Introduction

The 2001 Legacy Plan

A comprehensive plan is the official public document used to guide the growth and development of a community. The 2001 Legacy Plan was a major City-County Planning Board initiative to assist citizens to develop a vision for Winston-Salem and Forsyth County’s future.

The Planning Board appointed the 21-member Legacy Steering Committee with representatives from across Forsyth County to guide the visioning process. Over 100 citizens were enlisted by the steering committee and organized into eight focus groups. “Forsyth County Tomorrow” (to be referred to herein as Our Vision), was the first result of their efforts. Our Vision calls for growing smarter and better by managing future development. In fact, the title of the plan document, Legacy, identifies the overarching theme – we are stewards of the community and we have an obligation to protect and enhance it as our legacy to future generations.

Our Vision was used as the basis for drafting the 2001 Legacy Plan including goals, objectives, policies and an action plan. Numerous public meetings with hundreds of citizens, stakeholders and organizations were held throughout the planning process. When completed, the 2001 Legacy Plan was adopted by Winston-Salem, Forsyth County and Forsyth County’s seven towns.

A Legacy Oversight Committee, comprised of 12 citizens, was appointed to monitor progress on Legacy’s Action Plan. A progress report was prepared annually and presented to the elected bodies. In 2006, the committee conducted a five-year benchmark study using 23 indicators and benchmarks related to the goals and objectives of the 2001 Legacy Plan. The benchmarking process showed success in some areas, such as transit usage, an increase in the Downtown housing stock, and overall housing affordability. The benchmarks showed less success in the relatively low amount of new development on the east side of Winston-Salem, no increase in the overall density of new development, and continued impairment of water quality in some streams.

Why update Legacy?

Three Good Reasons:

1) The Need for an Updated Action Plan and Policy Guide

A great deal of progress has been made since the adoption of the 2001 Legacy Plan. Of the 149 action items, 105 have been completed; the remaining items are no longer relevant or in need of an update. The 2001 Legacy Plan also serves as a policy document that guides many other planning initiatives. These planning initiatives can be broken into three basic program...
areas: Unified Development Ordinances (UDO) revisions and monthly development review; topical (or special subject) plans; and area plans.

The comprehensive plan provides guidance to each of these program areas through its goals and objectives. Since the adoption of the 2001 Legacy Plan, all relevant UDO changes have been completed, all topical plans recommended by Legacy have been written and adopted, and area plans for all but the Rural Area of the entire county are complete. The relevancy of Our Vision developed by Forsyth County citizens is still sound and even more applicable to today’s environment; however, it is time to update and extend the 2001 Legacy Plan and detail additional implementation efforts that help achieve its goals.

2) New Local and National Issues
New trends and issues that have come to the forefront in Forsyth County, as well as the nation, provide another reason for an update to the 2001 Legacy Plan. Downtown Winston-Salem has made a major comeback in housing, restaurants, entertainment, and the arts. The Heart of the Triad effort focuses regionally on community development. A new national emphasis has been put on topics such as sustainability and community health. Rising gas prices and congested roads have brought renewed interest in transit, walking, and bicycling. The changing economy continues to bring challenges and opportunities. These important issues can be addressed through the plan update process.

3) Our Changing Demographics
Last and most important are changes in our local demographics. Chapter 2, Updated Trends, discusses the projected increase in both our population and employment in relation to our dwindling land resources. Forsyth County’s population has been predicted to grow by 120,000 people by 2030, bringing our population total to almost half a million. How do we apply Our Vision to accommodate this growth and maintain or improve the quality of life we currently have?

Themes
Three themes will tie Legacy 2030’s chapters together:

- Fiscal Responsibility
- Livable Design
- Sustainable Growth

Fiscal Responsibility. Fiscal responsibility deals with providing infrastructure and services to citizens so that tax rates can remain lower through orderly, cost-efficient growth.

Sustainable Growth. Sustainable growth is the wise use of physical resources, which allows us to not only meet our current needs, but have resources for the needs of generations to come.

Livable Design. Livable design through thoughtful development can enhance the safety, prosperity, beauty, and quality of life of residents. Livable design is tied to all aspects of a community, including housing, neighborhoods, transportation options, facilities, commercial areas, and open spaces.

Image courtesy of Wake Forest Innovation Quarter

A vision of a completed Wake Forest Innovation Quarter in Downtown Winston-Salem.
Organization
Framework
The first three chapters set the stage for planning:

1) Legacy Vision and Goals – The 2001 Legacy Plan goals, objectives, and accomplishments;

2) Updated Trends – Demographics, trends, and future development capacity; and,

3) Growth Management Plan – The use of Growth Management Areas to guide development in a cost-efficient and sustainable manner.

Functional Elements
The next six chapters address in more detail opportunities and issues discussed in the Updated Trends and Growth Management Plan chapters:

4) Land Use – Land use principles and how they support the Growth Management Plan;

5) Transportation – Future transportation options and the relationship between transportation and land use;

6) Economic Development – The changing economy and how we meet new challenges for jobs and industry;

7) Environmental Quality and Sustainability – Environmental issues in our community and the use of green technology;

8) Healthy, Complete, and Equitable Communities – Planning issues and policies that affect the health of our citizens; and,

9) Community Character – Attributes of our community that make it special and give it a sense of place.

Geographic Elements
The next three chapters take the opportunities and issues discussed in the functional chapters and tie them to geographic areas of Forsyth County:

10) Downtown and the Center City – Continuing the revitalization of Winston-Salem;

11) Neighborhoods and Towns – Strengthening our neighborhoods through policies and actions; and,

12) Rural Character – Strategies for maintaining the character of our remaining rural areas.

Implementation Tools
The final two chapters discuss how recommendations will be implemented through existing processes and programs:

13) Area Plans – Continue to use a community-based planning process to bring the general recommendations of Legacy 2030 to all sections of the county; and,

14) Key Public Investments – Strategic public infrastructure investments that will help shape community development in a way that is consistent with Legacy 2030.