



Bryson City Land Use Plan

A VISION FOR 2045

(Adopted September 6, 2022)

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INTRODUCTION

Bryson City is a small community located in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Established in 1887 originally as Charleston, the town was later named Bryson City after its founder Thaddeus D. Bryson. Bryson City is the seat of Swain County and has a population of 1,555 as of the 2020 Census. The town serves as a hub for many outdoor recreational activities and offers a quaint downtown experience with unique shopping and dining opportunities. There are many tourist attractions but the most well-known are the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad and the Deep Creek area of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

PLANNING PROCESS

Several factors prompted Bryson City to pursue an updated land use plan for their town. In 2019, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted legislation, General Statute 160D, that requires local governments to adopt and maintain a land use plan to retain authority to apply zoning and other land use regulations.

In addition, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 accelerated some of the issues Bryson City was already facing related to growth and tourism. The pandemic encouraged more people to seek rural areas and outdoor recreation opportunities that were deemed lower risk than more urban indoor activities. There was also an increased interest in short-term vacation rentals as opposed to hotels, and the rapid transition to people working from home meant that people could move to rural areas and take their job with them, as long as they had access to high-speed internet.

Bryson City residents felt the pressure from increased tourism and growth and wanted to take an active role in planning the future of the town to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the demand on local resources. The Town requested the assistance of the Southwestern Commission Council of Governments to update their 2008 land use plan. The planning process began in May 2021 and was completed in August 2022. Tasks included reviewing existing plans, compiling data, mapping, public input, site visits, and multiple meetings with the Bryson City Planning Board and Town Council.



The first step in the process was to review previous plans developed for Bryson City. Southwestern Commission staff reviewed the following plans to understand the history and status of previous planning efforts:

- 2007 Bryson City Pedestrian Plan
- 2008 Bryson City Land Development Plan
- 2011 Bryson City Handmade in America Plan
- 2013 Blue Ridge Bike Plan
- 2015 Mountain Elements Health Impact Assessment
- 2019 Swain County Housing Report

While all the existing plans apply in some capacity, the most applicable to this planning process was the 2008 Bryson City Land Development Plan. The 2008 Bryson City Land Development Plan offered recommendations for Land Use (Residential, Commercial, and Institutional, Agriculture and Open Space, Industry and Manufacturing), Transportation, Public Services, Housing, and Economic Development. These categories served as the “Guiding Principles” for the plan, and recommendations were developed for each category based on their current state and the input received from the residents and stakeholders during the public input process. Reviewing the 2008 Land Use Plan allowed for a comprehensive comparison between then and now and reinforced the need for an updated plan.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Physical Setting

Bryson City is the county seat and only incorporated town in Swain County. Swain County and Bryson City are part of the Southwestern Commission Council of Governments, also known as Region A, which includes the seven westernmost counties of North Carolina. Bryson City is less than three hours driving time from multiple metropolitan areas including Asheville, Atlanta, Greenville, and Chattanooga (Figure 1). The Plott Balsam mountain range borders Bryson City to the east, Cowee Mountains to the south, and Great Smoky Mountains to the north. Nantahala National Forest shares the town’s southern line, providing access to the largest national forest in North Carolina.

The incorporated limits of Bryson City contain 2.2 square miles, 95% of which is land and 5% water. The Town is located near the mouth of the Tuckasegee River where it flows into Fontana Lake. The land was naturally attractive to early settlers due to the proximity to the river, fertile floodplain soils, and relatively gentle slopes. Much of the historic downtown area is designated as a flood hazard area. Figure 2 shows the river, elevation contours, and the flood hazard area which provide natural constraints to land development.

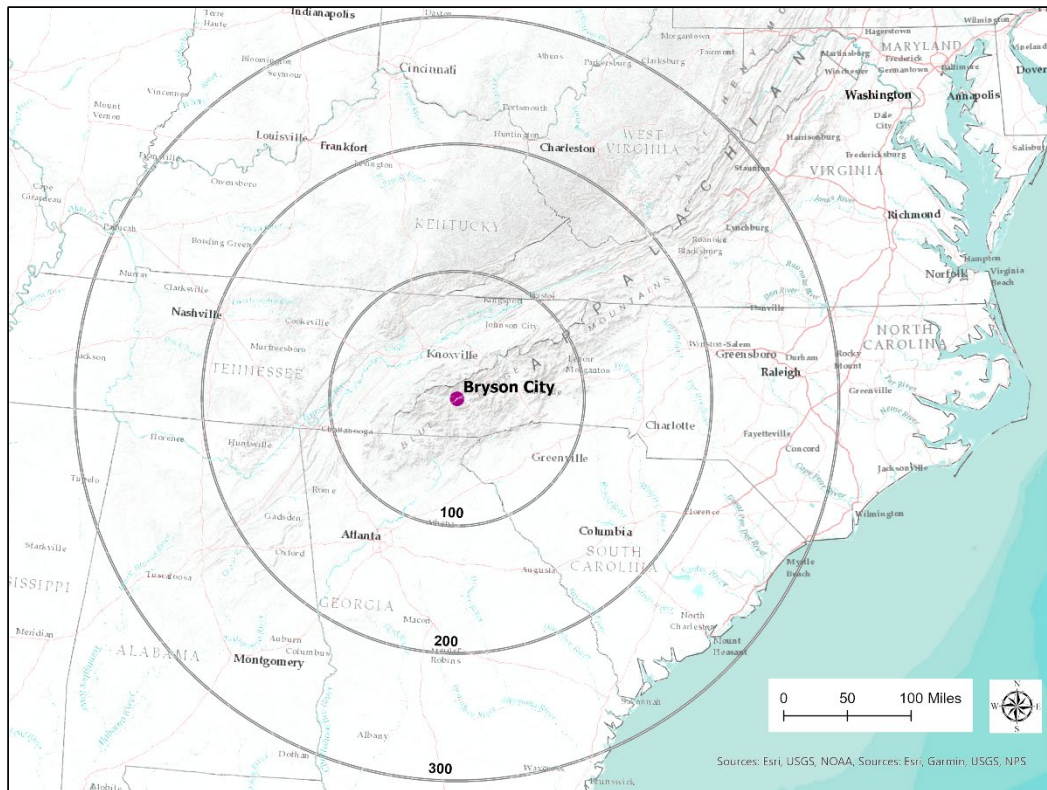


Figure 1. Vicinity Map of Bryson City.

Bryson City's temperate climate and natural resources form the backbone of the local economy and have enticed people to the area since its earliest settlement. Average annual precipitation is over 60 inches; temperatures average in the summer between 62 and 84 degrees and in the winter between 26 and 47 degrees. As a temperate rainforest, the area is home to hundreds of native plants and animals, making it one of the most biodiverse ecoregions in the country. The Tuckasegee River is home to a wide variety of aquatic creatures, including trout, bass, and other species that attract anglers. Bryson City is a gateway to the forest and other natural wonders both within its limits and beyond.



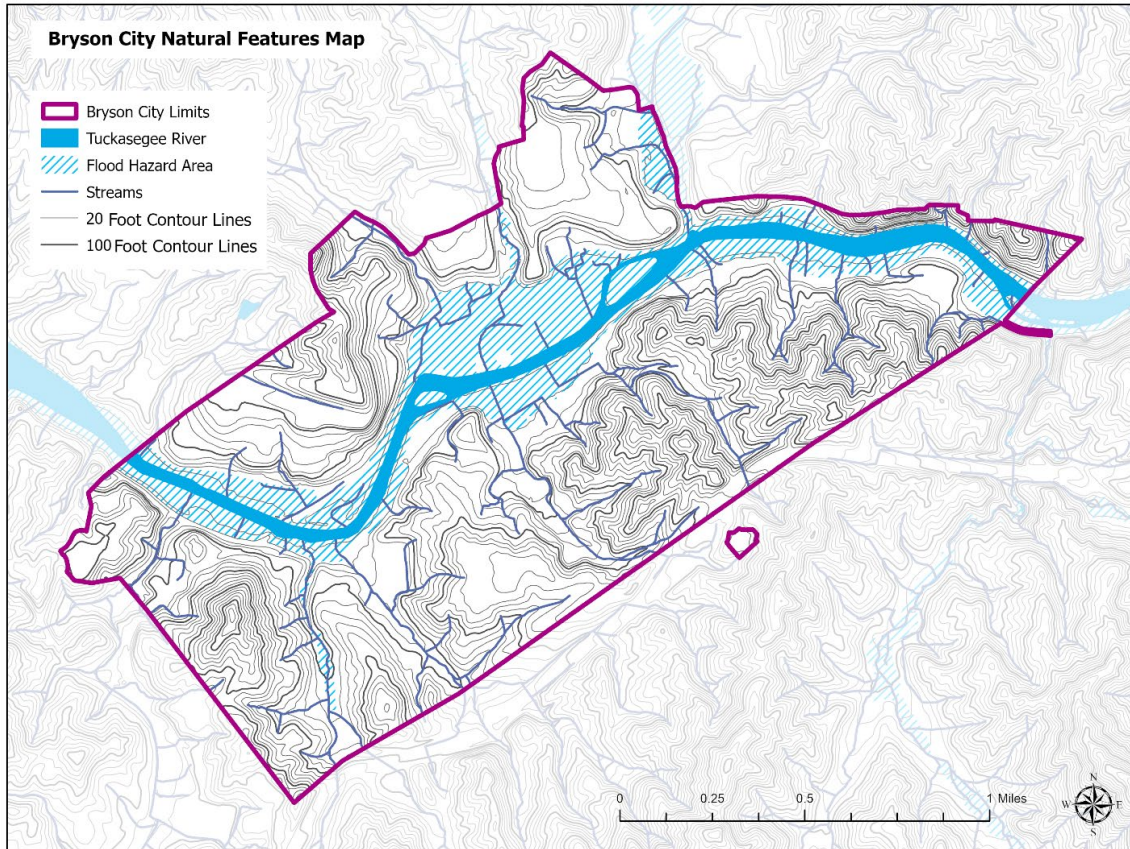


Figure 2. Natural constraints to land development.

Existing Land Use

Bryson City spans approximately one mile wide by 2.5 miles long. Most of the development is concentrated along the river and the major highway corridors entering Town – Veteran’s Boulevard and US 19. Figure 3 below shows a map of Bryson City’s general land use categories. The primary land use categories were assigned based on a combination of parcel data, field visits, and aerial photography. The categories identified include: commercial, agricultural, industrial, institutional, mixed use, parks/recreation, residential, and undeveloped.

