

Regional Planning and Development



In the year 2015, there is a collaborative spirit and ongoing dialogue between the various communities in the region.

Forsyth County is part of the larger urbanizing Piedmont Triad Region (see Map 5.1). With a 2000 Census population of over 1.4 million people, the twelve counties that make up this region are increasingly bound together by common economic, political and social ties. At the heart of this region are the Triad Metro Area counties of Forsyth and Guilford and the cities of Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point. Increasingly the Metro Area is the business, employment and service center of the region.

The Metro Area shares the Piedmont Triad International Airport, which is situated midway between the three cities. The airport's central location and excellent access to ground transportation has attracted significant development to the surrounding area, making it a growth center in the Metro Area.

The economic linkages in the Triad are indicated by the significant numbers of people commuting across county lines to their jobs every day. The 1990 census showed that 13,320 persons commute to work from Forsyth to Guilford County every day. They pass 5,407 persons commuting in the opposite direction from Guilford to Forsyth County. Significant commuting to work also takes place across other county boundaries into the Metro Area.

The geography of the Piedmont landscape doesn't necessarily respect somewhat arbitrary political boundaries. Watersheds and water supply and sewer systems whose location is often dictated by geography, overlap political jurisdictions. For example, the Muddy Creek basin extends from Forsyth County north into Stokes

County east of King and south into Davidson County. It is within this basin that Forsyth County can most economically provide gravity sewer. Similarly, High Point can best provide sewer service for Forsyth County residents east of NC 66 in the Deep River Basin. Consequently planning for these services and addressing other issues that span political boundaries should take place within a regional context.

The emergence of the Piedmont Triad Region has spawned a number of regional organizations intended to promote regional cooperation in planning and development. The Piedmont Triad Partnership is a non-profit organization formed to promote the 12 counties of the region. The Partnership has recently completed the *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan*. This plan addresses issues of regional concern, identifies opportunities and makes recommendations to improve the quality of life in the region. The *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan* is the source of a number of recommendations in this chapter.

Transportation in the Metro Area is a major issue. The joint Transportation Advisory Committee and the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation representing Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point transportation planning areas was responsible for overseeing completion of the Piedmont Triad Land Use and Transportation Study which has developed recommendations for coordinating land use and transportation in the region.

Two other regional planning organizations, The Northwest Piedmont Council of Governments and the Piedmont Triad Council of Governments serve the Triad region. They are

multi-county planning and service providers whose mission is to provide a leadership role in nurturing regional cohesiveness, as well as assisting with providing services.

The next several decades will no doubt witness the creation of new institutional arrangements to foster regional coordination. Indeed, this chapter recommends creation of new regional groups intended to promote regional cooperation and make the region a better place in which to live and work.

Our Vision

Forsyth County recognizes that it stands to benefit from increased regional cooperation in planning and development. The *Legacy* Focus Groups have therefore envisioned a future in which we are active participants in regional initiatives aimed at fostering appropriate growth and development in the Triad Region. Here is our vision.

In the year 2015 we envision that...

- 👁 There is a collaborative spirit and ongoing dialogue between the various communities in the region.
- 👁 Approved annexation agreements between communities are fostering orderly growth and development and minimizing land use and jurisdictional conflicts.
- 👁 An effective regional transportation system makes commuting within the region more efficient, reduces traffic congestion and

improves air quality.

- 👁 Major new industries provide high paying job opportunities in the region.
- 👁 Regional parks, greenways and other recreational opportunities foster regional identity and improve the quality of life for residents of the region.

