Facilities for the general population of Boone are inadequate, particularly with regard to indoor facilities. Watauga Medical Center operates an excellent "wellness center" for paying members, but there is a pressing need for a major multipurpose, indoor public recreational center. Watauga County has a swim complex that has been declared deficient because of age and basic inadequacies. Attempts to replace that installation with a newer facility have been unsuccessful. With regard to passive recreation and open space, greenways have become a favored recreational feature in the Boone community since Boone's topography and multiple streams provide good opportunities for a system of greenways throughout the urban area. Fields for organized sports have become more and more important in Boone and the surrounding area as the Watauga County Parks and Recreation Department has organized adult and youth leagues for several sports. The Town of Boone has been an active partner in supporting that Department's efforts. New fields are planned for several land parcels in flood prone areas that would be difficult to use for other purposes.

***Community Appearance***

Boone residents have become aware that community appearance and image are important factors, not only for the quality of life of existing residents, but also as important tools in attracting desirable new businesses and industries. Boone has made some beneficial efforts in recent years toward enhancing its overall appearance, including establishing a Community Appearance Commission, preparing improved sign regulations, and adopting standards for grading, buffering, landscaping and tree preservation. Public attitudes at town meetings for the Comprehensive Plan Update expressed strong support for continuing the Town's beautification efforts, particularly with regard to town entrances and major streets, overhead utility poles and wires, and street trees. There was also considerable interest in vigorously pursuing aesthetic standards for commercial development.

***Community Character***

Many area residents continue to find recent development along major thoroughfares leading into to Boone to be objectionable in terms of its negative aesthetic impact on the community. This impact is especially damaging in a small community like Boone where the desired rural character of a high country small town can be easily overwhelmed by corporate standard building designs that detract from the area's original character.

***Environmental Quality***

Environmental quality issues identified by local area residents cut across a broad spectrum. Included are protection of water quality, sewage collection and treatment, controlling development in sensitive areas (floodplains, ridge tops, areas of excessive slope, or wetland areas), solid waste disposal and recycling, water and energy conservation, control of littering, hazardous waste disposal and other sources of pollution including excessive noise, odor, air, and light pollution.

***Downtown***

Residents attending town meetings for the 1993 Comprehensive Plan expressed a strong desire that the traditional rural and small town, "high country" atmosphere of Boone be retained. Further, it was recognized that Boone's downtown represents the last vestiges of the community's original character. The Downtown merchants have established an effective trade association and have subjected themselves to a property tax surcharge to be used for Downtown enhancement. The Downtown has also been part of the Main Street planning program. Such efforts should be continued and added to when appropriate. The Howard Street infrastructure project, including underground utilities and sidewalks with aesthetic enhancements, has considerable support from the community as well as the merchants in the area.

***Planning, Coordination and Public Involvement***

Public decision making on key issues such as land use, development, transportation, utilities, recycling, environmental management, law enforcement, education, recreation, tourism and economic growth efforts will require increasing levels of advanced planning and coordination between the Town, the County, and the University. The entities involved have created regular meetings and communication channels for mutual support and the identification of and acting in concert to promote their common interests.

**Policies for Growth and Development**

Beginning with the first town meeting for the 1993 Comprehensive Plan, meaningful public involvement was a critical factor in identifying issues and determining their relative importance to residents of the planning area. Building upon this information, the 1993 Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee reviewed, modified and endorsed a number of specific Policy Statements for consideration by the Boone Town Council. The Policies that are presented in the Comprehensive Plan are the results of this process; as officially adopted Policies of the Town, they will serve as the basis for future decision on capital improvements, ordinances, zoning matters, subdivision approvals, and other similar matters. As noted below, when these policies were examined beginning in 2002, some of these policies were found to have been completely implemented, some have been pursued but will require constant effort to maintain the policy's implementation, while others have not yet been fully implemented or require language that reflects current circumstances.

**Sensitive Land Areas**

The Plan also makes reference to three types of sensitive land areas. These areas require special consideration and treatment when development is being contemplated. The three types of area are:

***Floodprone Areas***

Floodprone areas are those sections of stream bottoms subject to flooding during a 100 year storm event. This definition uses mapping techniques that examine the probable hydrological consequences of specific rates of rainfall over various time periods. There is a loose usage that states that floodprone areas have a one percent chance of being flooded in any given year. Actually, two or more 100-year storms can occur within a single year if extreme meteorological conditions occur such as two hurricane remnants coming over the mountains within the same hurricane season. Development of any kind is to be especially discouraged in these areas. At the same time, they can be well suited for use as greenways or to provide open space relief.

***Watershed Areas***

Watershed areas are land areas contributing surface drainage to drinking water supply intake points as delineated on the Town of Boone Watershed Map. Development is subject to the restrictions provided in the Town's Unified Development Ordinance.

***Steep Slope Areas***

Steep slope areas are those sections of the planning area with slopes in excess of 25 percent. Intensive development is to be strongly discouraged in these areas due to the significant potential for negative environmental and aesthetic consequences.

**Summary of Public Participation – Comprehensive Plan Development**

Meaningful public involvement was an essential part of preparing the 1993 Comprehensive Plan for Boone. During that planning process, several opportunities for citizen contribution were provided. First and foremost was the appointment of the fourteen-member Citizen's Steering Committee, with representatives from the Town Council, the Planning Board, the University, the Chamber of Commerce, and the community at large. Their role was particularly critical during the formulation of the Growth Policies and Implementation Actions. The overall objective of the

Steering Committee was to ensure that the resulting plan and polices reflect, as closely as possible, the will of the people in the community. The following is a summary of public involvement program phases and key meetings for the 1993 Boone Comprehensive Plan:

### ***Strategy Development***

The first priority in developing the public participation strategy for the Comprehensive Plan was to meet with the Steering Committee to discuss the planning process, provide an overview of citizen involvement, and outline specific roles for the Steering Committee, consultant, town staff, planning board and Town Council. During this period GHA, in cooperation with the town planning department, also introduced the committee to the purpose and scope of the Comprehensive Plan, and sounded out the committee as to some of the most critical issues in the community.

### ***Issue Identification***

To allow the citizens to make their growth and development concerns known as early as possible in the planning process, a community-wide meeting was planned and publicized to gather information that was to be a foundation for the plan. This first town meeting was held on October 6, 1992 at Hardin Park Elementary School with approximately 300 people attending. Participants used index cards and display sheets to record their preferences following a modified nominal group process. After issues were identified, the relative priority of each issue was determined by those attending taking part in simple voting procedure. After more than 650 issues were identified, and subsequently sorted into some 35 policy categories, a complete listing and ranking of all issues as identified at the town meeting was compiled and presented to the Steering Committee.

### ***Plan Development Work Sessions***

With the results of the initial meeting in hand, GHA, working closely with the town staff, prepared a draft set of Plan Objectives, Growth Policies, and overall Growth Strategy Map, and a series of Implementation Actions for review and discussion by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee held several meetings to review each of the proposed plan sections to suggest changes. Discussions were frank and candid. GHA then prepared revised objectives, policies, map and implementation actions in accordance with Steering Committee directives and comments.

### ***Policy Clarification and Community Consensus Building***

Upon completion of the draft polices and growth strategy map, a second town meeting was held. This second town meeting was held on March 30, 1993 at Hardin Park Elementary School and was attended by approximately 200 people. The involvement technique used at this meeting was a "walk-around questionnaire." Fourteen pages of policy statements were enlarged to poster board dimensions and mounted on a wall at various points around a large meeting room. Each sheet corresponded to one of the fourteen policy categories contained in the draft plan. Citizens were then asked to walk around to each sheet in the questionnaire and record their level of agreement or disagreement with the various policies. A member of the Steering Committee or the town staff was stationed at each of the sheets to answer questions, provide points of clarification, and listen for additional insights from the public. Following the meeting, revisions were made and policy statements were clarified based on public comments in the town meeting.

***Draft Plan and Distribution and Public Review***

Following completion of the revised plan, the draft was delivered to public officials in Boone. In addition, several copies of the plan were made available to the public at the Watauga County Public Library, Town Hall Annex and the Boone Chamber of Commerce. On July 15, 1993 the Steering Committee, the town staff and GHA presented the Comprehensive Plan to the Planning Board and Town Council in a joint work session. Comments were recorded for further discussion and consideration. On September 7, 1993, the Boone Town Council unanimously adopted the Comprehensive Plan, conditioned upon revisions being made in keeping with the changes authorized in the minutes of that Special Meeting.

**Summary of Public Participation - 2006 Comprehensive Plan Update**

For this update, the Planning Commission was asked to perform an overall evaluation of the 1993 plan to determine progress made over the past decade toward implementing various action agenda items and determine the current relevance of plan policies. In order to perform this task, the Planning Commission utilized the same planning process involved with the original plan development. Acting in the same capacity as the original Steering Committee, the Planning Commission sought meaningful public involvement throughout the evaluation process.

***Work Sessions***

Beginning in the summer of 2002, many of the monthly meetings of the Planning Commission were conducted as work sessions which included the participation of numerous government officials, community groups, staff members, and other town boards or committees. Each of the following provided information and assistance throughout the evaluation process:

The Boone Area Chamber of Commerce staff members Mike Wagoner and Laurette Leagon assisted with evaluation of Economic & Industrial Development Sections in June 2003.

Blake Brown, Public Works Director and Chairman of the Boone Transportation Committee and Dempsey Wilcox, Town Council and Boone Transportation Committee member, assisted with evaluation of the Transportation Section in April 2003 and again in October 2003. In addition, Chris Turner, Director of AppalCart provided additional assistance with the Transportation Section in April 2004.

George Suddreth, previous Town of Boone Public Utilities Director, initially assisted with evaluation of the Utilities Section in April 2003. Rick Miller, current Public Utilities Director, provided further assistance in November 2004 after the Town received a comprehensive analysis of the Town's water distribution system entitled "Water System Hydraulic Analysis & Master Plan". This analysis was prepared by WK Dickson and contained information relating to the existing water system, future water system demand, and potential service area maps. The Planning Commission utilized this latest utilities system information in their evaluation of both the Utilities Section and Agricultural & Rural Development Section of the plan and to formulate recommendations relating to the Town's Growth Strategy Map.

Watauga County Parks and Recreation staff members Deb Wynne and Stephen Poulos assisted with evaluation of the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Section in April 2003.

The Community Appearance Commission met jointly with the Planning Commission to assist with the evaluation of the Community Appearance and Community Character Sections in January 2004.

Randy Feimster, previous Director of the Downtown Boone Development Association, assisted with evaluation of the Downtown Section in December 2002.

Reggie Hassler, Fire Chief and Bill Post, Police Chief assisted with evaluation of the Public Safety Section in July 2003.

Following each of these work sessions, the Planning Commission subsequently worked in groups to review comments and prepare recommendations relating to the validity of current policies and the status of listed implementation actions. The Planning Commission also evaluated the Plan Objectives, Executive Summary, and Growth Strategy Map. All these sessions were open to the public and widely advertised. Throughout the course of this evaluation, a number of public presentations were given to interested groups including the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, Watauga Avery Board of Realtors, and various civic organizations. The local media also did an outstanding job of providing coverage of the Planning Commission's activities.

#### ***Policy Clarification and Community Consensus Building***

After assembling the suggested changes to 1993 plan, the Planning Commission held an open meeting for public comment in April 2004. The meeting provided an opportunity for the public to make their concerns known relating to recent growth and development issues facing the public. Like the original meetings held for the development of the 1993 plan, the meeting facilitation process involved a walk-around questionnaire technique. This included enlarging to poster board size the Planning Commission's findings relating to policies and implementation actions. Citizens were asked to evaluate the Planning Commission's work, provide comments and insight, prepare written comment, and help to prioritize areas in which the Town should place the greatest emphasis. Following the meeting, the results were compiled, reviewed, and discussed by the Planning Commission. Revisions were made to both policies and implementation actions, and new policies and actions were created in response to specific points raised by the public.

#### ***January 2005 Comprehensive Plan Analysis***

Following the completion of their analysis, the staff prepared a report in January 2005 entitled "Comprehensive Plan Analysis – Overview, Conclusions and Recommendations". This report was presented to the Town Council in February 2005 and contained the findings of the Commission's study and recommendations for action. The Council, having evaluated the Planning Commission's recommendations, provided authorization to move forward with revisions to the 1993 Plan. The full report containing the details of the Commission's review, a summary of public input, and written public comment sheets may be obtained in the Development Services office.

The following is a brief summary of the Commission's conclusions and recommendations:

### *Policy Statements*

The overwhelming majority of the policy statements within the 1993 plan remained valid without modification. This finding confirms both the strength and relevance of the growth policies guiding Boone's decision makers.

### *Implementation Actions*

Relatively few implementation actions within the 1993 plan have been fully completed or found to be no longer valid. Work is continuing on the overwhelming majority of action items and involves a number of elected and appointed boards, committees, and staff members. Examples include items pertaining to stormwater management, neighborhood protection, steep slope development, commercial appearance standards, transportation development, and public utility improvements.

### *Growth Strategy Map*

The Commission recommended an expanded study area boundary and modifications to designated primary and secondary growth areas. These recommendations were largely based on changing conditions relating to public utility services, transportation system improvements, and the town's extraterritorial zoning jurisdiction expansion in 1998 and 1999. The Commission paid particular attention to coordinate draft revisions to the growth strategy map with those maps of potential utility service areas included in the 2004 Water System Hydraulic Analysis & Master Plan prepared by WK Dickson.

### *Format Revisions*

The Commission discussed throughout their evaluation the need to improve the format, eliminate inconsistencies, and to both improve upon and streamline the text in the narrative sections to better establish the context for the application of policies.

### *The Need for Further Visioning*

Although this update reflects contemporary concerns and issues, this document should be considered only as an interim measure which justifies and reinforces our current foundation for on-going planning through the year 2010. The Town Council and Planning Commission agree that a more comprehensive, long range planning process should be undertaken. This process may include the appointment of a citizen's steering committee which would guide a broad based community visioning process toward the ultimate objective of creating a new long range planning document. The Planning Commission recommends that the Town begin this process within three years and expects the project would be complete within five years.

### *September 2005 Draft*

Having received authorization from Council to proceed, the Planning Commission and staff prepared a draft Comprehensive Plan update for public review and comment in September 2005. The town staff posted the draft plan on the town's website and placed copies of the draft at the Watauga County Public Library, Watauga County Administration and Planning offices, Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, Boone Town Hall, and the Development Services Department. The draft was widely circulated and another well publicized open meeting was held for public comment in January 2006. This joint meeting of the Town Council and Planning Commission

was held at the Town Council Chambers and was well attended by Town Council, Planning Commission, town staff, and the local media. Public attendance and comment was very low.

***March 2006 Comprehensive Plan Update***

Following this public meeting, numerous Council comments and recommendations were incorporated into the draft by a Planning Commission Sub-Committee in February. The Sub-Committee's revised draft was then placed on the Planning Commission's March 2006 agenda for review and approval.

On May 11, 2006, the Town presented the 2006 Comprehensive Plan Update for public comment at the Spring Quarterly Public Hearing. The Planning Commission incorporated final revisions to the Plan following the Public Hearing and the Town Council unanimously adopted the updated Comprehensive Plan on May 18, 2006.

## 1.1 Overall Objectives for the Boone Comprehensive Plan

### **Introduction**

For any long range plan to be effective, it is important that the plan have several overriding objectives. Such objectives provide a compass, overall direction, and central thrust to the effort. At the same time, they can serve as criteria with which to evaluate the plan's policies and recommendations.

The following objectives flow from the issues and ideas identified by the public at the special Town Meeting for the Comprehensive Plan held on October 6, 1992. The objectives were then refined and edited following review and comment by the Citizen's Steering Committee for the Comprehensive Plan. Further refinements occurred when the Plan was updated in 2005. The following objectives, which have not been listed in any particular order of importance, are deliberately broad in scope and less specific than either a policy statement or an implementation action.

### ***Economic Development***

Acknowledge the area's natural beauty, university, and medical center presence as the Town's greatest assets for economic development and jobs creation. Treat them accordingly.

### ***Community Appearance and Community Character***

Blend the built environment with the natural, scenic, and historic character of a High Country small town. Especially discourage commercial strip development, cluttered signage, and "cheap" apartment buildings.

### ***Open Space***

Integrate open space and greenways into the urban fabric of the Town. Preserve the countryside by discouraging suburban sprawl. Avoid development in floodplains, on ridgetops, and on steep slopes.

### ***Environmental Quality***

Address and monitor growth factors and activities that contribute to water, air, light, and noise pollution.

