

OUR COUNTY, OUR FUTURE

Comprehensive Plan | Section 1



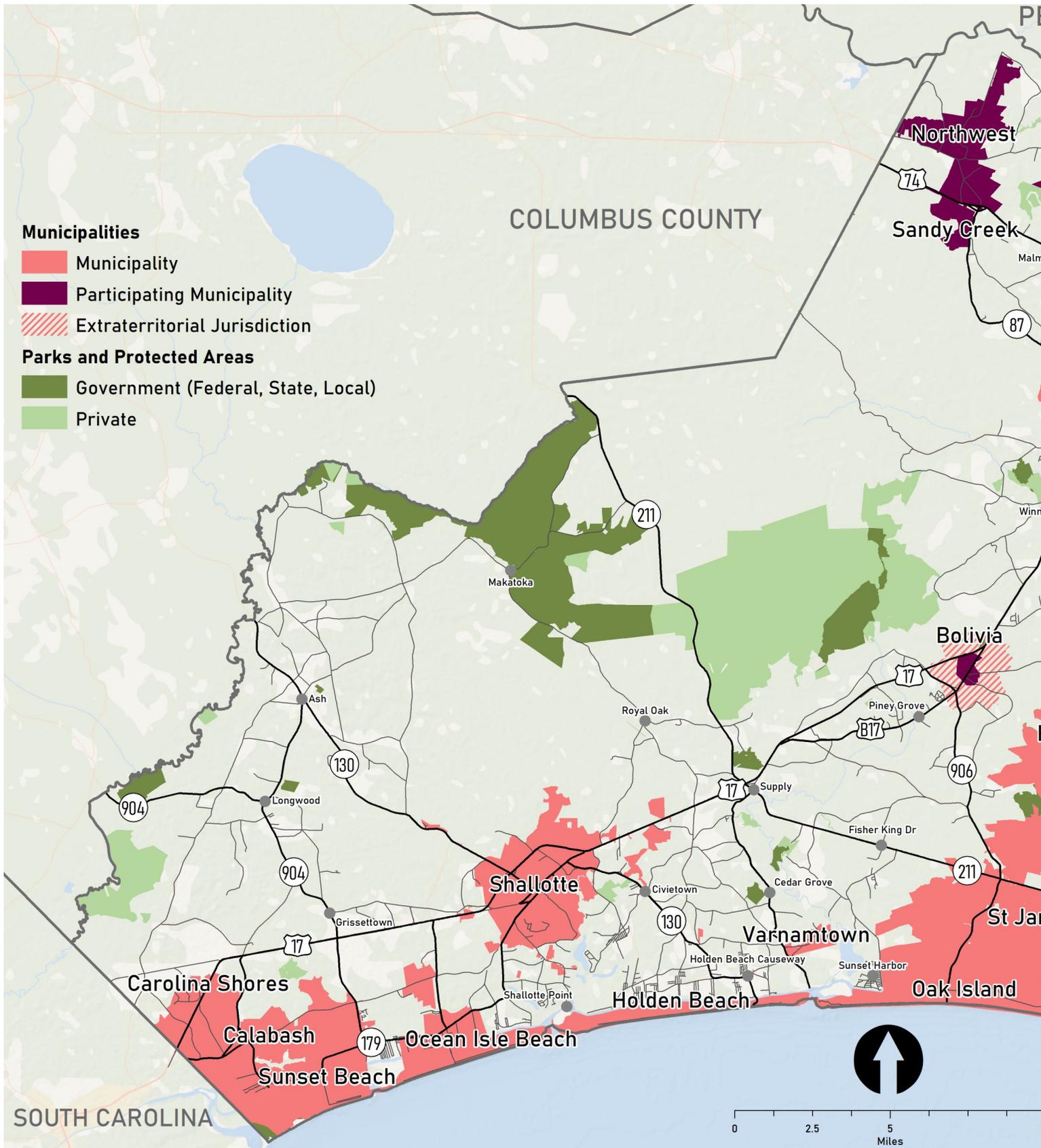


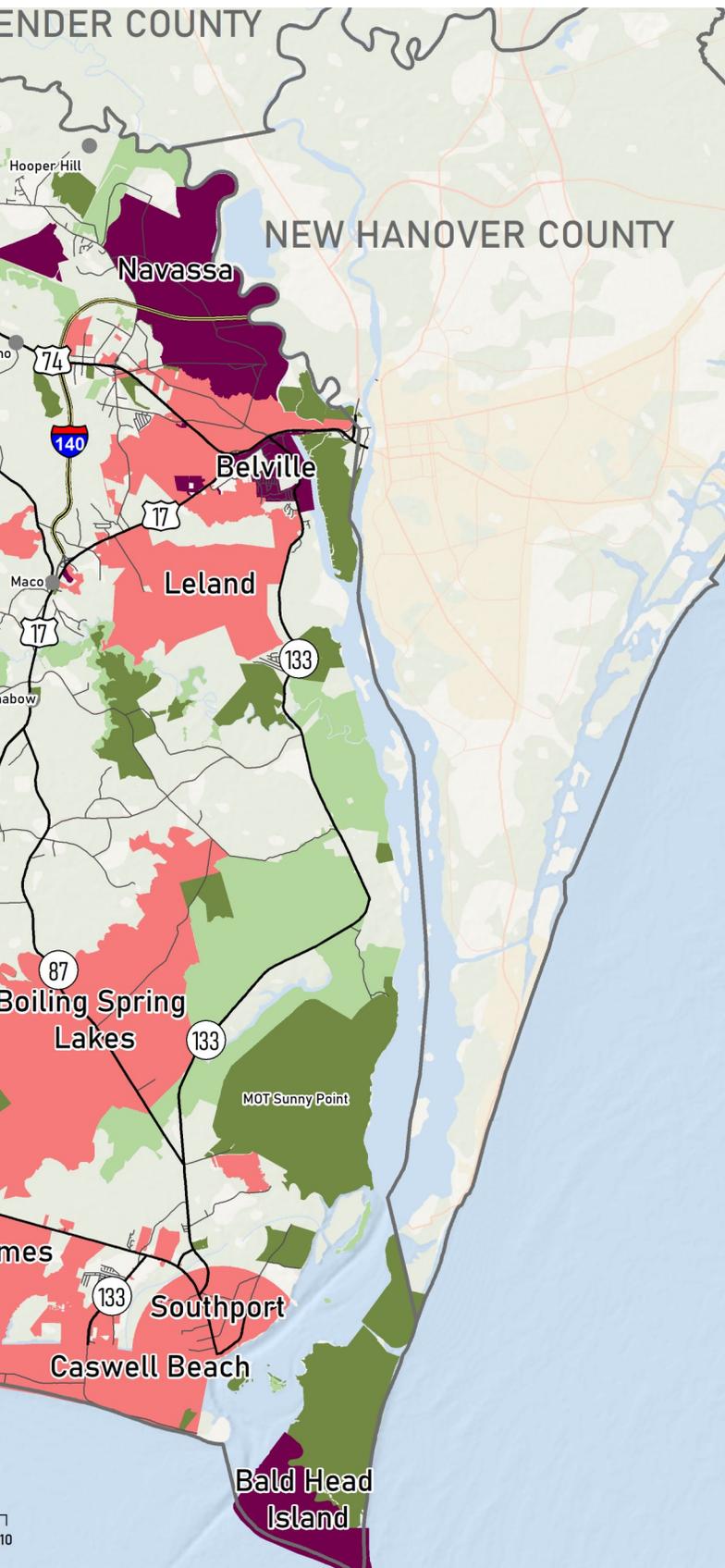
About the Plan

Brunswick County's new comprehensive land use plan, *Blueprint Brunswick*, is intended to provide a framework that will guide local government officials and private citizens as they make short- and long-term decisions regarding development and conservation. As the name of the plan suggests, it serves as an overall "blueprint" for the future of Brunswick County. Implementation of the plan will result in the most appropriate use of available land in the county and protection of the county's natural and cultural resources.

Blueprint Brunswick has been developed in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 160D of the North Carolina General Statutes as well as the requirements contained in the North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission (CRC) Land Use Planning Requirements 15A NCAC 7B as modified by the CRC in 2016. A matrix identifying the location within the plan of the required elements is provided under "Organization of the Plan" in Appendix A.

The Planning Area





The Planning Area is Brunswick County, which encompasses over 1,000 square miles. It includes the entire area within the county boundaries. However, the recommended policies are intended for the unincorporated area, where the County has planning and zoning authority, as well as five participating municipalities. (Refer to Figure 1, Planning Area Map.) As participants, Bald Head