Goals, Objectives, Policies and Action Agenda

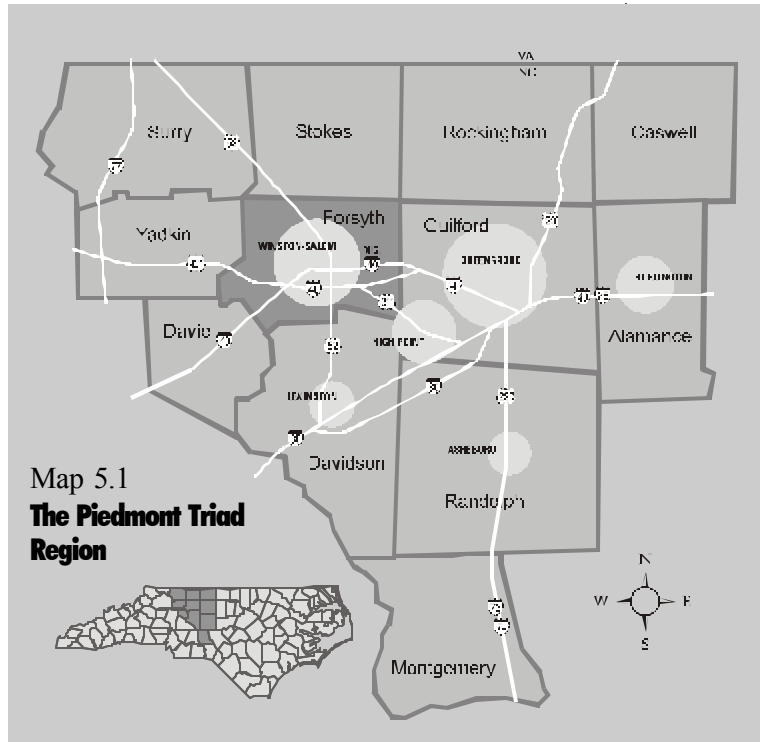
Goal:

Effective collaboration among communities of the Piedmont Triad Region in managing regional growth and development to ensure a high quality of life for the region's residents.

Objective 1: Regional Identity

Public understanding of the importance of a strong regional identity and support for regional plans, policies and projects that build a sense of region.

Regional identity is the image, visibility and presence the Piedmont Triad area has elsewhere in the state, southeastern US, nationally and



Map 5.1
**The Piedmont Triad
Region**

replacement for individual community identity. It is an addition to it, an expansion of the boundaries within which we operate and within which we cooperate for mutual progress. Developing a positive image outside our region starts with creating a sense of regional identity within the population of the Triad. This means increasing residents' awareness of the nature and implications of regional planning and development and seeking their input on regional level issues. The development of region-wide facilities and events, particularly in sports and recreation, would aid in the establishment of a regional identity. The process of marketing the region to the world has begun but the need to develop a strong regional image and identity still remains.

**Objective 2:
Regional Transportation**

Support the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation's (PART) mission to promote the development of an efficient public transportation system which would provide regional mobility, encourage economic development, promote sustainable growth patterns and protect the built and natural environments of the region.

The need for a regional transportation authority was brought about by a number of factors. These include the growing together of the three major urban areas of the region, the congestion caused by significant long distance commuting to work along the major corridors connecting these urban areas, and the need to address air quality issues on a regional basis.

These factors also pointed to the need for a balanced transportation plan that would address not only transportation issues but the connection between land use and transportation. A draft Piedmont Triad Transportation Study has been completed. A major element of the plan is the development of a land use structure to support multi-modal transportation services and reduce dependence on the automobile. The intent is to provide services for alternative modes of transportation which are accessible, affordable, and capable of meeting the travel-time requirements of citizens. These include pedestrian walkways, bicycle facilities and transit services in addition to roadways.

internationally. Our neighbors in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Triangle area have a strong positive regional identity. The close proximity of three major universities there and the nationally known Research Triangle Park have helped create that image. Charlotte has significantly increased its regional identity with pictures of Ericson Stadium and its downtown skyline on national TV during Panther football games.

It is important to build within the Piedmont Triad Region a similar strong distinctive image so that we can better market the region nationally and even internationally as a single integrated unit. Regional identity is not to be seen as a

Policies

- Devise appropriate participation processes for citizen input into regional planning issues to ensure residents' support for regional plans and projects.
- Use education and the media to increase awareness of regional issues and build a strong regional identity.
- Promote regional activities in all communities of the region.

State legislation has authorized and local governments have created The Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation. PART is intended to provide a structure to coordinate the resources of the region and facilitate the cost effective use of tax dollars for regional public transportation planning and programming. The objective is to provide excellent public transportation services in the region through regional planning and cooperation and citizen involvement. These services will support quality growth and economic development, protect the region's natural and built environment and generally improve the quality of life for area residents.