### ***Trees***

Conserve existing trees and plant new trees, especially hardwoods.

### ***Automobile Transportation***

Maximize the efficiency of existing facilities, but not at the expense town and neighborhood character and livability. Build or expand transportation facilities and parking areas as needed, but with care. Work to reduce auto dependency, use, and congestion.

### ***Bikeways***

Implement the planned system of bikeways as a legitimate transportation alternative. Unify with greenways and other pedestrian facilities where possible.

***Mass Transit***

Enhance and support the mass transit system as an effective alternative to the congestion created by the individual automobile.

***Pedestrian Movement***

Encourage a system of sidewalks, paths, crosswalks and compact development patterns which make it easy to get around Boone on foot.

***Infrastructure***

Engage in long range planning for water and sewer systems, stormwater runoff, natural gas, and other utility systems. Place overhead utilities underground whenever feasible.

***Public Safety***

Maintain a high level of policing and fire protection and plan the expansion of public safety services to coincide with projected population increases and identified needs.

***Energy and Waste***

Reduce waste generation, and the consumption of energy and water. Develop area recycling programs to the fullest. Encourage an anti-litter consciousness among residents and visitors.

***University***

Emphasize cooperative planning among the Town, County, and University.

***Downtown***

Support and enhance the cultural and historic significance of downtown Boone, and affirm its appealing, pedestrian orientation.

***Recreation***

Strive for additional public recreation facilities, especially sports fields, greenways and indoor recreation centers.

***Neighborhoods***

Ensure the livability of neighborhoods, especially through land use and traffic planning.

***Public Involvement***

Encourage active public involvement and volunteerism to expand the effectiveness of community planning and action.

## 1.2 Growth Strategy Map

### **Growth Strategy Map**

Some of the Policies make reference to specially mapped areas; the Growth Strategy Map contained in the Comprehensive Plan illustrates these areas. The areas may be defined as follows:

#### ***Primary Growth Area***

The Primary Growth Areas is that portion of the urban growth area where urban level or facilities are already in place or can be provided most cost effectively. This is the area where near term growth and development is to be especially encouraged.

#### ***Secondary Growth Area***

The Secondary Growth Areas is that portion of the urban growth area where urban level services can be provided, but on a lower priority basis than in the primary growth area.

#### ***Rural Area***

The Rural Area is that portion of the planning study area that is influenced by urban area growth forces, but within which urban level development should be strongly discouraged. Urban level services and associated development densities should not be planned for this area, except in case by case evaluations of major economic development projects.

## 2.0 Policies for Growth and Development

The Policies of the Boone Comprehensive Plan are designed to provide a basis for future decisions regarding general development, capital improvements, rezoning requests, subdivision approvals and other related matters. The intention is to establish agreed upon principles from which a coordinated strategy for development can be implemented.

Each of the Policy Categories presented in the Comprehensive Plan is addressed in the following format:

*Narrative - A brief summary of the issues, relevant findings, and in some instances, general recommendations.*

*Policy Statements - Brief statements of local government principles designed to achieve legitimate public objectives related to the issue.*

It is important to understand that the narrative (discussion) contained in this section is not policy, and does not carry the same degree of importance as the actual policy statements. The narrative is designed to provide background and rationale for the ensuing policy statements. In most instances, the discussion serves to identify a problem or issue, and may present a summary of findings from other source documents, the initial Town Meeting held for the Plan, or input from the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. There is no intent to establish policy within any discussion section, but some clarification as to the intent of the policy statement may be found there. Information presented in the narrative may become outdated and subject to change over time.

The policy statements, on the other hand, must be viewed in a wholly different light. As statements of local government principle, the policies should remain basically constant until the next comprehensive plan update is prepared. Frequent changes to the policies would undermine their effectiveness in achieving the intended objectives. The policies are designed to maintain a consistent and predictable direction for local government decisions affecting local growth and development of the planning area.

## 2.1 THE ECONOMY

Economic Development ▪ Commercial Development ▪ Industrial Development ▪ Agricultural & Rural Development ▪ Downtown

### OVERVIEW

During the past four decades, Boone's economic base has shifted from its traditional industrial and agricultural sectors toward the service sector, represented most strongly by Appalachian State University, Watauga Medical Center and the tourism industry. The county has had lower unemployment levels than the state and the nation for several years, but the occupational choices available locally are dominated by the lower wage portion of the service sector's jobs. So even with the high level of employment and with Watauga County's per capita personal income increasing by 5.6 percent from 2001 to 2003, the low base in 2001 meant that the 2003 per capita income remained below the state or national levels.

### 2.1.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



#### NARRATIVE

##### *Business and Industry Sought*

While there is considerable agreement that the area wants higher paying jobs, most area residents do not favor encouraging any and all forms of economic growth. Rather, they would support different or expanded economic activity only if it increased the opportunity for stable, higher wage jobs and enhanced the quality of life for existing residents. Specifically, area residents have expressed a strong desire that any future economic

development be consistent with maintaining the quality of the area's existing natural resources. In addition, new economic development should seek to provide jobs to those who already live in the Boone area with a preference for those enterprises that would require area workers to upgrade their skills through appropriate training.

##### *Tourism*

The subject of tourism as an economic development industry was a major point of discussion as the 1993 plan was being put together. Fundamentally, there was consideration of the proposition that if the community wishes to increase median incomes in the area, there should be a concerted effort to encourage tourism that generates higher expenditures per tourist visitor. The benefit of such a strategy is that more dollars will be injected into the local economy for the benefit of permanent residents while minimizing the number of visitors generating that economic impact. Ultimately, "wear and tear" on the area's natural environment will be minimized, while the economic benefits of tourist dollars will continue to flow into the community.

At the same time, 1993 Steering Committee members expressed the view that the Boone area should retain its market position in the travel industry as an affordable destination for families and others on a limited budget. This two-pronged strategy will require balanced attention to both market niches, including, for example, a variety of restaurants, accommodations, and attractions offering services at broad price ranges. Regardless of the market niche pursued, the overall image of the community and the amenities offered will be critical factors in further developing a successful tourism industry.

The public comments for the 2006 Plan update affirmed tourism as a necessary part of the local economy. Any economic activity, including tourism, will have to take place within a framework that recognizes our local environment as a major asset that shall be preserved and enhanced as much as possible.

Over the last several years, Boone has increasingly become the retail and service center for an expanding permanent and seasonal population in Watauga and surrounding counties. In 2004, nearly 40 per cent of the Town’s employment was in service sectors: accommodations and food service, retail trade, and arts and entertainment. (Jud, 2005) There is a tourism element in each of these sectors, but retail trade and the food service entities also indicate the Town’s status as a regional economic center.

***Economic Development Initiatives and the Role of Educational Institutions***

The Watauga County Industrial Park located in the Town of Boone is full. Most of the park’s occupants are local, successful businesses that developed and expanded in the Boone area. One or more new business parks or separate sites appropriate for commercial use are needed. Firms that could significantly benefit Boone area residents include those that would help the local labor force develop a significant human capital component with the workers’ increased skills leading directly to higher wages. Recruiting those firms should be an active, ongoing effort of all local governmental and non-governmental organizations with any interest in economic development. The thriving academic environment at Appalachian State University and Caldwell Community College should play an important role by increasing the capabilities of the local labor force as well as any other role that can be devised. At the 1993 Steering Committee meetings, an increased role of these institutions in the overall economic development of the area was discussed. That necessary interrelationship has become even more important in the years since 1993.

**POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

A. *The Town shall protect and enhance a high quality of life, image, cultural amenities, and natural beauty as the most effective, long term component of an economic development strategy.*  
 \*\*\*\*\*

A.1 Continue to evaluate and amend development regulations to help insure aesthetic quality in the area and preserve the natural beauty of the area. \*\*\*\*\*

A.2 Adopt analytically sound, technically based hillside development regulations to preserve natural beauty. \*\*\*\*\*

A.3 Support the Arts Council, Jones House, ASU and others in attracting quality cultural events to Boone.

A.4 Balance the benefits of economic development projects with special concern for environmental quality issues.

*B. New and expanding industries and businesses shall be encouraged which: 1) diversify the local economy, 2) train and use a skilled labor force and 3) increase area residents' incomes.*

*C. The Town shall encourage the development of a well-balanced tourism trade as a primary element of the area's economic future. Investments in services, facilities, and proper growth management shall be employed in furtherance of this objective.*

*D. Economic development efforts shall encourage the revitalization and reuse of currently unused or underutilized structures, sites and infrastructure in appropriately located areas.*

D.1 Evaluate development regulations for amendments providing flexibility in the renovation and redevelopment of existing structures and sites.

D.2 Urge the resolution of the clean up process of the 482 State Farm Road site so as to render the building suitable for use as soon as possible.

D.3 Pursue annually at least one joint public-private venture that will benefit the community at large.

*E. The Town shall encourage a public service and regulatory environment conducive to business recruitment and expansion, while at the same time enhancing the area's physical and human resources.*

E.1 Continue to look for ways to make development regulations and permit procedures more predictable and timely. Evaluate opportunities for administrative review and permit issuance for development projects which, due to their small size or relatively minor impacts, may not require review by a formal public commission or board.

*F. New firms and expanding businesses that complement the natural resources and beauty of the region shall be especially recruited and encouraged.*

*G. The Town shall support the development of new business parks.*

G.1 Identify suitable property for possible business park development.

*H. The Town shall promote coordination of economic development resources with the appropriate institutions and agencies. Regional coordination and interaction among areas with a shared economic interest shall be encouraged.*

H.1 Assist business recruitment and expansion efforts by providing demographic and market data and development information to potential developers and business prospects. Direct such interested parties, by referral through the Economic Development Director, to identified locations in the community.

H.2 Include economic development as a specific point of discussion by the recently created Community Council.

H.3 Continue to support the Economic Development Commission as the lead economic development agency in the county. Continue to support and work with the Committee of 100, Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Development Authority, High Country Host, Broyhill

Institute for Business Development, High Country Council of Governments, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, JobLink and others on issues of economic benefit to the whole community.

*I. Small business start-ups, expansions and spin-offs shall be encouraged. The presence of ASU and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute shall be recognized as a necessary and important resource for area businesses.*

*J. Appropriate educational and training programs shall be encouraged to help local residents, especially those unemployed and underemployed, take advantage of business expansion and to develop new skills.*

J.1 Encourage the growth of a student internship program between area businesses, ASU and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute as a means of providing training for Boone area citizens.

J.2 Actively pursue workforce training through ASU and Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute to meet existing needs of current employers and make efforts to develop the skills necessary for higher paying jobs.

J.3 Support careers education programs in the public schools.

*K. Boone shall identify and provide services consistent with the needs of the area's growing retiree population.*

K.1 Support local agencies and institutions efforts in the development of programs and services providing for the needs of the growing retiree population.

## 2.1.2 COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT (ALL SERVICES INCLUDING RENTAL HOUSING)



### NARRATIVE

Town planners and elected officials have traditionally viewed new commercial development as one of the most challenging land uses with which to deal. This is certainly no less true in Boone, where citizen comments at the 1993 Town Meeting reflected a strong distaste for a continuation of the commercial development patterns that had prevailed in Boone over the past decade or more. However, as discussed in the “Community Appearance” section of this plan, Boone

has made significant progress since 1980 in mitigating the negative aspects of commercial development by implementing guidelines for signs, landscaping, buffers, and grading activities.

Over the last decade, Boone’s economic role as a regional service center has become more dominant. Appalachian State University has increased its enrollment and, concurrently, the number of employees. Watauga Medical Center has grown and is continuing to install new outpatient services.

To deal with the commercial encroachment issue, it is necessary to think of commercial uses in two decidedly different categories: (1) large scale, automobile-oriented commercial uses and, (2) small scale, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood businesses. Each type of use, when properly designed and located, can contribute positively to the livability of the Town. General recommendations follow for these two different types of commercial development:

### **Automobile-Oriented Commercial Uses**

*Limit large scale commercial uses to the intersections of major streets.*

So long as traffic circulation and access receive careful attention, very large scale commercial uses work best at the intersections of major streets. Large scale shopping centers, office complexes, manufacturing uses, and other large institutions are major traffic generators, usually drawing considerable amounts of cross-town traffic. By locating such uses at major intersections, motorists will find it more convenient to stay on major thoroughfares to get to these uses, rather than cutting through narrower, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood streets.

*Pull buildings up to the thoroughfare and place parking to the interior or rear of site.*

As noted by residents attending the Town Meeting for this Plan, some of Boone’s major thoroughfares suffer in appearance from the sea of asphalt located to either side of the roadway. Parking lots dominate the street scene. As a result, commercial businesses have traditionally built large, colorful (i.e. garish), pole-mounted signs as a substitute for the lack of business visibility at the street interface. By pulling commercial buildings up to the street, a sense of street enclosure is created and commercial signs can be incorporated into the design of the building

itself. The ideal situation would be to arrange large scale commercial buildings in a manner which would enclose a parking courtyard to the interior of an encircling building complex.

*Strive for all-around architecture.*

Commercial architects and developers have demonstrated an ability to create commercial buildings which are equally presentable on all sides (e.g. consider the modern day Mall, absent the sea of parking and monolithic scale). This all around architecture should be encouraged, especially where a large scale commercial use abuts a less intensive land use. By providing for all around architecture, the commercial use presents a more attractive appearance from all sides. It also affords the possibility that residents of adjacent areas will be able to approach the place of employment, shopping or service from the interior of the superblock (traditionally the back side of buildings) thereby capturing customers while reducing demand for parking.

*Buffer large scale land uses from adjacent residential areas, but make such uses accessible from the neighborhood.*

Large scale commercial developments are often “buffered” from adjacent residential areas by use of a substantial fence, a wall, a planted buffer strip or by some combination of the three. The purpose of this fence or strip is to effect a total separation of the use from the adjacent residential area. The objective is to completely isolate the commercial use from the residential area visually and functionally. As a result, people living within walking distance cannot walk or bike to the commercial use. Instead, they must use their cars to drive out onto the thoroughfare to reach a place of employment or shopping which may be only a few hundred feet from their home. This plan recommends two ways to accommodate large scale commercial developments so that nearby residential areas are protected, while allowing potential workers and shopper from these neighborhoods to walk, bike or drive to the major use:

*First Method: Provide natural buffers, fences, and walls but penetrate them with pedestrian accessways.*

When plant material, fences, or walls are created or preserved as buffer strips, they should include pedestrian and bicycle paths which penetrate the buffer from the adjacent residential area.

*Second Method: Use small scale buildings as a buffer.*

Even better, a row of residentially scaled and designed commercial buildings may be positioned as a land use and building buffer between the large scale use and the residences to the interior of the superblock. These buildings should be designed to blend easily with the scale and style of adjacent homes.

*Provide for public transit stops and convenience clusters.*

Public transit stops for buses and taxis should be an integral part of the design of large scale commercial uses from the outset. Each stop should be outfitted as a convenience cluster including, for example, a bus shelter, shade trees, benches, drinking fountains, and newspaper racks.

*Limit driveway access to major thoroughfares and connect adjacent parking lots.*

The problems created by numerous driveways entering a major thoroughfare are obvious. Certainly, the traffic circulation and street design of new major commercial developments should provide for a minimum of driveway cuts. In many situations, it may be necessary to give new commercial developments access only to local streets or parallel service streets, from which access to the thoroughfare may be gained. In addition, adjacent developments should be required to connect their off-street parking lots so as to encourage movement between uses without entering the thoroughfare. These parking lot connections could be made a condition for both new construction and redevelopment.

*Encourage a diversity of mixed uses in large scale commercial developments.*

The separation of land and buildings uses into single purpose office parks, shopping centers, light industrial parks, etc. contributes to unnecessary automobile traffic between uses. This can be no more evident than during the typical lunch hour when workers in isolated employment complexes must get into their cars to get to a restaurant or do mid-day shopping errands. As a result, many communities (including Boone) now have three rush hours during a typical day, instead of two-morning, evening and mid-day. Small assembly operations, offices, retail shops, personal services, restaurants, post offices, and other uses should therefore be encouraged to located in mixed use developments whenever possible.

**Small Scale, Pedestrian-Oriented Neighborhood Businesses**

Note: Small scale pedestrian oriented businesses are distinguished from other types of commercial uses by their location, market area, and physical design. They are located away from the cross town motoring public, have a market area limited to a neighborhood area, and are designed at a residential scale and style of architecture. Unlike large scale, automobile-oriented commercial developments, neighborhood businesses require a compact neighborhood to bring a large number of households within walking or biking distance of the business.

