



PLANNING THEMES REPORT

A REPORT ON PLANNING THEMES AND POLICY DIRECTIONS
FOR THE CITY OF WILSON

Prepared by Clarion Associates
May 2009

CONTENTS

1. REPORT OVERVIEW	1
Structure and Purpose of Report	1
2. SUSTAINABLE PLANNING	4
3. ECONOMY	6
Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input	6
Relevant Policy Documents and Studies	7
Preliminary Policy Direction	9
Areas for Further Exploration	9
4. MANAGED GROWTH (LAND USE, TRANSPORTATION, AND PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE)	11
Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input	11
Relevant Policy Documents and Studies	12
Preliminary Policy Direction	15
Areas for Further Exploration	15
5. NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING	17
Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input	17
Relevant Policies and Studies	18
Preliminary Policy Direction	18
Areas for Further Exploration	19
6. QUALITY OF LIFE (COMMUNITY AMENITIES AND URBAN DESIGN)	20
Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input	20
Relevant Policies and Studies	22
Preliminary Policy Direction	22
Areas for Further Exploration	23
7. HEALTH AND WELLNESS	24
Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input	24
Relevant Policies and Studies	24
Preliminary Policy Direction	25
Areas for Further Exploration	25
8. EDUCATION	26
Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input	26
Relevant Policies and Studies	27
Preliminary Policy Direction	28
Areas for Further Exploration	28
9. COMMUNITY	29
Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input	29
Relevant Policies and Studies	29
Preliminary Policy Direction	30
Areas for Further Exploration	30

10. COLLABORATION31
 Preliminary Planning Themes from Public Input 31
 Relevant Policies and Studies 31
 Preliminary Policy Direction 31
 Areas for Further Exploration 32

11. NEXT STEPS.....33

1. REPORT OVERVIEW

This is the first report of the Wilson 2030 Comprehensive Plan process. This report provides analysis of the public participation efforts undertaken during Task 1 of the planning process (Project Start-Up) and initiates Task 2 (Existing Conditions and Planning Analysis).

The Comprehensive Plan is an opportunity for the Wilson community, as a whole, to work toward consensus on a vision for the future by identifying community concerns and aspirations and creating an action plan to achieve the vision. This report takes the first step in this process to identify key themes raised by the community, to review current programs and policies related to these themes, and to provide policy direction for future planning efforts.

STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

The specific purpose of this report is to synthesize community input provided to date, to organize the input into key themes, and to generally discuss Wilson's established policies related to these themes.

Community input related to the Plan was provided at several recent events.

- Four Focus Group Meetings held on October 29 and 30 (Wilson Leadership Team, business owners, neighborhood representatives, and Wilson 20/20)
- November 18, January 12, February 12, March 25, and May 12 Steering Committee Meetings
- November 18 and March 10 Plan Forum Meetings
- December 3 *Symposium of Ideas* public forum
- March 26 Neighborhoods, Corridors, Gateways Design Charrette
- May 13 Downtown Design Charrette

During each of these events, participants were asked, in different ways and using different methods, to give voice to their aspirations and concerns for Wilson.¹ Organizing public input into planning themes creates a framework both for understanding community issues and for developing action plans and priorities from the myriad ideas and issues the community has identified. Community input is organized using the goal themes identified in the Wilson 20/20 Vision as a starting point. The Wilson 20/20 Vision document is a foundation piece for development of the 2030 Wilson Comprehensive Plan as it provides a vision for the larger region of which the City of Wilson is a prime component. These community themes include the following:

- Sustainable Planning
- Economy
- Managed Growth (Land Use, Transportation, and Public Infrastructure)

¹ During the eight Comprehensive Plan events, many ideas for implementation strategies were raised by participants. These suggested strategies will be brought into this planning process following consensus on community goals.

- Housing and Neighborhoods
- Quality of Life (Community Amenities and Urban Design)
- Health and Wellness
- Education
- Community
- Collaboration

Relevant policy documents were reviewed to provide a greater understanding of the current planning context in Wilson. This report does not summarize each policy document reviewed, but instead identifies the relevance of Wilson’s adopted policies related to identified key themes and discusses how these policies can be incorporated within the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. Relevant policy documents reviewed include the following:

- Wilson Capital Improvement Plan (FY 2007/08 through FY 2011/12)
- City of Wilson Operating Budget (FY 2008/2009)
- Wilson’s Economic Development Council (website)
- Wilson Downtown Development Corporation (website)
- Wilson Education Partnership (website)
- Wilson Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Development Task Force (2009)
- Wilson County Schools (website)
- 2025 Wilson County Comprehensive Plan (2008)
- Wilson Cost of Land Uses Fiscal Impact Analysis (2008)
- Wilson Comprehensive Bicycle Plan (2008)
- Wilson 20/20 Community Vision (2007)
- Wilson Pedestrian Plan (2006)
- Wilson Housing Improvement Action Strategy Plan (2005)
- 301 Task Force Report (2003)
- Wilson Growth Management Plans (1990 and 1999)
- Wilson City/County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (1993)
- AIA Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team Plan for Wilson (1974)

This report also provides preliminary policy direction for how the City should address the key planning themes outlined in the report. Policy direction was provided by both the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and Plan Forum that reviewed public feedback and reached consensus on policy direction questions posed to them.

Last, this report identifies areas that will be further explored during Task 2 (Existing Conditions and Planning Analysis) and identifies areas for further exploration. The

existing conditions analysis will include assessments of community planning factors, including population (past, current, and future projections), natural features, parks and recreation, housing, neighborhoods, workforce, economic development, transportation, public facilities and infrastructure, land use and zoning, and development capacity.

2. SUSTAINABLE PLANNING

The concept of “sustainable planning” involves the ability of a community and society to plan for the needs of the present population while ensuring that future generations have the same or better opportunities. There are increasing concerns that we are creating communities that are not sustainable in the long run. The goal here is to establish a framework for strategic, efficient, progressive, purposeful, smart decision-making. The City of Wilson seeks to plan for its future by achieving the following sustainable planning objectives:

- **Consistency** – Policies and strategies should be connected to achieve multiple goals and to ensure that policies are consistent.
- **Coordination** - Coordinated planning among City departments and with other jurisdictions on areas of joint interest should be achieved.
- **Interrelated** – Linkages between community issues should be acknowledged.
- **Interdisciplinary** – Planning approaches should be broad based and include the input of multiple disciplines when identifying strategies for addressing community concerns.
- **Impact-considering** – Consideration of long-range impacts should be folded into policy decisions.
- **Resource-conserving** – Community policies should focus on decreasing public costs, fostering efficient use of lands, and protecting important natural resources.