Island, Belville, Caswell Beach, Navassa, and Northwest fall under the purview of the Brunswick County's Land Use Plan ("Blueprint Brunswick"). The other incorporated municipalities in Brunswick County prepare and adopt separate land use plans.

Six municipalities chose to participate at a higher level and prepare specific land use plans as separate but related elements within Blueprint Brunswick. These communities funded these supplemental products of the process and the tasks to produce them. The resulting plans are provided in Section 6.

- Bald Head Island
- Belville
- Bolivia
- Navassa
- Northwest
- Sandy Creek

Figure 2.1 Planning Development Map

Why Plan?

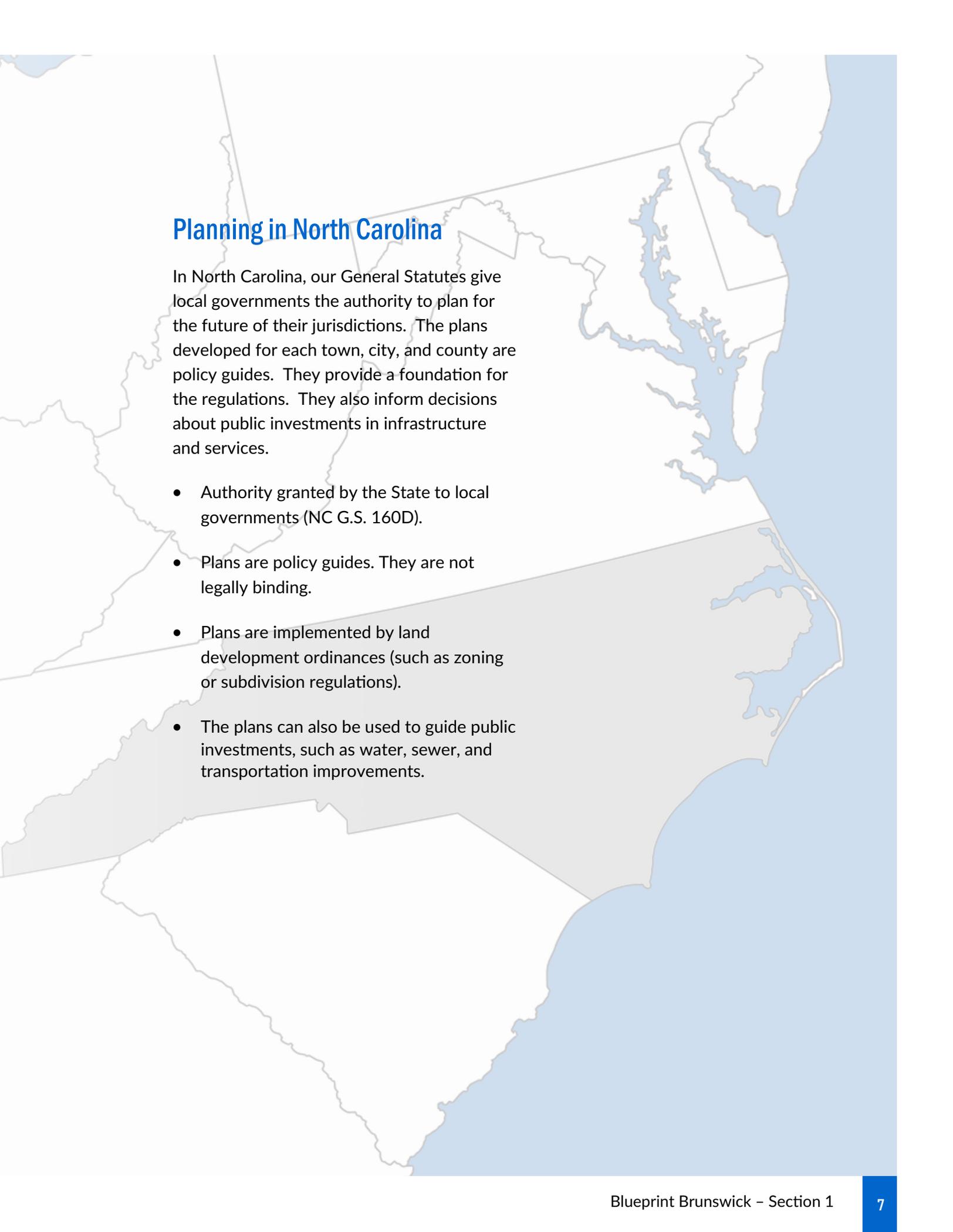
Change is inevitable. Every community has the option of managing change or simply letting change happen. In planning for the future, Brunswick County has proactively chosen to effect change in a manner that brings about positive outcomes for the community as a whole. Planning presents an opportunity for citizens to have a voice in the process. Through the process, a broad cross-section of the community can participate in shaping the plan by communicating ideas, preferences, concerns, priorities, and expectations. In doing so, they can help define the changes that are desired and, more importantly, express support for policies to improve their future economic, environmental, and social well-being. This process opened the door to defining the future vision for Brunswick County and conveying that vision through this Comprehensive Plan.

