

Community Life



Our community in 2015 is a friendly and accessible place for senior citizens, disabled people, and lower income residents.

A strong sense of community, racial harmony, excellent schools, safe neighborhoods, quality health care—these factors are fundamental to creating a high quality of life in communities, making them places where people want to live and to which people want to relocate.

Unfortunately, some believe the quality of life in our County has declined in recent decades. We have lost a strong sense of community—the feeling of connection to the place we live and to our neighbors. This loss is hampering our ability to work together to overcome community problems. We often do not know our neighbors and we do not trust people who are different from us, especially those of different races and income levels. While our County is becoming more ethnically diverse, our individual neighborhoods are economically and racially segregated.

We have excellent higher education opportunities in our community and our primary and secondary schools have performed very well on the North Carolina Accountability System - the “ABC” Plan. Average SAT scores continue to follow an upward trend. Our students scored 15 points above the state average in 2000. In Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, 69 percent of students took the test, compared with 44 percent nationally. In spite of this higher participation, our average scores are closing in on the average. Sixty percent of our graduates attend four-year colleges. An additional 25 percent enroll in community and junior colleges, and trade and industrial schools. All totaled, 85 percent of graduates participate in post-secondary education.

Although 24 of our 66 public schools are designated as community schools and are available to any public program, some campuses are not accessible to the public and seem closed off from the community.

Increasingly, people still do not feel safe in many parts of our community and some do not even feel safe in their homes.

Elderly and disabled people and those without cars have difficulty getting to shopping and services because our communities are structured for automobiles instead of for people.

Our Vision

This chapter discusses these quality of life issues and makes specific land use and physical design recommendations to improve the quality of life in Forsyth County. Aspects of these issues that are specifically program-oriented, such as school curricula, are not included in the action agenda items of this chapter.

In the year 2015 we envision that...

- 👁️ Our communities and neighborhoods have been designed to encourage a sense of community. Our strong sense of community enables diverse people to work together to solve community problems.
- 👁️ Our communities and neighborhoods are inclusive of all races, ethnic groups and incomes. People of different backgrounds live, work, worship and have fun together.

- 👁️ People feel safer in our community and we have factored safety into the design of new and existing developments.
- 👁️ Our educational system is outstanding and our neighborhood schools are again a primary focus of community life.
- 👁️ We have high quality and well designed medical facilities at convenient locations throughout our County.
- 👁️ Our community is a friendly and accessible place for senior citizens, disabled people, and lower income residents.

Goals, Objectives, Policies and Action Agenda

Goal:

People of different races, ages, abilities, and incomes work together to overcome community problems, provide accessible resources to residents and attain a high quality of life in Forsyth County.

Objective 1: Sense of Community Unity

Design communities and neighborhoods to promote a strong sense of community unity.

The concept of “sense of community” is a somewhat vague but important idea that people can develop a sense of unity based on common interests and shared goals. This sense of community enables them to work together to overcome problems and help create a high quality of life in their community. A strong sense of community is essential to dealing with and resolving most community issues including fundamental quality of life issues like race relations, school quality, and crime which are discussed in this chapter.

The most important step toward developing a sense of community is recognizing common interests and shared goals. It is often easy for people of the same race or ethnic group to see what they have in common, but sometimes more difficult for people who live together in a geo-

graphic area to see their commonalities. The built environment, that part of the physical environment that is human-made, can be designed to bring people together, increase opportunities for interaction, and help people recognize their common interests and goals. Other chapters of *Legacy* discuss the concept of sense of community as it relates to the built environment including: designing neighborhoods which foster a sense of belonging in Chapter 10, "Building Better Neighborhoods;" neighborhood problem solving and participation in the public decision making process in Chapter 13, "Active Citizenship;" and, the importance of community gathering spaces and public festivals in Chapter 11, "Community Character" and Chapter 8, "Open Space, Parks, and Greenways." No additional action agenda items are proposed in this chapter.

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**Objective 2:
 Diverse Communities**

Create neighborhoods and communities that are open to all races, ethnic groups and incomes and which recognize and celebrate cultural diversity.