One of the challenges in addressing sustainable planning in a community comprehensive plan is that many of the issues are global in nature – air quality, renewable energy sources, climate change, and others – and it is often difficult to identify how local planning policies can address these issues. It can be problematic for a community to come to grips with how a relatively small local government can address these issues, particularly when the community has its hands full with local development issues. However, there are important local implications of the concept of sustainability that can be considered. Key sustainable planning objectives for Wilson include the following.

- Improving the entire system that prepares and educates Wilson’s citizens for the workforce and engagement in the community.
- Prudent use of the City’s budget to ensure fiscal health and efficiency.
- Promoting integrated community engagement that focuses on “One Wilson.”
- Land management policies that promote the development of new industries while fostering revitalization in the Center City areas and a more sustainable growth pattern.
- Wise and careful management of natural resources and protection of the environment for both current and future use and enjoyment.

Many initiatives are already underway that work to achieve these objectives, such as fostering infill development in the Center City areas. This type of development uses existing infrastructure, promotes the reduction in the City’s carbon footprint, promotes

the use of alternative transportation modes, and fosters community. The City desires to work to determine how best to "think globally and act locally," while also recognizing that these efforts must be balanced with other local demands on government time and resources.

3. ECONOMY

Wilson's economy has experienced a remarkable transition over the last 50 years. From being the premiere historic producer of golden leaf tobacco to its current industrial base of pharmaceutical, aerospace, life science, building material, automotive, food manufacturing, and plastic industries, the City has maintained a viable economy in hard times of transition. The City's success is illustrated by recent accolades -- being ranked as a top tier micropolitan community and one of the top small business markets in the South.

The future of Wilson lies in its economic success. The generation of new jobs and new tax revenues plays an important role in maintaining and improving the City's quality of life. Balancing the importance of the regional employment draw to Wilson and the need to employ members of the local workforce will be critical into the future. The current economic and fiscal crises being felt around the nation and the globe have impacted and will continue to affect Wilson. The City of Wilson supports economic development efforts and the City recognizes the impact of local quality of life factors, such as schools, aesthetics, cultural and recreational opportunities, etc., on recruiting new businesses to the community. The City's partnerships with local businesses and institutions, such as Barton College, are critical to the success of the City.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding economic development issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following seven themes:

- **Maintain and Expand Wilson's Economic Base** – Maintain a healthy economic base of manufacturing, banking, pharmaceutical, and other clean growth industries.
- **Enhance Job Readiness of Workforce** – Educate and improve the job skills of the local workforce to both decrease unemployment rates and demand for outsourcing jobs to workers living outside of Wilson.
- **Promote Downtown as a Core Commercial Activity Center** – Efforts to encourage revitalization and redevelopment of Wilson's historic Downtown have been undertaken by many organizations and entities. The City has made Downtown a high priority and has dedicated staff and programs in place to foster these efforts. The City and partnering organizations should continue to make Downtown's resurgence a priority.
- **Encourage Infill and Revitalization** – Foster development within Wilson's Downtown Center City neighborhoods² and where infill and revitalization opportunities exist, such as the Highway 301 Corridor.
- **Support Expansion of Barton College** – Barton College contributes over one million dollars a week to the City's economy. The College is one of the largest economic engines driving the City's economic success. The City supports

² The Center City is defined as the area within the Ward Boulevard loop and includes not only Downtown but many neighborhoods, such as Elvie Street, Washington Carver Heights, Cavalier, Five Points, and others.

expansion of Barton College and seeks ways to assist the College in these efforts.

- **Encourage Development of Locally Owned Businesses** – Many new commercial businesses in Wilson are nationally owned corporations or franchise type enterprises. Wilson should retain its unique community character by encouraging and supporting development of locally owned businesses.
- **Promote Redevelopment of Brownfield Sites** – Several brownfield³ sites in Wilson present opportunities to achieve three goals: 1) reduce the harmful release of waste to the environment, 2) clean up existing sites that are contaminated, and 3) revitalize underutilized properties and expand economic development opportunities in Wilson. Reclaiming and redeveloping brownfield sites is a sustainable approach to economic development that Wilson should pursue.

RELEVANT POLICY DOCUMENTS AND STUDIES

A review of existing planning documents and studies found a long history of support for economic development in Wilson, as evidenced in the following economic goals outlined in the Wilson 20/20 Vision:

- Develop a highly-trained and employable workforce
- Be a regional employment center with a diverse base
- Nurture and support new and existing business growth

The City's current adopted 1999 Growth Plan places a heavy focus on economic development. The Plan's vision and values include the following objectives:

- Promote development variety
- Support a diversified job market
- Endorse economic development and related opportunities
- Encourage commercial and industrial development
- Target clean growth industries
- Foster inner city growth and revitalization
- Address intrusions into and/or impacts on residential land uses
- Advance geographic equitability in distribution of growth
- Stress continued job education
- Enhance the overall quality of life in our neighborhoods and community

³ The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines brownfield sites as "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant."

The Wilson Economic Development Council, established in 1957, focuses on making Wilson more attractive to industry by marketing the City and greater Wilson area and assisting companies with location and expansion projects. The Commission's five-year Strategic Plan focuses on promotion of five major industries, including life sciences/pharmaceuticals, automotive, building products, foods, and defense/security, targeting businesses that will employ 25-100 workers. Most active industrial properties in Wilson County are located in the City of Wilson, largely due to infrastructure constraints in the County. This includes two established industrial parks: Wilson Corporate Park and Hackney Industrial Park. The Commission's efforts have resulted in the investment of more than \$253 million in Wilson County over the last five years, and much of this has been in the City of Wilson.

The biggest challenge facing Wilson's economic future is a lack of job-ready workers. Many workers commute in to Wilson, while unemployment rates in the City and County are high. Addressing unemployment for the community is a high priority. An example of current strategies to address this trend includes the Wilson Education Partnership that is working to create programs that prepare students for entering the workforce.

Another solution was developed by the Wilson Chamber of Commerce. In the spring of 2008, the Chamber appointed a Workforce Development Task Force to tackle the issue of improving Wilson's workforce. This Task Force identified the that most significant challenge to address is that many students do not understand the academic knowledge, personal skills, and character they must present to potential employers to obtain desirable jobs. The Committee's mission is to "equip our population with twenty-first century skills to meet the needs of current and future employers." The Task Force is focusing their efforts under several key action strategies: 1) creating and enhancing partnerships between businesses and schools, 2) developing and implementing a parenting educational program, 3) developing programs to retool career exploration for students, and (4) securing the commitments of local businesses to recruit from local employment pools. The partnering organizations represented on the Task Force have worked together to hold students events like the "Career and Technical Education Day" where students learned from professionals about career opportunities. They have also requested that the State of North Carolina invest in Wilson's future by providing financial assistance to develop a Career Center that will assist students in exploring career choices and goal setting for career success.