*Integrate small scale pedestrian oriented shopping and work places into the design of new neighborhoods.*

Future neighborhoods should provide the opportunity for at least some residents to work and/or conduct certain shopping errands within their greater neighborhood area. These residents should be able to walk or bike to their place of work. Similarly, small scale retail and service establishments should be carefully designed into neighborhood “superblock” (typically an area of more than one neighborhood, bounded on all sides by major thoroughfares or confining natural features) to allow some shopping trips to occur without getting out onto the major thoroughfare. Such service establishments should be housed in buildings which have a residential character and scale, and might include, for example, a neighborhood grocery store, walk up bank teller machine, automated post office, etc. While this will not reduce entirely the need for shopping and employment outside the neighborhood, it will nonetheless play a major role in reducing overall traffic on major collector streets.

*Locate neighborhood businesses away from major thoroughfares.*

It is important that neighborhood businesses not be convenient to the cross-town motoring public. Their location on the interior of the superblock, accessible only by relatively narrow neighborhood streets, will discourage their use by those who do not live within the superblock.

One important exception to this rule is when a small scale, mixed use businesses are employed as a buffer between a large scale, automobile-oriented development and nearby residences.

*Design at a residential scale and character.*

The height, width, setback, building materials, roof pitch, etc. of neighborhood businesses should be consistent with the scale and character of the residential area they serve. The square footage of these structures should also be limited so as to further discourage high volume, out of neighborhood business. The building in which the business is house should be viewed as an interesting architectural asset to the neighborhood, rather than the typical visual blight associated with, for example, a modern day convenience store.

*Coordinate their location with transit stops and bikeways.*

Neighborhood businesses and small places of work should be located so as to reinforce and support the transit system and bikeway system. The sidewalk in front of a small scale neighborhood store, for example, is a natural location for a bus stop. The bus rider can purchase a newspaper, a loaf of bread, a quart of milk, or whatever other incidental item they may need to pick up on their way home. Bicyclists may find such stores convenient places to stop for a cold drink or a snack. Further, by locating the transit stop close to small places of work, more people will be induced to ride the bus rather than drive their car.

*Use on-street parking in coordination with a limited amount of off-street parking.*

On-street parking can be highly effective in meeting the parking needs of small, pedestrian-oriented stores and businesses. By limiting the amount of off-street parking, the store or place of business is made less convenient to cross-town motorists, but no less accessible to the neighborhood resident on foot or bicycle. At the same time, the neighborhood business will be more compatible with the residential character of the area.

*Permit only residentially scaled signs and lighting.*

An identification sign for the place of business can be relatively small and unobtrusive, since the store will not be designed or marketed to grab attention of the motoring public. Rather, the store's business will come from those who live within the neighborhood superblock and are already aware of its convenience. Likewise, exterior lighting need be no greater than the kind of security lighting a resident might install on the corners of a house.

*Consider the inclusion of buildings for neighborhood services as upfront, vertical infrastructure cost of new development.*

This recommendation is directed at the private sector developer and home buyer. Neighborhood services within walking and biking distance should be just as essential to the livability of a neighborhood as water and sewer lines. In our present day, developers and homeowners associations oftentimes underwrite the costs of pools, tennis courts, club houses, etc. as a necessary first cost of development. In the real estate development business, a clubhouse would be referred to as vertical infrastructure, while a sewer line would be part of the development's horizontal infrastructure. This same kind of thinking should apply to the first costs of building space for neighborhood services, if necessary. Under this arrangement, the homeowners association could then lease the structure out at a rent that the market and the economics of the store will bear. The neighborhood corner store manager would basically operate as a

concessionaire, subject to the reasonable standards of the neighborhood association. In light of the rapidly expanding ranks of Watauga County’s senior citizen population, it is conceivable that one or more resident retirees would welcome the social and economic benefits of “running the neighborhood store”.

*Consider automated neighborhood services.*

Beyond the locally operated neighborhood store, numerous other possibilities are emerging to provide convenient neighborhood services. New technologies are allowing walk-up post offices, automated bank teller machines, and milk “mini-depots”, for example, to be made readily available at the pedestrian-oriented, neighborhood scale. These other types of services can be operated with very little human supervision and overhead.

*Place neighborhood services near public amenities, when opportunity allows.*

The small corner store/transit stop is a logical location-mate for a public park, elementary school, etc. By aggregating several diverse but small-scaled uses into a single location, a convenient service center and natural neighborhood focal point is created for superblock residents. Experience has also shown that public parks which are under the causal observation of nearby business owners have fewer vandalism problems and incidents of childhood mischief.

*Encourage apartments over small retail shops and/or offices.*

Another effective way to exercise control over the use and activity of a neighborhood service business, is to provide for residential apartments in the floors overhead. Such apartments provide for around-the-clock surveillance, and help assure that any neighborhood business is maintained at a level which is compatible with the neighborhood. Such apartments, by the way, convenient to a public park, neighborhood services, a transit stop, bikeway, and away from major thoroughfares present a highly desirable residence for someone who does not own (or chooses not to own) an automobile. Such units are also affordable, due in part, to the absence of land and infrastructure costs.

**POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. Uncontrolled strip development along the area’s through streets shall be prohibited. The undesirable effects of existing strip development shall be reduced and/or reconfigured when redevelopment opportunities permit. New strip development on isolated single lots along through streets shall be discouraged. \*\*\*\*\**

A.1 Review and revise the Town’s driveway and parking standards to minimize driveway cuts and require that adjacent parking lots be connected.

*B. Commercial and Office Development shall be encouraged to locate in planned shopping centers, office parks and mixed use developments to stop the proliferation of strip development.*

B.1 Review the Town’s zoning text and map with the objective of reducing the negative impacts of typical commercial strip development.

*C. Community/Commercial Centers shall be located adjacent to a major street and contain or be adjacent to other appropriate community facilities.*

*D. Automobile Orientated Neighborhood and Convenience Commercial Centers shall be encouraged to locate on a collector street or secondary street at its intersection with a major street.*

*E. Residentially scaled and designed neighborhood businesses may be a planned element of newly developed or redeveloped neighborhoods. They should be near other compatible facilities such as elementary schools and neighborhood parks.*

*F. Commercial uses may be encouraged to develop by consolidation and expansion of existing commercially zoned property, only when such consolidation and expansion does not encroach upon a viable residential area.*

*G. Effective buffering and/or landscaping shall be provided where a large scale or automobile-orientated commercial or office use adjoins an existing or planned residential use.*

*H. Encroachment of incompatibly scaled and designed commercial or office uses into viable existing or planned residential areas shall be prohibited.*

H.1 Amend the zoning map to provide appropriate commercial zoning in transitional areas that do not encroach upon established residential neighborhoods.

*I. Office and institutional development may be encouraged as a transitional land use between residential areas and higher intensity commercial activities.*

*J. Highway Oriented Commercial uses shall be clustered along segments of major streets and contain land uses which are mutually compatible and reinforcing in use and design. Businesses shall be encouraged to coordinate their site designs with other nearby businesses. Design factors shall include, at a minimum, shared parking and street access, convenient pedestrian and vehicular movement, and consistent sign standards.*

J.1 Beyond the major corridor area consider the development of architectural design standards for commercial development throughout the Town's planning area. \*\*\*\*\*

J.2 Consider supplementing the highway corridor overlay district in the zoning ordinance to encourage commercial development to include: 1) attractive signage, and 2) build-to lines with parking in the rear.

### 2.1.3 INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT (MANUFACTURING SECTOR)



#### **NARRATIVE**

Until Highway 421 was widened in the early 2000's, Boone's recruitment of commercial firms was hampered by the community's location away from major interstate highways, rail service, and commercial air facilities. In Boone the demand for land itself must be considered because the demand for residential and service land uses has made property acquisition for any large scale commercial purpose increasingly difficult.

During the initial town meeting for the 1993 Comprehensive Plan, the need for additional future manufacturing presence drew moderate support from area residents, provided that such industrial development was "appropriate" for Boone. It is apparent that Boone residents favor the economic growth that would occur as a result of new commercial enterprises that would be classified as manufacturing, fabrication, or distribution, but local citizens are not willing to accept any commercial activity that would compromise the long term environmental quality of the area.

#### ***Criteria for Industry Location***

Warehousing, storage and distribution facilities are an essential component of most industrial operations and are accommodated within areas planned for both heavy and light industry. In recent years, however, many new forms of warehousing, storage and distribution facilities have emerged in the development marketplace. Mini-warehouses, for example, have become common features in nearly all communities today. When these new warehousing facilities occur along major thoroughfares in a community, it is important that they are properly landscaped and buffered so as not to detract from the overall image of the area.

Light industries may be located within the urban area providing that the processes involved do not adversely impact the environment or neighboring properties. Because light industries generally do not require large land areas, they can more easily be integrated into existing areas of available services thus reducing public costs and minimizing home to work distances. When properly designed and sited, light industries can be compatible with adjacent residential and commercial uses.

Heavy industries, on the other hand, may not be located within the urban area due to their large land area requirements and potential to create adverse impacts on the environment and neighboring property owners. Public support for the complete prohibition of heavy industries in Boone has been voiced from the initial meetings of the Steering Committee and was again emphasized by the public during the Planning Commission's 2005 evaluation.

**POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. The Town shall encourage a public service and regulatory environment conducive to light industrial development, provided that long term environmental quality considerations shall not be compromised.*

- A.1 Support consideration of new, environmentally friendly, light industries.
- A.2 Assist recruitment of light industries by providing demographic and market area data, and development information to potential developers and business prospects. Direct such prospects, by referral through the Economic Development Director, to existing and planned business parks and sites.
- A.3 Encourage low impact businesses that provide high paying jobs for the local population.

*B. Industrial development shall be located on land which is physically suitable and has unique locational advantages for industry. Advanced planning for the identification of such land shall be encouraged.*

- B.1 Review the town’s zoning maps so as to determine the appropriate location of existing and future light industries.

*C. Industrial development shall not be located in areas which would diminish the desirability of existing and planned non-industrial uses, not shall non-industrial uses be allowed to encroach upon existing or planned industrial sites.*

*D. Heavy industrial uses shall not be permitted within the zoning jurisdiction of the Town of Boone. \*\*\*\*\**

*E. Light industrial uses may be located in or near existing built up areas to take advantage of available services and to minimize home to work distances. Careful design and or buffering may be required to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas.*

- E.1 Through the development review process, ensure that warehouses, storage and distribution facilities provide adequate buffering and landscaping along highly visible major streets.

*F. Warehousing, storage and distribution facilities shall have a direct access to appropriate thoroughfares, and shall be visually buffered according to their location.*

*G. New industrial developments shall be encouraged to locate in planned industrial parks.*

## 2.1.4 AGRICULTURAL & RURAL DEVELOPMENT



### NARRATIVE

Statistics nationwide reveal a continuing decline in agriculture as a percentage of national employment. The Boone area is no exception, even with recent increase in Christmas tree farms and related operations. While the amount of acreage and crop land may fluctuate from year to year, the overall trend toward a declining agricultural base is clear.

Despite these overall trends, the more rural and agricultural areas of the planning area hold special values to different groups of people. For farmers, the preservation of agricultural land can mean the preservation of a livelihood. The active production of farm land also contributes to the economy of Watauga County, the State of North Carolina and the nation. For urban dwellers, the preservation of farm land can mean the protection of open space and the provision of visual relief from the more intense development patters of the town. In any event, agricultural and rural lands are becoming increasingly recognized for the multiple values they hold.

It has been said that the best way to preserve the countryside is to make better cities. Land development policies which encourage a more compact urban growth pattern have the dual benefit of conserving agricultural and rural land areas. On the other hand, the provision of suburban infrastructure, such as public water and sewer, and new or improved radial highways, tend to promote growth in the urban “hinterland”. Given these constraints, area residents who participated in the town meeting for the initial Comprehensive Plan expressed their concern that the rural character of the greater Boone area be protected if at all possible. Those concerns were echoed during the 2005 Comprehensive Plan update. Fortunately for Boone, much of the land areas designated as Rural Growth Areas are protected from high density urban level development by the water supply watershed regulations.

### POLICIES AND ACTIONS

*A. Farms and woodlands shall be recognized as an integral part of the planning area’s open space system. \*\*\*\*\**

A.1 Farms and woodland open spaces shall be conserved through a comprehensive rural area conservation strategy, to include rural area density standards, tax incentives, conservation easements, and other means. These areas should be considered in the planning for pedestrian ways, bikeways, greenways, and other open space needs. \*\*\*\*\*

*B. Agriculture, forestry and low density residential activities shall be the preferred land uses in the Rural Area, as identified on the Growth Strategy Map. Urban level development shall not be encouraged in the Rural Area.*

B.1 Employ the Town’s water and sewer extension policies to encourage a compact

development pattern.

B.2 Contain new urban area development within the designated Urban Services Area on the Growth Strategy Map.

B.3 Investigate expansion of the Town's jurisdiction as a means to provide proactive planning in areas likely to request voluntary annexation.

*C. Rural Area lands having a high productive potential shall be conserved, to the extent possible, for appropriate agricultural use.*

C.1 The merits, costs and benefits of radial road improvements leading out of the heart of Boone shall be carefully evaluated, relative to improvements to in-town alternative transportation systems.

C.2 Lands having a high productive potential shall be designated as such and Rural Area zoning applied.

C.3 Establish town support for local farm to local market initiatives with Agricultural Extension and ASU Department of Sustainable Development.

## 2.1.5 DOWNTOWN



### NARRATIVE

Residents attending the town meeting for the initial Comprehensive Plan expressed a strong desire that the traditional rural and small town, high country atmosphere of Boone be retained. Further, it was recognized that Boone's downtown represents, in large measure, the last vestiges of the town's original character. The Town has enacted a number of zoning ordinance text amendments which have as their objective the preservation and improvement of downtown's prevailing

character, building setbacks, street yard environs, and landscape standards. Nonetheless, there remains a clear need for the preparation of a downtown improvement plan to establish a specific design intent for the physical quality, visual image, and function of the downtown area. Therefore, the policies and implementation actions set forth in this document can and should affirm the need for such a plan.

### *Downtown Improvement Plan*

While the details of such a downtown improvement plan are beyond the scope of this document, there are several general suggestions that can be made:

- A citizen's steering committee, comprised of downtown area merchants, property owners, university officials, town officials, and nearby residents should have a central role in preparing the plan.
- The overall design theme for the downtown should be consistent with the dominant character of the original buildings in the area. It should establish an attractive appearance for visitors and residents, yet be flexible enough to allow for affordable design solutions. The town should create and reinforce an architectural style consistent with the original high country, small town flavor of Boone. It may be necessary to examine photographs of the downtown as it existed before the growth boom of the 1970's and 80's to get a clearer idea of some design themes. These themes can then be developed to tastefully expand and enhance their effect.
- Downtown area landscape plantings, walks, public lighting, site furnishings, and signage should create a year-round, coherent and generally historic atmosphere. Appropriate shrubs and trees indigenous to the high country area should be employed in all streetscape plantings.
- Building architecture should be consistent with Boone's regional context in using indigenous materials whenever possible. Such materials could include, for example, stone, brick and wood, as opposed to glass, plastic or other highly reflective finishes.

- Any side of a building facing a street should receive architectural treatment consistent with a pedestrian orientation. Windows and doors should be employed to provide architectural interest, while large uninterrupted blank walls or glass areas should be avoided.
- The master plan for the downtown should include, at a minimum, the following elements:
  - An idealized land use pattern including the placement, size, and use of buildings and land, traffic flow, parking areas, and pedestrian movements.
  - Design guidelines that specifically address desired architectural and landscape details.
  - Creation of incentives for public and private downtown revitalization efforts.

### ***Parking***

In July 1991 the Town entered into an agreement with the McLaurin Parking Company to provide parking management services in the downtown area. This arrangement is reportedly working well, but will require continual monitoring and adjustments as conditions change. Careful coordination between the Town and ASU is necessary to address the long term parking needs and traffic problems of the central area of the community. The feasibility of perimeter parking lots or parking garages (located to the interior of the block) should be investigated. The demolition of buildings in Boone's downtown core should be avoided at all cost, and if such demolition does become necessary, any buildings destroyed should be replaced with another building, rather than parking. To insert parking in place of an attractive building would only serve to destroy the pedestrian-oriented cohesiveness of the downtown area.