In North Carolina, counties and municipalities are required by the North Carolina General Statutes to meet the planning requirements of N.C. General Statutes Chapter 160D.

In environmentally sensitive areas, plans are crucial in effectively managing growth to minimize the negative impacts of development on important natural resources. Therefore, the North Carolina Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) legislation requires that each of the twenty coastal counties prepare and adopt a Land Use Plan. Municipalities within these counties have the option of adopting individual plans or being under the authority of the County plan.

What is a Comprehensive Land Use Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a policy guide that details a community's long-term vision and outlines the steps necessary to achieve it. The plan provides a framework for addressing issues and opportunities pertaining to growth and development in an organized, efficient, and sustainable manner. Taking into consideration existing conditions and emerging trends that could impact how and where development occurs, it seeks to strike a balance among the many competing demands on resources while protecting public investments. It is comprehensive, as it addresses several interrelated topics.



Planning in North Carolina

In North Carolina, our General Statutes give local governments the authority to plan for the future of their jurisdictions. The plans developed for each town, city, and county are policy guides. They provide a foundation for the regulations. They also inform decisions about public investments in infrastructure and services.

- Authority granted by the State to local governments (NC G.S. 160D).
- Plans are policy guides. They are not legally binding.
- Plans are implemented by land development ordinances (such as zoning or subdivision regulations).
- The plans can also be used to guide public investments, such as water, sewer, and transportation improvements.

Relationship to Other Plans

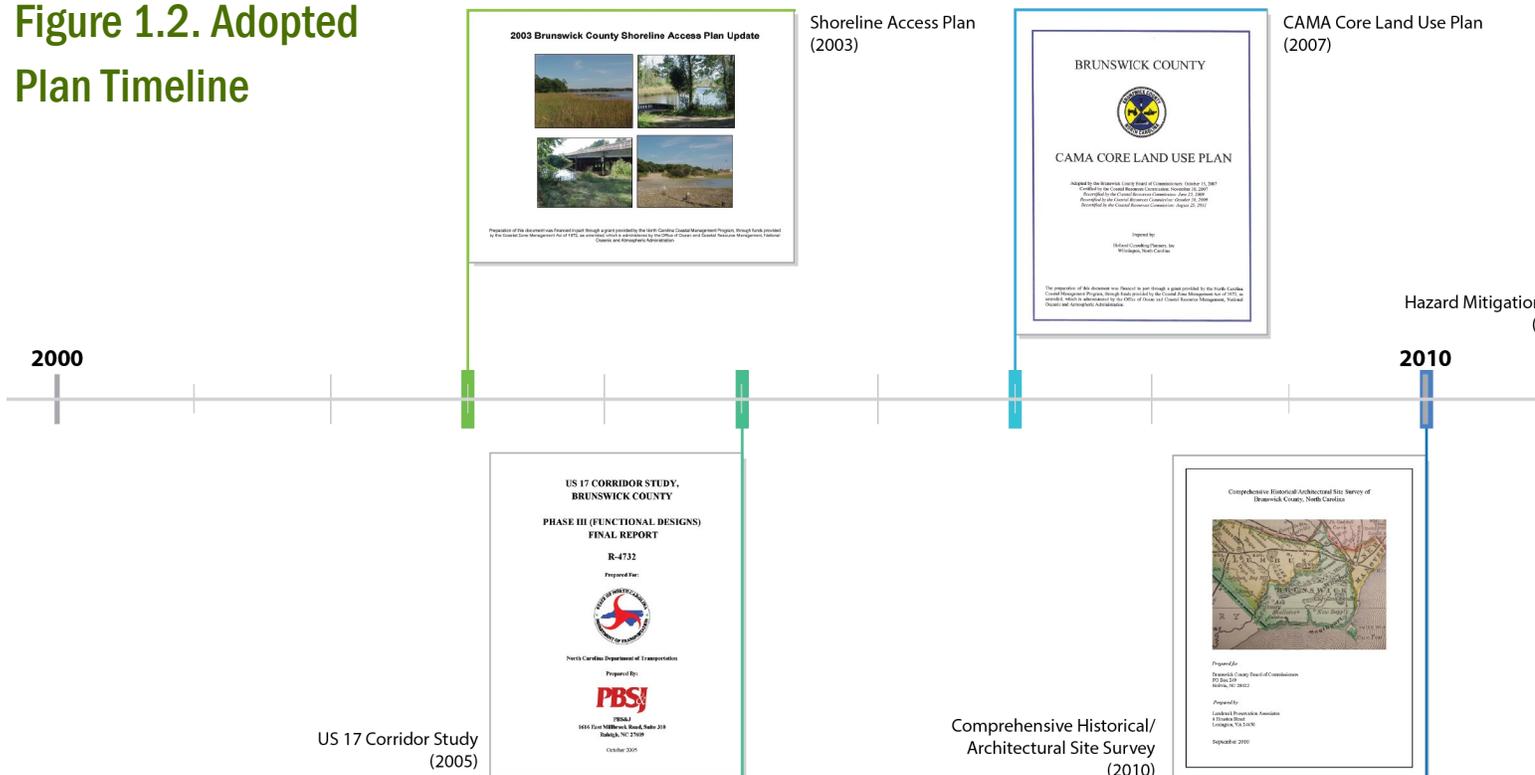
Blueprint Brunswick replaces the Brunswick County CAMA CORE Land Use Plan that was adopted by the Brunswick County Board of Commissioners in 2007. The previous plan was certified by the Coastal Resources Commission (CRC) in 2007, and it was recertified as recently as 2012. While the previous plan served the County well for many years, the recent and projected increases in population growth rates, change in development patterns throughout the county, and development activity in the county warranted the creation of an updated policy guide. The new plan will better inform the decisions of County leaders, the County's partner agencies, and a wide variety of stakeholders.