Quality of life factors are also critical for businesses looking for new locations. Disinvestment in the Downtown core and adjoining neighborhoods and a lack of amenities for young professionals can play a role in determining whether new businesses move to the area. Opportunities exist for improving underutilized areas, such as the Highway 301 Corridor. The 301 Task Force Action Plan sets out priorities for expanding economic development in the Corridor, including development of a special tax district, staffing to assist the Highway 301 Advisory Committee to implement the Action Plan, identifying investors, and fostering communication between developers and the local community. Moving forward with development of the Comprehensive Plan, it will be important to understand which actions are working to foster new development.

Wilson County also supports economic development efforts. The County's recently adopted 2025 Comprehensive Plan includes goals to encourage compatible industrial

and commercial development by focusing on specific sites that minimize impacts on surrounding communities. The Plan also encourages agri-tourism and green business development. Specific strategies in the Plan include partnering with municipalities on future economic development efforts and supporting the Economic Development Commission.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

Development Incentives - Incentives for new development should be used wisely and sparingly by the City. Wilson should assess the return on investment they will earn from potential developments seeking incentives. The City should also identify the potential impacts on existing businesses when considering incentives for new businesses. Local business owners should be given priority when providing incentives.

Given their current market potential, some areas of the City may require incentives to foster new development, such as along the 301 Corridor. Incentives can come in the form of public infrastructure improvements, such as roads, water, and sewer. Flexibility in development regulations is another way to create incentives for developers. Public-private partnerships may be appropriate to foster developments in certain locations.

Any community incentives should be provided to businesses that produce many jobs paying moderate to higher salaries and should not be used to recruit new businesses that will have little impact on the quality of life of the local workforce. Analysis to determine what incentives will be most advantageous to the community should include a break down by business type/land use, type of incentive requested, impacts on existing businesses, and whether or not the project is located in an area targeted for economic development, as well as other factors. Specific criteria should be developed to assist the City in making decisions about eligibility for incentives.

Workforce Development - Wilson needs to support the efforts of local educational institutions – Wilson Community College, Barton College, and the Wilson County School system – to train today’s students to be tomorrow’s workforce. The City should support the efforts of local nonprofits that provide supplementary training and job skills development to at risk populations.

Fostering Development in Aging Commercial Corridors - The City’s first strategy for revitalizing aging commercial corridors, such as the 301 Corridor, Downtown, and Five Points, is to identify ways to enhance the quality of life in these areas. This includes reducing crime rates, providing more public amenities (e.g., sidewalks), and creating a vision for the area. Feasible solutions need to be prepared for areas in need of investment. Development approaches should focus on making development in these areas convenient and easy for potential developers. Public-private partnerships may be required to initiate development activity.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Evaluations of the preliminary planning themes and current policies regarding economic development in Wilson call for further exploration of economic planning factors to inform the Steering Committee as they move forward with plan development. Further exploration should include the following:

- Evaluate existing land use, including the amount and type of non-residential development in Wilson, as well as the amount of land zoned for non-residential uses.
- Conduct a market analysis of retail and office/industrial uses to determine what type of and how much development the Wilson market can absorb.
- Determine the status of implementation of the 301 Task Force Action Plan.
- Identify any recent economic development efforts of EDC (Economic Development Council).
- Determine ways that the City can use the Comprehensive Plan to foster local economic development efforts (i.e., provision of infrastructure, zoning, public-private partnerships, etc.).
- Identify other possibly threatened business corridors throughout the City.

4. MANAGED GROWTH (LAND USE, TRANSPORTATION, AND PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE)

The City of Wilson has experienced steady increases in growth since 1900. Wilson's proximity to Raleigh and the Research Triangle, its access to major transportation corridors (I-95, US-264, Highway 301), and affordable cost of living make it a prime location for many businesses and residential developments. Between 2001 and 2007, the City permitted 2,238 new residential units, more than double the permits for all other areas in the County.

Growth in Wilson County is focused in the northeastern sector of the County, leading into Raleigh and Wake County. This development "pull" from Raleigh has played a large role in land development patterns in the City of Wilson. The focus of development has moved from the Center City area westward to I-95, leaving many areas underutilized. When asked, many residents say that more could be done to manage growth in a manner that preserves valuable open space and community history.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding land use and growth management issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following themes:

- **Efficiently Build Off of the City's Historic Land Pattern** – Direct development to areas that are currently served by public infrastructure and areas that are underutilized to create a greater development balance throughout the City. Discourage development from occurring in areas where the City does not intend to provide future public services by 2030.
- **Encourage Infill and Revitalization of the Center City** – Foster development within Wilson's Downtown and Center City neighborhoods, including mixed-use developments that provide residential opportunities in Downtown. This area needs a "vision" to help facilitate this change and partnerships between public and private entities to make it a reality.
- **Encourage Development of Targeted Undeveloped Lands** – New opportunities for development exist in Wilson. Undeveloped lands, particularly the areas located along US-264 between Airport Road and I-95, are likely to develop in the future. The way in which development occurs over time will have an impact on the community. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan will analyze different alternatives for development and using community feedback to these alternatives, it will provide guidance for the way in which undeveloped lands should be developed in the future.
- **Develop a Vision for the 301 Corridor and Implement** – The 301 Corridor has long been affected by the changing focus of growth towards the northwest. A clear and feasible vision and plan for the Corridor should be developed and implemented.
- **Maintain Levels of Service for Public Infrastructure and Facilities** – Continue to provide adequate water, sanitary sewer, road capacity, parks, and police and fire service as new growth occurs.

- **Ensure Development Compatibility** – New developments should be compatible with adjacent, existing uses and should be organized to create clusters or nodes of like development.
- **Ensure a Fiscal Balance of Land Uses** – Tax revenues from some residential developments in Wilson do not offset the cost to provide public services. Through its land development plan, the City should foster a balance between non-residential, residential, and mixed-use land uses to achieve a better fiscal balance.
- **Provide a Multi-Modal Transportation System** – Many residents in Wilson have limited access to vehicles and need alternative modes, such as public buses, to move from destination to destination. But in many cases, the existing transportation infrastructure provides limited accessibility to bus stops due to lack of sidewalks and bike facilities. Enhancements to the City’s bus system and pedestrian and bicycle networks are necessary to meet the needs of many residents, including students. New infrastructure is needed to make the existing infrastructure work more efficiently.
- **Protect Existing Road Capacity** – To ensure that Wilson maintains reasonable commute times to the Triangle region, to Greenville, and to other regional destinations, road capacity along key corridors, such as US-264, NC-42, and NC-58, should be maximized. Future development occurring along these corridors should be designed in a manner to efficiently use existing road capacity and should mitigate potential traffic impacts.
- **Protect Valuable Environmental Resources** – Future development should be designed to protect critical environmental resources, such as floodplain areas and wetlands. Opportunities for public use of these areas, such as greenways, parks, and recreational areas, should be identified. These uses should not negatively impact natural resources and provide opportunities for residents to experience and learn about the natural environment.
- **Address Energy Use and Rates** – Many citizens are concerned by the cost of their utility bills and think that current energy prices are not sustainable into the future. Opportunities to identify energy conservation measures and to decrease energy costs should be explored.
- **Promote the Use of Green Development Technologies** – Wilson should encourage the use of green construction techniques for new developments, including new public facilities.