### ***A Variety of Activities***

Finally, the continuation of a variety of activities should be encouraged in the downtown, including retail sales, services, dining, entertainment, residential, government, education, finance, recreation, and public open spaces. It is important for the economic health of the downtown that it not be given over to one use more than another. For example, if the downtown were to become too heavily dominated by offices, the night life and natural pedestrian security of the area after dark would decline. If the downtown were to become completely tourist oriented, the usefulness of the area to ASU students would be eliminated. Or, if the University were to expand its educational facilities into the downtown proper, thereby eroding the present critical mass of businesses there, the downtown could cease to function as a viable commercial district.

### ***Residential Uses Downtown***

The downtown is a logical area for higher density residential development: close to town services, bus lines, entertainment, and other urban services. In many instances, where residential development can be established over ground floor commercial uses, there are no land costs involved, thereby contributing to the affordability of these units. Further, the more pedestrian oriented the downtown area and the more residential areas convenient to the downtown area, the less traffic and parking demand will be generated by automobiles in the area.

***Bus and Bicycle Needs***

In keeping with the pedestrian-oriented character of the downtown, no other part of Boone should receive a higher priority for mass transit service and secure places for bicycle parking.

**POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. A compatible design character for the downtown area, drawing upon the locality's original High Country small town features, shall be identified, reinforced and supported to put forth a quality image and sense of place. \*\*\*\*\**

- A.1 Prepare an overall landscape strategy for the public right-of-way in coordination with private sector landscape treatments, e.g. street trees, planter boxes, planting beds.\*\*\*
- A.2 Evaluate the adequacy and appearance of street lighting as it currently exists, making recommendations for further improvements and avoid excessive delays by proceeding to provide and/or correct.
- A.3 Evaluate the need for additional street amenities such as benches, trash receptacles, and directory signs.
- A.4 Establish specific architectural and design standards for downtown consistent with its location, setting, and various functions.
- A.5 Support the efforts of the Kraut Creek Committee and other similar

*B. The Town, in concert with the downtown property owners and merchants, shall encourage public and private efforts to develop and publicize adequate and appropriately designed off-street parking lots in the downtown area.*

- B.1 Develop a plan and establish a timetable for the construction of off-street public parking facilities including well designed parking decks (decks other than traditional concrete boxes).

*C. A variety of mutually compatible and supportive mixed uses shall be encouraged in the downtown area.*

- C.1 Examine zoning ordinances and revise as necessary to encourage construction of buildings with residences over ground-floor businesses.
- C.2 Develop strategies that will assist in providing a diversity of commercial and service businesses more reflective of the town's economic and demographic profile.

*D. Public and private developments shall be encouraged to incorporate local artistry into public and semi-public spaces downtown.*

- D.1 Consider the placement of public art (including murals and statuary) at appropriate locations in the downtown area.
- D.2 Support the development and enhancement of cultural facilities, e.g. art and antique galleries.

*E. Public and private development decisions in the downtown area shall exhibit a special concern for maintaining the intensive, pedestrian oriented character of the district.*

- E.1 Evaluate the need for additional sidewalks and crosswalks and make physical improvements to existing sidewalks and crosswalks in the downtown area. \*\*\*
- E.2 Evaluate the needs of bicyclists and take appropriate action regarding bicycle travel and

storage needs in the downtown area. \*\*\*

E.3 Incorporate transit stops into the downtown area for the convenience of the bus riders.

E.4 Planned improvements shall emphasize needs of the pedestrian.

*F. The maintenance and revitalization of downtown Boone, as well as planning for its future development, will reflect the realities and qualities befitting its geographical setting and function as a center of (1) commercial and service activities, (2) educational and cultural activities, events and (3) public services.*

F.1 Support events throughout the year that promote the downtown area as the cultural center of Boone.

F.2 Continue to support the efforts of the Downtown Boone Development Association, the North Carolina Main Street Program and the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce.

F.3 Encourage private investment and seek public funding opportunities for downtown revitalization projects.

F.4 Given the proximity of Appalachian State University to downtown, engage the University in both planning and implementation actions.

## 2.2 INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation ▪ Utilities ▪ Parks, Recreation & Open Space ▪ Public Safety ▪ Environmental Quality

### OVERVIEW

Public goods are those facilities and services that are available to Boone citizens and visitors alike. The Town must work in cooperation with other governmental agencies and utility service providers to ensure that the public is well served.

### 2.2.1 TRANSPORTATION



### NARRATIVE

Transportation issues were important to area residents attending the initial town meeting for the Comprehensive Plan. Boone's geographic position in a relatively narrow, elevated valley floor creates physical limitations for new road construction. Rivers and creeks further dissect the landscape, making roadways costly to build and maintain. Even so, Boone has historically been a cross-roads community for the region, with a number of roads converging on this small town.

Furthermore, topographic constraints limit the ability of town planners to design a thoroughfare system based on parallel or systematic north-south and east-west traffic corridors. As a result, the few main travel corridors in the area are strained to their limit, particularly during peak tourist periods.

Despite these difficulties, there are several factors working in Boone's favor to offset these transportation problems. First, Boone is fortunate to have such a large student population. With proper attention to the placement of services and other activities, student populations can generate far fewer trips per housing unit than would be generated by a usual non-student population. Second, Boone's relatively small geographic size and compact development form can lend itself to alternative types of transportation that the automobile.

#### *Implementation of Transportation Improvements*

Improvements to U.S. highways converging in Boone makes the need for improving the traffic pattern in downtown ever more essential. The projects requiring immediate attention are:

#### *King Street Widening*

This project is a critical and long overdue improvement to US 421. Serving both as an east-west corridor for through traffic and as a facility serving local traffic needs to Appalachian State University and downtown Boone, this roadway has been experiencing heavy traffic congestion that will only increase. Based upon the Purpose and Need Study prepared by the Statewide Planning Branch in July of 2003, the portion of Highway 421 east of Hardin Street currently

does not provide an acceptable level of service. Further, if no improvements are made, traffic projections for this section of East King Street will continue to exceed the design capacity in the design year 2030. Now listed the State of North Carolina Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as project U-4020, it is imperative to the Town of Boone that this project be given top priority in order to improve the mobility, connectivity, and safety problems that currently exist along this segment of US 421. Construction of TIP Project U-2703, locally known as the Daniel Boone Parkway, will NOT alleviate this capacity problem in the future.

#### *The US 421 Bypass*

The construction of the US 421 Bypass has been researched and discussed for thirty years by the Town of Boone and the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT).

**Boone's Thoroughfare Plan** (1991) first affirmed the need for the bypass. Now listed in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) as project U-2703, this project is necessary to reduce the current mixed use of US 421 by through and local traffic, improve connectivity between US 421 and US 321/221 and NC 105, and to improve the traffic flow and safety of the traveling public. At this time, Statewide Planning has developed and selected four alternative corridors for further study. The Town continues to place a very high priority on this project and looks forward to seeing this project fully funded.

#### *In-Town Road Widenings: Two Perspectives*

Support for road widenings is understandable, given the very few opportunities for new roads in the area, and the relatively modest funding that the area receives from the state, compared to larger urban areas. At least two perspectives should be considered concerning the merits of widening the various major thoroughfares (421, 321, etc.) leading from the urban fringe through the developed areas of Boone. One perspective holds that such widenings may have certain negative impacts on the character and quality of life in a small town that can outweigh their benefit in temporarily relieving "the traffic problem". The other holds that such widenings are an economic necessity, allowing persons from outside the Boone area safer and more convenient access to major service facilities in town, while also serving a legitimate commuting need for suburban residents. Road widenings have a powerful influence on a community, which needs to be fully understood in the context of a long range plan for Boone. Each perspective warrants consideration and is discussed in greater detail as follows:

Perspective 1: The negative impacts of road widenings through the developed areas of the community may outweigh the objective of moving traffic more quickly.

*Summary: Improvements to and widening of major streets through the older, developed parts of the community have historically benefited suburban areas to the detriment of the urban center. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the widening of such in-town roads does not improve access to the downtown (the downtown can be accessed in a number of ways that are far less destructive than the automobile); rather, such widenings simply make suburban raw land and developments more accessible and attractive to the home buyer compared to in-town neighborhoods or other close-in developments.*

Such widenings, which on their face appear to be simply a logical response to existing travel demand, actually subsidize suburban development to the detriment of in-town neighborhoods.

Within a short period of time after the road is widened and access to the suburban area is improved, new developments seize the opportunity and the resulting new trips generated flood the newly widened road. Before long, the vicious circle between wider roads, more lanes, and more traffic leads to demand for an even wider road with still more lanes of traffic. Several major problems are then created when these growing numbers of suburban-based automobiles reach the urban center of their daily commute:

- They severely congest older, narrower, in-town streets.
- They cause traffic to spill over into residential neighborhoods streets.
- They create an insatiable demand for parking wherever they go, (which can be several different places).
- They create pressures to redesign in-town streets for traffic volumes they were never intended to accommodate; in doing so they can destroy the historic character, function, and livability of in-town commercial districts and residential neighborhoods.

If the demand for new automobile dependent, suburban neighborhoods spawned by these road subsidies were instead channeled into neighborhoods coordinated with transit and bikeway planning, the rate of increase in congestion on the town's streets could be dramatically reduced.

Perspective 2: Road widenings through town are essential to the economic prosperity of Boone.

*Summary: The town's major streets through town need to be widened and improved because of the unique character of the local economy. Boone continues to develop as a major regional service center and tourist destination point. The three largest employers, Appalachian State University, Watauga Medical Center and tourism, generate an exceptionally large number of cars traveling in and out of Boone.*

### **ASU**

The current ASU enrollment of approximately 14,500 students is roughly one-third of Watauga County's total population of 42,500. Approximately 2,000 faculty and staff are employed by the University. Students, faculty and staff commuting to and from classes or work, or traveling home for the weekend, combined with visiting alumni, parents and others attending sports, art, music and other events all add to the traffic volume on Boone's substandard 2-lane access roads.

### **Watauga Medical Center**

As one of the area's largest employers, Watauga Medical Center is recognized as a regional facility, drawing patients from neighboring counties as well as Tennessee. Beyond traditional hospital patient care services, the Center includes an outpatient kidney dialysis center, regional cancer treatment center, advanced birthing facilities, and clinical programs such as the Sanger Heart program. The "doctor's park" area adjacent to the Medical Center continues to expand, offering services ranging from general practitioners to a variety of specialists.

### **Tourism**

Although visitors come to Boone for a variety of reasons, a major focus of the High Country Host promotional effort over the past twelve or fifteen years has been to attract people living within 100 miles of the High Country to come here for weekend or several day visits. This focus

has been highly successful. These “short-stay” visitors, along with other vacationers, fill the motels and restaurants, visit the attractions, and contribute to the traffic count.

**Points of agreement between the two perspectives:**

Despite the varying perspectives of these two views, there are points of agreement that warrant mentioning:

1. Both views agree that road improvements leading between Boone and other urban centers, airports and facilities are positive and should be supported.  
Thus, inter-city road improvements, those leading from the edge of Boone’s urban area to another city or major facility, are universally supported.
2. Both views agree that there is a need for alternative solutions to the transportation problem. Some solutions involve finding better ways to move people and goods. Others require changing the way in which neighborhoods and developments are laid out to reduce travel demand and traffic congestion on major streets. Some of these solutions are outlined below.

***The University***

First, the University area and its immediate surroundings, should be developed (or redeveloped over time) with a wide range of business and personal service activities. The University and the nearby downtown area should continue to provide a broad range of shopping, personal service, entertainment, dining, banking and other activities-all within close proximity to the student population.

***Transit Sensitive Development***

Second, the AppalCART system is a major asset for the community and presents one of the best long term strategies to minimize further traffic congestion in the town. The key to this long-term strategy, however, will not be to simply extend bus routes to serve larger geographic parts of the community; rather, future development patterns should be located and designed explicitly for bus service. In some urban areas, this concept of coordination new development with transit services is known as “joint development” or the creation of “pedestrian pockets”. Major traffic generators and attractors should be designed (or as the case may be, redesigned) to incorporate convenience clusters for users of the bus system. Such convenience clusters might include heated or weatherized shelters, and service placed in concert with the major bus stops such as magazine stands, street front convenience stores, and coffee shops.

***Bikeways***

Another attractive long term alternative to the automobile is the Town’s development of a comprehensive bikeway system. Given the area’s heavy student population, Boone is uniquely positioned to develop an outstanding combination bikeway-greenway system. The Town’s adopted “Alternative Transportation Plan” short and long term plans for development of greenways, pedestrian ways, and mass transit. Unlike new road and streets, which may require extensive right-of-way acquisition, building demolition, land clearing, grading, expensive construction, and on-going maintenance, bikeways can be developed with relatively little interruption of the existing urban fabric, and at modest cost. Bikeway planners have become

quite adept, out of necessity, at employing whatever opportunities arise to achieve connected bikeway systems. Bike routes may be any combination of: (1) compatible bike lanes on through streets, (2) paths not on the street but within the street right-of-way, (3) separated off street trails, and (4) effective use of side streets, alleyways, or other available corridors.

Of the four bike route options available, the *effective use of side streets, alleyways and other corridors* is the least expensive. Generally, this can be accomplished simply by intelligent planning in the layout of new neighborhoods. This means that new residential developments should connect their streets with adjacent developments to allow bicyclists to navigate the interior streets of adjoining neighborhoods, without having to travel on major thoroughfares.

The next least expensive alternative is the addition of *compatible bike lanes* on existing and new streets. Normally, a strip of asphalt along the outside lane of the street, identified by appropriate signage, is all that is required.

*Bike paths not on the street but within the street right-of-way* are more expensive because they require the construction of separate paths specifically for bikes. Such paths have their greatest utility along major thoroughfares where traffic volumes are high, the roadway surface dangerously congested, and where there are no alternative routes on the interior of the superblock.

*Separated off street trails* have the advantage of totally removing the bicycle from potential side swipes or other accidents with the automobile. Disadvantage of the off street trail include the tendency for people to view the trail more as a recreational outlet than as a serious transportation mode, and potential lack of proximity of the trail to urban activities along the way. This last concern is of critical importance because bikeways, just like any other form of transportation, must have as their primary objective the linkage of activity centers and facilities. Such activity nodes will include places of work, places of schooling, places of living, and places of gathering. If this objective is not met, the bikeway is reduced to a simple recreational path with limited capacity to help solve the Town's long term transportation problems.

Finally, if the bicycle is to achieve meaningful status as a legitimate transportation alternative, it will be important to provide secure bike storage convenient to all land use activities. At the very least, bike storage should include bicycle racks convenient to the entrances of buildings and other activities.

### ***King and Howard Streets Downtown***

Steering Committee members wished to emphasize their desire to see King Street in downtown Boone retain its present character and design in terms of pedestrian and automobile movement and on-street parking. Under no circumstance should the number of vehicle lanes on King Street downtown be increased to move greater volumes of traffic at the expense of on-street parking or pedestrian movement. Similarly, while proposals to improve the appearance and functionality of Howard Street are well supported, an increase to move greater volumes of traffic at the expense of parking or pedestrian movement would be unacceptable.

***Central Medians***

There is a need to place central medians down the middle of several of the town’s major streets. Specific examples include Rivers Street and Blowing Rock Road. In addition to providing an aesthetic improvement to the roadway corridor, central medians can provide a “safe island” for pedestrians trying to cross these busy streets.

***Pedestrian Crossings***

Another specific recommendation involves the placement of one or more elevated pedestrian crossings over River Street in conjunction with a landscaped central median barrier to effectively eliminate unsafe, at-grade pedestrian crossings.

***Air Travel***

The town’s existing airport in east Boone is severely restricted as to its future growth due to the residential development that virtually surrounds the property. Efforts to investigate the feasibility of a new facility, conducted several years ago, were unsuccessful. Completion of the four-laning of US 321 from Blowing Rock to Lenoir will improve access to and from Hickory Airport which can handle more air traffic and offer connections through major hubs.

***Transportation System Management***

Many of the preceding recommendations in this section have focused on physical improvements to transportation facilities, such as roads, bikeways, pedestrian crossovers, and airports. Increasingly, however, transportation planners are paying greater attention to non-physical improvements that fall into the category of “transportation system management” (TSM). Such items can include, for example, staggered work hours, van pooling, park and ride programs, and limitations on car use during certain times of the day and in certain parts of town. AS stated previously, Boone’s relatively well-educated and informed citizenry may be receptive to actions to implement many of these TSM alternatives. While it is beyond the scope of this plan to investigate the merits and feasibility of such alternatives in Boone, such opportunities should continue to be explored as desirable implementation actions in furtherance of plan objectives.

**POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. Street patterns shall be designed so as to define the limits of the neighborhood, accentuate focal points and interesting vistas, allow convenient circulation within the neighborhood and provide multiple, alternative outlets from the area to adjoining neighborhoods and /or major streets. Particular attention shall be given to avoid designs that provide convenient “cut-through” traffic opportunities. \*\*\*\*\**

A.1 Evaluate design standards for new subdivision streets for possible provisions for street patterns and designs which would accentuate focal points and interesting vistas, allow for convenient circulation within the neighborhood, and provide multiple alternative outlets from the area to adjoining neighborhoods and /or major streets.

*B. Planned systems of pedestrian ways, bikeways, greenways, and similar facilities shall be encouraged as energy efficient and environmentally sound transportation alternatives. Site planning that incorporates secure bicycle storage at places of living, working or schooling, shopping, and gathering shall be required, where appropriate. \*\*\*\*\**

B.1 Encourage and legitimize alternative transportation through the enhanced use of

bikeways, pedestrian ways, and greenways throughout the Town. Link existing bike, pedestrian, and greenways where possible and continue efforts for expansion. \*\*\*\*\*

B.2 Continue to implement sidewalk construction throughout Boone in accordance with the Boone Walkways Long Range Plan (1995 Boone – Blowing Rock Alternative Transportation Plan). Actively pursue available funding opportunities.

B.3 Provide safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian crossings at major intersections and along Highways 321, 421, and 105.

B.4 Explore funding options for alternative transportation projects throughout Town. Options could include a city-wide vehicle registration fee, earmarking property taxes for alternative transportation improvements, and seeking grant funding opportunities from federal, state and private organizations.

*C. The **Boone Thoroughfare Plan** shall be employed to promote a hierarchical, functional road network and to promote the proper arrangement of land patterns by controlling the location of streets and roads.*

C.1 Explore opportunities for major traffic planning initiatives between the Town of Boone and ASU in accordance with Boone's Thoroughfare Plan.

*D. Properly designed major street intersections containing right and left turn bays shall be encouraged where crosswalks and pedestrian traffic do not have first priority.*

D.1 Construct additional turning lanes at intersections where traffic is backed-up during peak traffic times.

*E. Sufficient right-of-way along new roadways and at major intersections shall be acquired to allow future facility expansion.*

E.1 Amend development regulations to require sufficient right-of-way in new developments, according to an overall system plan.

*F. A program of improvements and maintenance to maximize the use of existing streets shall be employed as a cost effective means of meeting area transportation needs, provided that such improvements shall not destroy the livability of a residential or commercial area for the sole purpose of moving greater traffic volumes.*

F.1 Synchronize all traffic signals and coordinate sign locations in the town with priority given to the downtown area.

F.2 Endorse the opening of Howard Street, between Appalachian Street and College Street, in accordance with Boone's Thoroughfare Plan.

F.3 Continue and expand the role of Boone's Transportation Committee, whose responsibility is to recommend priorities and action plans for small scale transportation improvements.

*G. The operational success of the area's mass transit system shall be enhanced through the encouragement of compact, transit sensitive development patterns. Site planning that incorporates transit stops and convenience clusters shall be required, where appropriate.*

G.1 Evaluate and amend site plan standards to include provisions for transit stops, sidewalks and pedestrian ways, bikeways and secure bicycle storage.

- G.2 Construct transit stops with covered passenger shelters to encourage ridership.
- G.3 Construct, where possible, bus stop pull-out areas or lanes to avoid holding up traffic along traffic corridors.

*H. Policies that have the effect of reducing automobile dependency, use and congestion in the heart of the urban area shall be supported.*

- H.1 Prepare educational information concerning the location and use of bikeways, greenways, the bus system, and other forms of transportation as alternatives to the automobile.
- H.2 Work to promote increased coordination of University access concerns within the Alternative Transportation Plan.

*I. Driveway cuts along major streets and roads shall be limited to allow these streets to serve primarily as safe traffic movement corridors or, alternatively, to maximize curb frontage for on-street parking.*

- I.1 Periodically evaluate the Town's driveway regulations to minimize driveway cuts onto area streets.

*J. Private roads serving multiple uses shall be discouraged in new developments, except where public performance standards can be met, and when provisions for continued maintenance are assured.*

*K. The Town shall encourage the development and use of park and ride lots at the edge of town when and where demand warrants.*

- K.1 Plan for park and ride lots on the perimeter of town.

*L. All future road construction within the Town shall be examined for bike and pedestrian feasibility. Wherever possible, compatible bike lanes and pedestrian walkways shall be implemented in conjunction with accompanying road construction.*

- L.1 Facilitate the development of central medians in the town's main roadways to assist in the creation of safe pedestrian crossings.
- L.2 Explore funding options for business, pedestrian, car, and bike friendly conversion of the center turn-lane of the new five-lane Hardin Street so as to enhance the character of the street and promote shared use by cars, businesses, the university, bikes, and pedestrians.
- L.3 Work with NCDOT when planning new roadways or roadway improvements. Stress the importance of bike and pedestrian ways, bike and pedestrian crossings, and landscaping.

*M. Continued improvement and appropriate expansion of regional air facilities shall be encouraged and supported.*

- M.1 Continue to support transportation projects which improve access to regional air facilities.

## 2.2.2 UTILITIES



### **NARRATIVE**

Steering Committee members stressed the importance of addressing the town's immediate needs before looking into other, less pressing recommendations for improvement. Foremost among these fundamental needs is the planned expansion of the Town's water treatment plant.

### ***Water and Sewer Improvements***

As of 1998, the Jimmy Smith Waste Water Treatment Plant had a design capacity of 4.82 million gallons of waste water per day and was treating an average 2.48 million gallons per day, designed with wet weather max flow reaching 12.05 million gallons per day. Boone's Public Utilities Department estimates that the plant will reach full capacity by about 2017. Boone's Public Utilities Department shall still provide considerable efforts to eliminate inflow and infiltration (unplanned leakage) from entering into the wastewater system. The long range plan for the wastewater facility calls for a future expansion through retrofitting in 2017. The plant was designed for a 20 year use. Total cost for retrofitting at the Jimmy Smith Waste Water Plant has not been estimated at this time. Public Utilities Department officials emphasized the need to continually inspect the system to identify problems which need to be fixed on an on-going basis.

The Boone Water Treatment Plant had a design capacity of 3 million gallons per day and was treating an average of 1.8 million gallons per day as of September 2005. (Peak consumption was measured at 2.6 million gallons per day.) The Utilities Department estimates that normal capacity for the plant is growing near. WK Dickson engineering firm has been hired to help the Town decide exactly how the water system's capacity should be expanded and find the most appropriate source of raw water. The design and implementation of any expansion will not be completed before 2008, perhaps 2010. The preliminary reports from the engineer suggest that locating a raw water source to meet Boone's projected needs may be a major constraint for the Town's development patterns. The Public Utilities Department along with WK Dickson continue to investigate the options and hope to provide recommendations to Town Council sometime within this physical year.

In addition to these fundamental plant expansions at the wastewater and potable water supply plants, the Public Utilities Long Range Plan identifies a number of other improvements needed to the water distribution and wastewater collection systems. These are all deemed to be fundamental needs of the town and are incorporated by reference into this Comprehensive Plan.

### ***Growth Policy Implications of Water and Sewer***

Apart from the physical improvements to the water and sewer plants and their piped systems, there is also an implied growth policy element to the design of these systems. It is generally

accepted planning principle, for example, that the provision of centralized water and sewer services can be a major determinant in the location, density, and timing of new development in an urbanizing area. During the 1950's, 60's, and 70's, federal and state governments heavily subsidized the extension of water and sewer services into the suburban areas surrounding our nation's cities and towns. Viewed from the local government perspective, this "inexpensive" funding source made the extension of water and sewer services an attractive capital investment. Unfortunately, the provision of such services also contributed to urban sprawl. Urban sprawl tends to drive up the costs of providing public services to a rather widely scattered population.

During the past decade, however, local governments have witnessed a dramatic decline in the amount of funding available from state and federal sources for programs and facilities of all kinds, including water and sewer facilities. Local governments are finding it necessary to carefully plan for public water and sewer services and to provide them only where such needs can be fully justified. At the same time, water and sewer service extensions are being viewed increasing as an effective growth management tool. Because the cost of such improvements have become so enormous, the methods by which water and sewer facilities are financed are also being employed to influence development. These perspectives are reflected in the following growth strategy.

### ***Growth Strategy and Map***

The Growth Strategy Map, which is part of this Comprehensive Plan, identifies three key areas that are recommended to be treated differently in terms of the provision of public water and sewer services. The ***primary growth area*** includes all of the area within the existing Town limits, and an appropriate adjacent area that can be financed and served in a cost-effective manner. This is the area where the Town would most like to encourage new development as well as "infill" development and revitalization.

The ***secondary growth area*** is also viewed as having a favorable location for future development. However, because the secondary growth area is less cost-effective to serve, the Town will encourage development in this area to a lesser extent than it will for development in the primary growth area. The outermost limit of the secondary growth area is known as the ***urban services boundary***, the line beyond which the Town would prefer that water and sewer service not be extended.

Outside the urban services boundary lies the rural area, an area that is clearly less cost-effective to service than the primary or secondary areas. By designating lands as rural, appropriate agriculture, open space, and environmentally sensitive lands (e.g. Floodprone areas, areas of steep slope) within the planning area are preserved. In the event of a major economic development project, the Town's preferred policy of limited service to rural areas can be overruled by other counter-balancing policies. For a major economic development project to be served with public water and sewer, the project would have to meet all the requirements of the Economic Development policies contained in this Plan, as well as any other applicable policies, plans and regulations.

### ***Natural Gas***

When the initial Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1993, University officials had been working to bring piped natural gas to the Boone community and to the University in particular. In 1993, members of the steering committee felt it was in the best interests of the entire community to work cooperatively to bring piped natural gas to Boone. Today, Frontier Energy has successfully brought natural gas to the Boone area and is currently providing service to many of Boone's large commercial and institutional customers.

### ***Stormwater Management***

An issue that continues to emerge in many communities throughout the state, including Boone, is stormwater management. This issue was identified during the drafting of the 1993 Comprehensive Plan. At that time, it was noted that the initial costs of compliance with federal mandates is overwhelming for most municipalities if proper planning, which involves both financial and regulatory strategies, is not immediately begun.

The 1993 plan noted that, from a financial standpoint, it may be necessary to establish a capital reserve account in which to deposit funds collected from newly created stormwater management districts. From a regulatory standpoint, the plan emphasized the creation of new development standards utilizing on-site retention systems, ground water recharge of stormwater, and minimization of impervious surface areas. Since 1993, the Town has continued to investigate and promote storm water management standards that are geared towards protection of water quality and reduction of off-site stormwater flows. Recently however, Boone's storm water management program has received a great deal of criticism from the development community. Some developers view stormwater management as an engineering "problem" that must be dealt with instead of viewing development activity as the root cause of most stormwater problems. Regardless of the conflicting sentiment on this issue, federal mandates may soon have a significant impact of the Town's program.

## **POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. Extensions of water and/or sewer services that could result in scattered, non-directed development and costly provision of other urban services shall be prohibited. \*\*\*\*\**

*B. Water and sewer services shall be concentrated within the limits of a geographically defined Urban Growth Area. The Primary Growth Area shall receive first priority for the provision or enhancement of water and sewer services.*

**B.1** Continue to monitor water consumption at the Boone Water Treatment Plan with an eye toward planning for expansion of the facility when appropriate.

*C. The Town shall consider the highest level of participation in the cost of providing water and sewer services within the Primary Growth Area with the next highest level of participation considered for the Secondary Growth Area.*

*D. Water and sewer services shall not be extended to properties in the Rural Area (outside the Urban Growth Area). Exceptions to this policy may include the provision of services to other local governments, cooperative agreements on major economic development initiatives, and extensions needed to address imminent public health problems or related environmental hazards.*

D.1 Establish revised written water and sewer service extension policies consistent with the designated growth area on the Growth Strategy Map of this plan. Coordinate with the County in assessing water and sewer needs in the areas of the county that are already facing significant development pressures, and that are supportive of an organized, planned growth strategy.

E. *The Town shall employ incentives to encourage a concentration of intense urban type development within the Urban Growth Area.*

E.1 Establish an incentive program to encourage development within the Urban Growth Area.

F. *Area-wide cooperation and support shall be sought in bringing in alternative utility services to the Boone Area.*

F.1 Consider the establishment of an “Alternate Energy Commission” to address this and other energy issues on an on-going basis. \*\*

G. *Long range planning for a possible stormwater collection and treatment system shall be supported, including the development of financial and regulatory strategies.*

G.1 Prepare a community-wide stormwater management strategy to address the future Implementation of NPDES Phase II program requirements.

### 2.2.3 PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE



#### NARRATIVE

The Town of Boone is blessed with a location in a region steeped in natural recreational opportunities. As a result, there can sometimes be a tendency to neglect the development of planned recreational facilities, because "...we've got recreation opportunities all around us". There is considerable evidence, however, that area residents very much want improvements made in both passive and active local recreational facilities.

#### *Greenways*

With regard to passive recreational opportunities and open space, greenways offer particular promise in the Boone Community. The greenway concept, which currently is receiving a significant attention across the country, encourages the use of natural corridors such as river and creek floodplains for linear park systems. These natural corridors can be supplemented as necessary by manmade corridors such as utility and transportation rights of way to assemble a complete, interconnected system of linear open spaces within a community.

The July, 1987 study "Greenways in Boone" set forth a good foundation for beginning a greenway program in Boone. The study's survey of potential greenway corridors effectively recognized that Boone's topography and multiple streams offer good opportunities for an even distribution of greenway throughout the urban area. A subsequent pilot report (Boone Greenways: Pilot Project Report and Proposal, October (1987) resulted in the implementation of Boone's first greenway - a facility which has received considerable support from citizen community wide. Evidence of this was apparent at the first town meeting for the Comprehensive Plan, in which the attendees expressed strong support expanding the system. Finally, the Town of Boone adopted the "Boone/Blowing Rock Alternative Transportation Plan" in 1995, a comprehensive planning document for long range alternative transportation planning, including the continued development of greenway facilities.

It should be noted that Watauga County's growing retiree population, along with its significant student population, is particularly well suited for using greenways. It is well known that walking is a highly beneficial and popular activity among the elderly. At the same time, students can make effective use of greenways in moving from residential areas to the university and elsewhere.

It should also be noted that the greenway serves the multiple objectives of open space preservation, transportation, recreation, floodplain management, wildlife conservation, and a multitude of other purposes. All continuing planning work on greenways should be conducted within the broader scope of Boone's "Alternative Transportation Plan", under the direction of the Town's Greenway/Alternative Transportation Committee.

### ***Active Recreation Needs***

In the area of active recreation, Boone's needs are a combination of recreational facility shortfalls, uneven distribution, and unequal access. To be specific, ASU has recreational amenities adequate to serve the University's needs, but these facilities are not readily available to the general public. Facilities for the general population of Boone are inadequate, particularly with regard to indoor facilities. There is a pressing need for a major multipurpose, indoor pool, drama theater, dance room, weight room, and storage areas. The center could also include facilities designed especially for the needs of teenagers and senior citizens (e.g. an "Inter-Generational Family Center"). Before incorporating these specific needs, however, it would be necessary to evaluate the current senior center being operated by the Watauga County Project on Aging, and the youth center being completed by the Watauga County Youth Network.



### ***Neighborhood Parks***

In addition to the lack of a major public recreation center, there is a general shortage of neighborhood park facilities in Boone's urban area. The Fall 1991 Planning Studies Report by the ASU Department of Geography and Planning pointed out that while there are some 30 neighborhood areas in Boone, very few have neighborhood parks. To address this need, it is suggested that the Town pursue a program for the long term development of neighborhood mini-parks, pocket parks

and other, more sizable neighborhood facilities in concert with the preparation of Special Area Plans. Also to prevent park shortages from occurring in newly developing areas, it will be important that future developments include a recreation component as part of an overall mixed use development pattern in each neighborhood.

### ***Policy Development***

The open space and parks policies contained in the Plan are future oriented—they address the need to plan for and set aside appropriate sites and areas to keep pace with anticipated growth of the community. In keeping with this policy, all land acquisition should be done as far as possible in advance of actual need, as soon as projected need can be determined. The emphasis should be to acquire critical or strategic areas now before future development drives up land costs. One way to minimize acquisition costs while achieving multiple objectives is to focus on natural areas generally unsuited for intensive development, such as critical watershed locations and/or flood prone areas. Also, properties which have visual, cultural or historic significance should be given special consideration.

