

Chapter 9: Community Character

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Introduction

Community character can be defined as the various elements that makes a place special and different from all other places. It is a reason that new businesses want to come to a community, it is what makes families want to move to be part of a community, and it is what attracts visitors and tourists to a city or town. Community character is why citizens are proud to call their city home. It is not something that can be duplicated from another location. It is something that a community has worked to preserve or create over many years. This chapter addresses a number of topics that impact a community's character including public art, historic preservation, visual corridors, gateways, trees, cultural features and design guidelines.

Forsyth County is rich with heritage, natural beauty and community amenities. What do we want to keep and improve on for both current Forsyth County residents and the 120,000 new people who will call this community home? How do we preserve what we have while growing in a dynamic fashion?

How Have the 2001 Legacy Plan Strategies Worked?

Finding the balance between preserving what is significant to our community and

What the 2001 Legacy Plan says about Community Character....

Create and perpetuate a unique, special, and distinctive image for the communities within Forsyth County

Use quality design to display our pride in the rich and diverse history of the County

Encourage major employers and institutions to display their pride through creative design incorporated in their buildings, signs, and landscaping

Design attractive roadways that include auto, bike, and pedestrian features

Create development design guidelines to promote livable, sustainable, and visually pleasing communities

Encourage the preservation and reuse of existing sites and buildings

Educate the community on the benefits of considering aesthetics in the development process

Identify, protect, and promote historic resources

Encourage the historic preservation of the various and diverse buildings and neighborhoods

Create awareness of historic resources

Develop historic preservation alliances

Incorporate community gateways and boulevards to convey sense of pride

Maintain rural farmland

Incorporate wide green buffers to creeks and add walking trails

Provide attractive directional signs and event banners

embracing new development is a challenge. Since the *2001 Legacy Plan*, many steps have been taken to allow our community to grow in a viable but visually-conscious way. New regulations for on-premise signs were

adopted by the Winston-Salem City Council, Clemmons Village Council, the Walkertown Town Council and the Kernersville Board of Aldermen to assist with the cluttered appearance of some of our roads and neighborhoods. New street standards with sidewalk and street tree requirements were adopted, which enable our communities to be more walkable and aesthetically pleasing. Large-scale retail (“big box”) development is now required to follow design standards, which includes an option for public art. Additionally, discussions are taking place in the community about encouraging public art for both public and private projects. The Creative Corridors initiative, which is making appearance and design recommendations for the street and highway corridors framing the center city, is one example of this movement.

The City of Winston-Salem recently approved a downtown overlay district (Winston Overlay) to assist with the design and placement of new development and rehabilitation of old buildings in the city's core. The municipalities of Lewisville, Clemmons and Kernersville have adopted Town Center Design Guidelines. In 2006, the second and final phase of Community Crossing, a corridor project begun in the 1990s that connects major institutions in Winston-Salem, was completed in the area of South Main Street and I-40.

Through the Area Plan process, design guidelines have been created for the conversion of homes into office uses, suburban business parks, activity centers, and low-intensity commercial development.

The natural environment can also be an important part of a community's character. Several steps have been taken to preserve the natural environment and our tree canopy. The requirement for street trees in the new street standards as well as the Tree Ordinance were adopted in Winston-Salem. Also, the Planned Residential Development (PRD) regulations were adopted by the City and County which require the preservation of open spaces and natural areas. Residential and Commercial Infill Ordinances for the Urban Neighborhoods were adopted by the City Council and will be vital in protecting the character of our older areas.

To know what you want to preserve in your community, you need to know what you

Figure 13: Local Historic Studies

Forsyth County Architectural Survey Update, three phases completed by Heather Fearnbach 2011

Spanning the Past, a Survey of Selected Historic Bridges in Winston-Salem, 2008

Historic Resources in Forsyth County, A Source Book, 2007

Winston-Salem's African-American Neighborhoods 1870-1950, by Langdon E. Oppermann in 1993

Forsyth County Architecture: From Frontier to Factory: An Architectural History of Forsyth County, a survey completed by Gwynne Taylor in 1981

What Community Character strategies/tasks have been completed since Legacy's Adoption in 2001?