RELEVANT POLICY DOCUMENTS AND STUDIES

Wilson’s land planning history is well documented in various plans and studies, the most recent of which is the Wilson 20/20 Vision document. The following goals of this document are reinforced by the preliminary planning themes:

- Consider and preserve open space and history
- Encourage equitable and evenly-distributed investment
- Create vital Downtowns
- Beautify connections between neighborhoods and transportation systems

The earliest land use study reviewed for this report is the 1974 American Institute of Architects Rural/Urban Design Assistance Team Study for Wilson. This document predicted a change in growth patterns from the Center City to the west (I-95/Raleigh) and recommended that clustered development in the form of a network of activity centers should guide growth evenly throughout the community.

In 1990, the City of Wilson and Wilson County developed a joint City-County Growth Plan. The Plan designated areas surrounding the corporate limits of Wilson as a primary growth area. Although not called a comprehensive plan, the Growth Plan set out policies for a broad array of planning factors, including economic development, transportation, water and sewer service, industrial development, commercial and office development, housing, and others. This effort illustrates that the City and County can collaborate successfully to plan for growth.

Due to changing growth patterns, new development interests, and public improvements in Wilson, the City updated the Growth Plan in 1999. The 1999 Growth Plan is the current adopted Plan for the City of Wilson. The Plan amended the primary and secondary growth areas for Wilson based on proposed service extension, road improvements, and local development interests. The Plan's vision includes values to achieve the following:

- Promote development variety
- Foster inner city growth and revitalization
- Address intrusions into and/or impacts on residential areas
- Advance geographic equitability in distribution of growth
- Enhance the overall quality of life in our neighborhoods and community

The 1999 Growth Plan policies may still be relevant today and should be a starting point for developing policies for the 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

In 2008, Wilson County updated its Growth Plan and adopted the 2025 Wilson County Comprehensive Plan. The Plan's Future Land Use/Growth Vision map designates a large amount of land surrounding Wilson as a primary growth area to be developed in the next 5-10 years. Build out of this area will likely have a significant effect on public services and community character in Wilson. One of the first objectives of the Plan is to develop a unified development ordinance, which could include changes to zoning and development standards to foster development in designated primary growth areas. The Plan includes goals to protect floodplains, water supply and watershed areas, and promotes the development of conservation subdivisions. Of interesting note in the Plan was mention of the City's request for extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) in 2003. This request was denied and the County established new policies for granting ETJ at that time.

Several targeted reports, plans, and programs that impact land use planning in Wilson were also reviewed. The Wilson Downtown Development Corporation coordinates an impressive program to bring back investment and development to Downtown Wilson.

They manage several incentive programs including the Owner-Occupied Building Grant Program, the Rent Incentive Program, the Rent Grant Extension Program, the Façade Matching Grant Program, Historic Preservation Tax Credits, and the Downtown Loan Pool. The Turning Point Workforce Development Board, a board of the Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments, works with the City and the Downtown Development Corporation to support and provide resources to these efforts.

The 301 Task Force Action Plan (2003) includes specific actions to improve the 301 Corridor, including amendments to zoning and infrastructure improvements and roadway enhancements. When developing land use plans for the Corridor, it will be important to consider these Action Plan strategies.

The 2008 Wilson Comprehensive Bicycle Plan also includes important land use recommendations, such as a proposed greenway network, school zones to facilitate bicycle-friendly design, and a mixed-use and compatible development land use pattern to better connect residences and activity centers and create a more bike-friendly community. Likewise, the 2006 Wilson Pedestrian Plan provides recommendations for updating the City's plan and development ordinances, including defining pedestrian-oriented development, developing a Safe Routes to School program (currently underway), providing sidewalks in redeveloped areas, incorporating pedestrian standards into the City Zoning Ordinance for both private and public developments, developing sidewalk standards for the City's Subdivision Ordinance, and development of a multi-modal Thoroughfare Plan. These documents will be assessed and the upcoming Existing Conditions Report will identify which of these pedestrian recommendations have been implemented.

Land development impacts the City financially by requiring public services and generating tax revenues. Property tax is the largest revenue source for the City followed by sales tax revenues. Property values in Wilson have grown 20 percent since 2000 – a lower growth rate than expected by the City's Financial Services Department. Adoption of a revenue neutral tax rate in 2001 has maintained property tax revenues at a constant total with corresponding pressure placed on the City's operating budget. The positive outcome is that the City's Administration was able to “do more with less” by using resources more efficiently while also providing lower tax rates⁴ to its citizens.

Because the City has received lower property tax revenues than expected while working to maintain lower property tax rates, the City has transferred fund balances from the Electric Fund to the General Fund in the past to pay for services and infrastructure improvements. Under the current economic situation facing communities around the nation (reduced tax revenues as well as decreases in State and Federal support), this practice is no longer a sustainable solution. The Wilson City Council recently passed a minimum fund balance policy of 25 percent for all funds to ensure financial security for the City.

A 2008 Cost of Land Uses Fiscal Impact Analysis report prepared by TischlerBise for the City of Wilson set out to answer the question - “what type of growth pays for itself?” Four of the five assessed non-residential land uses (industrial park, office, big box retail,

⁴ Wilson has the lowest property tax rate in the area (51.5 cents) when compared to Greenville (56 cents), Rocky Mount (55 cents), and Kinston (60 cents).

and hotels) resulted in net revenue surpluses for the City. The only non-residential use that resulted in deficits for the City was community shopping center development. Three of the six assessed residential land uses (high and middle value single-family development and single-family infill development) resulted in net surpluses. Residential property valued at \$250,000 or more pays for itself, according to the study. Infill development uses existing services and thus does not require an increase in service cost.

