

Building Better Neighborhoods



The character of neighborhoods in Forsyth County has undergone a radical change over the past four decades. The trend has been away from compact, self-sufficient, mixed use neighborhoods located in cities and small towns. In their place we have been building large-lot suburban subdivisions and strip commercial corridors. This suburban development pattern has resulted in neighborhoods that are often homogeneous, separated from jobs and shopping, and almost totally dependent on the automobile.

Large lots and the lack of sidewalks, porches and neighborhood gathering places have reduced the opportunities for interaction of residents and eroded our sense of community.

The disappearance of nearby neighborhood shopping has forced most of us to drive for all of our daily needs. Younger and older people who do not drive, find it difficult to function independently in a suburban environment lacking neighborhood services.

As young families have moved to these new developments on the suburban fringe, many older neighborhoods have fallen into decline. The preservation and revitalization of these older neighborhoods is important to reduce suburban sprawl and provide affordable housing. Living in older neighborhoods reduces commute lengths, improves accessibility to needed services, and makes good use of existing infrastructure. While residential revitalization has occurred in some areas of Forsyth County, the revitalization of older commercial areas within our in town neighborhoods has been slow to follow.

Housing that is affordable to lower income people, including public housing developments, is scarce and concentrated in a few areas of our community, dividing us by class and income. It is hard to find sites for affordable housing options such as multifamily and manufactured housing due to neighborhood opposition.

Dissatisfaction with current development patterns has spawned a new trend in planning and development called traditional neighborhood development. Also known as new urbanism, transit-oriented or neotraditional development, traditional neighborhood development is becoming a viable, marketable alternative to suburban sprawl.

Traditional neighborhood development is based on a return to the town designs existing before World War II. Traditional neighborhood development tries to reduce the role of the automobile and incorporate convenience, walkability, aesthetics, livability, environmental sensitivity, connections to other neighborhoods and a sense of belonging back into community design. We need to embrace and adapt these concepts because they are the basic foundation to building better neighborhoods.



TND's are based on neighborhood designs that existed before WWII.

Our Vision

The *Legacy* Focus Groups have envisioned in their report, “Forsyth County Tomorrow” more livable neighborhoods in our urban areas, suburbs, and small towns. New neighborhoods and revitalized older neighborhoods contain a diversity of housing types and people, and better access to neighborhood shopping and services, recreational facilities, and educational opportunities. A united effort to address social issues such as crime, quality of education, and homelessness has helped to strengthen the relationship between our neighborhoods. With careful planning, appropriate design standards, and citizen empowerment, neighborhoods have become the building blocks of our community.

In the year 2015 we envision that . . .

- 👁️ New neighborhood designs encourage a sense of community by incorporating features such as front porches, sidewalks, street trees, pocket parks, trails, community focal points, and nearby neighborhood services. Residents, including the elderly, handicapped, and young enjoy walking to nearby neighborhood-scale shopping and services, schools, churches, and public open spaces.
- 👁️ Affordable housing for all citizens is a priority of the community. Various housing designs that are suitable for different income levels, family sizes, types, and tastes have been developed in many communities

reducing segregation and enhancing interaction. Public housing reform and increased home ownership bring a high level of neighborhood pride to all areas of our County. Many residential opportunities are provided for people who choose to live Downtown or in older, renovated historic neighborhoods surrounding the central city.

- 👁️ In our self-sufficient neighborhoods, cars are not necessary for day-to-day living. We can travel by bicycle, on foot or take the bus. Sidewalks and greenways connect neighborhoods to nearby parks, shopping, schools, and other neighborhoods. Neighborhood streets have been designed to slow down traffic, making neighborhoods safer for children and adults alike.
- 👁️ Reliance on incentive-based policies instead of directives and penalties encourages developers and businesses to work with neighborhoods to create consensus on new development proposals.

Goals, Objectives, Policies and Action Agenda

Goal:

New and revitalized neighborhoods that offer a variety of quality housing types, convenience to services and shopping, and foster a strong sense of community.

**Objective 1:
New Neighborhood Designs**

Compact, pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods that contain a mixture of residential and commercial buildings, public spaces and amenities, and offer a variety of transportation options.