## **POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. Future park development and open spaces shall be planned to provide for the rational and equitable distribution of recreation and open space opportunities within the planning area. Public facilities shall be provided to address the unmet needs of area residents lacking access to university or private recreational facilities.*

*B. Financial support shall be provided to the rehabilitation, upkeep, and expansion of existing facilities first, and to new facilities second.*

B.1 Continue and enhance support for near term improvements to existing parks and facilities.

*C. In determining future sites for park, recreation and open space facilities, multiple objectives for natural area conservation, visual enhancement, promotion of cultural and historic preservation, watershed and flood prone area protection shall be considered.*

C.1 Consider development of a master parks plan which would incorporate multiple policy objectives.

C.2 Support the efforts of the Kraut Creek Committee and other similar efforts to establish public green spaces and parks in the downtown business district.

*D. Land acquisition for new recreation sites in advance of need shall be encouraged to achieve desirable locations at cost effective levels.*

D.1 Prepare a long range, community-wide master parks and recreation plan to identify long term land acquisition needs in keeping with the growth of the community. \*\*\*\*\*

D.2 Consider the establishment of a land dedication provision or fees in lieu of land dedication in the Town's development regulations. Coordinate such dedications fully with pedestrian, bikeway or greenway space objectives.

D.3 Prepare an information pamphlet identifying the tax advantages and process for making property and land easement donations.

*E. Provision of open space and recreational facilities shall be encouraged in private developments and through intergovernmental and public/private partnerships.*

E.1 Employ the neighborhood planning process to identify neighborhood park and recreation needs.

*F. The identification and appropriate development of a system of open space greenways within the planning area shall be encouraged for both recreational and alternative transportation purposes. The use of natural corridors such as streams, floodplains, and secondarily, man-made corridors such as utility and transportation rights-of-way and easements shall be emphasized. \*\**

F.1 Prepare a greenways action plan with the full coordination, leadership and input of a Greenways Citizen Action Committee.

*G. While emphasizing programs which serve the unmet recreation needs of the greatest number of people, the Town shall strive to meet the needs of specific population subgroups, including, particularly, teenagers, the elderly and the physically challenged.*

G.1 Establish an inter-generational advisory committee to evaluate the needs of seniors and youth in Boone. The committee should be charged with responsibility for developing recommendations for an inter-generational family center, or alternatively, independent senior and youth center facilities. This effort should include input from the Watauga Youth Network, High Country Council of Governments, Project on Aging, Watauga County Parks and Recreation, New River Mental Health and other related programs.

## 2.2.4 PUBLIC SAFETY



### NARRATIVE

Citizens attending the town meeting for the Comprehensive Plan were largely silent concerning public safety and emergency medical services. Their lack of comment concerning such issues was taken to mean that there is a general level of satisfaction with such services in the Town of Boone. Even so, this plan includes a discussion of such services to allow for dialogue concerning continued improvements in these areas. The discussion begins with several broad

objectives for an effective public safety program, followed immediately by review of fire, police, and emergency medical services in Boone.

**Objectives** Several objectives for an effective public safety program include the following:

- Reduce the loss of life and property in the event of an emergency.
- Plan the expansion of law enforcement protection to coincide with the current and projected population increases and identified crime-related problems.
- Provide effective police services, including law enforcement, crime prevention, community service, and order maintenance.
- Dispatch emergency services in an expeditious and orderly manner.
- Maintain a high level of emergency management and civil defense preparedness.
- Continually update, revise and initiate new plans and develop citizen preparedness necessary to react efficiently to disasters.
- Promote public participation and awareness of public safety plans and programs.

### **Fire Protection**

Since its inception in 1926, the Boone Fire Department has been a fundamental part of the continued growth of Boone. The fire department has evolved from a totally volunteer department to a mixture of 12 paid staff and 23 volunteers. In addition, the department has expanded to two stations and ten apparatus vehicles. It is generally accepted that as the Town grows so will its services. Consistent with this view, the Boone Fire Department feels that major challenges are on the horizon. The main challenge for the Fire Department in the years ahead will center on the following issues.

#### *The need for additional full time personnel.*

With the continued growth of the town, increased responsibilities and alarms are inevitable. By adding additional personnel, the Fire Department would be able to provide the citizens of Boone with automatic response capabilities by 24 hour staffing, combined with continued support by volunteers.

*Continued upgrading of aging apparatus.*

Fire protection equipment ages and must be replaced just as other types of motor vehicles and equipment become obsolete or worn out. Recommended schedules are in place for retirement and replacement of aging apparatus. New federal and organizational requirements and designs will be an integral part of this on going process.

*Continued specialized training.*

New requirements are continually emerging concerning specialized training for fire personnel in areas of hazardous materials, confined space rescue, drive-operator and structural fire fighting. Federal and state agencies, as well as insurance companies, are requiring additional training for personnel that will require acquisition of special equipment as well as financial support.

*Community education and programs.*

Recently, the Department has implemented a number of fire safety programs, including smoke detector ordinances, fire extinguisher programs, and Aluminum Cans for Burned Children funds. Through these programs the fire department has provided information and education to the citizens of Boone. Through the continued development of school programs, new fire safe workplace training and additional opportunities, the promotion, growth and development of these programs will increase.

*Expanded inspection programs.*

With the implementation of Volume V of the North Carolina State Building Code, fire safety inspection responsibilities will increase as growth and new development continues in Boone. Significant attention must be given to this area to reduce the potential for fires.

*Additional station requirements.*

Due to the future growth of the town, advanced acquisition of an additional fire station site will be necessary to achieve a strategic location at a reasonable price.

*Reduction in ISO rating for the town.*

Emphasis will continually be placed on lower ISO rating for the town. A lower rating significantly reduces insurance premiums to the citizens and encourages commercial and industrial growth in the area. Boone is blessed with a good rating presently but, it is recognized that with attention to various personnel, facility and equipment, anticipated rate of reduction is forthcoming.

*Opportunity for community partnership.*

Citizen involvement in fire safety programs, grant funding, fire safe workplace development and violation enforcement should be encouraged. Strong community support, involvement and awareness will help expand this beneficial opportunity.

***Police Protection***

Local law enforcement services are provided by the Boone Police Department, the Watauga County Sheriff's Department, and the Appalachian State University Police Department. The Boone Police Department has 35 full time officers and 30 vehicles including 6 four-wheel drive vehicles. It serves the incorporated area. The Town Police Department and ASU Police

Department also have cross jurisdictional authority. The Watauga County Sheriff's Department has 30 full time deputies, 20 marked patrol cars, 10 unmarked patrol cars and 4 four-wheel drive vehicles. Its patrol area includes Boone's extra-territorial jurisdiction.

Over the years, the Boone Police Department has grown and improved with the town; however, the department will need to address more complex issues in the future. Some of these issues are:

*Continue community programs.*

Continue on-going community programs such as the Ride Long Program, D.A.R.E. program, Police Explorers, School Resource Officers, Bicycle Safety Program, and Traffic Related Safety Programs.

*Continue specialized training.*

New technical requirements emerge regularly in the law enforcement field. These requirements call for continued specialized training and retraining to keep pace with advances in the profession.

*Establish and promote Community Related Policing Concept.*

Community related policing offers a holistic and comprehensive approach for preventing crime before it happens. The concept requires a strong commitment of time and resources to make it work.

*Recruit police personnel.*

Set standards for recruiting police personnel and attending career days at various education institutions. Like any profession, the regular recruitment of qualified personnel is a key to the long term success of the operation.

*Establish and maintain public information awareness and community involvement in the police process.*

"Self policing" by area residents is the most cost effective means of providing a secure and safe community. Public involvement and partnering with law enforcement officials is critical to this approach.

*Analyze and control illegal violations through directed and targeted patrol in specific areas and at specific times.*

An effective police program requires a proper balance between crime prevention and enforcement of the law. Intelligent policing requires current information and accurate analysis.

*Partner with Local Agencies*

Work with the ASU Police Department, Watauga County Sheriff's Department, and other local agencies.

*Emergency Medical Facilities*

Watauga County Medical Center is a regional facility with a 117 bed capacity and is used by 87 doctors. Emergency medical services in the area are provided by the Watauga Medics and by the

Watauga Rescue Squad. The ambulance service has 20 full time and 20 part time emergency medical technicians and 7 ambulances serving the entire county.–

### **POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. The Town shall employ community education, school, and public involvement programs to enhance community awareness of public safety issues. \*\*\*\**

- A.1 Continue on-going community programs such as the Ride Along Program, the D.A.R.E. program, Police Explorers, School Resource Officers, the Bicycle Safety Program, and Traffic Related Safety Programs.
- A.2 Continue to promote the Community Related Policing Concept.
- A.3 Continue to reduce crime through Problem Oriented Policing.

*B. The Town shall periodically review the need for additional paid personnel, capital improvements and equipment needs to meet or exceed public safety standards, insurance ratings and other measures of public safety.*

- B.1 Land acquisition for an additional fire station should remain a top priority. \*
- B.2 The need for additional paid fire department personnel to provide 24 hour staffing will be evaluated annually.
- B.3 Replacement schedules for retirement of aging fire and police apparatus will be updated annually.
- B.4 Evaluate law enforcement personnel needs annually.
- B.5 Set standards for recruitment of police personnel and attend career days at various education institutions.

*C. The Town shall periodically review the need for and sponsor professional level training for law enforcement, fire, and emergency personnel.*

- C.1 Continue specialized training to meet or exceed the technical requirements of the law enforcement profession.
- C.2 Continue specialized training for fire personnel in areas of hazardous materials, confined space rescue, driver-operator and structural fire fighting.

*D. The Town shall place renewed emphasis on enforcement of the state building code and flood prevention regulations to avert or minimize loss of life and property during natural disasters.*

## 2.2.5 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

### NARRATIVE

The subject of environmental quality cuts across a broad spectrum of issues. These issues include:

- Protection of water quality
- Sewage collection and treatment
- Controlling development in sensitive areas (floodplains, ridge tops, areas of excessive slope, or wetland areas)
- Solid waste disposal and recycling
- Water and energy conservation
- Control of littering
- Hazardous waste disposal
- Other sources of pollution (excessive noise, odor, air, water and light pollution)

Several of these issues which drew particular comment from Boone area residents during preparation of the initial Comprehensive Plan are further discussed as follows.

#### ***Recycling***

Of all of the environmental issues identified by the Boone citizenry, none stood out so clearly during the town meeting than the issue of recycling. There appeared to be a general consensus that the public was ready to adopt a more aggressive recycling program if they were only informed as what to do and how to do it.

Comments received at the town meeting reflected a high level of public awareness and specificity about the recycling issue. Suggestions made included the need for enhanced business recycling, residential recycling, methods to make recycling easier, support for mandatory recycling, and comments about the major types of products to be recycled, including glass, paper, and plastics. Also mentioned was the need to cut back on the generation of waste at each household or business; so as to reduce the need for recycling overall.

Discussion at the Steering Committee level focused on efforts being made by GDS, the waste management firm currently under contract with the Town of Boone. It was the general consensus that the recycling services offered by GDS were a good start, but that they could be considerably improved through education, more convenient service offerings, and program visibility. Several implementation actions were identified in support of this objective.

#### ***Litter***

Closely related to the issue of recycling, was the concern about instating a very strong anti-littering campaign in the community. There was also consensus that the town needed to encourage an “anti-litter consciousness” among residents and students. The creation of this consciousness could be a combination of education, enforcement, and publicity. In addition, more convenient trash disposal and recycling would be instituted to complement and support the educational campaign.

### ***Waste water collection and treatment***

The Town has recently completed expansion of its sewage treatment facility, which is currently operating at about half of its design capacity. In addition, numerous collection system improvements have been undertaken, and more are planned, to replace and upgrade the Town's waste water infrastructure.



### ***Storm water management, runoff and drainage***

Problems related to storm water management, runoff and drainage were identified as a major ongoing issue in the Boone community—one that is expensive to correct. Drainage is a large scale problem which does not readily lend itself to incremental or piecemeal solutions. Rather, a comprehensive drainage and stormwater management plan is needed. Perhaps the foremost need in this regard is accurate surveying and mapping of the

Town's existing drainage systems. Other elements of the plan might include consideration of utility fees and other funding alternatives, the need for coordination between Town policies and requirements for the private sector, and the need to consider permeable parking areas or other similar innovative approaches to stormwater reduction.

### ***Critical Watershed Protection***

Related to the stormwater management issue is the need to protect the area of the Boone that drains into the Town's potable water supply. During the course of preparing this plan, the "protected" and "critical" areas of the Town's watershed were mapped in accordance with state standards. During the first part of 1993, the Planning Commission and Town Council received a draft watershed protection ordinance for review, public education and comment. The plan was adopted in May 1993.

### ***Floodprone Areas***

The Town has been actively involved in floodplain management for over twenty-five years. As a result of the Town's efforts to prevent property loss through pro-active floodplain management, property acquisition and open space preservation, Boone residents realize a reduction in flood insurance premiums. Currently the state is involved in a statewide floodplain mapping program which will effectively update the Town's Flood Insurance Rate maps. These new maps will further improve the Town's floodplain management capabilities.

### ***Water Conservation***

The Town is currently engaged in a study of locating additional sources of raw water to meet its water supply needs and is fully involved in water conservation efforts. The current and future growth rate in Boone has created a pressing need to develop effective measures to ensure that water use is efficient and that conservation efforts are maximized.



***Steep Slopes and Ridges***

In May of 2005, the Town Council established a Steep Slope Development Task Force consisting of elected and appointed board members and various citizens with expertise necessary to study the issues and impacts of hillside development. The Task Force is in the process of developing a comprehensive approach to controlling the aesthetic, safety, health and natural resource issues associated with steep slope development.

**POLICIES**

*A. Development on ridgetops and excessive slopes shall be strongly discouraged. Where development is allowed, stringent performance standards shall be met. \*\*\*\*\**

A.1 Continue working on the preparation of hillside and ridge-top regulations for consideration and adoption of Town Council. \*\*\*\*\*

*B. Continued improvements to the public sewage collection and treatment facilities shall be supported, with priority given to servicing existing or planned densely developed areas where environmental and economic benefits can be realized.*

*C. Development activities in the 100 years floodplain or near lakes or streams shall be carefully controlled. If development must occur, low intensity uses such as open space, recreation and adequately buffered agricultural or forestry activities shall be preferred.*

*D. Runoff and drainage from development activities shall be of a quality and quantity as near to natural conditions as possible, with special emphasis given to critical watershed areas.*

*E. Development which preserves the natural features of the site, including existing topography, streams and significant trees and vegetation, shall be reflected in the Town’s Development Standards.*

E.1 Consider the use of innovative zoning techniques such as density bonuses and transfer of development rights in exchange for preservation of significant environmental features.

*F. Recognizing the economic and environmental costs of commercial and residential stormwater runoff, innovative stormwater management techniques such as permeable sidewalks,, driveways, and parking areas shall be encouraged.*

*G. The development of a comprehensive drainage and flood plain management plan, including public and private actions in support of plan implementation, shall be supported.*

G.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive storm drainage plan and a flood management plan to include public and private implementation strategies. This plan should be coordinated with the Town’s current activities with the Community Rating System (CRS) program to

reduce flood insurance costs to the citizens of the Town of Boone.

G.2 Continue to evaluate necessary revisions to the town's flood insurance rate maps.

*H. Local area requirements for solid waste disposal facilities shall be anticipated through advanced planning; facilities shall be located and designed so as not to adversely impact significant natural or man-made resources.*

H.1 In cooperation with GDS, ASU and Watauga County, prepare a strategic action plan for solid waste facilities and programs in Boone, particularly concerning enhancement of reuse of containers and materials, recycling and waste reduction methods.

*I. The Town recognizes the need for a regional solution to the solid waste issue, and will support efforts toward that end.*

I.1 Encourage and participate in a cooperative, regional solution to the solid waste problem in concert with organizations such as the High Country Council of Governments, and appropriate state agencies.

*J. Research and development of reuse, recycling, and resource recovery programs, whether public or private, shall be encouraged and supported.*

*K. The Town shall encourage and set an example which promotes water and energy conservation, and the reduction of waste generation at the source.*

*L. An anti-litter consciousness, beginning in the schools, and including the university, businesses and individual citizens and visitors shall be encouraged.*

L.1 Establish a community-wide anti-litter campaign. Publicize the campaign through schools, local civic organizations, ASU service organizations and all local media outlets. Such a campaign could also be an item of focus for the Community Council.