Given the fact that a significant proportion of the housing stock in Wilson is valued below \$250,000, the City will need to consider alternative ways to offset the public costs to service many residential properties. Moreover, this study suggests that with the present revenue structure, the City cannot continue to provide current levels of service to certain types of new development without finding new revenue sources.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

Key Growth Areas - Before policy direction can be provided regarding where new development should be located, more information is needed. The City needs to understand the projected amount of regional development that Wilson will be receiving for the short-term and long-term. Once we know how much development we can expect and understand our development capacity, then the City can make decisions about where that growth should occur.

Managing Growth - The City's growth management strategy has worked well in the past. Because the City now has little planning jurisdiction outside of its corporate limits (i.e., extraterritorial jurisdiction or ETJ) the City is limited in managing growth beyond its borders. Collaboration between the City and County is imperative and should include work to expand the City's ETJ.

Policies regarding the expansion of water and sewer facilities should address future growth boundaries. The City should consider an annexation policy that addresses growth management concerns and directs new development to occur within the City and to other targeted economic development areas.

Balancing Land Uses - To make the most of existing resources and decreasing public budgets, the City should promote a balance of land uses. This implies that land will be allocated for residential and non-residential development in a manner that public services do not deplete City resources and can be efficiently provided.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Evaluations of the preliminary planning themes and current policies regarding land use and development in Wilson call for further exploration of planning factors to inform the Steering Committee as they move forward with plan development. Areas to be further explored include the following:

- Growth estimates from the Reality Check regional planning initiative.
- Evaluate current land capacity and its ability to serve future population and business growth.

- Conduct a market analysis of residential, retail, and office/industrial uses to determine what type of and how much development the Wilson market can absorb.
- Evaluate growth alternatives to determine a “preferred” land use plan.
- Evaluate Wilson’s Water and Sewer Service Area.
- Review the Wilson County policy for granting ETJ.
- Review the status of Implementation of the 301 Task Force Action Plan and other targeted plans.

5. NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING

When asking Wilson residents what it is about the City that keeps them here, the common response is, “It’s home.” Home is the place where Wilson’s residents know their neighbors, care about their community, and where they enjoy spending time.

Neighborhoods are the key building blocks of Wilson. While many residents love the neighborhood they call home, there are many important neighborhood and housing issues in Wilson that need to be addressed. The greatest long-term threat to Wilson is the long-term deterioration of its neighborhoods. As neighborhoods decline, they affect local business development, the educational system, and the culture and quality of life of the area. One example is the neighborhood around Barton College. Disinvestment in this area may be putting the long-term sustainability of the College at risk. It is a top priority of Wilson to improve several of its neighborhoods, focusing on those in the Center City area.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding neighborhood and housing issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following themes:

- **Improve Aging and Historic Neighborhoods** – Many existing neighborhoods are suffering from a lack of maintenance, aging infrastructure, incompatible zoning, and general disinvestment. Many of these neighborhoods are located near the heart of Wilson and impact the success of institutions like Barton College. The City needs to work with landowners, non-profits, and neighborhood organizations to improve the quality of life in these areas.
- **Maintain the Character and Integrity of Existing Properties** – Residential properties should be adequately maintained and should be utilized to their fullest potential. Historic preservation efforts and efforts to maintain non-historic properties of significant value should be undertaken to ensure long-term sustainability of residential neighborhoods and their unique character.
- **Increase Homeownership Opportunities** – Many of the areas experiencing disinvestment in Wilson include a high number of rental properties. Expanding homeownership opportunities could not only open the door for more families to achieve the American dream, but also improve the quality of area neighborhoods by creating a sense of ownership and pride that comes with owning a home.
- **Provide Housing Opportunities for a Diversity of Households** – Wilson’s citizenry is aging and will require a different type of housing than traditionally afforded by single-family subdivisions. Senior housing, up-scale multi-family housing, and mixed-use developments are needed in Wilson.
- **New Development Should Enhance Community Character** – Both residential and non-residential developments should be designed to create an attractive atmosphere, including quality built structures, preserved trees, landscaping and buffering between roadways and adjacent uses, and appropriate siting of buildings.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND STUDIES

Neighborhood and housing issues are addressed in many City plans and studies. The 1974 American Institute of Architects Rural/Urban Design Assistance Team Study for Wilson identified strategies for revitalizing neighborhoods including streetscape improvements, replacing trees, compatible zoning, need for more open space, and maintaining affordability. The Plan noted that back in the early 1970s, there was a large contrast between historic and new neighborhoods – namely the mature trees that were lacking in new developments. Many citizens still believe that this is a problem in newer subdivisions.

In 2005, an 80-member citizen-based committee led development of the Housing Improvement Action Strategy Plan for Wilson. The Plan includes strategies for tenant and landlord accountability, improving the housing complaint and enforcement process, providing educational opportunities to tenants and landlords, improving affordable housing ownership, improving safety in neighborhoods, code improvements, and other strategies. During the next phase of planning, the implementation status of this Plan will be assessed. Given the fact that the Plan was developed only a few years ago, it is likely that many strategies have not yet been implemented and should be considered for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan.

The Freeman Place is a great example of a public-private partnership between the City of Wilson and local developers. Focused on creating more homeownership opportunities and revitalization of a Wilson neighborhood, the City of Wilson applied for and received federal CDBG funds to assist in redevelopment efforts of this neighborhood. Local architects have assisted in development of models for affordable housing for low and moderate income households. The result is a new vision for this neighborhood that enhances neighborhood character and provides adequate and affordable housing to area families.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

Neighborhood Protection Efforts - Wilson is interested in pursuing development of neighborhood planning efforts. These efforts will focus on development of implementation strategies to improve neighborhood character, ensure that properties are maintained and well-used, and to protect neighborhoods at risk from the effects of blight and disinvestment. Neighborhood conservation districts are one tool that the City is considering to bring about these changes. Public investments in neighborhood infrastructure, such as street lighting and sidewalks, is another.

Nuisance Abatement - The City has improved its nuisance abatement efforts in recent years. Many blighted buildings that are no longer structurally sound have been removed through the City's demolition program. More funding is needed to address additional nuisance problems in the community.

Incentives for Revitalization Efforts - There is interest in providing incentives to property owners that rehabilitate older buildings and raise the quality of neighborhoods. Actual incentives that may be provided will be vetted during this planning process.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Evaluations of the preliminary planning themes and current policies regarding quality of life issues in Wilson call for further exploration of planning factors to inform the Steering Committee as they move forward with plan development. Further exploration will include the following:

- Evaluate future population trends and housing needs.
- Identify neighborhoods in need of revitalization efforts.
- Neighborhood Conservation District overlay opportunities.