In 1995, a story entitled “Fifteen Ways to Fix the Suburbs” made the cover of *Newsweek* magazine. The story said people were becoming disenchanted with standard subdivisions—the big lawns, isolation from their neighbors and the need to drive five miles for a gallon of milk. The story went on to call for changes: smaller lots, corner stores, narrower streets and a dozen other design changes, to fix the problems. The story was significant because an issue that formerly concerned only planners and architects was being written up in the mainstream press.

The kind of subdivision design called for in the *Newsweek* story is called “traditional neighborhood development” or TND. The essential elements of TND are a mix of residential and non-residential land uses, provision for alternative means of transportation so that absolute reliance on the automobile is lessened, architecture on a pedestrian scale, and socially friendly public spaces. Forsyth County has examples of such communities including East Winston, West Salem, Waughtown, Ogburn Station and the West End.

The West End development has many of the design attributes of “traditional neighborhood” design. Houses are placed close to the street on

small lots, front porches look out on the sidewalk, narrow, curving streets are designed to follow the rolling topography, and public spaces such as Grace Court and Hanes Parks add to the character of the area. A rich mix of housing types including apartment buildings, brownstone townhouses, and duplexes complement the many single family dwellings. In the 20s, 30s and 40s, services were scattered throughout the neighborhood including concentrations on Burke Street, and Fourth Street.

The type of neighborhood development exemplified by West End declined after World War I. The coming of the automobile allowed people to live further away from Downtown. New subdivisions were built on larger lots and strict separation of retail, employment and residential uses came into vogue. By 1959, Forsyth County had moved to a pattern of development that would come to be called suburban sprawl.

The traditional neighborhood design principles seen in the West End are one reason the neighborhood remains a very desirable place to live a hundred years after the first houses were built there. These classic design principles are an excellent model to follow in building the neighborhoods of the next century. Builders across the country are testing the market for TND type developments. Almost 200 TND projects are now under construction or in the planning stages in the United States. Southern Village, a new traditional housing development near Chapel Hill, recently featured in *Time* magazine, used the West End as the model for its design. Other North Carolina communities including Cornelius, Huntersville and Davidson in northern Mecklenburg County have adopted land devel-

Table 10.1

Traditional Neighborhood Design Guidelines

- The neighborhood has a discernible center.
- Most of the dwellings are within a 5-minute walk of the center.
- There are shops and offices at the center or at the edge of the neighborhood.
- Public structures at prominent locations and open spaces are integrated into the neighborhood pattern.
- There is a variety of dwelling types, lot sizes and prices.
- Higher density multi-family and attached units are typically close to the neighborhood center.
- Residential and commercial buildings are placed close to the street.
- Parking lots and garage doors rarely face the street.
- Streets within the neighborhood are relatively narrow, shaded by rows of trees and form a connected network.
- A system of sidewalks and greenways creates a pedestrian circulation system.
- There is a transit stop within walking distance of the neighborhood.

opment codes that facilitate the development of TNDs. Here in the Triad, Greensboro and Guilford County have adopted traditional neighborhood district regulations.

In creating new neighborhoods using traditional neighborhood design principles, three major components must be considered: residential development, neighborhood-serving commercial development, and the layout of the street system. What the traditional model actually requires is a movement away from single use zoning and towards an approach blending all three of these elements.

Residential: Traditional residential developments, those exemplified by West End, include a mixture of housing types, smaller lots, connected streets, public gathering places and a pedestrian atmosphere. Even some of Forsyth County’s current subdivision activity reflects the trend to smaller lots and pedestrian amenities.

Neighborhood Commercial: Citizens in our community are becoming increasingly concerned over the current trend toward big box retail, unsightly strip commercial areas, and enclosed malls. Such developments, which cater exclusively to the automobile, increase traffic congestion and air pollution. Having pedestrian-oriented, well-designed commercial areas in and near neighborhoods can serve as a focal point for the neighborhood and also reduces the number and length of automobile trips.