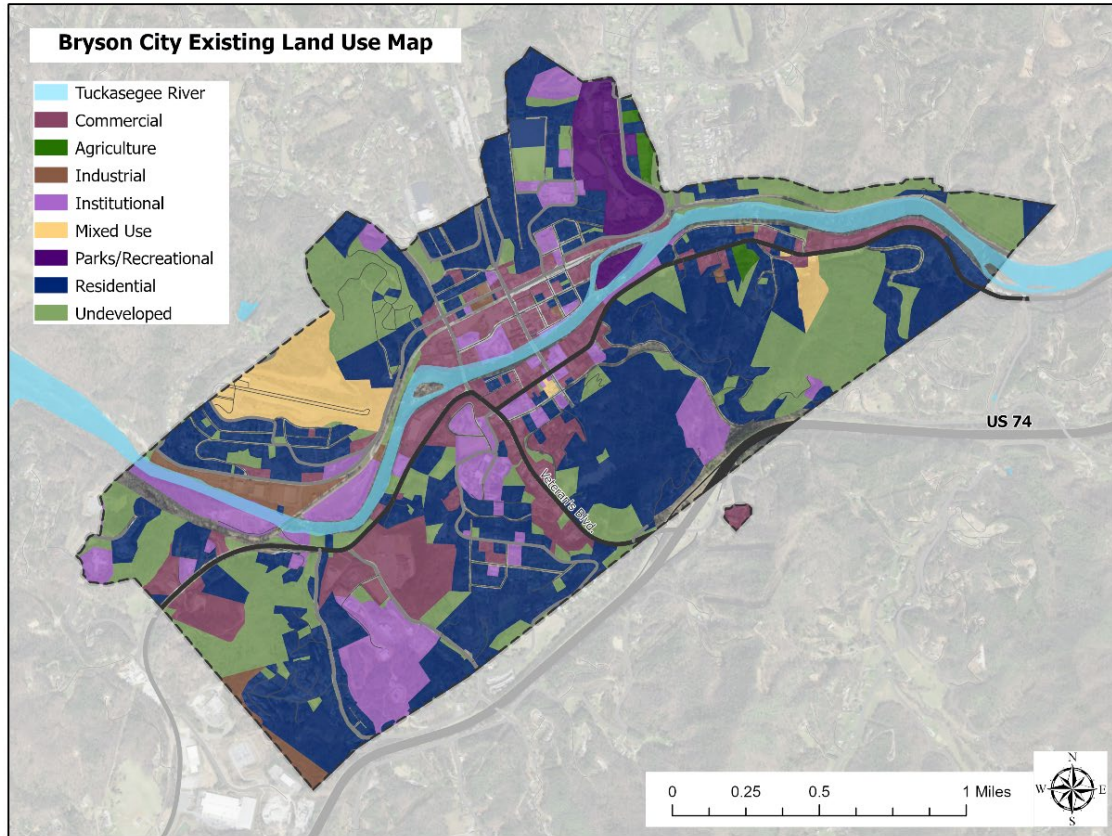


Figure 3. Map of Bryson City's existing land use categories.

The majority of land in Bryson City (41%) is used for Residential purposes, followed by 16% in the Commercial and Industrial category (Figure 4). The Institutional land use category (12%) includes institutions such as schools, churches, museums, the library, and government offices. Only 3.3% of the land is used for Parks and Recreation, and 0.5% is used for Agriculture. Approximately 22% or 287 acres is Undeveloped.

Parcel Ownership

There are 1,048 individual parcels that are wholly or partially within Bryson City's boundary. Approximately 70% of these parcels are owned by Swain County residents and 86% are owned by North Carolina residents. The remaining 14% of parcels are owned by residents of 15 other states, with the majority being from Florida and Georgia.

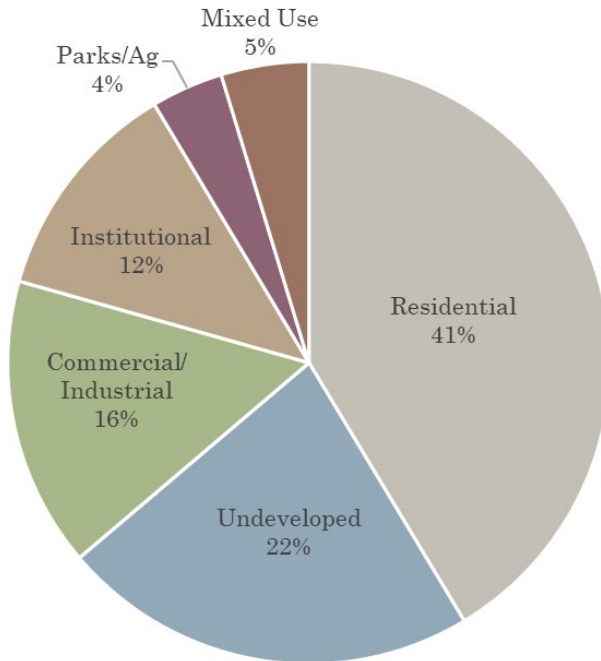


Figure 4. Percentage of existing land use categories in Bryson City.

Population Demographics

Response rates for the 2020 Census were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and detailed data comparisons to previous census efforts may not be reliable. However, the overall population statistics are reliable. The North Carolina State Demographer's certified population of Bryson City on July 1, 2020 is 1,555, while the April 1, 2020 US Census Bureau count is 1,558 (Figure 5). North Carolina as a state is growing rapidly, primarily in the urban areas. NC is currently the 9th most populous state and by 2040 it is projected to be seventh most populous in the nation.

Bryson City's growth rate has been moderate, though the data does not yet reflect the growth that has been seen in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. Time will tell if the most recent surge of people moving to rural areas with outdoor recreation opportunities will continue, or if the overall trend of movement towards urban areas and away from rural areas will prevail.

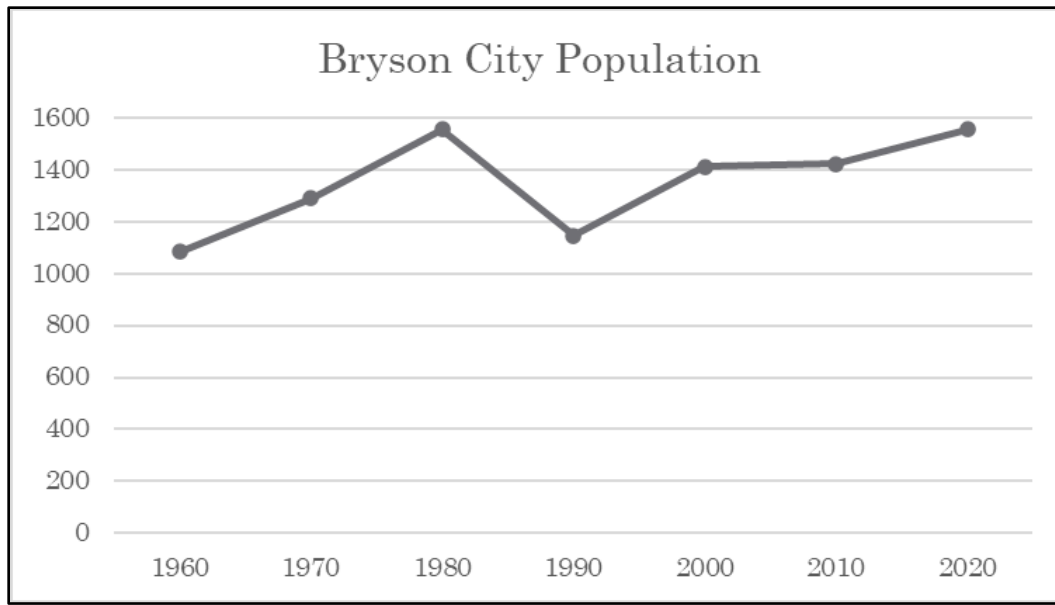


Figure 5. Bryson City Population 1960-2020.

The population of Bryson City has been significantly older than the county, state, and country, though the median age has been declining since 2017 and dipped below Swain County in 2019 (Figure 6).

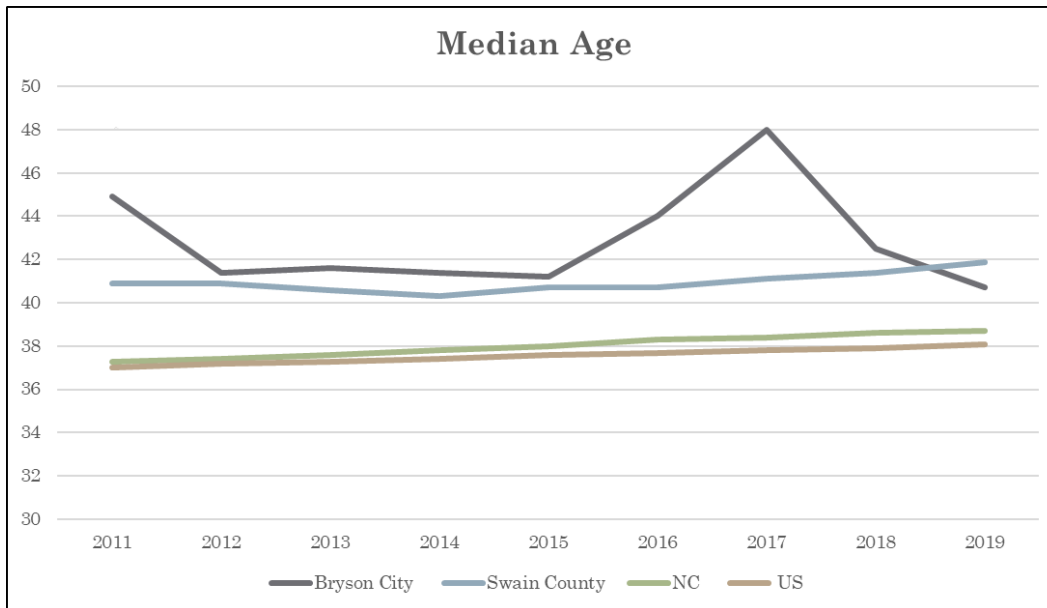


Figure 6. Median age of Bryson City, Swain County, NC, and US.

The state demographer population projections are shown in Figure 7. It is estimated that by 2050, NC will have almost 14 million people and Swain County will have almost 16,000 people.