Several other plans have been adopted in recent years, including the More than a Trail Plan. A

summary of each is provided in Appendix B. The recommendations of such plans and studies have been taken into consideration and the relevant policies in those plans helped formulate the recommendations outlined in this document.

The process to prepare Blueprint Brunswick included the creation of an updated Parks & Recreation Master Plan for the County. Both were developed in concert with the County's Water and Sewer Master Plan, which was updated during the same planning period. Simultaneously, the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) created specifically for Brunswick County was prepared through a separate but coordinated effort overseen by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Figure 1.2. Adopted Plan Timeline



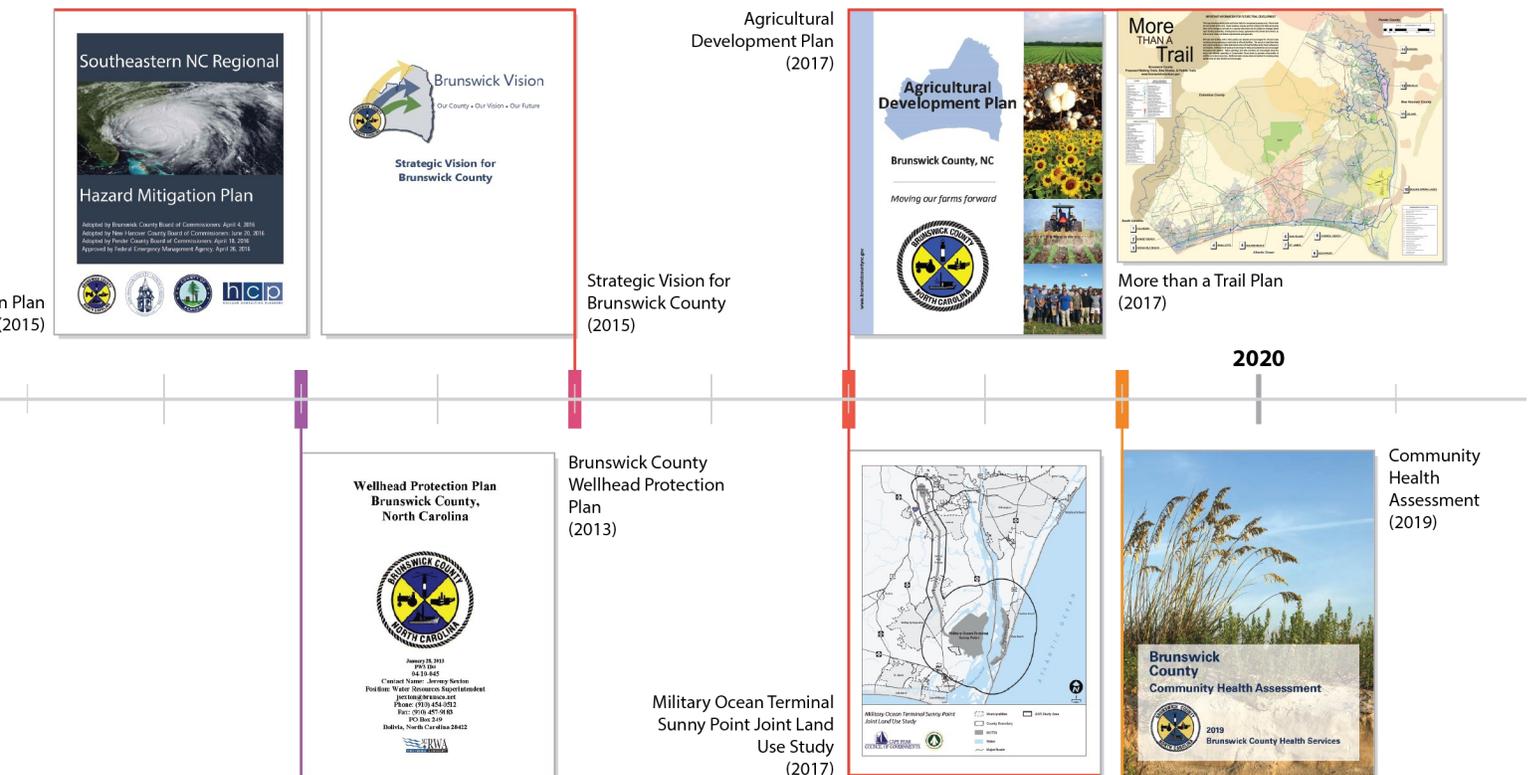


Going forward, adopted plans should be reviewed to determine the need for modifications to ensure consistency with the recommendations of Blueprint Brunswick, which now serves as a new framework for growth management in Brunswick County. (Refer to Section 4 for more about updating plans.)