6. QUALITY OF LIFE (COMMUNITY AMENITIES AND URBAN DESIGN)

Wilson's quality of life refers to the experience of the City through its cultural events, recreational facilities and programs, beautification and visual aesthetic, and design of the built environment. Downtown Wilson is a major asset to the community. Years of changing economic conditions have resulted in disinvestment in Downtown and a decline in quality of life in the community. But things are changing, and Downtown Wilson is experiencing a renaissance. New streetscape improvements line Nash Street, new restaurants have opened, and there is a sense of revitalization in the historic core.

The City is interested in identifying ways to continue to improve the quality of life in the community for long-time residents, those looking to relocate to the area, and tourists. This includes providing more cultural and recreational opportunities for all age groups and income levels, providing better pedestrian and bicycle accessibility throughout town and to key destinations, improving the design and quality of development in the community, and ensuring a vibrant and thriving Downtown for future generations.

The City has many partners in this effort – public educational institutions (Barton College, Wilson Community College, and the Wilson County School system), the Wilson Arts Council, and other entities all have an impact on the quality of life experienced in the community. Partnership efforts are needed to create a more vibrant Wilson.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding quality of life issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following themes:

- **Enhance City Beautification Efforts** – Wilson seeks to be experienced and remembered as an attractive City by both its residents and visitors. Clean and inviting public spaces, tree-lined streets, and attractive neighborhoods are essential for creating this experience. These community goals can be achieved through a combination of efforts: landscaping, better maintenance of vacant lots, tree preservation and tree replanting initiatives, and increasing the quality of new and redeveloped buildings in the community -- to name a few. This theme focuses on beautification efforts to address overgrown lots and blighted areas. Efforts are needed to work with landowners to improve overgrown and unsightly lots that impact neighboring properties. Public spaces should be improved by providing additional landscaping and tree plantings. Design charrettes being conducted by the City may identify additional opportunities for increasing the visual appearance and beautification of public and private spaces.
- **Maintain "Tree City USA" Status and Enhance Tree Preservation Measures** – For 26 years, Wilson has achieved the "Tree City USA" designation from the Arbor Day Foundation and its partners the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters. This designation acknowledges the City's efforts to protect its tree canopy through public initiatives and tree preservation regulations. In recent years, the City has increased tree preservation by improving development regulations. But more can be done. Looking to the future, Wilson seeks to raise the bar even further on tree preservation efforts. Continuing to achieve the community's vision of being the "City of Trees" will

require new or enhanced efforts to address tree preservation on both public and private lands. Doing this will not only improve the visual experience of the community but enhance the City's tree canopy and natural environment. Specific objectives should include preserving tree stands that serve as buffers along major roadways, preserving heritage/specimen trees, preserving tree groves of a significant size, and protecting the roots zones of preserved trees during construction. Working with landowners of existing developments to retroactively replant trees is another opportunity for enhancing the tree canopy in Wilson.

- **Enhance Design of New Developments** – New developments (including projects to redevelop existing developed areas) should convey the look and character that emphasizes that Wilson is the “City of Trees.” Developments should be designed to minimize the removal of existing mature trees in streetscape areas and areas accessed by the public. Landscaping and trees can be used to soften and unify the appearance of developments from the street and to define entryways. The quality of neighborhoods can be enhanced by planting street trees on new residential lots. For commercial and industrial developments, parking lot requirements should be enhanced to create better pedestrian circulation through clearly defined walkways and tree/vegetative plantings and to soften their appearance and reduce the automobile dominance of non-residential developments. Recommendations for specific trees and natural plants used in landscaping should be provided.
- **Enhance Community Gateways** – Gateways are perceived “entrances” to Wilson. Many gateways to the community do not provide a positive visual experience and could be improved through public and private efforts, such as signage and plantings.
- **Become a “City of the Arts” for All Ages** – Wilson provides many opportunities for young families and older residents. A recent success was the reopening of the Edna Boykin theater and development of the Imagination Station Science Museum. But to compete with neighboring cities, more opportunities are needed. Demographics in the City are changing and the City should work with partners to provide cultural and entertainment opportunities for singles, young professionals, and seniors. This will be implemented through collaborative efforts with partners such as Barton College and Wilson Community College.
- **Provide Activities for the City's Youth** – Recreational opportunities, specifically sporting activities in Wilson, are excellent. More activities and entertainment options are needed to provide affordable, healthy, and constructive alternatives for the City's youth.
- **Improve Older Parks and Recreational Facilities** – Wilson offers many parks and recreational amenities to area residents. Some of these facilities are outdated and in need of replacement and repair. The City is working to develop a strategic plan for improving recreational opportunities for residents.
- **Create a More Connected Community** – Neighborhoods, schools, shopping centers, and places of employment should be better connected through the design of new developments and should provide pedestrian and bicycle

accessibility through streetscape improvements and greenways, reducing automobile dependence. In addition, greenways, bike paths, and sidewalks are needed to provide linkages within existing developed areas, connecting local points of interest, employment locations, and neighborhoods and schools. Safety concerns should be addressed by providing better lighting, ensuring clear passage along pedestrian and bicycle routes from the obstruction of landscaping and trees, providing signage, providing bike racks, and other design solutions.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND STUDIES

Quality of life issues are addressed in many City plans and studies. The following quality of life goals from the Wilson 20/20 Vision document align with the preliminary planning themes identified by the City's residents:

- Varied social, educational, cultural and recreational activities
- Superb athletic facilities, parks, arts, cultural attractions
- "Community of choice" for young adults, families, and retirees

In 1993, the City and County of Wilson jointly developed and adopted the Wilson Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Many of the eight specific recommendations of the Plan have been implemented, including establishment of the Buckhorn Reservoir and development of a senior center. The Master Plan is in need of updating to reassess existing and future needs for recreation. Changing demographics in the community will likely require a different strategy for providing park and recreation opportunities, specifically for aging populations. The 2025 Wilson County Comprehensive Plan includes a strategy to update the Park and Recreation Master Plan and to work with the municipalities in the County to ensure adequate provision of parks county-wide.

A recent survey of Wilson residents showed that 15 percent of respondents do not have access to an automobile and 70 percent of respondents are interested in using their bikes more often. The 2008 Comprehensive Bicycle Master Plan is an up-to-date Plan that provides specific guidance on development of bicycle and greenway systems in the City. Specific initiatives from the Bicycle Plan can be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan, such as the development of a bike registration program and helmet program and long-term goals such as development of a greenway network in Wilson.

Historically, the City of Wilson has experienced more pedestrian injuries than any other similarly sized community in North Carolina. The 2006 Pedestrian Plan focuses on developing safe walking environments that link destinations. Goals, objectives, and policies from this Plan can be folded into the Comprehensive Plan. Specific recommendations to promote pedestrian improvements in existing plans and codes will be assessed during the implementation phase of the planning process.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

Improving Character of New Development - The City supports efforts to improve urban design in the community. Design of Downtown urban spaces, development and streetscapes along major roadway corridors, and gateways to the community are key focus areas for improving design and development standards.