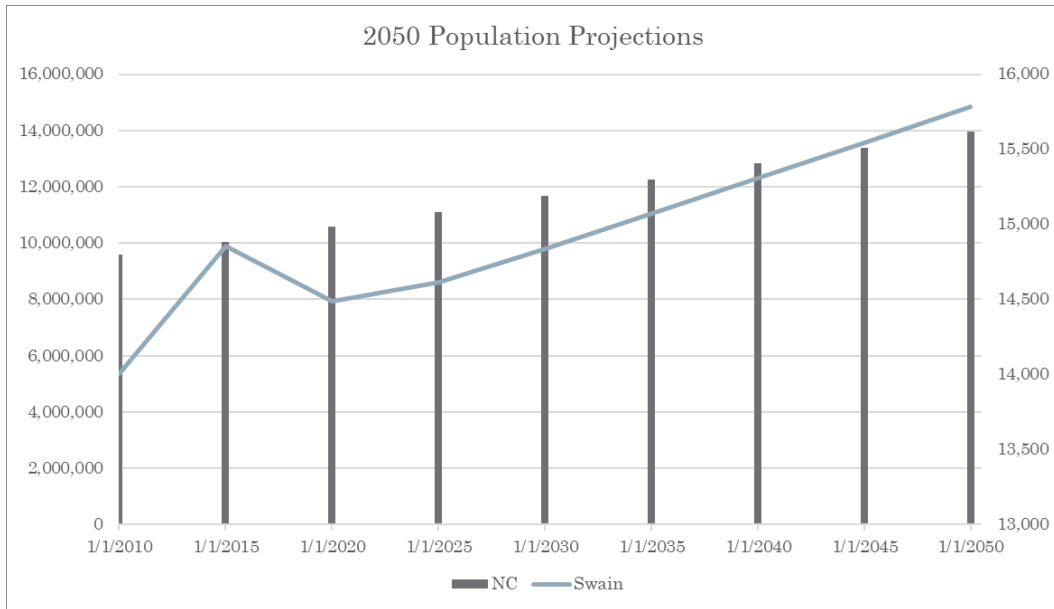
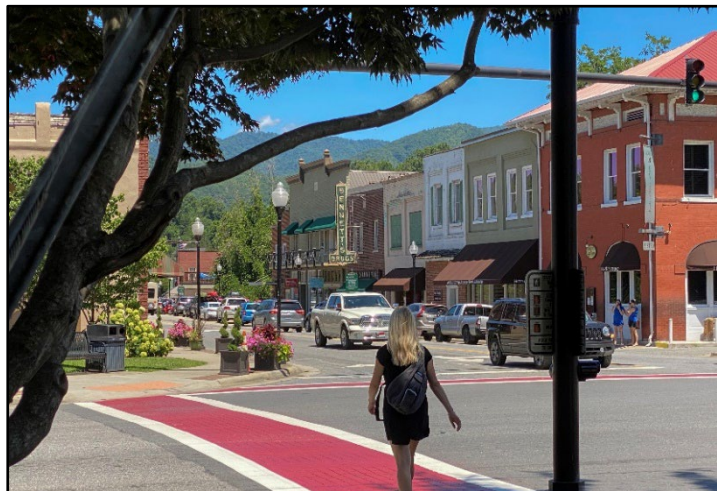


Figure 7. 2050 NC and Swain County Population Projections.

Transportation

North Carolina is one of the few states in the country that does not have a county road system. Out of approximately 30 miles of roadway within Bryson City, the Town maintains approximately 11.75 miles and the remainder are maintained by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) or private entities. Bridges and culverts on town streets are also the responsibility of the Town. The Town receives a small amount of funds from the State (called Powell Bill funds) to use for town-owned streets and sidewalks. Outside of town limits, NCDOT owns and maintains the vast majority of the road network, with some federal and private roads.

Private roads are often not well-maintained due to lack of road maintenance agreements among property owners. Without long-term planning and a method of accruing funds for major repairs, many private roads fall into disrepair. NCDOT receives numerous requests to take over private roads, but all roads must be brought up to NCDOT standards before the state can consider acquiring them.



Paving secondary roads requires the road to be brought up to minimum NCDOT standards, and all rights-of-way must be voluntarily donated by the property owners.

Sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian signals are all owned and maintained by the Town. Bicycles have the same rights as motor vehicles in North Carolina and can share the travel lane with automobiles except on controlled-access highways (such as US 74). Swain County Public Transit provides transportation to all residents of Swain County, serving Bryson City and the larger region. There are no fixed regular routes, but individuals can call to schedule a ride.

The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad operates primarily as a tourist attraction but has also served freight customers in the recent past and is able to provide freight service if and when needed. Rail transportation does not extend to the west beyond Cherokee County, because the old rail rights-of-way were abandoned many years ago and returned to the property owners. Therefore, all rail freight must travel to the east through exchange agreements with several other railroad companies – Watco/Blue Ridge and Norfolk Southern – at significant expense. The steep grades at Topton and Balsam also increase the expense of hauling freight by rail.

Bryson City is close to three small airports in Macon County, Cherokee County, and Jackson County. The closest major airport is Asheville. Sossoman Field, the small landing strip above the town, is no longer operational.

Utilities

Bryson City provides drinking water and sewer services for customers within Bryson City as well as county residents outside of town limits. Figure 8 shows the approximate service area for water and sewer. The sewer treatment plant is currently at capacity, and there is a moratorium on new connections other than single-family residential. Water and sewer services have a major influence on land use, as any large-scale development will require access to public water and sewer. The Town is in the process of acquiring property to expand the treatment plant and gain additional capacity.

Electricity in Bryson City is provided by Duke Energy. High-speed internet is widely available within Bryson City, though much of Swain County does not have high-speed internet.

Many households in Swain County only have access to satellite internet, which is cost-prohibitive, and there are several households in the county who do not have access to phone service. According to December 2020 FCC form 477 data for Swain County, 32.33% of homes in the County are unserved at a moderate internet speed, or an estimated 2,820 households.

According to the Broadband Indices released by the North Carolina Department of Information Technology, 32.59% of Swain County residents do not have access to

moderate internet speeds. Additionally, in the NC Broadband Survey, 506 respondents out of 1,000 (49%) indicated that they did not have internet (excluding cellular and satellite). Sixty-eight percent of these respondents indicated that the reason that they did not have internet is because they simply did not have access to it. Ten percent of these respondents also indicated that they did not even have access to cellular service.

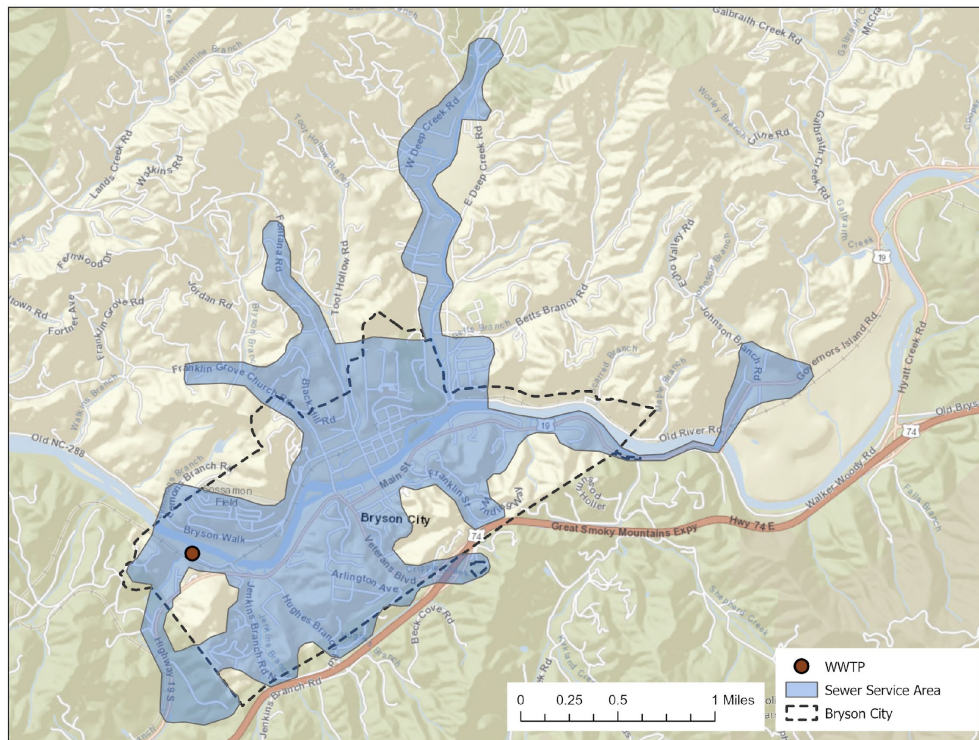


Figure 8. Approximate area of available sewer service and location of the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP).

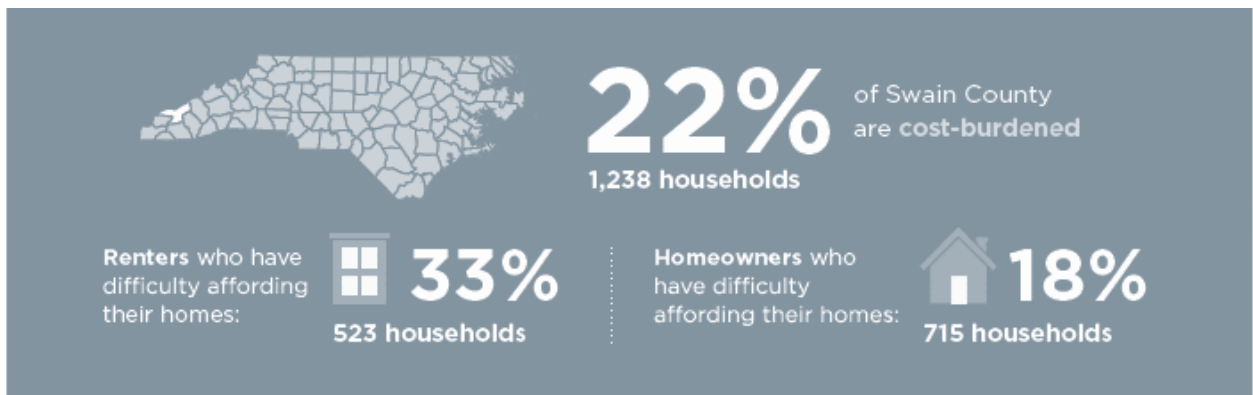
Housing

Availability of housing that is affordable to the average, working individual is difficult to find in Region A, if not the United States as a whole. Housing prices have sky-rocketed because of several different factors mentioned previously in the plan, including the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals and families transitioning to remote work in smaller towns, and an increase in tourism in more rural towns. The housing market in Bryson City is no exception, although the effects are exacerbated due to the tourist economy that has long been a driving force. The following housing data is on a county level but is still relevant to create a snapshot of the existing conditions of the housing market in Bryson City and the surrounding area as well as the need for additional housing that is affordable to a variety of incomes, ages, and levels of ability.

According to the North Carolina Housing Coalition, in 2021, 1,238 households in Swain County, or 22%, are cost burdened. Cost burdened is defined as a family who

is spending more than 30% of their budget on rent or mortgage expenses, plus energy and utility costs. 523 households (33%) of rental households have difficulty affording their homes and 715 households (18%) of homeowners have difficulty affording their mortgages. When households are cost burdened, children may go without nutritious meals or school supplies in order to afford to have a safe place to sleep at night.

- Swain County's area median income for 2021 is \$47,700.
- Swain County's median home price for 2021 according to www.realtor.com is \$397,500.



A Housing Report conducted in 2019 by T. Ronald Brown: Research & Analysis of Asheville, examines population, household, and tenure trends, broken out into the senior market (age 62 and older) and the market of the working age (ages 18-61) population. The Housing Report concluded that Swain County, over a study period of five years (2020-2025), could sustain 56 subsidized rental units for seniors, and 149 subsidized rental units for the working age population, all at 80% of the area median income or lower.