DID YOU KNOW...?

The plan is not a regulatory document. Rather, it is a policy document that guides a community. It provides a foundation for zoning and other land development regulations, which in turn will help implement the plan.

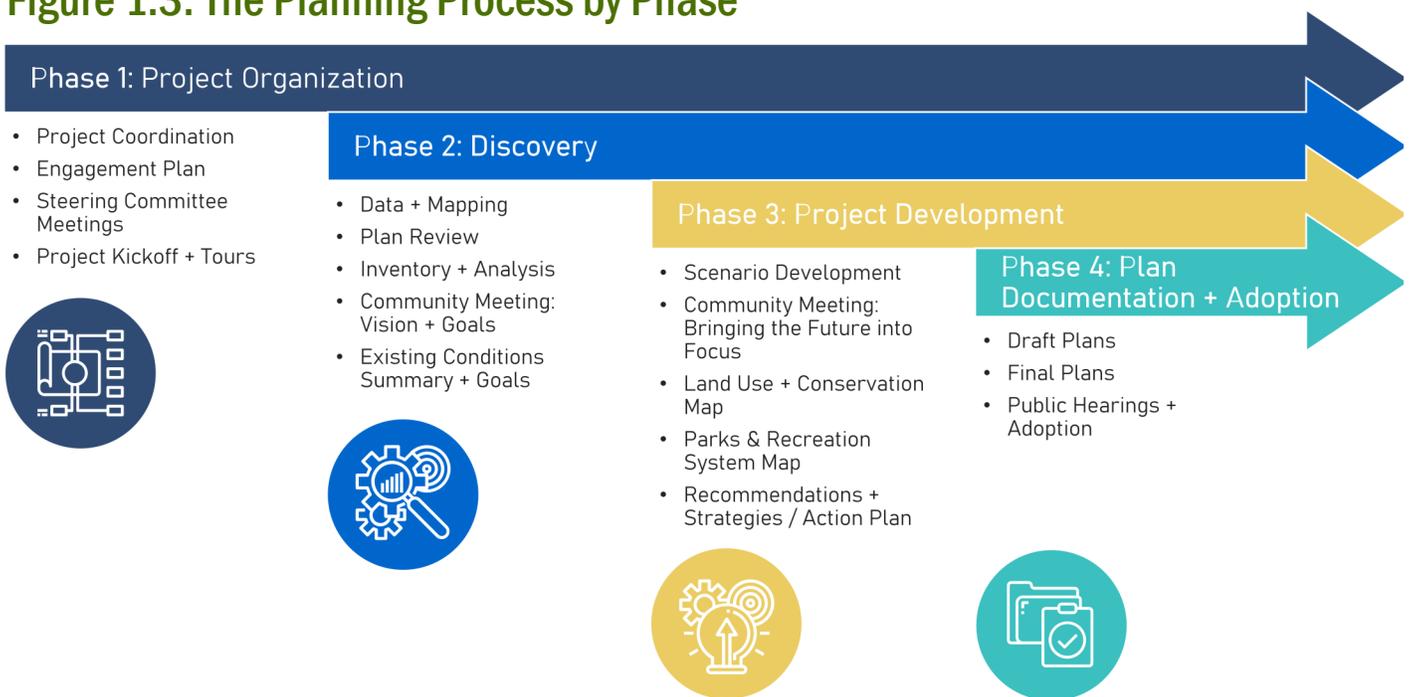
A common point of confusion is the difference between a land use map and a zoning map. The distinction is an important one. To be clear, land use plans are policy guides. They do not have the force of law. Plans establish a vision for the future that is reflective of community expectations. The “vision” is represented by a land use map that shows the future development pattern. Plans are implemented through a variety of tools. One of those tools is the zoning ordinance, which does have the force of law. Zoning puts into place the rules to be followed as property is developed or redeveloped. Such rules should be consistent with the intent of the adopted plan. The official zoning map depicts the zoning districts to delineate the areas where the rules apply. Another tool is subdivision regulations that puts into place rules for subdividing land. Both subdivision and zoning regulations can be found in the Brunswick County Unified Development Ordinances.



The Planning Process

Blueprint Brunswick was developed through four phases of work completed over a period of two years. The timeframe allowed ample opportunities to engage the community, coordinate with concurrent planning processes (Parks & Recreation Master Plan, Water and Sewer Master Plan Update, and Comprehensive Transportation Plan), and prepare six municipal plans to be integrated as additional elements in the county's plan. The key activities are noted in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3. The Planning Process by Phase



Community Engagement

The process was organized around an inclusive, multifaceted community engagement program executed through collaboration with various project partners whose buy-in is critical to the successful implementation of the plan. In addition to community meetings, other community input opportunities were offered, including an online survey, municipality interviews, and stakeholder interviews. Project participants considered issues and potential opportunities, fiscal and market realities, and community values to clearly define an inspirational yet realistic vision for the future and outline a sound set of action steps to realize that vision. (Refer to Appendix C for a complete summary of the Community Engagement process.)

Advisory Committee

A series of Advisory Committee meetings were conducted during this process. The committee was made up of representatives of various County departments, the Planning Board, and the Parks & Recreation Board. This committee helped guide the process by deciphering community input gathered throughout the process, sharing background information to provide context, offering ideas for policy changes, and evaluating products of the process prior to completion.

At project kickoff, the County staff and the Consultants toured the Planning Area. A first-hand look at the existing development pattern strengthened the Consultant team's grasp of the existing conditions and stimulated the generation of ideas to explore during the planning process. This tour included County staff and others with knowledge of the development pattern. This sharing of insights exposed important local conditions and issues that might not be immediately apparent.



County & Municipal Meetings

A series of community meetings were held during the planning process.

Community Meeting 1: The existing conditions as well as related issues and opportunities were discussed at the community meetings hosted in November 2020. A total of five meetings, one in each electoral district, were held. Due to COVID restrictions, these meetings were held outdoors when possible, three mini sessions were held at each location to accommodate more people safely, and the meetings were live streamed.