According to a 1993 study, Winston-Salem and Forsyth County neighborhoods are more segregated by race than any other urban area in North Carolina. While many important aspects of race relations are not within the scope of land use planning, where people live is a land use issue and an important indicator of our level of racial harmony. Living near people who are different

from ourselves can help us learn what we have in common and appreciate our differences.

In the past, racial diversity has been primarily a white/black issue. However, with a growing Hispanic population, our County is becoming more ethnically diverse. The 2000 Census showed that about 19,577 people of Hispanic origin lived in Forsyth County. The Waightown area, on the southeast side of Winston-Salem, has become a magnet for Hispanics in our County. However, many Hispanic immigrants seek moderate-priced, private market housing throughout the County.

The competition for moderate-priced housing, along with cultural differences in living patterns, has created tensions in some neighborhoods. In the future, our County is likely to become even more ethnically diverse as other immigrants are drawn here by economic opportunity and quality of life.

A result of our segregated neighborhoods is a number of predominately one-race schools. The School Board's schools of choice plan adopted in 1995 permits families within each of the eight elementary zones and six middle school zones to choose between several schools in their geographical area, and transportation is provided within the

zone. While the schools of choice assignment plan enables children to attend schools closer to their homes and hopefully increases community bonds with schools, choice patterns indicate that



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African-American students are very willing to select schools in white suburban areas (about one out of four students), and white students are reluctant to select schools located in predominately African-American neighborhoods (about two out of a hundred students). Over 30 percent of the students participating are seeking schools other than their resident area. Segregated schools are not an unforeseen consequence of the new system, as according to the

Winston-Salem Journal, "...most school board members say that letting children attend a school close to home is more important than busing or racially integrated schools." Many members of our community, however, believe that our schools should be integrated and know that with a neighborhood-based school district system, the only way to have integrated schools is to have integrated neighborhoods.

The reasons our community is segregated have been the subject of extensive discussion by community leaders and citizens working to promote racial harmony and understanding in our

community. Reasons may include: patterns of housing and land prices; zoning and density restrictions; discrimination; historical settlement patterns; and personal attitudes and choices. Local government can address some but not all of these potential reasons. Housing and land prices are largely determined by the private market, although zoning and land use policies are a component of land value. Local government can help assure that a variety of housing types and densities are available throughout the community through zoning and can combat some discrimination by enforcing fair housing laws. Impacting personal attitudes and choices is far more difficult and will take involvement of the entire community.

Local governments can participate with the private sector in educating citizens and newcomers about neighborhoods and housing opportunities available throughout our community. Members of the real estate profession have a unique opportunity to help diversify our neighborhoods by learning about different areas and showing potential buyers homes throughout the County. Many people will choose to live where they have a historic, family or cultural connection and this choice should be respected.

As discussed in this chapter and in other chapters of *Legacy*, the built environment can be designed to foster interaction and promote understanding. The built environment can also be used to recognize and celebrate diversity. At first, celebrating socially unique, often racially dominant areas while promoting integration many seem at odds. However, these ideas are not mutually exclusive. We can be a community where different

cultures are celebrated and where people feel they have the choice to live throughout our community.

Features of the built environment that can be used to recognize and celebrate diversity include community gateways and culture specific areas. Community gateways or distinctive design features can be used to identify culture specific neighborhood or business areas. These gateways can be simple physical features that serve to tell residents and visitors where they are. The features can also reflect the character of the people who live there. Local examples of neighborhood gateways and distinctive features include: the coffee pot in Old Salem; the “Winston East” light post banners in the commercial area at Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive and New Walkertown Road; and the decorative lighting and street furniture in the downtown Winston-Salem Art District.

Another means of recognizing and celebrating diversity is the creation or identification of culture specific business areas. San Francisco’s Chinatown is the consummate example of a culture specific district, but many such areas exist on a smaller scale in cities throughout the country. These areas proudly display physical features of a culture’s heritage and provide shopping and economic opportunities for members of the cultural group. The areas can also provide other community residents with an opportunity to learn about and gain an appreciation for different cultures and can be an attraction for visitors. Culture specific spaces in Forsyth County could include, but certainly not be limited to, an African-American business district or a Hispanic Market.