Housing Variable	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
Total Housing Units	652	619	713	833	823
Owner Occupied Housing Units	330	310	342	321	314
Renter Occupied Housing Units	238	181	246	295	289
Total Occupied Housing Units	568	491	588	616	603
Vacant Housing Units	77	128	125	217	220
Seasonal Housing Units	7	25	28	64	93
Year-Round Housing Units	645	648	651	710	684
Median Gross Rent	\$160	\$277	\$349	\$589	\$571
Median Value of Owner-Occupied Units	\$33,500	\$56,400	\$84,400	\$143,800	\$115,000

Table 1. Change in housing unit variables over time.

The previous information, in conjunction with the following data provided by AirDNA, a nationwide vacation rental data center, creates a snapshot of the current housing market in Bryson City. According to AirDNA, there are 909 active short-term rentals in zip code 28713, which covers Bryson City and the surrounding area. The 2020 Census estimates that there are 9,145 households in Swain County. This data is approximate but shows that roughly 10% of households in Swain County are being used for short term rentals. Also, according to AirDNA.com, approximately 525 of those homes are 2 bedrooms or less, which could be affordable housing stock, if they were available for long term rental or purchase.

Employment

According to US Census Bureau data, in 2018 there were 1,592 people employed within Bryson City. Only 122 of these people also lived in the Bryson City town limits, with the remaining 1,470 commuting into the Town. Another 478 people live in Bryson City, but work elsewhere, as illustrated in Figure 9. This commuting pattern is somewhat typical of towns due to the concentration of commercial activity. However, the imbalance can also indicate a lack of housing options available in town. Generally speaking, more balanced availability of housing and jobs leads to stronger communities, due to decreased time and money spent commuting.

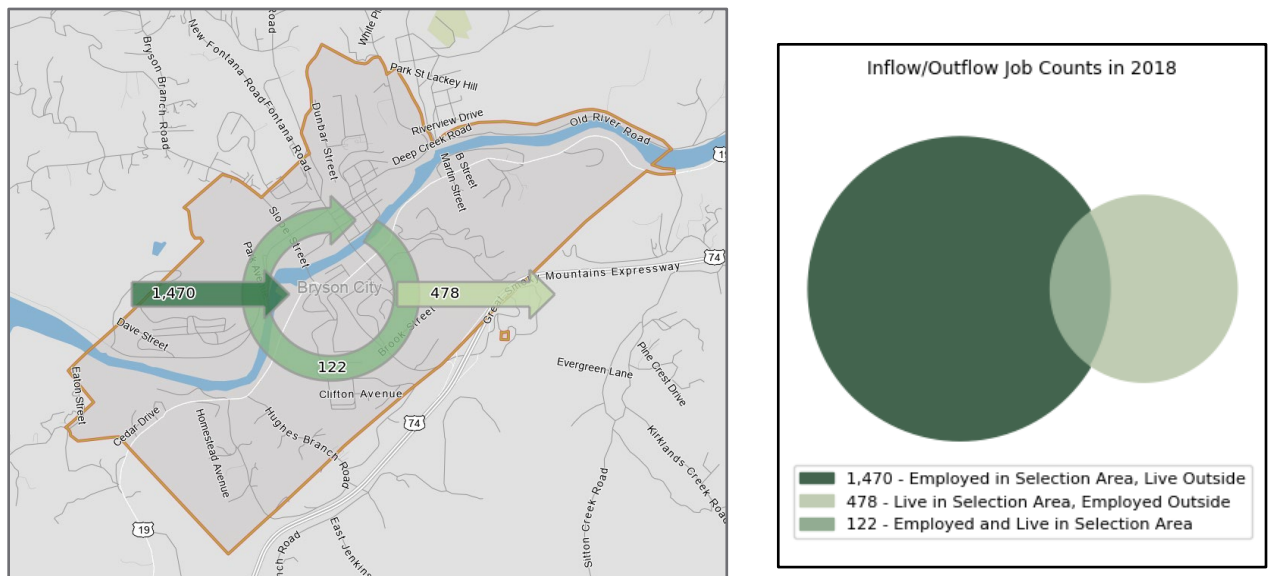


Figure 9. Inflow of jobs into Bryson City by non-residents and outflow of jobs from Bryson City by Town residents.

According to 2021 data from the Internal Revenue Service, the top employers in Swain County include:

Company Name	Employees
Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians	1000+
Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority	500-999
The Cherokee Boys Club Inc	250-499
Swain County Schools	250-499
Swain County	100-249
Nantahala Outdoor Center LLC	100-249
Great Smoky Mountains Railroad	100-249
Ingles Markets Inc	100-249
U S Department Of Interior	50-99
Fedex Ground Package System Inc	50-99
Swain Community Hospital	50-99
Beasely Flooring	50-99
Coca-Cola Bottling Company	Below 50
Town of Bryson City	Below 50

Table 2. Top employers in Swain County.

The commuting distance and direction data (Figure 10) show that about 50% of jobs require a 10–50-mile commute and 14% of jobs require a commute greater than 50 miles. Most commutes occur to the southwest and east of Bryson City.

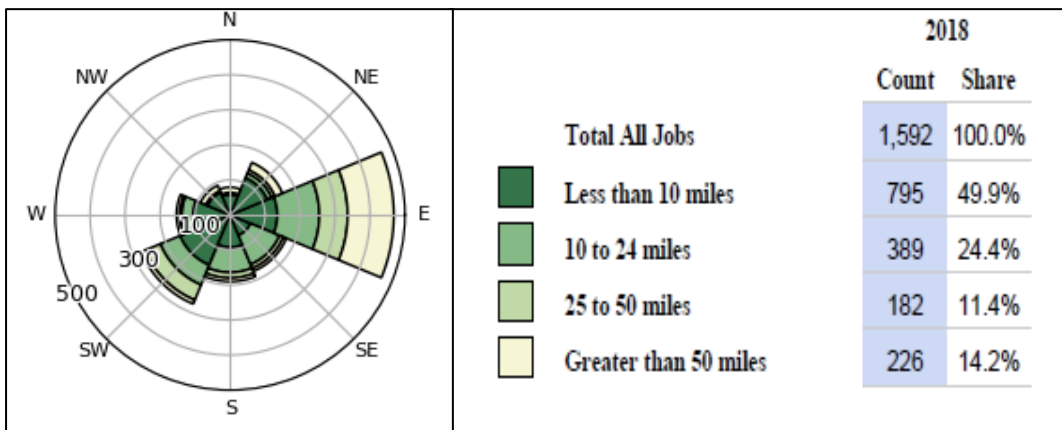


Figure 10. Distance and direction in which workers travel on their commute.

Zoning and Land Use

Zoning is a local government's opportunity to guide the physical development of land and the type of land uses that are appropriate for a specific section of their jurisdiction. Zoning typically specifies areas that are either already used for or would be appropriate for specific uses like residential, industrial, recreational, and commercial. Zoning can also prevent dissimilar uses from locating beside each other.

A lack of planning does not prevent change from happening.

An example of this would be industrial uses, such as an asphalt plant, would not be appropriate in a residential area, or an adult establishment such as an adult bookstore or club would not be appropriate in a residential or commercial area next to a school or library.

Zoning is a tool that towns and/or counties can use to preserve the character, culture, health, and safety of their communities. A town can look at only commercial or residential zoning if they so choose. In small towns with limited vacant and developable land, zoning can be

utilized to guide development in a manner that suits the town and will not look out of place or out of context. A zoning ordinance can consist of permitted uses within a zoning district, development standards and design guidelines. Permitted uses are the types of businesses (retail store, brewery, pharmacy, restaurant, etc.) that can locate in a commercial district, or the type of housing (single family, duplex, manufactured home, etc.) that can be built within a residential district.

Development standards can describe how a permitted use will be built on a parcel within a zoning district. Some examples of development standards would be the distance a building needs to be from an adjacent property line and the centerline of the road, or the minimum or maximum square footage of the structure. Design guidelines could consist of a list of exterior building materials that would be appropriate for a specific zoning district. When a town or county implements a zoning ordinance, all, or none, of these guidelines and standards can be incorporated. A zoning ordinance is a specialized document that is developed uniquely for/by the town or county to meet their needs and vision.

Zoning is a tool that has been utilized by towns within southwestern NC for many decades. Out of the 17 municipalities within the southwestern seven counties comprising Region A, only three are not currently utilizing zoning to guide development while protecting the culture and character of their town. The Town of Hayesville was among the earliest to recognize the benefits of adopting zoning in the 1940s to mitigate the impacts of growth during construction of the Chatuge Dam. See the table below for more information about the municipalities in Region A and when their zoning ordinances were adopted.

Town	Zoning Ordinance	Year Adopted
Canton	Yes	1977
Clyde	Yes	2005
Waynesville	Yes	2011
Maggie Valley	Yes	2007
Sylva	Yes	1998
Dillsboro	Yes	2014
Webster	Yes	2012
Forest Hills	Yes	2004
Highlands	Yes	2014
Franklin	Yes	1998
Bryson City	No	N/A
Andrews	Yes	1985
Murphy	Yes	1982
Hayesville	Yes	1946
Robbinsville	No	N/A
Lake Santeetlah	Yes	2021
Fontana Dam	No	N/A

Table 3. Municipalities in the southwestern NC region with adopted zoning ordinances.

COMMUNITY INPUT SUMMARY

Community input is a crucial component of the planning process and ensures that the plan reflects the unique local vision, needs, and desires of the people who make Bryson City what it is. Involving the public in the development of the plan helps to instill ownership and build support for implementation of the plan elements in future years. The Bryson City Planning Board served as the steering committee for the planning process, providing guidance on public engagement activities and reviewing all materials in advance. The planning team members attended six Planning Board meetings throughout the process. A webpage was established to distribute draft documents, survey results, and keep the public informed about the planning process.

In addition to the Planning Board meetings and interviews with specific stakeholders, there were four primary community input opportunities for the land use plan:

1. Opportunities and Challenges Survey
2. Goals and Objectives Survey
3. Public Input Workshop
4. Public Hearing

The Opportunities and Challenges survey was conducted to learn what people were most excited about and most concerned about for Bryson City's future. These results were used to develop the draft goals and objectives for the land use plan. The second survey presented these draft goals and objectives to the public for review and comment. An in-person public input workshop was also held to hear feedback from the public on draft plan elements and maps. Finally, the Town held a public hearing prior to adopting the plan. These public input activities were advertised in the local newspaper, Facebook, and the Town website.