*M. The location of hazardous waste storage and disposal facilities in the Boone planning area shall not be supported. Transportation of hazardous materials through Boone shall be discouraged. The location of propane storage tanks shall be carefully controlled to the extent permitted by state and federal law, as well as by state enabling legislation for local government regulation.*

*N. Industries and activities producing excessive noise, odor, air, water and light pollution, or other harmful impacts, shall not be permitted, unless such adverse impacts can be clearly overcome through effective mitigation.*

## 2.3 THE COMMUNITY

Community Appearance ▪ Community Character ▪ Housing & Neighborhoods ▪ Public Involvement

### OVERVIEW

Boone has its roots as a mountain town which now serves as the seat of county government, an educational center, and the economic focus of this area. As its economic role has grown, the Town has tried to enhance its sense of being of the mountains and of remaining a small town in which all citizens are included as a part of the whole community. As the Town continues to grow, its physical appearance and social development must continue to respect these ideals.

### POLICIES AND ACTIONS

*A. Urban type development within the Urban Growth Area shall meet appropriate Town standards.*

A.1 Establish minimum architectural design standards for commercial development throughout the Town.

*B. Properly planned, mixed use developments that promote efficient provision of public services shall be encouraged within the Urban Growth Area.*

*C. Funding for outside agencies and organizations serving the citizens of Boone shall continue to receive support consistent with area service needs and Town budget constraints.*

C.1 Funding requests for outside agencies and organizations serving the citizens of Boone shall continue to be evaluated on an annual basis consistent with area service needs and Town budget constraints.

*D. Coordinated inter-governmental and university-town planning for urban area land use and development, transportation, utilities, recycling, environmental management, law enforcement, education, recreation, tourism and economic development shall be encouraged.*

D.1 Involve appropriate agencies, organizations, and citizens in the preparation of community-wide function plans including, for example, a master parks plan, a small projects transportation committee, water treatment expansion planning, the recycling program, a storm water management plan, anti-litter campaign, and other specific plans.

### 2.3.1 COMMUNITY APPEARANCE



#### NARRATIVE

Boone, like many other towns in the southeast and across the nation, is awakening to the fact that community appearance and image are important factors-not only for the quality of life of existing residents, but also as important tools in attracting desirable new businesses and industries. Components of community appearance can include a multitude of visual images, including the presence or absence of trees, the appearance of public and private signage, streetscape conditions, parking lot landscaping, public and private outdoor

art, the presence or absence of overhead wires, and the way in which local development practices seek to preserve the natural features of land and properties in the community.

Boone has made some beneficial efforts in recent years toward enhancing its overall appearance. A Community Appearance Commission has been established. The Town's sign regulations, first established in 1980, have received a favorable public response. The grandfathering clause for the ordinance expired in 1987, which means that any changes in signage must now conform with the newer regulations. The sign ordinance was stream-lined in 2004. Grading, buffering, landscaping and tree preservations standards (found in the Town's zoning ordinance) were significantly upgraded in 1990, following a highly acclaimed model first developed by the City of Raleigh. The Town was the first in the state to adopt a Tree ordinance with the Department of Transportation (DOT) allowing for the planting and maintenance of trees within DOT right of ways. The Community Appearance Commission reevaluated the Town's Tree Ordinance in the early 1990's and recommended no changes. Recently the Tree Board, at Council's request, studied the issue of tree preservation within residential subdivisions. As a result of this study, UDO requirements for developer supplied tree surveys have been reduced within residential subdivisions. The Tree Board has been instrumental in reviving the town's Master Tree Plan and is actively working Town staff on a street tree planting program.

The Boone community has been a participant in DOT's Adopt-A-Highway program, the locally initiated Adopt-A-Street program, and River cleanup projects in addition to the Town's active enforcement of various community improvement codes.

Public attitudes at the town meeting for the Comprehensive Plan expressed strong support for beautifying the town, particularly with regard to town entrances and major streets, overhead utility poles and wires, and street trees. These items are discussed in greater detail as follows:

***Tree Trimming***

In the past, tree trimming was a hot topic in Boone. The Community Appearance Commission has, on two different occasions, invited utility companies to participate in a discussion and forum on tree trimming. In addition, the staff has been actively distributing information concerning proper trimming and pruning techniques.

***Town Entrances and Corridors***

Historically, American towns have not been developed with discrete, definitive boundaries or predetermined limits. Rather, as towns have grown, they have simply spilled out farther and farther into the countryside. The problem and challenge regarding Boone's town boundaries and entrances, then, is to create some form of identity and sense of entry from amidst the blurred urban/rural fringe.

Towns and cities, by their very nature, should be more urbane, and more formal in their treatment of streetscapes, than would be found in a more rural setting. The town should therefore employ a variety of streetscape improvements to let the traveler know that he or she is entering a different and special place. These techniques include the following:

***Introduce carefully selected street lights and street light standards.***

The onset of attractive and appropriately scaled street lights along the town's major thoroughfares is an unmistakable clue that the motorist is leaving the country and entering a special place.

***Introduce sidewalks and bikeways.***

Areas inside the town limits should be developed at a level of intensity which calls for sidewalks and bikeways. The presence of a sidewalk is a natural indicator of an urban setting, while the introduction of bikeways along either an extra wide outside lane or as a separate parallel path connotes a certain level of urban sophistication.

***Introduce median strips, planting plazas, street trees, and supplemental landscaping.***

There is perhaps no single item that can radically improve the appearance of a street as much as the introduction of consistently spaced, canopy-creating street trees. In much the same way that a new coat of paint can hide a world of defects, street trees can make up for much of the visual blight associated with commercial strip development.

***Show contrast in signs through enhanced sign controls.***

Poorly planned, overdone commercial signage can be one of the most dominant and unsightly aspects of the built environment along a major street. A sudden change in the character of signage, therefore, from a garish miss-mash of competing, pole-mounted signage can leave a startling, positive impact on new arrivals to Boone.

***Put overhead utilities underground.***

The absence of utility poles and overhead wires makes a noticeable statement to the motorist entering the town. This issued is addressed in detail in the following section:

### ***Utility Poles and Wires***

The preference of area residents for the use of underground utilities was made very clear at the initial town meeting for the Comprehensive Plan. In this regard, there is good news and bad news. The good news is that the Town already requires that new developments employ underground utilities. The bad news is that a large part of the developed area of the town is literally covered with overhead utilities.

Both the level of complexity and cost involved in putting existing overhead wires underground is great. Complicating factors are many and include:

- utility service interruptions,
- traffic disruptions while streets, driveways, sidewalks and curbs are broken up and replaced,
- yards with existing trees and other landscaping must be trenched,
- existing water and sewer lines may need to be relocated, and
- several utility companies may share the same poles, requiring multiple services to be placed underground at the same time.

Since the costs of converting the entire community from overhead to underground utilities would be prohibitive, the following recommendations suggest three methods for gradual or partial conversion, based on priority.

*Prepare a master plan for the placement of utilities underground, with priority given to pre-determined areas.*

Since undergrounding of utilities is so expensive, and there is so much area affected, a master plan for undergrounding is needed to identify and schedule specific areas for undergrounding. This plan should be incorporated into a community-wide beautification plan for maximum impact. Priority areas scheduled for undergrounding might include critical scenic spots, heavily traveled streets, commercial districts, and important viewsheds. Costs would be tabulated for each area to be undergrounded, along with some notion of cost-benefit analysis.

The preparation of such a plan would require participation by the full cross section of the interests involved, including area utility companies; residential, commercial and industrial property owners; the Town of Boone; the State Department of Transportation; and other special area or interest groups involved.

*Give high visibility, pedestrian-scaled area first priority.*

Of all streetscape elements in the town's older commercial areas, overhead utilities are perhaps the most visually damaging to a pedestrian-scaled environment. To its credit, the Town has successfully relocated many overhead utilities from King Street to Howard Street at the rear of the commercial structures. This is clearly appropriate for the intensive use that King Street receives from both residents and visitors to the town.

*Give major thoroughfares second priority.*

Boone's major thoroughfares are the town's first impression to the rest of the world. Every consideration should be given, therefore, to the removal overhead utilities from these

thoroughfares. Specifically, as existing thoroughfares are widened, or otherwise improved, provisions should be included in the construction plans for the undergrounding of overhead wires. Steering Committee members mentioned specifically, for example, that utility wires along the NC 105 Extension should be undergrounded in conjunction with the widening of that thoroughfare.

*Put other overhead utilities underground as opportunities arise.*

An “opportunity program” for conversion is suggested to take advantage of situations as they arise when existing overhead utilities must be altered, changed, or relocated. Periodically, utilities must change their overhead facilities to increase capacity, update obsolete equipment, or replace it when it is worn out. These are opportunities to look for, and plan ahead for as changes occur. Other opportunities for conversion present themselves when a street is improved or relocated, when major renovations occur, or when a low density residential area is planned for a conversion to commercial or more intensive residential uses.

### ***Street Trees***

Residents of the Boone area expressed strong support for the preservation and planting of trees, especially hardwoods along area streets. The first step in accomplishing this objective was the preparation of Boone’s Master Tree Plan which was adopted by the Town Council in 1994. Major components of the plan include:

*Consistent street tree species should occur along predetermined sections of streets.*

The beauty and comfort of tree-lined streets comes from the consistent rhythm, spacing, and species selected for predetermined sections of streets. It is important that an entire segment of a street be planted with a single species to create a sense of individuality, distinction, and pride for that location.

*No single tree species should comprise more than 10-15% of the total street tree population of the town.*

Since the legacy of tree destruction left behind by the notorious Dutch elm disease, there has been understandable concern expressed about the risks involved in overusing a single species of tree in a community. It is out of concern that many urban foresters suggest that limits be set to prevent over-planting of a single species. Rather, it is suggested that particular street segments (at most, several blocks of a street), be planted with one species. In this manner, if another devastating tree disease should come along, an entire area of the community will not be made suddenly barren.

*The Town may wish to require the planting of street trees as part of the up front cost of new development.*

During the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, street trees were not viewed simply as optional ornamentation, but rather as an integral part of the foundation of any good neighborhood. It is unfortunate that street trees are no longer a standard element of most of today’s new developments. This plan therefore recommends that development standards for new neighborhoods and other developments include the planting of street trees in accordance with an overall street tree master plan. Under this arrangement, developers would be required to install

street trees in the same way that they must install pavement, water and sewer lines, utilities, etc. to meet overall public standards for those systems.

*Expand the Town’s Street Tree Planting Program.*

Just as the Town must place a reasonable burden of responsibility on new neighborhoods and other developments to provide for street trees, so should the Town expand its efforts to see that existing neighborhoods and streets are retrofitted with street trees. In this regard, Boone has had an exiting street tree planning program, but it is currently not well known or at least not having a sweeping impact upon the community. Efforts should be redoubled to promote this program and to encourage existing neighborhoods to follow through on this opportunity.

Steering Committee members for the 1993 Comprehensive Plan identified opportunities to develop cooperation between citizens and organizations to plant more trees. Specifically, the student organization “SAVE” would be willing to dig holes and plant trees provided by the Chamber of Commerce, the Town or other civic organization. It was noted that the New River Power and Light Company has equipment that is capable of digging tree holes very efficiently. The street tree master plan includes a series of specific action steps necessary to pull together this cooperative effort.

***Dilapidated and Vacant Buildings***

The 1993 Steering Committee noted that the Town has a fairly good program to address problems related to dilapidated and vacant buildings. There are however a number of occupied and vacant structures that have, over time, become community eyesores. The Community Appearance Commission has noted a number of these properties and has begun to discuss options relating to the rehabilitation of these properties.

**POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. Measures to improve the effectiveness of grading, landscaping and buffering standards for new and existing developments shall be encouraged. \*\*\*\*\**

*B. The significance of street trees in providing visual relief, summer cooling, improved air quality and livability shall be recognized through public policies and actions to encourage their planting and maintenance. \*\*\*\*\**

B.1 Expand scope and effectiveness of the Town’s street tree planting program in close cooperation with student and citizen volunteer groups, power companies and other groups.

B.2 Implement Boone’s street tree master plan. Prepare an inventory of existing street trees and other significant trees within the urban area. Coordinate with Boone’s Walkways Long Range plan.

B.3 Amend the Town’s site plan review standards to require new commercial and residential developments to plant trees in accordance with the Street Tree Master Plan and Walkways Long Range Plan.

*C. The significance of major roadway entrances into Boone as measures of community image and quality shall be recognized through building placement, landscape, signage and other visual improvements. The Town, along with private property owners and developers, shall work to jointly improve the appearance and design of major street corridors.*

C.1 Prepare a strategic plan that addresses the problems of hazardous buildings, dilapidated buildings and visually unattractive property, beginning with an inventory of such places and establishing an action plan to change their appearance consistent with the High Country. \*\*\*\*

C.2 Contact NCDOT and request establishment of central medians along those major roadways in Boone which involve multi-lane facilities. Establish high priorities for locations where pedestrians must cross multi-lane facilities.

C.3 Prepare a plan for improving the appearance and function of at least one major highway corridor in Boone. Involve property owners, the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce, NCDOT, and appropriate local civic organizations on an advisory committee. The plan should include a review of landscaping and buffering requirements, signage, parking design standards, including parking to the rear, all-around architecture, driveway cuts, build-to lines and setbacks, and other requirements along the entry corridor.

C.4 All of the items listed under Community Appearance should be part of a single beautification plan for coordination and effectiveness of efforts and for policy consideration by Town Council. The Town Community Appearance Commission should coordinate all plan elements, and actively seek the input of the community at large.

*D. Sign policies and standards shall be periodically updated to enhance community identity and create a high quality business image.*

D.1 Conduct a review of the Town's sign regulations with the goal to have a long term policy consistent with the appearance of the High Country, including greater use of ground signs and directory signs.

*E. The Town shall encourage public, private, and utility company efforts to place utility wires underground whenever feasible.*

E.1 Prepare a Master Plan for the placement of utilities underground in Boone, establishing priority areas, estimating costs, scheduling the plan's implementation, and assigning responsibilities.

E.2 Coordinate with NCDOT and utility companies on the burying of overhead utilities when any roadway widening project is proposed.

## 2.3.2 COMMUNITY CHARACTER



### NARRATIVE

As revealed at the town meeting for the 1993 Comprehensive Plan, many area residents noted development activities along highway 321 and 105 was objectionable in terms of aesthetic impact on the community. As is the case with most issues of this magnitude, the problem is multifaceted. Since the turn of the century, building materials and techniques became increasingly homogenized throughout the United States. At the same time, major retail chains adopted a small number of development techniques and

store formulas being utilized across the country. Evidence of this can be readily seen in “formula-based” designs for discount stores, motel chains, video rental stores, fast food restaurants, and many other types of commercial buildings. Development regulations, emphasizing separation of land uses above all else, and with little or no concern for building architecture or scale, have done little to counter the flow.

### *What can be done*

These influences are especially damaging in a small community like Boone where the traditional rural character of a high country small town can be easily overwhelmed. If further declines in the town’s identity and character are to be prevented, both the public and private sectors will need to reconsider the methods and priorities of the present system of development. The following recommendations are an attempt to create some inroads in this regard:

#### *Establish at least minimal architectural design for new development.*

Experience from cities and towns around the country reveals that if the community does not specify what it wants, it will normally receive whatever the minimal chain store development formula specifies. Communities that are depressed economically and fighting a hard battle for new development, may feel that asking for a higher standard of design might prevent development from coming in. While this argument may have merit in economically depressed communities, it is clearly not the case in Boone, where evidence of rapid commercial development can be seen along the length and breadth of the town’s major thoroughfares.

#### *Identify critical locations in the town and zone them to require exceptional treatment.*

In every community, there are normally a number of especially significant locations that have a high degree of visibility or strategic importance. These locations may include major intersections, individual buildings of historic significance, public open spaces, or important views and vistas. In Boone, examples of such important areas might include entryways along the town’s major streets, the intersection of Blowing Rock Road and NC 105 Extension, the intersections of Blowing Rock Road and Rivers Street, the traditional downtown area, and the

university area. Due to the significance of these locations to the overall economic and aesthetic value of the town, special development standards are warranted.

*Place important outdoor spaces and new building of significant architectural merit in positions of visibility and prominence. Coordinate their placement with street designs.*

Over the last forty to fifty years, the practice of placing significant structures and outdoor places in the context of their site has given way to the real estate forces of minimum cost and secondarily, traffic flow. In the public sector, for example, new schools and parks are relegated to whatever land might be donated or acquired at the least expense. Post offices and tier governmental buildings, once the proud anchors of strategic, central locations, are today resigned to suburban highway locations—often buried among the malaise of commercial strip development, (e.g. objectively consider the Police Department/Development Services Department Building compared to the stately, proud civic building of earlier times). Fire halls, which once embodied the pride of a particular district in the community, are now assigned a similar fate.