The state legislature has approved \$750,000 for PART to study inter-city rail in the Triad and also look at the feasibility of extending passenger rail service from Raleigh to Asheville through Greensboro and Winston-Salem.

PART's draft action agenda which we endorse is detailed below.

Policies

- Plan for public transportation in the region including rail and bikeways.
- Coordinate and market the Regional Ridesharing and Vanpooling Program.
- Implement transit related demonstration projects in the region.
- Coordinate the activities of land use planning agencies within the region.

- Develop/coordinate air quality programs in the region.

Action Agenda

- Develop and maintain a database for travel demand forecasting for the region.

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**Objective 3:
 Land Development**

Orderly land development and an improved quality of life in the Triad region resulting from coordination of land use planning among the communities of the region.

The past decade has seen moderate growth and development in the Piedmont Triad Region focused mostly in the Triad Metro Area. In order to preserve our quality of life, orderly growth and development in the future is highly desirable. A significant amount of the land area between Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem is currently in open space and agriculture. However, existing land use plans of the adjoining communities have identified large portions of this area for future growth. We must ensure that such development adds to rather than detracts from the overall quality of life.

There are some examples of cooperation on land development issues in the region. Similar zoning districts, definitions and other language have been incorporated in recently revised development ordinances in the Metro Area to make it easier for planners and developers to understand

and synchronize the pattern of development. Annexation agreements between Kernersville and High Point, Kernersville and Winston-Salem and between High Point and Greensboro contribute to prospects for more orderly development as these communities grow together. The 426-acre regional Triad Park, located on the boundary between the two counties, ensures that there will be some open space between Guilford and Forsyth Counties in the future.

While these various efforts at coordination have been beneficial, a more structured coordination appears necessary to promote cooperation on a wider range of planning issues. At present, Forsyth County and Guilford County belong respectively to the Northwest Piedmont and the Piedmont Triad Council of Governments (COGs). These agencies need to work together to effectively coordinate land use planning in the Forsyth/Guilford County area. The COGs should also be in the forefront in establishing a clearinghouse for information on the area and eliminating the frustrations of having to approach multiple agencies to obtain desired regional data.

The draft Piedmont Triad Land Use and Transportation Study recommends a 2025 Regional Growth Conceptual Plan and sets forth policies to address land development and transportation in the region. The four policies are :

1. Coordinate long-range land use/transportation planning on a regional and local basis.
2. Direct a significant portion of future land use development to existing and proposed targeted nodes and transit corridors to support transit.
3. Integrate land use planning with infrastructure development

4. Encourage redevelopment of infill and “under invested” areas.

The draft plan also includes a detailed set of actions necessary to implement each of these policies.

Policies

- Identify an organization to coordinate land use planning in the Metro Area. The regions two Councils of Government could work together to perform this function.
- Ensure that agreements on annexation and the provision of services (particularly water and sewer) exist among communities in the region.

Action Agenda

- Adopt and implement the recommendations of the Piedmont Triad Land Use and Transportation Study for regional land use and transportation.
- Prepare a regional guide book for the development approval process. It would provide useful information on development approval processes and planning and zoning information to developers who work in the region.
- Develop joint area plans for areas of overlapping jurisdictions in the Triad region.
- Develop a corridor enhancement program to preserve, protect and enhance regional view corridors and community gateways with specific emphasis on transportation corridors linking the cities of the Triad Metro Area.

- Create a forum to facilitate regional networking and information exchange among professional planners in the region.
- Establish a regional geographic information system database and clearing house to assemble, organize, interpret and disseminate pertinent regional information.

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**Objective 4:
 Economic Development**

A sound regional economy resulting from collaboration between private industry and government agencies to attract businesses that expand and diversify the regional economy.

Communities in the Triad need to attract businesses that increase the tax base and provide high paying jobs. This has become more difficult because of intense competition for the industries that provide these jobs. We, therefore, need to do targeted recruiting, seeking out those industries that benefit from and complement our local strengths. The *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan* has proposed that those targeted industries should include export-oriented businesses, high technology firms, and the film and tourism industries.