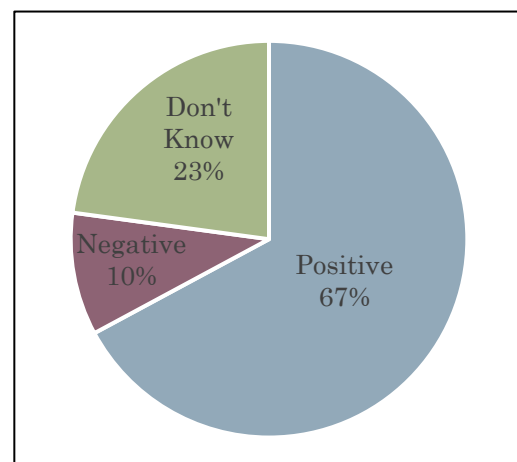
Opportunities and Challenges Survey

The Opportunities and Challenges survey was open from August 9th – September 21st, 2021. The public was invited to participate online or using a paper survey available at Town Hall. There were 71 responses received online and two on paper.

The survey asked several questions that prompted individuals to share their favorite things about Bryson City and also where there are challenges and opportunities for improvement. The favorite thing mentioned most often about Bryson City is the small-town atmosphere, followed by the abundant natural resources, the mild climate, and the walkable, business-friendly downtown. The biggest areas mentioned as opportunities for improvement were public facilities and infrastructure followed by housing affordability.

The final survey question asked how respondents felt about zoning to guide land development. 67% of respondents felt mostly positive that zoning could help Bryson City, 10% of respondents felt mostly negative, that zoning could hurt Bryson City, and 23% respondents were unsure and would need additional information before they decided.

A second component of the survey was an interactive mapping application that invited individuals to place points on a map of Bryson City to identify a specific opportunity or challenge (Figure 11). Twenty-nine unique points were entered on the map with 45 associated comments.



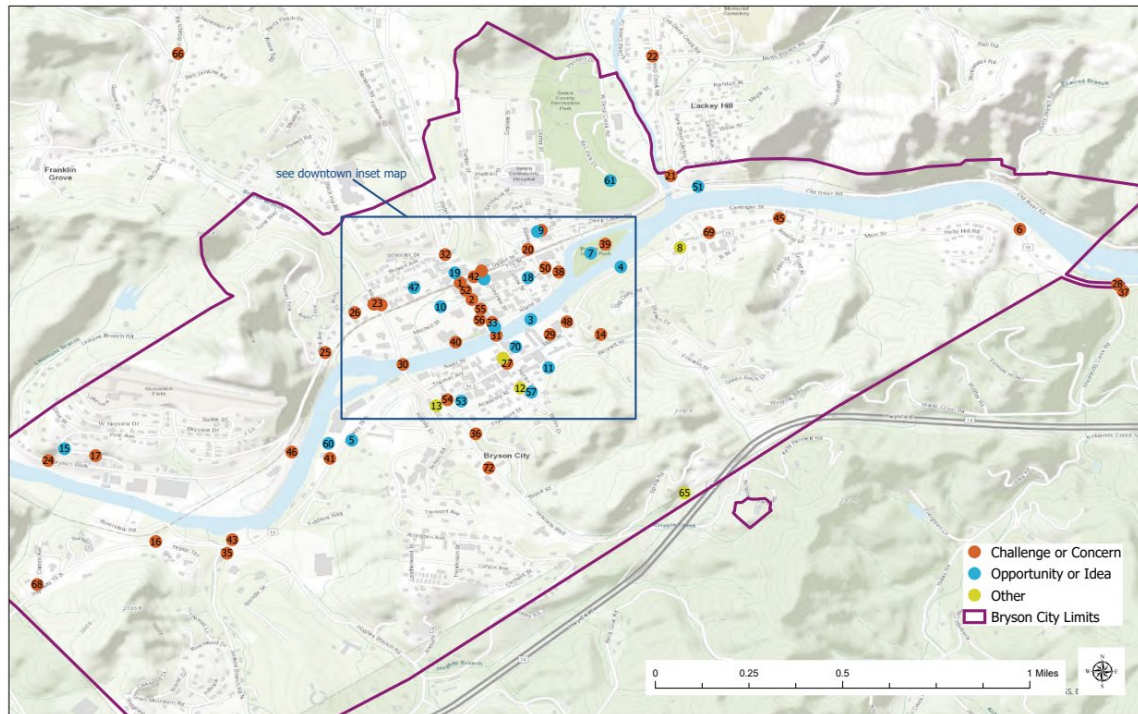


Figure 11. Mapping application from the Opportunities and Challenges Survey.

The complete Opportunities and Challenges Survey and all responses can be found in the Appendix.

Stakeholder Interviews

Several major employers in the community were interviewed to obtain their perspective on the issues facing the future of Bryson City.

A representative of Swain County Schools was interviewed and discussed the main issues to be addressed through the planning process as well as challenges and concerns in Bryson City. The increased traffic due to tourism and families visiting the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad is an issue as the end of the school day often coincides with the train coming back to town. This can create difficulties with emergency vehicle access, parents picking their children up from school, and the school bus schedule. Lack of adequate parking in town for visitors and residents alike was also mentioned. A possible solution discussed is a parking deck.

At the time of the interview, concrete plans were not in place for new construction of the Swain Middle School, although updates are necessary due to HVAC and water/sewer issues. The Bright Adventures Pre-School is to be moved to a new facility within 5 years. The bus garage was built in the 1930's to service equipment being used to build Fontana Dam. The garage needs to be replaced due to environmental issues caused by corrosive fluids.

Also mentioned was the problem of “brain drain” and students being Swain County’s most valuable export. In the past, the majority of school employees and teachers were locals, and now there is a teacher shortage and some of the shortage is believed to have been caused by the lack of affordable housing in the county. Many teachers live in Cullowhee and commute to Bryson City every day for work. On their commute, they pass several other schools, and when job openings become available closer to home, they “jump on” the opportunity. The need for medium-to high-density housing in Swain County that could serve the first-time home buyer and rental population of individuals just getting started in their careers was discussed.

A representative of Swain Community Hospital was interviewed to better understand the services that they provide to the community and any plans that they have for the future. Swain Community Hospital serves as one of 21 critical access hospitals in North Carolina and has been in partnership with Harris Regional Hospital since 1997. Swain Community Hospital serves as a gateway to Harris Regional Hospital and serves six counties in the region. Visibility of the hospital is an issue due to its location but traffic from tourism and visitors to the town don’t seem to disrupt the flow of service at the hospital. Competitive pay and retainment of employees can be a struggle due to commute times and the lack of affordable housing in Swain County.

Goals and Recommendations Survey

The results from the first survey were used to develop the draft goals and objectives for the land use plan, and then a second public input survey was conducted to obtain feedback on the draft plan elements. The Goals and Objectives survey was open from May 12th – June 5th, 2022 and received 133 responses online. Paper copies of the survey were available at Town Hall during the survey period, but none were completed.

The survey asked respondents to rate each of the six draft goals on a scale of one to five, with one being a positive rating and five indicating a negative rating. The average scores given to each goal are shown in the table below. All of the goals received a positive rating on average, with Goal 1 being most popular and Goal 5 being least popular.



Score	Goal
1.4	Goal 1: Protect and enhance the unique features that give Bryson City its character and make it a desirable place to live, work, and play.
1.7	Goal 2: Balance the benefits of a thriving tourism economy with the demands on local resources.
1.9	Goal 3: Encourage land development and/or redevelopment that provides a balance in land uses and promotes a sense of community and overall quality of life.
1.9	Goal 4: Align land development with the capacity of existing and planned infrastructure.
2.1	Goal 5: Develop a transportation system that provides safe and convenient access for all users to places of work, shopping, and services.
1.5	Goal 6: Increase the diversity of housing options and opportunities for residents with varying levels of density, price, and style.

Table 4. Average score of survey respondents rating of each goal for the land use plan. The highest-ranking score was a 1 and the lowest-ranking score was 5.

Respondents were then prompted to consider their top priorities for usage of tax dollars beyond essential services (i.e., fire, police, water/sewer, street maintenance). The two most popular choices focused on eyesores and housing. They suggest that people would like their tax dollars to be used to help property owners restore or demolish dilapidated structures, and to subsidize rent for landlords to rent to long-term tenants instead of short-term visitors. Figure 12 indicates the number of times each focus area was selected as a top priority.

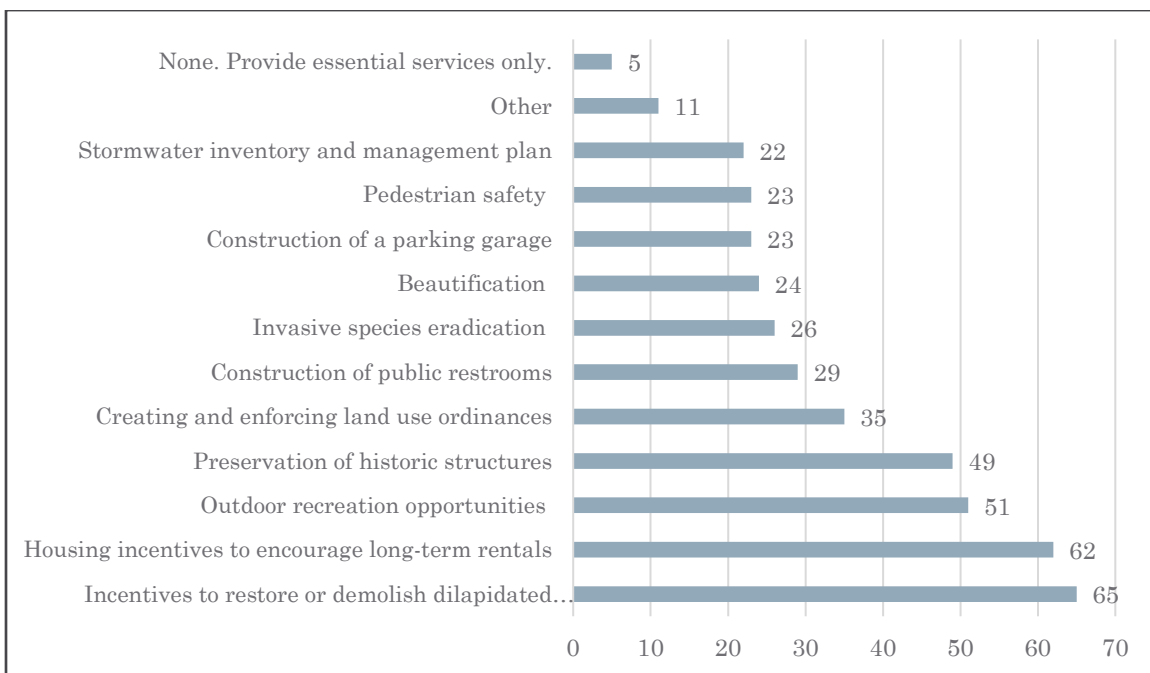


Figure 12. Total votes received for each focus area to be a top priority.

Survey participants were also asked to share their suggestions on next steps that should be taken to address their highest priority. The full responses to the open-ended question can be found in the Appendix, but the summary of the responses shown in Figure 13 reflected eyesores and housing being the top priorities of the survey participants.