Inclusive communities and neighborhoods have a mix of income levels as well as a diversity

of races and ethnic groups. Providing a variety of quality housing types for all incomes levels throughout our County is an objective in Chapter 10, “Building Better Neighborhoods.” The action agenda items to expand the availability of affordable housing include allowing cost-effective site design, emphasizing public-private partnerships, bonus densities with performance standards, and remaking public housing.

Policies

- Ensure that zoning and land use policies allow for a mix of housing types, densities, and prices throughout the community.
- Continue policies and programs to eliminate racial steering, redlining, and other discriminatory practices through education and the enforcement of Fair Housing laws.
- Create community gateways for different neighborhoods and areas with culture specific physical features.
- Develop culture specific spaces and hold culture specific festivals and special events.

Action Agenda

- Educate citizens, planning boards and local officials about the need for and value of inclusive housing policies.
- Educate citizens and real estate professionals about neighborhoods and housing opportunities available

throughout the County through neighborhood tours, community fairs, and other special events.

**Objective 3:
Quality Educational System**

Locate and design educational facilities which provide high quality life long learning opportunities and are assets to the neighborhoods in which they are located.

Public schools represent a major capital investment for tax payers. Their location and design impact the quality of education and the school’s role in the community. With the recent school building efforts in Forsyth County, school administrators were under significant time pressure to get new schools built to meet needs and to implement the new attendance zone district system. Because of time constraints, up front coordination with agencies outside the school system was not as extensive as it could have been. The result has been some less than ideal school sites and some lost opportunities to include other public facilities, such as new park sites, in the planning and site acquisition process. The school administration has provided greenway easements and public recreational facilities at several of the new school sites. Further with the soccer fields, ball fields, and tracks which have or will be developed at each of the new schools, additional recreational facilities for community citizens and organized groups will be provided. For its part, the City-County Planning Board needs to do a better job in the future of working

with the school system to identify appropriate school sites and identifying park, greenway and other public facility needs that could be co-sited with potential new school sites.

The location of schools can also be an important factor in steering residential development. New schools are often seen as more desirable than existing schools even before they have a track record of providing quality education. Residential development is drawn to quality schools. Locating new schools in outlying areas can therefore contribute to sprawl. To reduce the contribution to sprawl, the rehabilitation of existing schools and reuse of existing sites should be considered before schools are built in outlying areas.

Funding and providing sites were major challenges in the recent school building efforts in Forsyth County. The location of new schools should be consistent with the Growth Management Plan and should be coordinated with the acquisition of other public facilities, such as parks, libraries, and continuing education facilities. Except in unusual circumstances, schools should be located where they can be readily served by

public facilities and services, including roads, utilities, and public safety services.

The physical design of educational facilities sets the environment for learning, impacts the quality of education, and makes a statement about how we value education. Sites that are designed with sensitivity to natural features can link students to the environment and provide outdoor learning opportunities. Well designed school sites can also connect students with the community around them and connect the surrounding community with local schools.



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We all know that schools can be more than a place to educate children. Historically, schools have been a community focal point, a place of community identity and pride. They can provide open space, recreational facilities, meeting places and learning opportunities for all community residents. Unfortunately, all schools in Forsyth County do not currently serve these functions. Management of our existing school facilities and planning for

new schools should ensure that all schools are connected with and provide benefits to the community in which they are located.

School system approved programs such as after-school programs operated by the YMCA and the YWCA, GED classes and Head Start programs operate at some schools. However, out of necessity some school facilities are gated and closed to public use because some community residents do not respect school property and perform acts of vandalism on unprotected spaces. Expanded use of indoor and outdoor school facilities should be made accessible for use before and after school hours. However, money to hire staff to appropriately supervise this use must be provided or other service providers must be willing to supervise the activities and also pay for the utility costs associated with use of school facilities for extended hours.

A recent educational phenomenon in North Carolina is the creation of charter schools, private schools funded with public tax money. Because of the public funding of these schools, they should be expected to have links to the community and serve as community assets beyond the education of their student body. Private schools that do not receive public funding cannot be expected to serve the same functions as public schools but should be designed to be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and to complement the environment.

Winston-Salem and Forsyth County are fortunate to have many quality higher education institutions. While these institutions do not directly pay taxes, they can be good citizens and give back to the community in other ways including providing professional expertise, continuing edu-

cation, cultural opportunities and athletic teams that can enhance our sense of community spirit. These institutions should be encouraged to grow to meet their needs in a manner that is compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods. Respect for natural and historic resources, reuse of existing structures and joint use with other institutional facilities should be encouraged.