- ❖ Sign ordinance (Winston-Salem, Clemmons and Kernersville)
- ❖ Sidewalk and Street Standards
- ❖ Demolition-by-Neglect Ordinance
- ❖ Forsyth County Architectural Survey Update field work, database, and mapping
- ❖ Merged the Historic District and Historic Properties Commission
- ❖ Historic Resources Source Book published
- ❖ Street Tree and Tree Ordinances (City only)
- ❖ Tree City, USA Designation (City and Clemmons only)
- ❖ "Big Box" Retail Text Amendment (City only)
- ❖ Winston-Salem Downtown Overlay
- ❖ Town Center Design Guidelines completed for Lewisville, Clemmons and Kernersville
- ❖ Overlay Districts with Design Guidelines for Kernersville and Clemmons
- ❖ PRD Regulations Overhauled
- ❖ Agricultural Tourism and Voluntary Agricultural District Ordinances
- ❖ Preserve Historic Forsyth, a countywide non-profit established
- ❖ Forsyth County Architectural Survey Update
- ❖ Historic Preservation Month celebrated
- ❖ Heritage Awards established
- ❖ Phase Two of Community Crossing Complete
- ❖ Design Guidelines created through the Area Plan process

have. Forsyth County's Architectural Survey Update was completed and a number of significant buildings and neighborhoods were recognized by the North Carolina State Historic Preservation office and placed on the State's Study List for the National Register. As part of the project, a historical context was written about the development history of Winston-Salem from the 1920s to the 1960s. Additionally, research and documentation has begun for a countywide agricultural history.

Since the adoption of the *2001 Legacy Plan*, the Historic District and Historic Properties Commissions merged to more efficiently and comprehensively monitor and protect the historical and cultural resources of the county. The Commission produced a number of publications and studies to make information on preservation available to the public (see Figure 13).

What are Other Communities Doing?

Community Character is a topic that is considered to be important in most communities. For this update, eight other comprehensive plans were studied including: Raleigh, NC; Cary, NC; Greensboro, NC; Portland, OR; Greenville, SC; Denver, CO; and Lynchburg, VA. The approach to community character varies depending on each city's priorities, but one theme prevailed; each community wanted to keep a unique sense of place.

The integration of design into public and private development projects is a common tool used by the communities studied. Recommendations to protect and enhance

the visual image of a community included the use of design guidelines, ordinances or programming that addresses major roadways, neighborhoods, commercial areas, downtowns, scenic corridors, gateways, greenways and landmarks. Many communities emphasize programs for the man-made environment such as gateways, corridors, public landscapes, streetscapes and public and/or private art. It is recommended that such programs not be limited to the urban environment, but should also address rural areas.

Many cities are seeking to preserve urban and rural viewsheds. In an urban area, views can be protected through the development review process or through outright purchase, such as the creation of a park. In rural areas, programs that buy development rights are popular (see Chapter 7, Environmental Quality and Sustainability for more details on open space preservation).

Some locations, such as Denver and Portland have prioritized the purchase of natural areas including forests, streams and other natural resources. Areas are designated for protection before any major development occurs. This ensures that land preserved through the development process is not just “left over land”. Communities are also beginning to see the necessity and value in the protection and preservation of working farms and historic landscapes that reflect rural heritage.

Active public art programs emphasizing the past, present and future of the community

are becoming more common. A public art program can promote both the character and culture of an area and serve as a bridge to open space, parks and greenways, as well as the built environment. Many of the communities studied have realized that historic preservation is not just about saving the old house on the hill. It is an important piece to the economic revitalization puzzle that can help the economic development of a downtown, neighborhood, or entire community. Many communities have developed procedures that abate violations affecting historic resources through repair and/or acquisition rather than demolition. Retaining existing housing stock is also a “green” approach since it recycles the housing we already have.

The preservation of an area’s cultural heritage is another important economic development tool. Cultural tourism is growing in many areas through various initiatives to promote the ethnic heritage and history of a community.

Community Appearance

The Community Appearance Commission is a 15-member advisory board appointed by the Winston-Salem City Council and Forsyth County Board of Commissioners. The Commission was formed in 1989 and includes citizens with a variety of backgrounds. A majority of the members have special experience or education in a design-related field. The mission of the Commission is to enhance the visual quality and aesthetic character of Forsyth County

and the City of Winston-Salem for residents and visitors.

The Commission’s primary functions are handled through three sub-committees: Technical Advisory and Project Review (TAPR); Education and Awards; and Trees and Woodlands. The TAPR Committee reviews projects which receive public funding and provides comments and recommendations to the project managers and designers of each project.

The Education and Awards Committee sponsors public educational seminars, a Letter of Recognition program and a biennial Awards Ceremony. The biennial Awards Ceremony honors individuals and companies who have made significant contributions to the appearance of the City of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.