Street System: The pattern and design of the street system is an important component of the overall traditional neighborhood development. A grid or modified grid street system of interconnecting streets is preferred to a system of a few

collector streets and many cul-de-sacs. The grid system disperses traffic instead of concentrating it on a few major thoroughfares, helps keep traffic on any one street low and lessens the need for future street widening. Street standards that allow narrower streets and tighter turning radii slow traffic and give the neighborhood a more pedestrian feel. Streets are typically designed for a speed of 25 miles per hour. Reading the “parade of homes” section in any newspaper makes it clear that developers are building mostly suburban-oriented residential developments with large lots and cul-de-sacs and home buyers continue to purchase those homes mostly because they have no choice. And while creating TNDs on larger greenfield sites is relatively easy, applying the same principles and design standards to smaller infill and redevelopment sites is more difficult. Traditional neighborhood design standards developed for inclusion in local development ordinances should therefore reside alongside more traditional subdivision regulations and exist to provide choice and an alternative to home builders and home buyers.

Standard subdivisions can be improved by selectively adopting some of the design principles and standards of TNDs. For example, concern about vehicles speeding on local residential streets and the safety of children walking and playing in those streets is often voiced by suburban subdivision residents. In standard subdivisions, even little-used streets are often 36 feet wide with big sweeping curves at the corners. These streets are great for cars; traffic barely needs to slow down. Narrow streets—as little as 24 feet wide—and tight, right-angled corners are

probably a lot safer and easier for walkers because they force drivers to slow down. Revised street standards that included narrower streets and other street calming principles could help address resident’s concerns about speeding and safety. Requirements for sidewalks would allow small children to have a safer means of travel and a better place to play. Moving away from the cul-de-sac and collector street pattern of traditional subdivisions to a grid-like pattern where more streets share in carrying traffic would also address traffic concerns.

By developing new design standards for Traditional Neighborhood Developments and refining our requirements for standard subdivisions, we can move toward our goal of building better neighborhoods in the future.

Action Agenda

- Develop traditional neighborhood design standards for inclusion in the Unified Development Ordinances that provide choice and an alternative to current suburban-oriented subdivision regulations.
- Work with the Winston-Salem Department of Transportation and the NC Department of Transportation to develop revised street standards that will slow traffic and make neighborhoods more pedestrian friendly. These revised standards may allow for narrower streets, increased horizontal and vertical alignments, and inclusion of street calming design.
- Require sidewalks as part of the design stan-

dards for TND neighborhoods and consider the inclusion of requirements for sidewalks in standard subdivisions.

- Make provisions for a neighborhood-scale, mixed use commercial district in the Unified Development Ordinances.
- Provide incentives for neighborhood-scale mixed use developments.

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**Objective 2:
 Existing Neighborhoods**

Existing neighborhoods are preserved and revitalized to become more pedestrian-friendly, provide needed services, and promote a strong sense of community pride.

An important factor for growth management and the retention of our natural and rural areas is redevelopment and infill development in our existing neighborhoods. Redevelopment and infill opportunities, both residential and commercial, can serve to focus development where infrastructure already exists reducing the pressure for development of greenfield sites in our rural areas. The preservation of the historical nature of many of our older neighborhoods adds to the desirability of these areas.

Existing neighborhoods can be retrofitted for and benefit from the traditional neighborhood approach and derive the same benefits as new neighborhoods. The same design standards for residential and commercial development and traf-

fic improvements recommended for new neighborhoods can be applied to these older neighborhoods. In fact, many of our older neighborhoods were at one time self-sustaining areas. Many of the traditional elements in these older neighborhoods still exist such as historical structures, pocket parks, sidewalks, and pedestrian friendly commercial areas which add to the attractiveness and value of the community.

Care must be taken to bring in only appropriate nonresidential uses at a neighborhood scale. Encroachment of large scale or undesirable commercial uses are usually detrimental to neighborhoods.

Changes and improvements can also be made to the street system in existing neighborhoods. Over time, roads in older areas have been redesigned to carry more cars at faster speeds, making the neighborhoods less desirable. Often, opening up new road connections between areas relieves congestion in neighborhoods. Traffic calming devices such as traffic circles, raised crosswalks and narrowed sections of streets also work well in existing neighborhoods and do much to make the areas more attractive by slowing down the volume and speed of traffic.

Policies

- Apply traditional neighborhood design principles and standards to existing neighborhoods and neighborhood commercial areas.
- Use long range plans/area plans to identify existing neighborhood residential and commercial areas where traditional neighborhood development can be applied.