In order to increase awareness of the recommendations of *Legacy* and to ensure continuing support over the long term, the guide should be made available for use in schools.

Education goes beyond schools. Our public libraries also play an essential role in providing learning opportunities for all citizens. Recently, the Forsyth County Public Library system opened the relocated Reynold Manor Branch Library in a rehabilitated movie theater and a new branch library in northeastern Winston-Salem as a joint use facility with Forsyth Technical Community College. The library system is currently working with Lewisville to relocate the Lewisville Branch Library in Lewisville's downtown at Shallowford Square. This reuse of existing structures, joint location and central siting should continue and serve as a model for the development of other public facilities.

Quality child care can be the first step in a good educational system. Child care facilities need to be located and designed to be convenient for parents, safe for children, and compatible with their neighbors. Larger child care facilities function much like businesses and can have significant impacts on surrounding uses. Currently, the Unified Development Ordinances permit home day care operations, facilities for up to 12

children, to be located in single family residential districts. Day care centers, facilities for more than 12 children, are permitted only in multifamily and non-residential districts, or as an accessory use to institutions. Frequently, petitioners seek rezoning for day care centers in single family residential areas to provide affordable care at accessible locations. These cases are reviewed and decided on a situation-by-situation basis, rather than on a consistent set of policies as they should be.

Policies

- Develop a variety of means and sources to fund public school capital improvements and acquire sites for future needs.
- Coordinate planning for public schools with parks and other public facilities and consider joint and multiple use of sites.
- Assure that public schools provide benefits to the community in which they are located and are designed to be compatible with and physically connected to the surrounding community.
- Assure that the architectural and site design of new public schools are of high standards and serve as a model of good development.
- Incorporate room for permanent physical expansion of public schools facilities and discourage use of mobile classroom facilities.
- Require new and existing public schools to have good pedestrian as well as vehicular access.

- Assure that school sites are designed to work with the natural features of a site and are developed in a manner that protects and complements the environment.
- Locate intensively used exterior facilities such as parking and ball fields at appropriate locations to minimize impacts on surrounding uses, particularly residential development.
- Encourage expansion of higher education institutions in a manner that meets the needs of the institution and is compatible with the surrounding community.
- Use libraries, places of worship, recreation centers and other community facilities to offer life-long learning opportunities, including college and continuing education classes.

Action Agenda

- Develop policy guidelines for the location of child care facilities.
- Prepare a long-range public school building plan that considers the reuse of existing buildings and sites and is based on the Growth Management Plan.
- Consider revising the Unified Development Ordinances to require special use permits for schools located in residential districts.
- Make *Legacy* available to the school system and encourage its use.

**Objective 4:
Community Safety**

Factor safety into the design of developments, neighborhoods, and communities and encourage residents to work with public safety officials to maintain a safe community.

Safety and the perception of safety are among the most important quality of life factors in a community. People often decide where to live, shop, and locate their businesses based on whether they feel their families, customers, and employees will be safe and can be adequately served in cases of emergency, such as fires or accidents. Much of public safety and crime reduction has to do with social factors that are not within the scope of land use planning. However, an important aspect of crime and crime prevention is the physical design and maintenance of our neighborhoods and business areas.

The practice of *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* (CPTED) brings together public safety officials, planners, and citizens to design or redesign the built environment to reduce opportunities for crime. The three key CPTED principles are: natural surveillance by placing physical features, activities, and people to maximize visibility; natural access control through the careful placement of entrances, exits, fencing, landscaping, and lighting; and, territorial reinforcement by using building, fences, pavement, signs, and landscaping to express ownership.

Safety can be improved through relatively simple design features, including locating

entrances so that they are easily visible, selecting plant materials so that they do not obstruct views, adding lighting at appropriate locations, and using decorative fences to indicate ownership. CPTED principles can be applied to both public and private developments, but can be especially important for public developments, such as parks, transit stops, and housing developments. Staff from the City-County Planning Board and the Winston-Salem Police Department have had training in CPTED concepts but their new expertise has not been systematically or widely used.