Parks and Recreation - The joint City-County Parks and Recreation Master Plan was developed more than 15 years ago. The City might consider updating the Plan in partnership with the County to identify unmet parks and recreation needs and develop a strategic plan to provide these new amenities. Partnering with the County could result in cost savings through partnership financing efforts.

Cultural Amenities - Expanding Wilson's cultural attractions and events must be done in a collaborative way. The City is willing to consider public-private partnerships to support the expansion of cultural attractions and events in Wilson.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Evaluations of the preliminary planning themes and current policies regarding quality of life issues in Wilson call for further exploration of planning factors to inform the Steering Committee as they move forward with plan development. Further exploration will include the following:

- Review design requirements for newly built and redeveloped areas.
- Assess existing cultural and recreational opportunities.
- Determine status of Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans and Housing Improvement Action Strategy Plan implementation.

7. HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Many communities around the nation are beginning to take a more prominent role to develop policies and support programs to ensure the health and wellness of citizens. Through the Wilson 20/20 Vision process, the greater Wilson community identified increasing health and wellness as a primary goal for the community. Teenage pregnancy and obesity rates in Wilson are some of the highest in the State. As of 2004, ratios of population to health service providers in Wilson were greater than most counties in the region. Wilson can do more to be a healthy community that promotes the wellness of its citizens, regardless of age or socioeconomic status.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding health and wellness issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following themes:

- **Promote the Development of an Active Living Environment in Wilson** – The City should plan for and invest in infrastructure improvements to provide safe and convenient amenities that help residents of Wilson lead more active and healthy lives, such as sidewalks, crosswalks, walking trails, greenway paths, bicycle lanes, and other amenities.
- **Increase Health and Wellness of City's Youth** – Work to decrease the number of obese children and teenage pregnancies in Wilson.
- **Provide More Opportunities for Healthy Living Developments** – Wilson should strive to provide mixed-use housing opportunities that provide recreational amenities such as walking trails, bicycle lanes, and parks to increase healthy behaviors.
- **Implement Safe Routes to School Plan** – Instilling good healthy behaviors, like walking and biking at an early age, can increase the health and wellness of Wilson's youth. Providing safe and accessible routes to school can help students increase their healthy behaviors and increase the sense of community that occurs through pedestrian interactions.
- **Encourage Development of Comprehensive Healthcare Services** – The City should encourage development of comprehensive, community-based health care and wellness programs for all citizens at all stages of life and all socioeconomic backgrounds. One idea is development of a medical arts center where health related services and supporting businesses could co-locate, providing new opportunity for a medical cluster of businesses in the Center City area.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND STUDIES

Health and wellness issues have only recently made their way into community plans. The Wilson 20/20 Vision document is the first policy document to address this topic directly through the following goals:

- Comprehensive, community-based health care for all citizens
- Local hospital and medical facilities are regional centers of excellence
- Support healthy lifestyles and clean environment

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans mentioned previously also include strategies for improving the design of communities to foster active living environments that include more opportunities for healthy behaviors, such as walking and bicycling.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

Healthy Built Environments - Wilson will pursue opportunities to create healthy and active living environments through mixed-use developments, better pedestrian and bicycle facilities throughout the City, and supporting the efforts of partner organizations to improve the health of the community's residents. Implementation of the City's bicycle and pedestrian plans are critical to achieving this goal.

Partnerships for Health - The City of Wilson is not in the business of bringing health care centers to the area, but does support efforts of area hospitals and health centers to locate to the area. New health care facilities could not only provide better health care opportunities to residents, but also provide opportunities for job creation.

Implementation of the City's Bike and Pedestrian Plans - An integral component of the City's efforts to create more active and healthy living spaces and more opportunities for healthy behaviors in Wilson is development of an interconnected pedestrian and bicycle system that links people and places throughout the City. Implementation of the City's existing bicycle and pedestrian master plans is a critical next step in creating a more healthy environment in Wilson.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Further exploration of health and wellness planning factors can help inform development of Comprehensive Plan policies and strategies. Areas for further exploration will include the following:

- Identify critical health statistics for Wilson's citizens.
- Review public health programs provided to residents.
- Inventory local health services in Wilson.

8. EDUCATION

Wilson's public education system is good, but it faces many challenges, including high school drop out rates and underperforming schools. Community demographics and the quality of life experienced in certain neighborhoods can play a role in educational attainment, supporting the notion that "it takes a village" to ensure the future of our youth. Quality of life issues, such as constructive after school programs, recreational amenities, and Safe Routes to School can improve the educational experience for the City's students. Partnerships with neighborhood organizations, community groups, and educational partnerships are helping to improve educational attainment in Wilson.

Educational needs in Wilson also extend beyond the public school system. Quality higher education opportunities are provided right in the heart of Wilson, including Barton College and Wilson Community College. These institutions provide not only degree programs and job skill training, but also cultural programming and community events. These institutions form a network of educational opportunities in Wilson. Barton College stands ready to work with the Wilson County school system to develop a strong neighborhood school in the Barton neighborhood.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding local educational issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following themes:

- **Increase Educational Attainment of City's Youth** – Work to decrease the number of high school dropouts in Wilson and increase overall achievement levels of underperforming schools. Support the efforts of the Workforce Development Task Force appointed by the Wilson Chamber of Commerce.
- **Coordinate with the Wilson County School system to Site and Plan for New School Facilities** – The development of schools can have a large impact on a community. Ensuring that the locations of new school sites align with community planning goals is important. Ensuring that new schools are designed in a manner that creates linkages to adjacent areas and reduces negative impacts is also critical.
- **Partner with Barton College to Increase Educational Excellence of the Public School System** – Barton College is an integral component of the City of Wilson and its Downtown. Partnerships between the College, the City, and the School District may help improve the success rates of public school students.
- **Support Wilson Community College in Providing Educational Programs for All Sectors of the Population** – Wilson Community College provides critical educational opportunities in Wilson for a broad cross-section of the community, ranging from high school graduates to retired seniors with interests in continuing education courses. The City should support the Community College in providing high quality educational services to the community.
- **Support Educational Partnerships that Improve the Educational Attainment of the City's Workforce** – Recognize and support educational partnerships, such as those established between Wilson Community College and Barton College and Wilson Community College and Wilson County Public Schools, that provide cooperative arrangements to ensure seamless transitions from high school to

college. One example is the Early College program that provides an accelerated opportunity for high school students to complete their two-year degree.