- Open new and platted street connections to take pressure off major roads and reclaim alleys in residential areas.
- Place traffic calming devices in existing neighborhoods as needed.
- Where possible, put greenways, sidewalks, trails and pocket parks into existing neighborhoods.
- Use the Neighborhood Conservation Overlay district outlined in the UDO for designing specific standards for areas.
- Protect existing neighborhoods through the creation of opportunities and incentives for their rehabilitation, redevelopment, and revitalization.
- Protect residential areas from inappropriate commercial and industrial encroachment.

Action Agenda

- Identify, throughout the County, underutilized commercial or brownfield sites that can be reclaimed for neighborhood commercial development.

**Objective 3:
Affordable Housing**

Provide a variety of quality housing types for all income levels and foster a climate that is hospitable to affordable housing development.

Housing is one of the most basic needs of people. The challenges to provide decent, safe, and affordable housing to people in our community are many. A variety of housing types can fill this need for lower and moderate income families. We need therefore, to promote a continuum of affordable housing development opportunities including:

- short term and transitional shelters,
- housing for special needs populations,
- publicly and privately developed multifamily rental housing, and
- a wide range of owner-occupied housing opportunities such as condominiums, townhouses, cluster homes, non-profit housing cooperatives, single family housing.

Affordable housing: Affordable housing is defined as housing available for purchase or rent by low or moderate income families for less than 30 percent of their gross income. For purchase, housing costs include mortgage principal and interest, taxes, insurance, and utilities. Moderate income families are those earning 50 to 80 percent of the area median income, while low income families are those earning less than 50 percent of area median income. In January of

1999 the median income for a family of four in our community was \$49,400 putting affordable houses for purchase in the \$60,000 to \$100,000 range.

Public-private partnerships are an important source of affordable housing. These partnerships occur when government and private entities, including business and not-for-profit organizations, bring together their unique resources and expertise to provide housing for low and moderate income families. The City of Winston-Salem recently helped create the Winston-Salem Housing Partnership, a public-private entity to



Manufactured homes can help fill the need for affordable housing.

meet housing needs. One not-for-profit organization that the City of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County have worked with is Habitat for Humanity. Habitat works with community groups, churches, and other volunteers to build affordable homes and sell them for no profit to qualified families. Habitat's goal over the next 5 years is to construct 25 houses per year selling at approximately \$45,000 per house. These houses are taxed at market rate.

Factory-built housing: Factory-built housing is an important component of affordable housing in the state and in our community. Modular homes and manufactured homes are two types of factory-built housing. Modular homes have more stringent specifications for foundations, roof construction and structural members such as walls and corner bracing than manufactured homes and are built to meet the North Carolina Building Code. In Forsyth County, modular homes are allowed in all residentially zoned districts. Manufactured homes do not meet the North Carolina Building Code but are required to meet standards established by the U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development. They are only permitted in certain residential districts in Forsyth County with a special use permit granted by the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Public perception of factory-built housing is negative due to a belief that this type of housing in an area brings down property values, making both individual units and manufactured housing developments difficult to locate in Forsyth County.

Accessory Apartments: An accessory apartment is a complete, independent living facility located on the same lot and under the same ownership as an owner-occupied single family dwelling. Allowing accessory apartments, either attached or detached from a single family structure, is another mechanism for providing affordable housing. In Forsyth County, attached accessory apartments in single family districts are

restricted to relatives, persons over 55 years of age and the disabled. Only relatives are allowed in detached units. Permitting accessory apartments with fewer restrictions on occupancy in some single family districts in urban areas could not only increase the affordable housing stock, but help prevent suburban sprawl by providing more housing where infrastructure already exists.

Public housing: Public housing provides shelter for those on the lowest rung of the income ladder. New rules from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) encourage razing high-rise apartments and replacing them with low-rise units in a traditional neighborhood setting. Studies show that scattering small projects throughout the community make for a more successful program. Because of this shift, along with the national movement for ending financial dependency of the poor, fewer public housing units will be available, making other affordable housing opportunities all the more important.

Winston-Salem is currently seeking funding for public housing developments in East Winston and Northeast Winston through HUD's Home Ownership Zone Program. The purpose of the program is to reclaim distressed neighborhoods by creating home ownership opportunities for low and moderate income families. In order to avoid some of the problems past federal housing programs have caused, these zones must incorporate traditional neighborhood development principles to provide communities that are human scale, pedestrian-friendly and contain mixed uses.