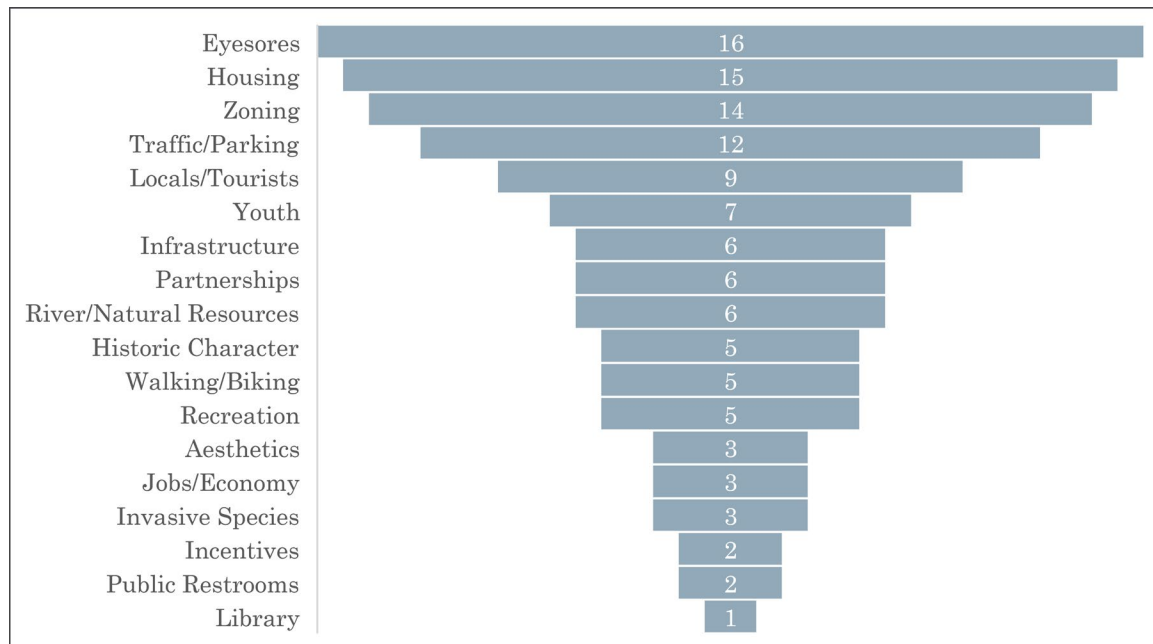


Figure 13. Number of times each topic area was mentioned when asked what step should be taken to accomplish the highest priority goals.

Public Input Session

An in-person public input session was held during the Goals and Objectives survey window; it took place May 31, 2022, from 3:00-7:00 pm. The goal of the session was to allow the public an opportunity to review the draft plan documents, ask questions of the planning team, and share their opinions on the draft plan and future land use map. It was also an opportunity for people without access to computers or internet to



take the survey on paper. The event was promoted in the local newspaper, on social media, and through email and websites. A total of six participants attended the session, including two planning board members.

Public Hearing and Adoption

The Town held a public hearing for the land use plan on September 6, 2022. No members of the public attended the public hearing or submitted public comments. Following the public hearing, the Board of Alderman adopted this Bryson City Land Use Plan.

Themes from the Public Input Survey

Several key themes emerged from the public input sessions and surveys. These themes were then used to guide the development of the vision for the town, and the goals and objectives to achieve the identified vision.

- **PRESERVE OR MAINTAIN:**
 - Preserve the vibrant, bustling, small-town feel.
 - Maintain the walkable downtown, unique character, business-friendly nature of the town.
 - Preserve the natural beauty of the river and the mountains.
 - Maintain the community and culture.
 - Preserve and expand outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **ENHANCE OR IMPROVE:**
 - Balance economic benefits of tourism with the associated demands on local resources.
 - Improve the diversity of housing options, focusing on affordability and density.
 - Enhance the connection to the river and its resources.
 - Enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety and connectivity.
 - Enhance commercial corridors to maintain safe access to businesses.
 - Encourage denser development along existing water and sewer corridors to maximize previous infrastructure investments.
 - Enhance partnerships with local groups.

GOALS and OBJECTIVES

The Planning Board helped craft a Vision Statement to guide the planning process. Setting the Vision for the future of Bryson City helps to establish a unified direction and guide decision-making for town leaders.

VISION 2045: The people who know and love Bryson City envision a thriving, walkable, business-friendly town with abundant outdoor recreation opportunities. The vision of Bryson City acknowledges and respects the culture and natural resources while encouraging positive changes that will improve the quality of life for current and future residents and visitors.

The results of the first round of community input were used to develop goals for the plan. Specific objectives were then developed to achieve each of the identified goals. The following goals and objectives are designed to move Bryson City towards this vision.

GOAL 1:

Protect and enhance the unique features that give Bryson City its character and make it a desirable place to live, work, and play.

Why this goal is important:

Addressing this goal will help to maintain the parts of Bryson City that residents and visitors have come to know and love. Preservation of the natural beauty of the river and the mountains and preserving the sense of community, history and culture will allow future generations to experience aspects of Bryson City. Maintaining the downtown corridor and preserving the historic buildings will preserve the charm of Bryson City while allowing development outside of the downtown corridor that is appropriate and necessary. Enhancement of the outdoor recreation spaces will offer opportunities for individuals and families to explore and experience the outdoors.

Objectives to achieve this goal:

- Preserve the natural beauty of the river and the mountains.
- Preserve the sense of community, history, and culture.
- Maintain the vibrant, walkable, business-friendly downtown.
- Preserve the unique historic buildings downtown.

- Enhance the connection between the Town and the Tuckasegee River to capitalize on this unique asset. Provide improved access to the river and views of the river.
- Enhance Island Park and add amenities to maximize access to recreational opportunities within Town.
- Enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.

Consequences of not addressing this goal:

The natural development of a place is often dependent on individuals and/or developers who have taken an interest in an aspect of the town. The quaint, small town feel of Bryson City is a draw to people of all demographics, although a loss of the charming and picturesque downtown could poorly impact the local residents and the tourist economy. Failure to preserve the culture and history of Bryson City through historic preservation and land use regulation could result in development that is inappropriate and out of scale and context to maintain the quaint culture of the town.

GOAL 2:

Balance the benefits of a thriving tourism economy with the associated demands on local resources.

Why this goal is important:

Encourage economic development that enhances the town's natural amenities and improves the quality of life, community stability, and opportunity. Development in western North Carolina is inevitable. People from all over the country have fallen in love with the mountains, rivers, and small towns. It is important to create a delicate balance between new development and the maintenance of the culture and character. The delicate balance needed in small towns like Bryson City can be achieved through the development of specifically curated ordinances that will help to maintain what is loved while allowing new development to occur in a responsible and context appropriate manner. Appropriate and responsible development will also help to balance the impact of tourism on the natural environment and the community of year-round residents and small business owners.

Objectives to achieve this goal:

- Work with Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Development Authority on funding infrastructure improvements to support the demands from tourism.
- Work with Swain County, Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, and other downtown businesses to develop solutions to traffic and parking issues.

- Promote and strengthen small, family-owned businesses.
- Expand recreational opportunities and activities for local youth and families.

Consequences of Not Addressing These Goals:

One of the greatest consequences of failing to reach these goals would be the loss of tourist attractions and the associated loss of small businesses, restaurants, and their economic benefits. Development without the responsible guidance of thoughtfully developed ordinances could result in structures that are not aesthetically pleasing and do not match the character or culture of Bryson City. The loss of the small-town feel and aesthetics could result in a decline in tourism, and thus a potential loss of small businesses and a decline in the local economy.

Many amenities that attract tourists also attract young people – walkability, a variety of dining and shopping opportunities, live music, etc. Having fun things for young people to do in Bryson City is critical to keeping them from moving away. The future workforce depends on a variety of ages in the population. Results of the community survey indicated an interest in youth-centered activities like an indoor pool, movie theater, and skate park.

GOAL 3:

Encourage land development and/or redevelopment that provides a balance in land uses and promotes a sense of community and overall quality of life.

Why this goal is important:

A balance in land uses is the goal of any thriving town. A balance in land uses means that dissimilar uses will not be developed next to each other. The prevention of such development will make the town a desirable place to live and work while protecting property values and the future of the town. The encouragement of responsible and appropriate land development or redevelopment will provide necessary, although not overpowering controls to the town. Controls could include making sure that best practices are used for development that will protect natural areas like rivers, streams and steep slopes. Having such controls would also protect the health, safety and welfare of residents and visitors against irresponsible development. This type of development would detract from the quaint culture and small town feel that makes Bryson City unique.

Objectives to achieve this goal:

General:

- Promote development patterns that allow safe and convenient access between residential areas, shopping, services, recreation, and public facilities.

- Encourage the development of the most appropriate land and target the most suitable locations for development, such as residential areas, industrial parks, and commercial corridors.
- Protect available residential and commercial land from inappropriate types of development.
- Consider adopting zoning to ensure new development is compatible with the character of Bryson City.
- Ensure best practices for erosion, sediment control, and stormwater management are utilized to protect the natural resources and prevent damaging impacts to properties downslope.
- Protect existing residential neighborhoods from non-residential uses that would impact quality of life or harm property values.

High-Impact Land Uses:

- Protect the safety, health, and general welfare of all citizens from inappropriate and disorderly development.
- Establish zoning for industrial, unsavory, or disruptive land uses that would detract from the character of the town and the quality of life of nearby residents and businesses.
- Require buffers and setbacks between incompatible or conflicting land uses.
- Establish zoning for abandoned or neglected properties that may create a nuisance, public health hazard, or harm neighboring property values.

Downtown:

- Consider establishing a downtown historic district to protect the unique character of the historic downtown and deter demolition.
- Encourage multi-use development in the downtown area, combining retail stores, offices, and restaurants with higher-density residential to enhance walkability and vibrancy.

Commercial Corridors:

- Consider establishing zoning for commercial development of the commercial corridors, ensuring safe and convenient access is maintained as these corridors continue to develop.
- Provide multi-modal access on commercial corridors to provide safe access for people walking, biking, or using public transit.

- Promote quality commercial development along the highways entering Bryson City, promoting a sense of arrival and gradual transition to the downtown center.
 - As the primary gateway into Bryson City, encourage the Veteran's Blvd commercial corridor to continue developing in a way that is consistent with the character of Bryson City.
 - US Hwy 19 Business to the west will likely continue to develop with commercial and light industrial land uses. Zoning can ensure that new development is consistent with the character of Bryson City and does not overburden the capacity of infrastructure.
 - US Hwy 19 Business to the east has limited undeveloped land and is more constrained due to the topography and the river. Zoning can help ensure that any redevelopment opportunities are consistent with the character of Bryson City.

Administrative:

- Consider establishing a Unified Development Ordinance so that all ordinances are clear, consistent, equitable, and enforceable.
- Modernize the Code of Ordinances online to maximize transparency and accessibility for the public.
- Consider hiring a code enforcement officer to ensure zoning is enforced appropriately and fairly.