Community Meeting 2: A second meeting in November 2021 was hosted as an open house at the County Government Complex. Refinements to community goals and ideas for the direction for the future of the community were presented. With input gathered at the second meeting, more specific policy ideas were formulated.

Community Meeting 3: The third meeting was held in October 2022 to confirm the preferred direction and solicit additional feedback on policies and strategies for implementing the plan. In addition, County staff and consultant team representatives attended community events to expand outreach efforts.

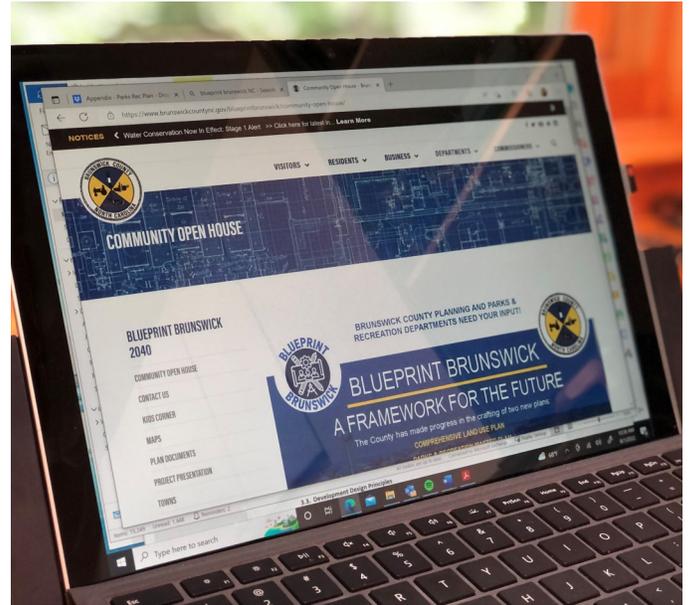


In 2022, the County staff and Consultant team conducted interactive meetings to engage the residents and other stakeholders of six municipalities in crafting specific land use plans. More information about the process to develop each plan is provided with the plans, which have been incorporated into the Section 6 of Blueprint Brunswick.

Municipal Meetings 1: Six meetings were held in March 2022 to define the issues and opportunities in each municipality. In this meeting, attendees were asked to examine the goals prepared for the county and identify those most relevant to their municipality.

Municipal Meetings 2: A set of follow-up meetings were conducted in April 2022 to evaluate a draft land use “vision” for each municipality as well as draft policy recommendations tailored to address the issues and opportunities identified in the March meetings. The input received helped refine the plans that are provided in Section 6.





Focus Groups

Focus groups, another type of input meeting held in the initial phase of the project, augmented the information gleaned from the analysis of existing conditions, as people with direct knowledge of crucial data shared insights and clarified the relevance of specific circumstances to the planning process. Nearly 300 people participated in the 23 sessions, which were hosted, both in-person and virtually, as small-group discussions at the County offices. The groups were generally organized according to the key topics, including the following: economic development; business; development/real estate; utilities (primarily water and wastewater); transportation; parks and recreation; open space and natural resources; college life; youth; senior living; health; affordable and workforce housing/homelessness; neighborhood interests; public safety; community health; service/faith; municipal interests; historic and rural resources; and agriculture. (Refer to the Appendix C for a list of invitees by topic.)

Supplemental Interviews

County staff conducted interviews with individuals who could supplement the information gathered during the Focus Group meetings. The 17 interviews addressed a wide variety of topics: economic development, real estate development, the needs of small businesses, community health, the environment, transportation, public safety, the needs of the current population, agriculture, and rural community concerns. (Refer to Appendix C for more about these interviews.)

Website & Social Media

A project webpage was maintained by County staff for Blueprint Brunswick on the County's website. Through this page, a one-stop, online resource was created where the project team kept the public informed about the project and the schedule of activities, encouraged public involvement with notices of meetings, provided links to online surveys, and posted documents produced by the Consultants during each phase. Links to this information were made available via social media posts (i.e., Facebook and Twitter).

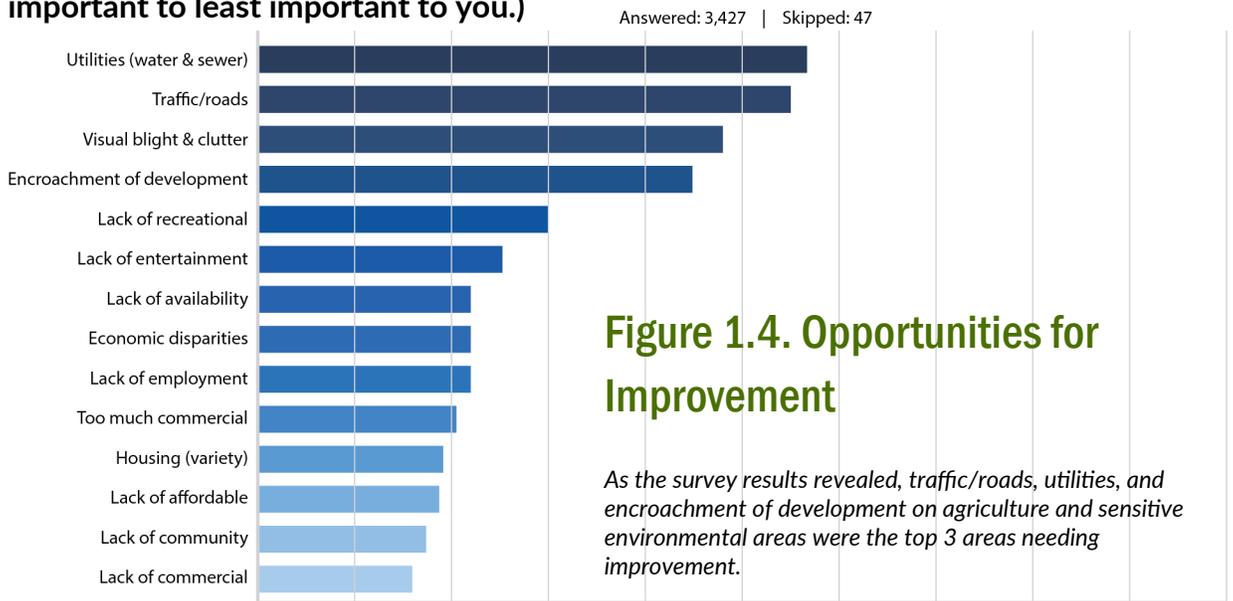
Municipal Interviews

Early in the process, the Consultant team conducted brief interviews with representatives of the 19 municipalities. These interviews typically included the managers and at least one elected leader. Ideas for better coordination between the municipal and County governments were among the input gathered.