The Trees and Woodlands Committee advises different entities on landscaping and tree management issues. This subcommittee, in partnership with Keep Winston-Salem Beautiful and the Winston-Salem Vegetation Management

Department, sponsors the popular Roots Day program. Roots Day is annual community event in which volunteers plant trees within a designated neighborhood. Since the first Roots Day in 1993, volunteers have planted over 5,000 trees throughout the City of Winston-Salem.

Historic Preservation

The Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission (HRC) is a 12-member citizen board created in 2002 and is appointed jointly by the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners, the Winston-Salem City Council, the Kernersville Board of Aldermen and the Village of Clemmons Council. Prior to the establishment of the HRC, historic preservation activities were administered by the Forsyth County Historic Properties Commission (formed in 1976) and the Winston-Salem Historic District Commission (formed in 1948). The HRC consists of five appointed representatives from Forsyth County, five from the City of Winston-Salem, one from the Town of Kernersville and one from the Village of Clemmons. In addition to at-large members, there are also designated positions that specify various types of expertise including architecture, architectural history, historic preservation, landscape design, planning, ownership of property in historic districts and ownership of historic landmarks. The HRC's role is to protect and enrich the county's cultural, historical, architectural and archaeological heritage through identifying, designating and preserving historic resources. In addition to administering local historic districts and landmarks, the HRC is involved in various activities relating to historic

resources throughout the County such as architectural surveys, National Register nominations, education programs and historic markers.

Figure 14: Historic Designations

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register is a federal program of the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. In North Carolina the program is administered by the State Historic Preservation Office, NC Division of Archives and History. The National Register does not impose regulations on property owners unless federal or state funding is involved or federal income tax benefits are applied for. The designation can be applied to sites or districts, and there are numerous designations in Forsyth County.

Historic District (H)

A local zoning district in Winston-Salem that controls land use and requires specific guidelines be met when altering, constructing, moving, or demolishing properties. Current Historic Districts are Old Salem and Historic Bethabara.

Historic Overlay District. (HO)

A local overlay zoning district that requires specific guidelines be met when altering, constructing, moving, or demolishing properties. The underlying zoning district (residential, commercial, etc.) remains in place. The only current Historic Overlay District is West End.

Local Historic Landmark

Landmark designation is available for highly significant structures and sites within Forsyth County, and provides local property tax benefits. Once a property is designated as a Local Historic Landmark, property owners must follow a design review process for alterations to the designated property.

The HRC has two major subcommittees: the Education Committee and the Historic Marker Committee. The Education Committee develops programs and projects to educate the public about the history of Forsyth County's built environment and the work of the HRC. The Education Committee sponsors historic preservation month activities. Throughout preservation month, the Education Committee sponsors local activities such as a weekly Lunch and Learn Lecture Series, tax credit workshops and historic marker unveilings. In 2006 and 2008 the HRC began and sponsored the Heritage Awards. The Awards recognized individuals, groups, organizations or businesses active in the preservation, restoration, rehabilitation or interpretation of the county's architectural, cultural or natural heritage. In 2011, the decision was made to transfer sponsorship of the Heritage Awards to Preserve Historic Forsyth (PHF), the countywide historic resources non-profit organization whose mission is to promote, protect and advocate for historic resources in Forsyth County.



In 2001, the City of Winston-Salem initiated a historic marker program. The purpose of this program is to recognize properties, events and individuals of local historic significance. Each year, the HRC selects up to three marker locations. The historic marker program has been highly successful in providing much-needed visibility and recognition for historic sites within the city.

Section 106 of National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) grants legal status to historic preservation in Federal planning, decision-making and project execution. Section 106 requires all Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their actions on historic properties. On a local level, the City of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County have a Programmatic Agreement with the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office to review all City or County projects which receive federal funding. Staff evaluates whether projects meet the requirements for a Section 106 review using redevelopment standards developed by the Secretary of the Interior.



Demolition by Neglect is defined as the destruction of a building through abandonment or lack of maintenance. In 2005, the City of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County both approved Demolition by Neglect Ordinances for Local Historic Landmarks or structures within Historic or Historic Overlay Districts. The goal of this ordinance is to protect some of most valued historic resources from extensive or severe decay or deterioration.