Maintenance and upkeep of neighborhoods, public facilities, and business areas also contribute to safety and the sense of security. Litter, overgrown lots, graffiti, abandoned or deteriorated structures, and broken windows in a neighborhood indicate disinvestment and suggest a lack of care, making residents and visitors alike feel unsafe. Abandoned buildings are a particular problem in residential neighborhoods and can be a magnet for drugs and prostitution. Current state law limits local governments actions if buildings meet minimal structural standards and are secured. Often, secured means boarded up, adding to the sense of deterioration in a neighborhood. Winston-Salem and other municipalities should seek enabling legislation to acquire buildings which have been abandoned for a significant period of time. Acquisition should be based on a fair market value determined by appraisal. Structures would then be resold with the requirement that they be rehabilitated to certain standards and occupied within a specific period of time.

Lack of maintenance can make neighborhoods feel unsafe. Conversely, prison-like security features, such as window bars, razor wire and blank walls can also create a sense of physical incivility and add to the feeling of insecurity in a community. Prohibiting these features is difficult, but they can be discouraged and other options encouraged.

Policing strategies, including Community-Oriented Policing, bike and foot patrols, and satellite and mobile police stations have increased police presence in many neighborhoods. While there may sometimes be increased cost involved to provide these services, they have improved the communication between residents and police officers and can make residents more involved in keeping their communities safe.

Police officers and other public safety officials can also play an important role in community planning efforts. For example, in the preparation of the Liberty Street Corridor Study, an area police officer and a firefighter served on the advisory committees and provided invaluable insights. Community police officers in the Liberty Street area also promoted public meetings and recruited participants for a new merchants association by handing out flyers on their beat.

While recent statistics show locally violent crime has decreased recently, people's fear of crime remains high. Part of the perception of insecurity is due to people's disassociation with their neighbors and their community as a whole. Therefore, making our County feel safe must include better connection between people with their neighbors and their community. Enhancing the sense of community belonging will make

neighbors more likely to watch out for one another and to work with public safety officials to keep their communities safe. The concept of sense of community is discussed above and in other chapters of *Legacy*.

Policies

- Ensure that new developments can be adequately served by police, fire, and emergency medical services and include the Police and Sheriff's Departments on the City-County Planning Board's Interdepartmental Site Plan Review Committee.
- Require street and driveway connections where necessary to ensure adequate access for public safety needs and vehicles.
- Factor safety into the design of new developments and the redesign of existing developments by using the expertise of City and County staff trained in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles to review the potential impact of all public developments. Encourage major private developments to seek voluntary reviews of major developments.
- Work with the Police and Sheriff's Departments to identify existing crime problem areas and work with area residents and property owners, including public entities, to develop and implement design-oriented solutions.
- Encourage zoning districts which permit a mix of uses, including commercial and residential

uses, to keep areas used throughout the day, in the evenings and on weekends.

- Maintain a sense of physical order by: creating incentives to property owners and neighborhood groups to maintain properties and neighborhoods; strenuously enforcing housing codes, abandoned vehicle, weeded lot and other sanitation ordinances; promoting City and County housing rehabilitation programs; and encouraging the reuse of vacant buildings.
- Discourage prison-like security features, such as razor wire, window bars, and blank walls.
- Maintain a strong police presence in and connection to the community through efforts such as Community-Oriented Policing, foot and bicycle patrols, and satellite police stations and mobile police stations.
- Involve Police and Fire Department staff in community planning efforts and on advisory committees.
- Develop new fire stations and satellite police stations in a manner that is compatible with the surrounding area and use existing facilities and structures whenever possible.

Action Agenda

- Develop and publish Safe Design guidelines and examples. Offer training sessions for design professionals.
- Winston-Salem and other municipalities should

seek enabling legislation to acquire buildings which have been abandoned for a significant period of time.

**Objective 5:
Healthy Community**

Provide convenient and high quality medical facilities throughout Forsyth County.

Our County is a leader in quality health care. Recently, our two major health care providers, Wake Forest Medical Center/Aegis Family Health Care and Novant Health Care/Forsyth Hospital have expanded to provide medical facilities in many areas of Forsyth County making health care more accessible.