Consequences of Not Addressing This Goal:

Survey results indicated people were not happy with “eyesores” and dilapidated properties. Presently, the Town has no mechanism to do anything about these properties and the property owners may not be able to afford to demolish them or redevelopment them. Without implementing zoning, the town will have no authority to prevent further properties from becoming public health hazards or detracting from community character and adjacent property values. Example: industrial land use producing noise and dust adjacent to a pre-school. Example: adult-oriented business adjacent to a church.

GOAL 4:

Align land development with the capacity of existing and planned infrastructure.

Why this goal is important:

Large- and medium-scale developments can bring many benefits to the community, such as job opportunities and housing, but can bring costs as well. Zoning with consistent standards can be applied to these developments, so they don't negatively impact the community. Many developers are accustomed to paying for turn lanes, sidewalks, sewer extensions, and stormwater management practices so that these costs are not borne by the local taxpayers alone.

Objectives to achieve this goal:

- Encourage well-planned development that is coordinated with necessary services such as water, sewer, electric, solid waste, and transportation.
- Encourage development in locations where public services such as police, fire, schools, and parks are available.
- Consider zoning that encourages infill development utilizing existing infrastructure.
- Establish appropriate water and sewer fees to provide adequate maintenance and operations and ensure consistent and reliable service.
- Discourage development in floodplains to minimize risk to public health and property damage.
- Develop a plan to manage stormwater runoff within the town, including an inventory of stormwater infrastructure conditions and a capital improvement plan.
- Consider zoning that would require new developments to provide supportive infrastructure (i.e., sidewalks, turn lanes, stormwater retention) so that these costs are not borne by local taxpayers.
- Pursue partnerships to install public restroom facilities downtown.

Consequences of not addressing this goal:

Proactive maintenance of existing infrastructure is less expensive and less disruptive to the community than making emergency repairs. Underground assets are particularly vulnerable since issues can go unnoticed until a catastrophic event (such as a ruptured pipe causing a large sinkhole that could result in significant damage to life and property).

GOAL 5:

Develop a transportation system that provides safe and convenient access for all users to places of work, shopping, and services.

Why this goal is important:

The movement of people and goods is a vital part of community structure and economic activity. Most items that we buy at a store or eat at a restaurant are not produced within Bryson City but must be brought in on trucks via highways. There is little to no freight transportation via rail or air in southwestern NC.

The modern US transportation system has primarily been developed around the personal automobile, assuming most people own cars. For many decades, transportation professionals focused on efficiency, moving people and goods between points in the shortest time possible. In recent years, it has become apparent that maximizing efficiency has minimized other benefits such as safety, equity, and connectivity. These elements are vital to healthy vibrant communities, and more people are demanding walkable communities and safer streets for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. Known as “Complete Streets”, roads that are built to accommodate all users are safer, better connected, and more economically vibrant.

Land use planning and transportation are closely intertwined, but rarely coordinated. Local governments (towns and counties) control land use while NCDOT controls most road improvements (other than those on town-owned streets). Large-scale developments approved by local governments can cause traffic issues that NCDOT cannot fix in a reasonable timeframe.

Objectives to achieve this goal:

- Improve pedestrian safety and access to workplaces, shopping, and services through the development of a connected sidewalk network extending from downtown and out along the three commercial corridors. Provide safe crosswalks at appropriate locations.
- Encourage commercial and industrial land uses with high freight volumes to locate near highways and major thoroughfares to minimize the impact of large trucks on other roads in the community.
- Partner with Swain County government and the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad to alleviate parking and traffic concerns associated with train departure/arrival times.
- Partner with Swain County Schools to alleviate traffic concerns associated with school drop off/pick up times.
- Protect the functionality of the two river crossings and avoid bottlenecks on the Slope Street Bridge and Everett Street Bridge by discouraging any large-

scale developments that would generate high volumes of traffic to locate on the north side of the river. Given the size of the river and floodplain, it would likely be cost-prohibitive to construct an additional bridge in the foreseeable future.

- Continue participation in the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization to plan, prioritize, and fund transportation improvement projects in the North Carolina Department of Transportation's State Transportation Improvement Program. Current projects under consideration include:
 - R-5843, Bryson Walk and Depot Street Road Reconfiguration – funded and scheduled to begin construction Summer 2022
 - Modernizing US 19 (R-4751) remains a top priority – this project was previously funded and preliminary design was started, but it was later defunded due to NCDOT budget issues.
 - Constructing a multi-use path on Fontana Rd to connect downtown to the high school is also a priority.
 - Constructing a new interchange on US 74 near Industrial Drive and Jenkins Branch has been submitted but has not yet been funded.

Consequences of not addressing this goal:

Incorporating impacts to the transportation system is a critical piece of land use planning. Unplanned development can cause congestion or safety issues that are not easily mitigated. Transportation improvement projects cost millions of dollars and take years (or decades) to get funded. Large scale developments designed without adequate infrastructure fall on the taxpayers to fix after the fact. Private development can happen at a much faster pace than public infrastructure. It typically takes ten years or more to get a project funded, and another ten years to get it designed, permitted, and constructed. Therefore, it is critical that land use planning accounts for impacts to the transportation system.

GOAL 6:

Provide diversity of housing options for residents. Increase housing options and opportunities with appropriate levels of density and design.

Why this goal is important:

Addressing housing is important to the sustainability and vitality of Bryson City as a thriving community. Providing diversity in housing options for all residents of Bryson City will benefit the community in lots of ways. Housing that is affordable

costs no more than 30% of the household's annual income. If a household is spending more than 30% of their income on rent payments, mortgage payments and utilities, the household is considered cost burdened. Having housing options for lots of income levels will benefit first time home buyers, retirees, single parent households, but also may incentivize teachers, nurses, police officers and other essential individuals in the community be able to live and work in the community that they serve. Housing options could include apartments, duplexes, townhomes, condominiums, and single-family dwellings. While tourism is an essential economic driver in Bryson City, tourists also drive the demand for short-term rentals. A balance is needed to accommodate full-time residents housing needs with the tourist economy to maintain a thriving community. The availability of housing options that are affordable will also provide options for young professionals to locate or relocate back home after receiving an education.

Objectives to achieve this goal:

- Collaborate on efforts to educate the public about the importance of affordable housing and the individuals who benefit from it.
- Consider adopting zoning to promote additional medium- and high-density housing in appropriate locations.
- Maintain the existing housing stock by seeking opportunities and partnerships to improve substandard housing.
- Consider opportunities to incentivize long-term rentals for residents vs. short-term rentals for tourists.
- Consider opportunities to preserve land for the development of mixed income housing (multi-family, townhomes, duplexes, etc.).

Consequences of not addressing this goal:

The consequences of not addressing this goal could be devastating to the community. Not having individuals who live and work in the town could open the town up to becoming a tourist destination only, rather than a thriving community. Bryson City is already experiencing development pressure. If property is not preserved for housing, it may be lost to other types of development. Also, having discussions and educating the public about the importance of housing that is affordable to a range of income levels is crucial to prevent opposition if/when new housing development is proposed.

GOAL 7:

Foster partnerships to enable collaboration on moving Bryson City toward their goals.

Why this goal is important:

The overarching issues impacting a community are typically considered by many organizations, as they impact the individuals that they serve or in some way affect their mission. Partnerships that foster collaboration can create cost effective impact and solutions when dollars are pooled rather than spent separately. Also, having a consensus and understanding of the partners and key stakeholders in a community can be beneficial when it comes to decision making and gathering input.

Objectives:

- Collaborate with other community groups to accomplish common goals and provide more effective and efficient use of the Town's financial resources.
 - Swain County Government
 - Swain County Schools
 - Swain County Library
 - Swain Community Hospital
 - State of Franklin Health Council
 - Tennessee Valley Authority
 - Duke Energy
 - Great Smoky Mountains National Park
 - Southwestern Commission Council of Government
 - Southwestern HOME Consortium
 - Southwestern Rural Planning Organization
 - Mountain West Partnership
 - NCDOT
 - Great Smoky Mountains Railroad and other local businesses
 - Tourism Development Authority
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - Local and regional nonprofit organizations

Consequences of not addressing this goal:

Different organizations with the same goals often end up working against each other (pulling in different directions). Working against each other can result in a smaller impact in the community, where collaboration and a pooling of resources can create a bigger impact. It may also be easier to accomplish goals with lots of players at the table.

FUTURE LAND USE

In crafting a vision for the future development patterns of the Town of Bryson City, this plan aims to provide a framework that is both descriptive and flexible — descriptive enough to provide the Town’s decision makers with clear information on the intended vision, but flexible enough to allow decision-makers latitude in the interpretation of the vision.

The Future Land Use Map (Figure 15) found in this section should not be interpreted as a regulatory document, such as a zoning map. Instead, it is intended as general guidance to help the Town’s decision-makers make clear, informed decisions in support of an agreed-upon vision.

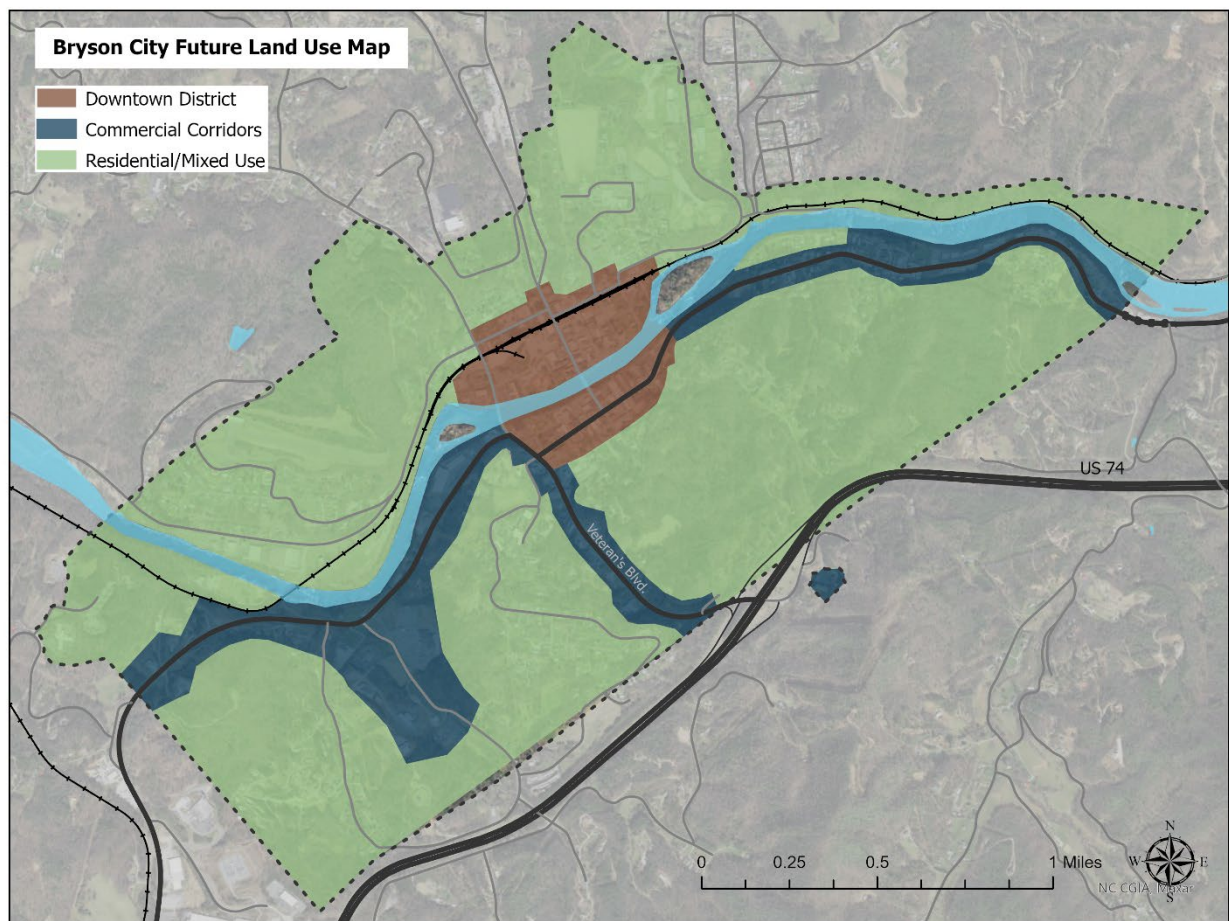


Figure 15. Bryson City Future Land Use Map.