Figure 15: National Register Districts Created Since Adoption of Legacy

Downtown North, 2002

Downtown Tobacco Winston-Salem, 2002, amended 2009

Holly Avenue, 2002

Ardmore, 2004

Friedland County Congregation, 2004

North Cherry Street (Winston-Salem), 2004

P. H. Hanes Knitting Co. Complex, 2005

Waightown/Belview, 2005

West Salem, 2005

Centerville, 2008

Sunnyside/Central Terrace, 2008

Reynoldstown, 2008

Other Community Character Initiatives

The Thoroughfare Overlay (TO) District is an overlay zoning district created to preserve the visual quality and functional operation of major roadways in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. The TO District consists of the public right-of-way and land within 100 feet on either side of the right-of-

way of all freeways and roads in the interstate system. The district includes supplementary standards for outdoor storage, loading and garage bays, utilities and setbacks.

The Winston Overlay (WO) District is an overlay zoning district which encourages new development that is compatible with the existing urban form and character of Downtown Winston-Salem. The standards of this district are intended to prevent new inappropriate suburban-style development, while still allowing for creativity and flexibility in creating urban, pedestrian-oriented design opportunities in the Downtown core. The WO District includes basic standards for the location of structures, building facade transparency, building entrances and parking.

The Community Crossing program was created by the Community Appearance Commission (CAC) in 1994. The Community Crossing route links the major civic and cultural assets of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County and was envisioned as a means of guiding visitors through the City along a linear gateway. The Community Crossing program runs along University Parkway, Marshall Street, and Main Street between US 52 and I-40. It connects major facilities such as Sci Works, Historic Bethabara, Wake Forest University, the LJV Coliseum, the Benton Convention Center, Old Salem, and the UNC School of the Arts. Phase Two on the southern end of the Community Crossing project was completed in 2006.

Revitalizing Urban Commercial Areas (RUCAs) are identified locations within the Urban Neighborhoods of Winston-Salem that have been designated for City assistance. In 2006 staff prepared recommendations for public improvements, private site improvements, regulatory changes and financial incentives to help improve the appearance of and revive these declining areas. The City Council approved its first round of funding for RUCAs in 2006, and approved a second round in 2011. While the Community and Business Development Department is responsible for administering the RUCA program, Planning staff is responsible for reviewing individual RUCA proposals for design consistency with the RUCA recommendations. Staff has also provided design assistance for RUCA participants as needed.



Public art has been discussed at length in the last several years by the City of Winston-Salem, the Arts Council and a number of other interested groups. While some public art has been created and

installed in various locations, there is not yet a comprehensive public art program. Some progress has been made with including public art as an option in our large-scale retail (“big box”) development requirements. The City hopes to continue working to establish a public art program in the future.

Issues for Community Discussion

Maintaining what makes Forsyth County unique can be approached in many ways, and many programs promoting community character have already been put into place. With 120,000 more people entering our county over the next 20 years, it will be even more important to designate and prioritize what needs to be protected and preserved.

Community Image

What we value and preserve provides an image to people visiting or moving to our community. Community image issues can include historic preservation, community appearance, preserving the natural environment and/or design guidelines for the built environment. In starting our community discussion, we need to ask a big-picture question: How do we want to be remembered? What are our overall priorities for creating/protecting our image?

Community Appearance

Many issues fall under this category including corridor enhancement, viewsheds and design guidelines for new development and the rehabilitation of existing development. Should viewsheds be

identified and protected proactively? Is our current Thoroughfare Overlay (TO) District adequate for enhancing major roadways? Are there other areas in need of protection through an overlay district? Do our natural areas need a program for their protection?

Historic Resources

Forsyth County has a long and rich historic culture, from the Moravians through the industrial period, and up to the technology period of today. What are the tools and who are the partners needed create a Historic Preservation Master Plan for the entire County? How do we prioritize historic areas or sites for protection?

Public Art

Public art not only provides landmarks in a community (such as the Salem coffeepot), it also enhances the appearance and enjoyment of a community. What are the tools and who are the partners who need to collaborate to create a Public Art Master Plan for the entire County, including our rural and various ethnic history? Should public art be a feature which helps create more interactive community spaces?

Summary

A positive community image is generally influenced by quality community design. With a positive image, the community will see such results as an instilled sense of pride in the citizens, employers and organizations who wish to locate here, a thriving tourism sector and additional people who want to be residents. When residents love and are proud of where they live, it will contribute to the overall economic,

environmental and social well-being of Forsyth County. To make this happen will take a combination of the preservation of the natural/physical setting and the historic character of the county, along with well-designed new development that will enhance the community and continue to foster pride and well-being. Balancing development and environmental values is necessary to maintain a good sustainable quality of life and a livable community into the future.