The role of local government planning in health care is to assure that appropriate sites are zoned to allow health care facilities and developed in a manner that is compatible with the surrounding area. Health care facilities should also be accessible to all citizens, including those without personal automobiles. One method of better assuring compatibility and good access is to use existing buildings near residential areas for health care facilities.

Policies

- Assure that all parts of the community have good access to medical care by permitting medical services near where people live.

- Assure that new health care facilities are designed in a manner that complements surrounding neighborhoods and are accessible by transit and pedestrians.
- Consider access to health care a priority when determining public transportation routes.
- Permit adaptation of existing facilities including retail buildings and places of worship for health care, whenever possible, and use places of worship, schools, and recreation centers for clinics in neighborhoods not otherwise served.
- Allow expansion of existing hospitals and other major health care institutions in a manner that protects surrounding residential neighborhoods.

**Objective 6:
Elderly and Disabled Citizens**

Create communities that are friendly and accessible places for older adults and disabled people.

Older persons make up one of the fastest growing segments of the population. In 2000, the median age in Forsyth County (the age where half the people are older and half younger) was 36.0 years and 12.6 percent of the County's population was 65 years and older. By 2020, the median age is projected to be 39.7 years and an estimated 16.4 percent of the population will be 65 years or older. Proximity to shopping, health care, and transportation are important to older adults, as is the oppor-

tunity to remain in their own community as their physical abilities and housing needs change. Planning for an aging population will require us to rethink the structure of our communities and adapt to different abilities and needs.

Improved medical care, changes in institutional policies, and aging of parents of disabled people have increased the need for housing for disabled persons. Appropriate housing for disabled persons ranges from traditional single family homes to skilled care institutions, depending on the physical limitations of the disabled person. The majority of disabled persons, however, most appropriately live in residential neighborhoods with good access to transportation, shopping, and services. Recent amendments to the Fair Housing Act prohibit discrimination against people based on handicap. Exactly what constitutes discrimination based on handicap is still being litigated in the courts. Regardless, our community has a responsibility to provide reasonable housing opportunities for all citizens, including disabled persons. The Unified Development Ordinances created new categories of uses to expand housing opportunities for groups of handicapped persons as well as other groups. Whether it has done so or has had the opposite effect has not yet been determined.

Policies

- Provide incentives for rehabilitation or adaptation of existing structures, including large single family homes, multifamily buildings, churches and schools, to provide housing for older adults and disabled persons.

- Encourage innovative means of providing housing for older adults and disabled persons and provide incentives to developers for providing housing for older adults and disabled persons within market rate developments.
- Permit services near where people live including places of worship and other institutions in a manner that is compatible with surrounding uses, and provide retail and service uses within walking and bicycling distance of neighborhoods.
- Expand the public transportation system, especially specialized services for older adults and disabled persons and assure that developments provide access to public transit stops.
- Consider the needs of older adults and disabled people in the design and redesign of public facilities and residential, commercial, and institutional developments.

Action Agenda

- Develop housing policies and programs that enable older adults and disabled people to remain in their own homes or to live in neighborhood settings whenever possible.
- Permit varied housing, including “elder cottages,” accessory dwellings for caregivers, shared housing, group homes, and small apartment buildings within residential neighborhoods.
- Permit larger institutional facilities, including apartment complexes and congregate care facil-

ities at appropriate locations. They can be transitional uses in neighborhoods and located at the edges of single family residential areas.

- Consider providing incentives including public subsidies or waiving processing and review fees and utility hook-up charges for developers providing housing for older adults and disabled persons.
- Work with disabled citizens, service providers, and neighborhoods to assure that regulations in the Unified Development Ordinances provide reasonable opportunities for housing for disabled people and amend regulations as necessary.

Conclusions

A community is not just a careful physical arrangement of buildings and roads. Community is also a state of mind—the beliefs and attitudes about others held by the people who live in a place. Winston-Salem and Forsyth County have traditionally had a strong sense of community. For example, we have more places of worship per capita than anywhere else in North Carolina. Those religious institutions bring people together and help bridge differences among people.

This chapter has shared our vision on topics under the heading of community life—sense of community, racial harmony, a feeling of safety, good education and access for the elderly. It has also made a series of recommendations on what physical planning can do to address these issues. Following through on these recommendations will lead to a stonger sense of belonging for all the members of our community.