The *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan* proposed creating a regional film commission to market the Piedmont Triad as a premiere region offering locations, schools, an existing film industry, and a growing crew base. The formation of this commission is already underway. The North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem offers the

foundation around which a regional film industry can be built.

Each community in the region contributes to the overall character and image of the region. The full potential of tourism as an economic industry is best realized if it is developed and marketed on a regional basis. The *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan*, therefore, proposes the establishment of a regional tourism development organization. This organization would consolidate existing fragmented tourism development efforts and develop and implement a regional tourism marketing plan. The goal is to promote the Triad region as a travel destination nationally.

The availability of resources and infrastructure vary within the region. Economic prosperity of the region can be enhanced by mutually beneficial agreements between communities that make the best use of resources. For example, Forsyth County has abundant water resources from the Yadkin River but limited land for development. Guilford County has land but limited water resources. Forsyth County provided water to Greensboro on a temporary basis during recent periods of drought. A transfer of water resources from Forsyth County to neighboring communities is, however, considered an interbasin transfer if surface water is moved from one river basin into another and not returned to its source basin. State certification is required for any interbasin transfer of two million gallons a day (mgd) or more. The State must be satisfied that the benefits of the proposed transfer outweigh the detriments and the detriments will be mitigated to a reasonable degree. Consideration for interbasin transfer of water resources from Forsyth County to neigh-

boring communities, would therefore be an opportunity to forge greater levels of cooperation concerning land use and economic/fiscal policies, including regional tax base sharing. Sharing of water and other resources has not met with much success in the past, however, due to State and local requirements. In addition, there is no precedent for tax base sharing in the Triad.

It is important to educate and train the regional workforce to meet the challenges of new industries that may be attracted to the region. There are many fine institutions of higher education in the region that can provide that educated workforce. Of equal importance is providing graduates from these institutions with attractive local job opportunities to encourage more of them to remain in the region and contribute to its growth and development. A priority should, therefore, be to improve cooperation among educational institutions and between these institutions and industry. Such cooperation would provide education and training for high-tech industries and create future job opportunities for graduates.

The *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan* recommends the development of an ongoing, collaborative dialogue among private and public educators and public and private business and industry to establish priorities and goals for the regional education system. It recommends that the Piedmont Triad Partnership together with the Piedmont Triad Horizons Education Consortium implement this initiative. The Piedmont Triad Horizons Education Consortium is an existing regional organization that functions as the guiding educational organization for the Piedmont Triad Region.

We endorse the following policies which are the main recommendations of the *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan* to promote regional economic development. We encourage implementation of the policies which follow.

Policies

- Establish and promote the region as a premiere location for the film industry offering locations, schools, workforce and an existing film industry.
- Support the formation of a Regional Tourism Development Organization that will work with all the major regional tourist sites and events to oversee the development of a marketing campaign to promote the region as a major tourist destination.
- Attract new high-tech, medical and research industries that provide higher paying jobs.
- Target export-oriented service and manufacturing companies that provide high paying jobs and generate new wealth.
- Coordinate the provision of infrastructure (water, sewer, transportation and communications) to support growth and development in areas of overlapping jurisdictions.
- Establish recognition of the region as a global business center by establishing programs to promote the region nationally and internationally.
- Develop intergovernmental agreements to share resources and economic development revenues.

- Work with the Piedmont Triad Horizons Education Consortium to initiate dialogue among the educational institutions and between them and the business community on the priorities for the regional education system.
- Provide advanced workforce training programs to support regional high-tech growth.

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**Objective 5:
 Open Space and Recreation**

A system of regional parks, trails, open space, and other regional recreational facilities that enhances the recreational opportunities and quality of life of residents of the region.

There are many existing parks and recreational facilities which provide open space and recreational opportunities to residents of the region. These include, for example, Triad Park, Tanglewood Park, the Yadkin River, the North Carolina Zoo, Pilot Mountain and Hanging Rock State Parks. Support and maintenance of these facilities contribute to an improved quality of life in the region.