The Housing Authority of Winston-Salem has received a \$27.7 million "HOPE VI" grant for the revitalization of Kimberly Park Terrace. This

community is located on the fringe of the central core of the Uptown area of Winston-Salem. The project will integrate an additional 12 acres of vacant land owned by the City of Winston-Salem. The award is intended to demonstrate that public housing communities can include a mix of families who are in public housing as well as families in privately owned housing. The new development will include elderly housing, home ownership, and multifamily units as well as economic development business activities. The new neighborhood could be a traditional neighborhood design with a pedestrian environment. It could become a unique Uptown Winston-Salem neighborhood.

Moderate Income Housing: The City of Winston-Salem provides financial support to a number of housing projects that have produced market-rate housing in East Winston. This policy is intended to help stabilize this slow growth area by encouraging middle income families to move back into the area. There have been three such projects in the last decade. The program has had some success and the City is willing to consider suitable proposals from interested developers.

Policies

- Encourage cost effective site design such as narrow streets, higher densities, clustered housing units, and narrow lot widths to encourage development of affordable housing.
- Rehabilitate older housing where feasible while maintaining housing standards.

- Promote public/private partnerships to develop affordable housing and support public/private groups providing affordable housing such as Habitat for Humanity and the Winston-Salem Housing Partnership.
- Improve the quality of current public housing and encourage the use of traditional neighborhood design for new public housing.
- Disperse public housing throughout the community and encourage and assist public housing residents to move into market rate housing.
- Create well designed manufactured housing, rental housing and public housing developments and educate citizens about the positive aspects of these housing types.
- Encourage the transfer of City/County owned residentially zoned property to nonprofit organizations or private developers at a nominal fee or at no cost in exchange for construction of affordable housing with resale restrictions that protect the public subsidy.
- Encourage construction of efficient, attractive smaller homes designed for today's diverse families.

Action Agenda

- Designate additional areas for high and moderate density housing development, including affordable housing, through the area planning process.

- Identify and support human and financial resources to facilitate affordable housing development.
- Offer incentives such as increased densities, clustered housing units, narrow lot widths, narrow streets and flexible site improvement standards for the development of affordable housing.
- Consider revising the Unified Development Ordinances (UDO) to be more flexible about where accessory apartments, shared housing and other affordable housing are located.
- Undertake a manufactured home subdivision development project that demonstrates quality design at an affordable price. Identify incentives to encourage this type of housing development.

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**Objective 4:
Sense of Community**

Create neighborhoods which have a true sense of community and are inclusive of all races, ages, and income levels to enhance interaction and understanding.

Neotraditional development seeks to develop a sense of community by including cultural, social, or religious places to gather as well as shops, schools, libraries and other public buildings in and at the edges of neighborhoods. Sidewalks provide the opportunity to walk rather than drive, further promoting contact and conversation among neighbors.

Neotraditional development encourages diversity of people in neighborhoods through design. A concept called “life-cycle housing” addresses the issue of age segregation in neighborhoods. By providing a mixture of housing types, including accessory dwellings, neighborhoods attract a mixture of ages and family types. Families can move within the same community as space needs and finances change. This is especially true for the elderly. As the elderly become a higher percentage of our residents, we will be challenged to find more options for their care. Proximity to shopping, health care, and transportation will be important to this age group.

Policies

- Use traditional neighborhood design standards to create neighborhoods with a “small town” feel (see section on Traditional Neighborhood Development).
- Encourage needed services such as child care and health care within neighborhoods.
- Encourage diversity within neighborhoods through educational programs.
- Continue policies and educational programs to do away with racial steering, redlining, and other discriminatory practices.
- Promote neighborhood ties through neighborhood associations, community artwork, gardens, and events.

- Encourage a mixture of housing types in neighborhoods including alternatives such as shared housing arrangements.

Conclusions

To give us a sense of community and to reduce our dependence on the automobile, we need neighborhoods with sidewalks, street trees and houses drawn close to the street and to each other. These neighborhoods should have a mix of housing types and prices so that there are places for people of all ages and incomes to live. They should have easy access to schools, parks, stores and offices. We need to start building these better neighborhoods.