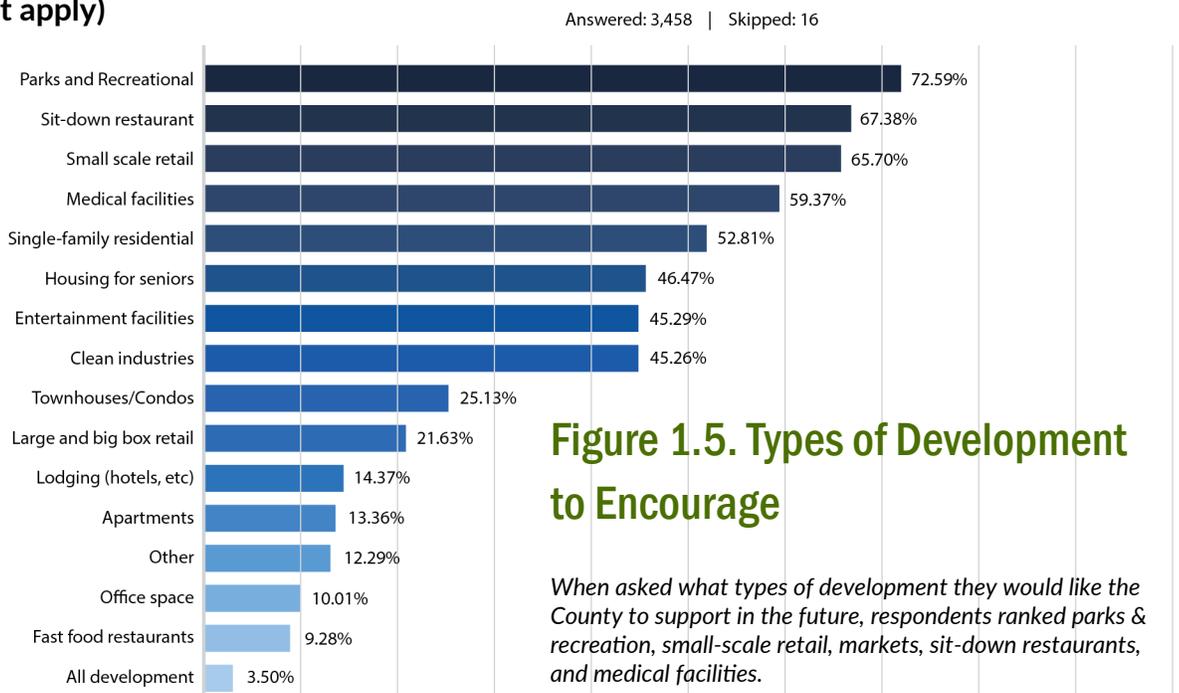
Community Surveys

The online survey participation was tremendous! Over 3,500 community members submitted responses to the three qualitative surveys, which included both closed- and open-ended questions about land use, development quality, employment, infrastructure, and community amenities. The responses helped clarify residents', property owners', business owners', and other stakeholders' perceptions, preferences, and expectations for the future. (Note: A complete set of reports with survey results is available through the Brunswick County Planning Department.)

Q: Every community can identify opportunities for improvements. Which of the following do you think apply to Brunswick County? (Please select from most important to least important to you.)



Q: In the future, what type of development should the County encourage? (Check all that apply)



Youth Art Contest

In February of 2021, Brunswick County announced the Blueprint Brunswick 2040 Art Contest. The purpose of the contest, which was created through the support of Brunswick County Schools and a partnership with the Brunswick County Arts Council, was to raise awareness of and increase fun, interactive engagement in the Blueprint Brunswick 2040 planning process. The contest also helped promote the arts in Brunswick County. The youth were invited to participate in the contest and help shape the County's vision for the future!

The contest was open to all students throughout the County in grades K-12 or those homeschooled from ages 5 to 17. Participants were asked to show their vision of Brunswick County's future using mediums such as acrylic paint, watercolors, tempera paint, colored pencils, markers, and crayons. Entries were separated into 4 grade level categories: grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. First, second, and third place awards were given in each category. Prizes for winners included gift cards, art supplies, and a framed award. In addition, the schools with the most submissions were awarded \$100 each.

A total of 20 submissions were received. Waccamaw School submitted the most in the K-2 and 3-5 grade categories and tied with Leland Middle School in the 6-8 category. North Brunswick High School had the most submissions in the 9-12 grade category.

A panel of judges comprised of local artists and members of the Planning and Parks and Recreation Departments selected the first, second, and third place winners within each category. In addition, the Planning Department and Parks and Recreation Department each picked their favorite. Winners were announced on June 19th, 2021 at the Soundstock Solstice by the Sea Festival at Middleton Park in Oak Island. The winning artwork is featured throughout this Blueprint Brunswick 2040 document.



Certificates were given out along with prizes to the winners.



Emma Robinson took first place in the grades 3-5 category.



Winners received baskets filled with art supplies and toys.

Using the Plan

Blueprint Brunswick will be used by the County and its municipalities as well as state and federal agencies and others involved in making decisions about the future of Brunswick County. Their decisions pertaining to changes to zoning and other land development regulations, capital investments, development approvals and permitting (including CAMA permits), economic development initiatives, funding, and conservation should be informed by the plan.