The Future Land Use map divides the Town into the following land use categories:

- Downtown District
- Commercial Corridors
- Residential/Mixed Use

The Downtown District is intended to allow a variety of uses within the historic downtown area of Bryson City, while preserving the vibrant small-business atmosphere and the unique historic character. Appropriate/encouraged uses in this area could include:

- Small-scale retail stores
- Restaurants
- Churches
- Service businesses, salons, offices
- Assembly halls, performance venues
- Accessory residential units (for example, second-floor apartments)
- Hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, inns
- Small scale open space/parks

If development or redevelopment were to occur within the downtown district, ideally, it would be small scale and aesthetically compatible with the surrounding structures. One of the key defining features of this use district is its pedestrian scale and walkability. Large auto-oriented commercial uses such as big-box stores, service stations, and fast-food restaurants should generally be discouraged in this area to maintain the walkability of the area. Another key attribute of this district is its reliance on public on-street and off-street parking rather than individual on-site parking lots at each building. It is important to maintain this district's unique identity as the heart of the community.

The Commercial Corridors category is where the larger scale, auto-oriented commercial uses would be more appropriate and where these uses have historically developed. The Commercial Corridors are the entrances to Bryson City, so they should be developed in a way that creates a sense of arrival and encourages traffic to slow down as they enter downtown. In addition to the uses already mentioned above, appropriate/encouraged uses in this area could include:

- Drive-thru restaurants
- Professional offices (law, real estate, medical, etc.)
- Larger scale retail (grocery stores, drugstores, etc.)
- Schools
- Libraries

The Residential/Mixed Use category encompasses the rest of the Town of Bryson City. Most of this category is residential land uses such as single family but there is a mixture of institutional uses as well as some commercial. Institutional uses could include schools and parks and commercial could include any range of small-scale retail stores to auto repair shops and more. This category would be the least restrictive, but if new development were to occur, it would be beneficial to have zoning that would protect residential property values by not allowing uses that are too dissimilar to locate in the vicinity of homes. In addition to the uses already mentioned above, appropriate/encouraged uses in this area could include:

- Single family housing
- Multi-family housing
- Industrial uses
- Mechanic shops
- Junk yards
- Hospitals/clinics

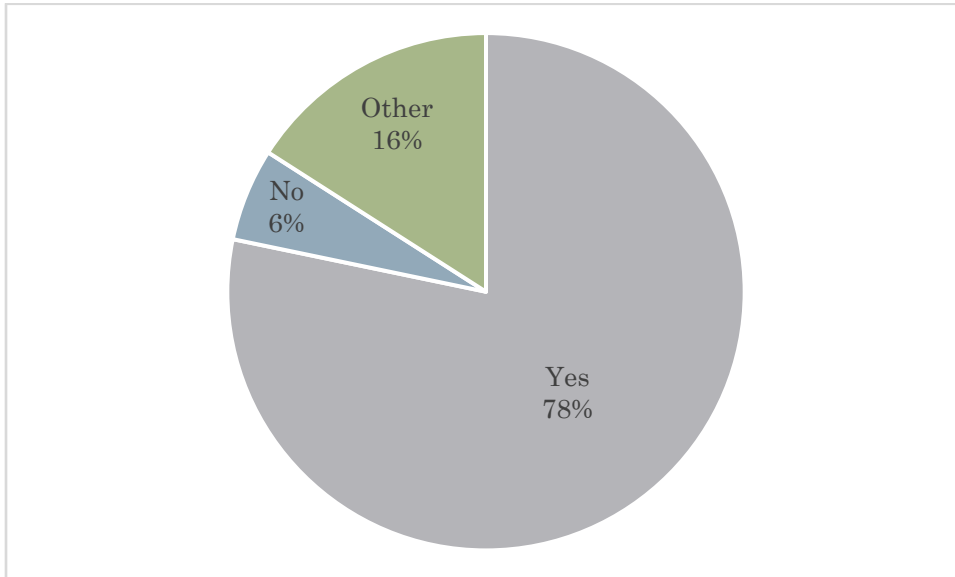


Figure 14. 78% of survey respondents agreed that the Future Land Use Map showed development patterns that are appropriate for Bryson City.

ACTION PLAN

The action plan lists each objective identified previously in the plan, while assigning a suggested time frame for implementation. The action plan should be reviewed annually during budget discussions to decide what might be appropriate to accomplish in the following fiscal year. An action plan is a tool to ensure that Land Use Plans are actionable.. The action plan, if the town so chooses, can ensure that goals and objectives are implemented in an appropriate and timely manner.

Objective	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7
Short-term (1-4 years)							
Work with Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Development Authority on funding infrastructure improvements to support the demands from tourism.							
Work with Swain County, Great Smoky Mountains Railroad, and other downtown businesses to develop solutions to traffic and parking issues.							
Encourage the development of the most appropriate land and target the most suitable locations for development, such as residential areas, industrial parks, and commercial corridors.							
Protect available residential and commercial land from inappropriate types of development.							
Consider adopting zoning to ensure new development is compatible with the character of Bryson City.							
Protect existing residential neighborhoods from non-residential uses that would impact quality of life and harm property values.							
Establish zoning for industrial, unsavory, or disruptive land uses that would detract from the character of the town and the quality of life of nearby residents and businesses.							

Objective	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7
Require buffers and setbacks between incompatible or conflicting land uses.							
Consider establishing a downtown historic district to protect the unique character of the historic downtown and deter demolition.							
Consider zoning for the gateway corridors, ensuring safe and convenient access is maintained as these corridors continue to develop.							
Consider hiring a code enforcement officer to ensure zoning is enforced appropriately and fairly.							
Consider zoning that encourages infill development utilizing existing infrastructure.							
Establish appropriate water and sewer fees to provide adequate maintenance and operations and ensure consistent and reliable service.							
Pursue partnerships to install public restroom facilities downtown.							
Encourage commercial and industrial land uses with high freight volumes to locate near highways and major thoroughfares to minimize the impact of large trucks on other roads in the community.							
Partner with Swain County government and the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad to alleviate parking and traffic concerns associated with train departure/arrival times.							
Partner with Swain County Schools to alleviate traffic concerns associated with school drop off/pick up times.							
Protect the functionality of the two river crossings and avoid bottlenecks on the Slope Street Bridge and Everett Street Bridge by discouraging any large-scale developments that would generate high volumes of traffic to locate on the north side of the river. Given the size of the river, it would likely be cost-prohibitive to construct an additional bridge in the foreseeable future.							

Objective	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7
Collaborate on efforts to educate the public about the importance of affordable housing and the individuals who benefit from it.							
Consider adopting zoning to promote additional medium-and high-density housing in appropriate locations.							
Consider opportunities to incentivize long-term rentals for residents vs. short term rentals to tourists.							
Consider opportunities to preserve land for the development of mixed income housing (multi-family, townhomes, duplexes, etc.)							
Medium-term (5-8 years)							
Maintain the vibrant, walkable, business-friendly downtown.							
Enhance the connection between the Town and the Tuckasegee River and capitalize on this unique asset. Provide improved access to the river and views of the river.							
Expand recreational opportunities and activities for local youth and families.							
Promote development patterns that allow safe and convenient access between residential areas, shopping, services, recreation, and public facilities.							
Establish zoning for abandoned or neglected properties that may create a nuisance, public health hazard, or harm neighboring property values.							
Encourage multi-use development in the downtown area, combining retail stores, offices, and restaurants with higher density residential to enhance walkability and vibrancy.							
Provide multi-modal access on commercial corridors to provide safe access for people walking, biking, or using public transit.							

Objective	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7
Promote quality commercial development along the highways entering Bryson City, promoting a sense of arrival and gradual transition to the downtown center.							
Modernize the Code of Ordinances online to maximize transparency and accessibility for the public.							
Discourage development in floodplains to minimize risk to public health and property damage.							
Develop a plan to manage stormwater runoff within the town, including an inventory of stormwater infrastructure conditions and a capital improvement plan.							
Improve pedestrian safety and access to workplaces, shopping, and services through the development of a connected sidewalk network extending from downtown and out along the three commercial corridors. Provide safe crosswalks at appropriate locations.							
Maintain the existing housing stock by seeking opportunities and partnerships to improve substandard housing.							
Long-term (9-12 years)							
Enhance Island Park and add amenities to maximize access to recreational opportunities within Town.							
Consider establishing a Unified Development Ordinance so that all ordinances are clear, consistent, equitable, and enforceable.							
On-going							
Preserve the natural beauty of the river and the mountains.							
Preserve the sense of community, history, and culture.							
Enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.							

Objective	Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5	Goal 6	Goal 7
Promote and strengthen small, family-owned businesses.							
Ensure best practices for erosion, sediment control, and stormwater management are utilized to protect the natural resources and prevent damaging impacts to properties downslope.							
Protect the safety, health, and general welfare of all citizens from inappropriate and disorderly development.							
Encourage well-planned development that is coordinated with necessary services such as water, sewer, electric, solid waste, and transportation.							
Encourage development in locations where public services such as police, fire, schools, and parks are available.							
Continue participation in the Southwestern Rural Planning Organization to plan, prioritize, and fund transportation improvement projects in the North Carolina Department of Transportation's State Transportation Improvement Program.							
Collaborate with community groups to accomplish common goals and provide more effective and efficient use of the Town's financial resources (a list of potential partners can be found in the plan).							