Within the heart of the Triad, the municipalities of Winston-Salem, Kernersville, Greensboro and High Point are rapidly growing together. As they expand, green buffers are needed between these merging cities to help maintain their individual identities. A special effort is needed to provide open space in the form of farmland, natural areas and parks in this core area.

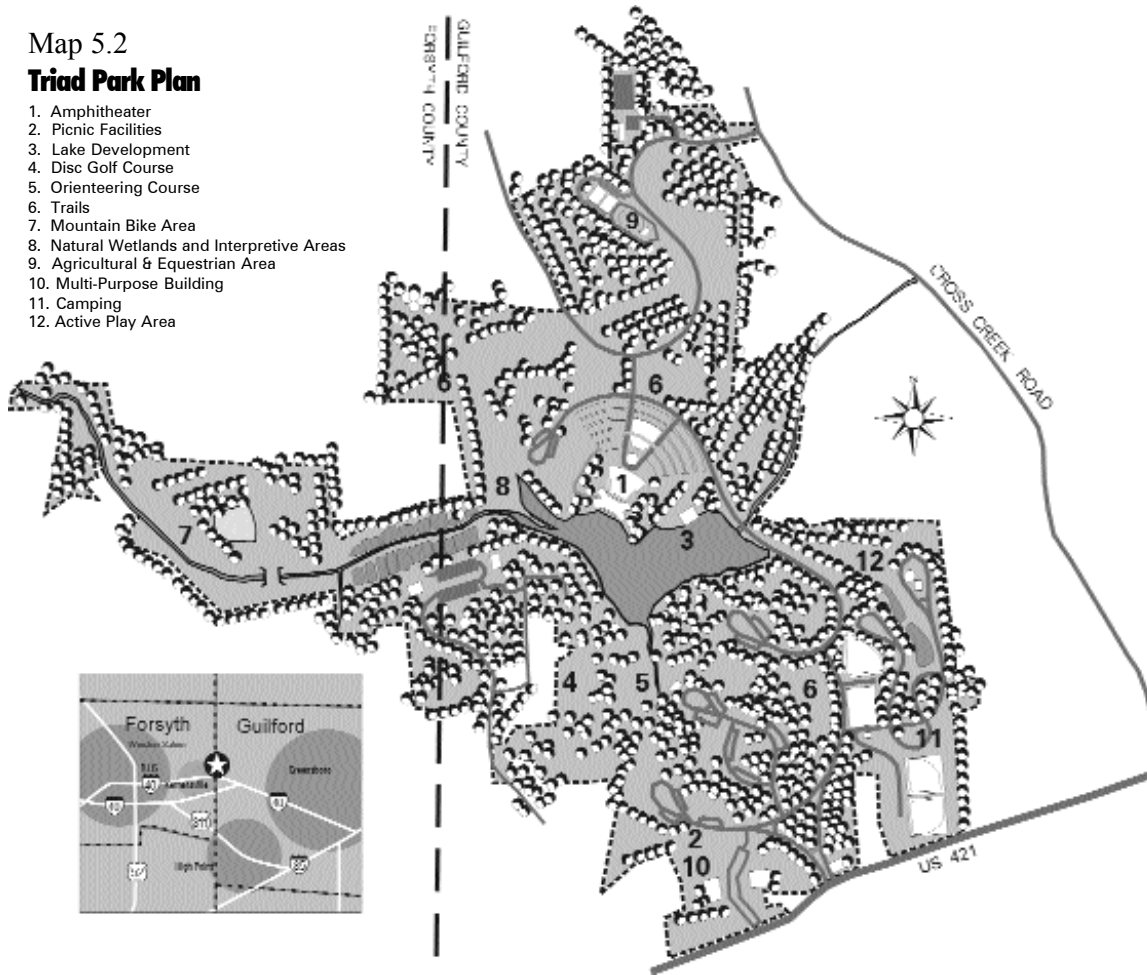
The new Triad Park (see map 5.2), located on the Forsyth-Guilford County line near Kernersville, provides separation and a green buffer and attests to the growing recognition and acceptance of the potential value of regional recreational opportunities in enhancing the quality of life of area residents. The 426-acre park, which

opened in 1997, is a joint venture of Forsyth and Guilford Counties. The master plan for the park includes a wide range of recreation facilities expected to be phased in over a 10 year period. When completed the park will significantly increase recreational opportunities for residents of the Triad Metro Area.