Additionally, the plan should serve as an effective communication tool. It should be used by a broad group of individuals and organizations seeking to understand the vision for the future of the county and their role(s) in helping realize the vision. The plan suggests new programs and partnerships. Therefore, to maximize the effectiveness of the plan, the County should be deliberate in sharing the vision with others involved locally in the community development process.

While the plan provides guidance to the County's leaders, staff, and partner agencies as they navigate change that is anticipated over the next 20 years, circumstances will shift in unexpected ways. Therefore, the plan should be reviewed every five to 10 years to determine needs for updates to respond to unforeseen challenges, emerging trends, and new opportunities.

Role of the Plan

Frame | Defines the issues and opportunities so affected individuals and organizations can move forward with purpose.

Focus | Sets a clear vision for the future so everyone—leaders, staff, citizens, partner agencies—are all headed in the same general direction to address key concerns and aspirations.

Guide | Informs decisions, especially those pertaining to future development and the use of tax revenue to support desired investments.

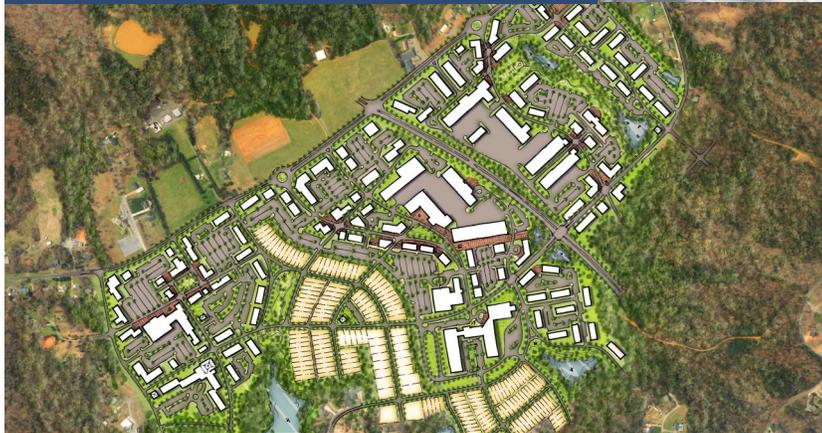
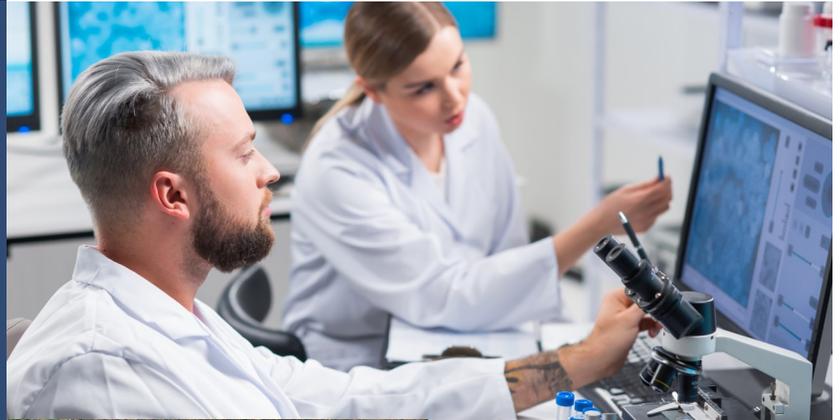
Coordinate | Aids coordination across County and municipal departments, with neighboring jurisdictions, and with regional, state, and federal agencies.

Strengthen | Bolsters grant applications and other initiatives to build funding for detailed studies, desired programs, and capital investments.

Comply | Sets the foundation for local regulations and other government functions. (*NC General Statutes 160D*)

Market & Communicate:

- Job Retention and Attraction
- Collaboration with Partners

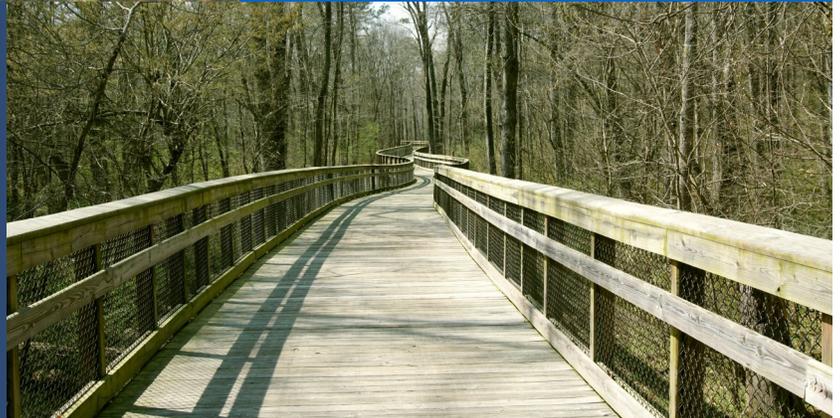


Development Approvals:

- Zoning
- Subdivision

Investments:

- Infrastructure
- Services
- Amenities
- Conservation Tools



Funding:

- CIP
- Grant Applications
- Private

Nicole Sanchez Resendiz took second place in the grades K-2 category.



Savannah Lancaster took first place in the grades 6-8 category.

Claire Brown took first place in the grades K-2 category.



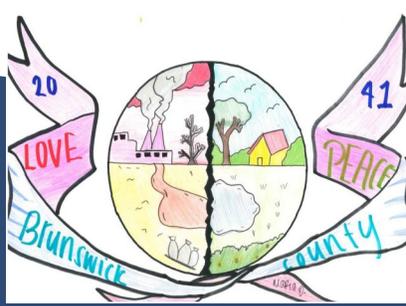
Eunice Gutierrez Nino took third place in the grades 9-12 category.

Addysen Rawley took third place in the grades 3-5 category.



Olivia Badovinac took second place in the grades 9-12 category and was the Planning Pick.

Lily Lopez took second place in the grades 3-5 category.



Maria Ochoa took first place in the grades 9-12 category.

Emma Collis was the Parks Pick.



Estrella Gonzalez took third place in the grades K-2 category.

Miranda King took second place in the grades 6-8 category.