This plan recommends that as new street layouts for new, mixed use neighborhoods are designed, termination points of streets (normally “T” intersections) should be reserved for buildings and outdoor spaces of architectural or community significance. Such uses might include schools, libraries, churches, public squares, or other public or private sector buildings of unusual merit or purpose.

*Incorporate significant natural and existing manmade elements into the thematic design of new developments.*

Normally, this can be accomplished by one of two methods: physical design and name recognition. Physical design can mean saving a significant tree, small pond, wetland area or old monument and incorporating these items into the open space system of the development. It can also mean saving a historic structure and creating a thematic design around it. Such a design might include architecturally compatible buildings, coordinated business signage, thematic street lights and benches, and other coordinated design elements.

*Save large trees, ponds, creeks, rock outcroppings, or other natural features of the landscape when locating new streets, buildings, parking lots, etc.*

This recommendation simply means to work with the land and its natural assets rather than fighting with it. Economic as well as environmental savings can be gained, for example, by curving an occasional street to save a large tree or rock outcropping. Many developers have now become savvy enough to realize that the preservation of a single significant tree or other natural feature may become one of the most important items in showing off the entryway or focal point of a new development. At other times, however, trees are cleared simply because they are an inconvenience to a particular chain store’s development formula or canned site plan. These are the situations where deliberate and conscientious public policy must step in to prevent wholesale destruction of Boone’s natural features.



*Relocate, if necessary, items of historic merit, monuments, significant works of art, etc. to new positions of prominence.* There are occasions when, for one reason or another, it is best to concede that a particular item may be better off being moved, that to risk its total loss, either physically or visually. While every effort should be made to retain existing historic elements in place, sometimes a new development will change the context of their setting to such a degree that the item has become trivialized. In other instances,

it may be better to recognize that the particular time was not well located in the first place and that it deserves a better location in the community. While allegiance to original historic context should always be the community’s first regard, it should not blind the town to better circumstances.

**POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. The identification, restoration and active use of structures, buildings, monuments, and neighborhoods of historic or architectural significance shall be encouraged as a means of enhancing their economic and cultural value to the planning area. \*\*\*\*\**

A.1 Conduct on-going assessments of critical locations in community deserving special attention by the zoning ordinance, in light of their high visibility, traffic impact, strategic location, or other unique features. Continue to encourage significant new public buildings and outdoor spaces to locate in these and other positions of visibility and strategic prominence. Encourage the private sector to do likewise.

A.2 Seek out locations of historical merit in the community, and prepare an action plan for their enhancement, rehabilitation, or relocation as may be necessary.

*B. Multiple and appropriate adaptive reuse of historic resources shall be encouraged.*

B.1 Amend development regulations to offer flexibility for restoration and active use of historic structures and other resources.

*C. Wise development of the tourism potential of the area’s architectural, historic, scenic and natural resources shall be encouraged.*

C.1 Consider the placement of public art at appropriate locations in downtown, including murals.

*D. The destruction of significant architectural, historic, scenic, natural and archaeological resources in the planning area shall be discouraged.*

D.1 Carefully scrutinize proposed road widening to ensure that such actions do not destroy community and neighborhood character. \*\*\*\*

D.2 Continue to support the Town’s tree preservation standards. Evaluate the effectiveness of the tree regulations since their establishment and amend them as necessary.

*E. New development, redevelopment and rehabilitation of structures and sites shall occur in a manner which is consistent with the neighborhood and architectural context of the immediate area, and supportive, whenever possible, of Boone's original community character as a High Country small town.*

### 2.3.3 HOUSING & NEIGHBORHOODS



#### NARRATIVE

In large measure, the unique structure of the Boone economy and the physical lay of the land have combined to strongly influence the types of housing and neighborhoods being created in the Boone area. For example, increased real estate costs, combined with an abundance of students and relatively low paid service workers, has resulted in a niche in the development marketplace for “cheap” apartment complexes. This demand is evidenced by the large number of such

complexes having been developed in the Boone area over the past decade. It is apparent that the free market forces of the development community have reacted to fill this demand for relatively inexpensive living space, regardless of the appearance or quality of the apartment developments.

A shortage of well located, affordable and buildable land is also having its effect on residential development. As the better building sites in the community have been developed, there has been a tendency to locate new residential development on less desirable sites, including, in some instances, areas threatened by flooding and areas of steep slope.

Perhaps the most critical housing issue in recent years has been the constant challenge to preserve existing single family neighborhoods. Many of Boone’s stable neighborhoods have been negatively affected by encroaching commercial and apartment development, traffic and noise. While this plan encourages consideration of well planned mixed uses in some areas for new development and redevelopment, further encroachment upon viable existing single family residential areas is strongly discouraged.



#### *Cut through traffic in existing neighborhoods*

An important factor influencing the quality of life in existing neighborhoods in Boone has been the impact of traffic movement within the town. As the strain has increased on Boone’s few major streets, cross town traffic has been forced onto parallel neighborhood streets - streets which were not designed to accept large traffic volumes. Over the years, as traffic levels increased, the quality of life on these streets has been reduced to extent

that their continued viability for residential use may become questionable. In extreme cases, it may be advisable to plan ahead for an orderly conversion from such residential uses to higher density residential use, office use or other compatible neighborhood land use.

Recently, the Town has taken steps to mitigate the problem of neighborhood cut-through traffic. This issue however needs to be continually monitored and new solutions sought to insure that the quality of life in these neighborhoods does not further deteriorate.

### ***Mixed Use Developments***

Consideration should be given to design of new suburban neighborhoods for mixed use land development patterns which generate fewer cross town trips to find necessary services. By providing places to live, places to work, places to shop, and places to gather in each neighborhood unit, there will less need for trips external to the neighborhood. The more services that are available to each neighborhood unit, the less congested the town's main roadways will be.

### ***Affordable Housing***

Affordable housing, much needed in the Boone area, can be provided through either public or private sector initiative, or some combination of the two.

From a public sector standpoint, the Town of Boone has previously had successful Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) housing programs which lead to the establishment of the Boone Housing Authority. The Town has also benefited from the efforts of the Northwestern Regional Housing Authority. At present there are no remaining extensive areas or concentrations of substandard housing in the community. Establishment of a Minimum Housing Board and effective enforcement of the Minimum Housing Code have successfully eliminated much of the remaining substandard housing. "Habitat for Humanity" and similar programs have also had success in Boone in recent years in addressing low and moderate income housing needs.

From a private sector standpoint, this report has already alluded to the construction, over the past few years, of "low cost" (if not affordable) housing in the form of inexpensively built apartment buildings. Judging from input received at the town meetings for the 1993 Comprehensive Plan, public sentiment toward this type of construction has not been favorable.

### ***The Accessory Housing Alternative***

A third alternative, not yet fully explored in the Boone area, is privately developed accessory housing. Accessory housing is a term used to describe a variety of housing forms, all of which are secondary to primary residence but share the same site or structure. Included are, for example, garage apartments, mother-in-law apartments or other accessory housing units. This form of housing is typically convenient to existing urban services, and thus places little additional burden on the area's public infrastructure and road system.

Accessory housing also offers particular promise to meet the needs of the area's growing retiree population. If Watauga County continues to attract large numbers of retirees in outlying residential communities, a new transportation problem may emerge. These retirement communities now filled with the "active retired" will eventually be occupied by elderly residents

who can no longer drive. Homes in these isolated residential developments will be far removed from shopping and medical facilities. Despite the obvious need, bus service will be difficult to provide, due to high cost of serving these remote, low density areas. Group housing and nursing homes, costly even today, will be unable to meet the long term care needs of the multitudes.

Accessory or “infill housing” provides an opportunity to address this problem. Many residential lots in Boone’s suburban neighborhoods average 10,000 or more square feet per lot. Provided the topography allows, the size of many of these lots affords good opportunity for attractively designed garage apartments or detached granny flats. Small accessory apartments can also be built within the wall of the main house. Regardless of the approach used, such units are highly affordable to build, because there are no additional land costs.

Accessory or infill housing offers several other advantages, both social and economic. First, such housing can provide for the healthy mixing of young and old. The once traditional supporting relationship between the elderly, the middle aged, and the young would again be restored, passing the wisdom and experiences of elders on to the next generation. Second, public transit, now uneconomical to operate, may be feasible with the addition of more housing units in the same area of land. Third, the addition or expansion of the AppalCART system into these areas would not only meet the needs of the non-driving elderly population, but also would encourage working age people to use the bus system. Fourth, from a builder’s perspective, many affordable housing units could be provided without the cost of building expensive infrastructure (streets, sidewalks, power and telephone lines, etc.). And fifth, the Town’s costs of servicing the population and maintaining the infrastructure would remain relatively constant, despite the larger numbers of people served.

In summary, traffic movement and land availability appear to be the town primary constraints on population growth and quality of life in the area. It behooves the community to plan for better designed residential developments convenient to major activity centers such as the University, the Medical Center and the downtown. Such development should be designed to be supportive of bikeways, pedestrian ways, and the AppalCART transit system whenever possible.

## **POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. The protection and rehabilitation of viable neighborhoods shall be encouraged to insure their continued existence as a major housing source and as a reflection of the area’s image as an attractive, highly livable community. \*\*\*\*\**

- A.1 As road widenings are proposed, carefully evaluate their potential impact on the integrity of residential areas, pedestrian-oriented commercial districts, and the ability of bicyclists and pedestrians to function in the affected area.
- A.2 Prepare at least two neighborhood plans, working closely with neighborhood residents, and incorporating the full range of neighborhood issues to include: land use, traffic, housing, neighborhood business services, infrastructure improvements, parks and recreation needs, crime and safety.
- A.3 Prepare a document readily accessible to the public that details residential zoning areas and the date on which each was implemented.
- A.4 Establish a planning and development policy that protects older established residential neighborhoods from the negative effects of adjacent commercial development.

A.5 Establish a task force to determine how like communities successfully enforce their existing residential codes. Items requiring focused attention: Detailed analysis of implementation and enforcement. For example, penalties, personnel requirements, budget implications, long-term effect on town character and economic development.

A.6 Implement a residential zoning enforcement policy based on the task force analysis above.

*B. Street system designs which discourage through traffic on purely local streets while allowing for free circulation within the neighborhood shall be encouraged.*

B.1 Update the Town's standards for subdivision street layouts, emphasizing circulation between neighborhoods and the ability of pedestrians and bicyclists to travel on back streets throughout the town.

B.2 To the extent federal and state funding programs will allow, seek and apply for at least one grant to provide for bicycle paths to connect residential areas with commercial and university districts.

*C. Proposed residential development which would expose residents to harmful effects of incompatible development or to environmental hazards shall be prohibited.*

C.1 Amend the zoning map and development regulations to prevent residential uses from locating adjacent to existing developments and other uses which may have characteristics which cannot be effectively mitigated.

*D. Innovative and flexible land planning and development practices shall be encouraged to create livable developments which better safeguard land, water, energy and historic resources.*

D.1 Continue to evaluate opportunities in the zoning ordinance for flexibly designed and located single-family and multi-family residential developments.

D.2 Establish ongoing relationships with ASU's departments of Geography and Planning, Appropriate Technology, and Sustainable Development to develop, enhance, and implement efforts toward creating affordable housing, appropriate infill development, neighborhood livability standards, and design standards for multi-family development. This should include attention to lighting, bike and pedestrian pathways, and federal, state, and local funding sources.

*E. Factors in determining preferred locations for high density residential development shall include: close proximity to the university, employment or shopping centers; access to major thoroughfares and the transit system; the availability of public services and facilities; and compatibility with adjacent land uses.*

E.1 Review the zoning ordinance for the appropriate placement of high density housing near urban activity centers that are coordinated with transit system stops.

*F. The affordable housing needs of area residents, particularly elderly and low to moderate income residents, shall be recognized in Town policies and actions regarding residential development.*

F.1 To the extent the federal and state funding programs will allow, seek and apply for at least one grant to provide for low to moderate income housing.

*G. Compact, full service neighborhoods, offering opportunities for living, working, shopping, and gathering places, shall be encouraged in newly planned developments, as well as for redeveloping areas.*

*H. The overall housing unit density for proposed infill residential development or redevelopment should be compatible with the average density of existing areas.*

### 2.3.4 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT



#### **NARRATIVE**

##### ***Town, County and University***

As Boone continues to grow, its area of influence in Watauga County becomes greater each year. Along with this urban expansion come greater challenges to serve the area's ever growing population, both permanent and seasonal. Public decision making on key issues such as land use, development, transportation, utilities, recycling, environmental management, law enforcement, education, recreation, tourism and economic

development require greater levels of advanced planning and coordination between the Town, the County, and the University. Mutual support and the identification of common interests among these three key entities can have a profound impact upon achieving area goals. Through these policies and this plan, the Town of Boone wishes to go on record as being strongly in favor of local inter-governmental and university efforts to provide and plan for these critical facilities and elements.

##### ***Outside Agency Support***

In addition to on-going coordination with the County and the University, the Town provides support to a wide range of outside agencies and organizations serving the citizens of Boone. Such agencies range from the Boone Area Chamber of Commerce to the Watauga County Hunger Coalition to the AppalCART Transit agencies. A complete listing of agencies with the amount of funding provided to each is available for review by any citizen in the office of the Town Manager.

##### ***The public at large***

Beyond key entities and outside agencies referenced above, the preparation of this Comprehensive Plan and its amendments has provided a useful forum for hearing the concerns of the public at large. Continued mechanisms must be identified to continually provide for additional opportunities for meaningful input from the public on the future growth of the area.

##### ***Small Area Plans***

The Comprehensive Plan provides a good platform to discuss growth issues of community-wide concern, there is an ongoing need for planning at small area and neighborhood level. Ideally, each significant, identifiable small area of the larger Boone community should be given the opportunity to participate in the production of a closely tailored small area plan. Such planning normally results in the highest levels of public participation and enhanced support for the implementation of specific actions recommended in each plan. In addition, the preparation of such small area plans affords the opportunity to view the town in more of a fine-grained pattern, rather than in large, homogenous, and non-descript land use blobs. Such plans can provide the opportunity to integrate carefully designed and appropriately scaled mixed uses into the fabric of

smaller parts of the community, thus further reducing traffic congestion on the town's already overloaded street system.

### ***Mapping Needs***

The 1993 Steering Committee accurately forecasted both the need for and capabilities of geographic information systems (GIS) for improved mapping and information sharing capabilities among the Town, County and ASU. Since that time, each of these entities has made significant improvements in their GIS capabilities. This has enabled a great deal of information sharing and planning activities among all stakeholders, including the general public, who may receive the greatest benefit of all from its use.

## **POLICIES AND ACTIONS**

*A. Public involvement shall be encouraged in decisions concerning land use and development by making the public aware of proposed developments at the earliest opportunity, as well as fostering communication among developers, the Town, the County, the University, and the general public. \*\*\*\*\**

A.1 Offer continued support to the recently created Community Council. A number of appropriate issues for consideration by the committee are included among these implementation actions.

A.2 Maintain and update a mailing list of architects, engineers, surveyors, landscape architects, realtors, builders, developers and contractors for notification and distribution of changes in Town policies and regulations.

A.3 Encourage periodic articles in all available media outlets about land use decisions, how they are advertised, and how they are made. Continue school presentations by Town planning staff to explain land use and how it affects each citizen.

A.4 Post all zoning change requests, special use and variance requests to the Town of Boone web site with date of application and date of impending and completed actions. Explore the possibility of providing links to the Town web site from local newspaper online editions in which the Town posts public notices.

*B. Neighborhood and special area planning shall be encouraged to foster public involvement in the production of closely tailored, action oriented special area plans and programs.*

B.1 Prepare at least two small area or neighborhood plans within the year.

*C. Specific functional plans and implementation tools shall be supported as part of the comprehensive planning program for the Town and County.*

*D. Special committees, advisory panels, educational forums, public workshops, leadership seminars, town meetings and media contacts shall be encouraged and fostered to enhance the effectiveness of citizen involvement in community planning and action.*

D.1 Hold an annual Town Meeting to hear citizen concerns about growth and development and the progress made. In addition to the annual Town Meetings, consider special workshops, open houses and a newsletter or annual report to keep citizens involved and informed about the future of the town and the action being taken. \*\*\*\*\*