The Piedmont Greenway is a regional trail system that is in the initial planning stages. It could link destinations in Guilford and Forsyth Counties including Bur Mil Park, Triad Park, and Salem Lake Park. The Piedmont Greenway could become a symbol of regionalism providing a physical link between the two counties for walking, jogging and biking.

Map 5.2
Triad Park Plan

1. Amphitheater
2. Picnic Facilities
3. Lake Development
4. Disc Golf Course
5. Orienteering Course
6. Trails
7. Mountain Bike Area
8. Natural Wetlands and Interpretive Areas
9. Agricultural & Equestrian Area
10. Multi-Purpose Building
11. Camping
12. Active Play Area



Policies

- Continue to fund development of the regional Triad Park and to acquire adjacent land for future park expansion as it becomes available.
- Continue to support funding of existing parks and recreational facilities.
- Work with organizations such as the Piedmont Land Conservancy to increase the availability of parks and open space in the region.

Action Agenda

- Develop a regional greenway plan for trails linking the Triad especially the main urban areas of Winston-Salem, Kernersville, Greensboro and High Point.

**Objective 6:
Environment**

Creation of a regional environmental management forum which coordinates research, decision making and project implementation related to regional environmental issues.

Environmental regions often cross political boundaries. It is important, therefore, for communities in the region to coordinate on environmental issues.

In the Triad, watershed boundaries cross county and municipal lines. North Carolina has established water quality standards that apply to all counties. Local jurisdictions have also created regulations to afford more protection to water supplies than the minimum state standards. The local regulations, however, do not apply to those parts of the watershed that are beyond the county or municipal boundaries. The future water quality of jurisdictions in the region, therefore, requires joint planning and cross-jurisdictional cooperation on watershed management issues.

Winston-Salem obtains water from the Yadkin River which forms the western boundary of Forsyth County. The Yadkin River Commission was created in 1991 by the County Commissioners of Davie, Forsyth and Yadkin Counties in recognition of the role of the Yadkin River in the development, recreation, history and environment of the region. The increasing demand for use of the river for drinking water and waste disposal indicated that a cooperative approach to issues affecting the Yadkin River

Valley was needed. The Commission is an advisory body which functions as a clearinghouse for river-related information and promotes voluntary conservation programs.

Preparation of a water quality management plan that includes the drainage basin of the Yadkin River was recently completed. The *Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basinwide Water Quality Management Plan* proposes to coordinate existing water quality protection measures to allow for better identification, management and public awareness of water quality problems and more public involvement in water basin management.

In view of the need to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the region's air, water and land resources and to improve environmental quality in the region, dialogue on environmental issues is essential. Existing regional environmental organizations such as the Piedmont Land Conservancy and the Yadkin River Commission have already begun some of this work and should receive our continued support. However, these are specialized agencies limited to specific areas of concern. A more broad-based forum for discussing common environmental concerns, coordinating plans, policies and projects, and collecting and disseminating information on regional environmental issues is needed.

The *Piedmont Triad Strategic Plan* proposes the establishment of a Regional Environmental and Land Use Planning Forum involving a broad spectrum of representatives in the region to promote broad-based regional cooperation and coordination (particularly among elected officials and staff) of information, policies, plans, and strategies. Implementation of this proposal could result

in the level of regional cooperation that would improve the environmental quality of the region.

Policies

- Support the Piedmont Triad Partnership in creating a regional environmental forum to foster regional cooperation, coordination and dialogue on environmental issues.
- Coordinate efforts for watershed protection within the region.
- Work with the Piedmont Land Conservancy, whose mission is to preserve natural and scenic lands in the Piedmont, to protect areas of regional significance.
- Continue to support the Yadkin River Commission in its mission to protect the Yadkin River Corridor as a community treasure by defining and promoting the river's full potential.

Conclusions

The development of a strong regional identity will be key to marketing the Triad region in the new global economy. We will need to set aside local community interests to achieve that goal.