- **Support Organizations Working to Improve Life Skills of Residents** -- Recognize and support other educational providers and partnerships delivering vital services to segments of the community needing assistance. Such entities include the Opportunities Industrialization Center of Wilson, Inc. [OIC] and Diversified Opportunities, Inc. [DOI].
- **Continue to Support the Wilson Education Partnership** – The City should continue to support the Wilson Education Partnership’s coalition of partners to create new programs for students, address high school reform needs, increase achievement levels and graduation rates, and improve job-readiness of the City’s future workforce.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND STUDIES

Education is a critical issue that is addressed in many City plans. The Wilson 20/20 Vision document addresses this topic directly through the following goals:

- High standards for achievement and appreciation for life-long learning
- Provide collaborative learning opportunities
- Keeping education up-to-date and relevant

The majority of public school programming and policy decisions are made by the Wilson County Schools. However the larger community plays a critical role in supporting development of new programs and partnerships. The City’s 1999 Wilson Growth Plan sets out five policies related to education:

- A quality education is recognized as one of the most important factors of future economic development in the County.
- The City is committed to improve student/teacher ratios.
- Educational programs and actions should emphasize parental involvement and assistance from the business community.
- Non-traditional and alternative education approaches are supported.
- Technical training and educational programs should help unemployed and underemployed citizens meet ever changing job needs.

The Wilson Education Partnership is a community-based, non-profit organization established to coordinate, encourage, and assist educational functions to benefit the students and staff in Wilson County Schools. Programs and services offered by the partnership include the following:

- International Baccalaureate Program
- Help One Student to Succeed Program
- Accelerated Reader Support

- Classroom Support
- Business Education Summit
- Character Education
- Advocacy for the public school system
- Other programs and awards

There are many good examples of partnership efforts in Wilson aimed at increasing the educational success of its students. The Workforce Development Task Force, appointed by the Wilson Chamber of Commerce, is working with the Wilson County Public School system to develop a program for career advisors that will prepare students for the 21st century workforce. Local businesses are in support of elevating the education and job readiness of Wilson's students and have partnered with the community to this end. The City partnered with the Elvie and Five Points neighborhoods to develop after school programs for neighborhood children.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

Partnerships for Academic Achievement - The City of Wilson respects the fact that the provision of educational services in the City is provided by Wilson County Schools. The City does not wish to compete with or duplicate efforts of the school district or any other partners, such as nonprofits and churches that provide after-school and summer programs. City efforts to improve academic achievement will focus on improving the quality and character of the community and its neighborhoods, providing better transportation opportunities so that students can take advantage of extra-curricular programs, and will consider assisting private entities with improving educational excellence in their neighborhoods.

School Siting - The development of schools can have a tremendous impact on a community, including spurring new growth, creating new transportation impacts, and changing neighborhood character. The City of Wilson wishes to work collaboratively with Wilson County Schools on the development of future schools to ensure that larger community goals are achieved.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Additional investigation into education-related planning factors can help inform development of Comprehensive Plan policies and strategies. Further exploration will include the following:

- Review of Wilson County Schools' plans for public facility expansion or development.
- Review of plans for new programs or facilities to be provided by Barton College and Wilson Community College.
- Development of regulations pertaining to school development in Wilson.

9. COMMUNITY

Community engagement is a cornerstone of any successful community. Wilson is a unique community because even though it lies in a larger metropolitan area, so many of its residents are long-time natives and have stayed in the City or are now returning to start families. There is a great sense of community because of these solid roots and sense of pride in the community.

Wilson is growing and new populations are moving to the City. Many of these residents may not be actively engaged in the community. Residents have identified many opportunities to strengthen community engagement, including development of the Comprehensive Plan.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding community engagement and perception issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following themes.

- **Change Community Perceptions to Emphasize “One Wilson”** – All members of the Wilson community are interlinked through a web of relationships, whether through educational, business, neighborhood, civic, or other ties. Perceptions of the Wilson community should emphasize the overall community and how the inter-relationships of each household, neighborhood, and district are a component of the larger picture – the City of Wilson.
- **Foster Development of a New Civic Center** – Wilson is lacking a space to hold larger community events. Providing a multi-use space that could be used for concerts and other events could help put Wilson on the map.
- **Provide Additional Opportunities for Civic Engagement to All Citizens**– Wilson will only improve if its citizens are actively engaged in community affairs. The City should provide greater outreach to the community through fun and entertaining civic engagement activities and include residents from a diversity of backgrounds.
- **Improve Communication About Local Events and Activities** – Many residents in Wilson are unaware of the cultural amenities available to them. Communication should be enhanced to make residents aware of events and activities of community interest.
- **Promote Self-Sufficiency through Local Social Services** – Public programs to help citizens in Wilson should focus on providing assistance to individuals that need help getting out of their current situation, such as addressing problems with addiction, combating homelessness, and gaining new job skills. Programs should focus on solutions that foster self-sufficiency and a community spirit of service.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND STUDIES

Development of community engagement and spirit is an area where the City has not historically developed formal policies, but has encouraged attention through establishment of citizen boards, programs, and volunteer efforts. The Wilson 20/20 Vision document addresses this topic directly through the following goals:

- Celebrate and respect diversity
- Promote justice, inclusiveness, harmony, and understanding
- Develop neighborhoods and their identity through connecting residents and involving them in government
- Fill leadership positions with local, diverse, representatives

Many non-profits, faith-based organizations, and other entities are focusing on development of a better community, whether it is through homeownership, job-training, educational programming for children, or other social services. These organizations are important partners of the City's in providing much needed services to underserved citizens and families in Wilson.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

Wilson's Human Relations Commission has initiated many efforts to foster community engagement and create better communication with its neighborhoods.

Neighborhood Summit events, the Citizens Academy, and the Latino Initiative are steps in the right direction to achieve community objectives. Many community organizations are involved in service projects in Wilson. A more formal service partnership with the City is a natural next step to better use volunteer efforts throughout the community.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Additional investigation into community engagement needs and opportunities can help inform development of Comprehensive Plan policies and strategies. Areas to be further explored include the following:

- Identify vehicles for communicating and engaging with non-traditional households in Wilson (i.e., non-English speaking households, persons with disabilities, and other minority groups).
- Review goals and programs of the Wilson Human Relations Commission and identify policies and strategies that should be included in the Comprehensive Plan.

10. COLLABORATION

No jurisdiction operates within a vacuum. Community decisions in one jurisdiction can have considerable effects on its neighbors. Wilson is fortunate to have a history of joint planning within the County. The City can work to improve its collaboration with other jurisdictions to support shared objectives.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING THEMES FROM PUBLIC INPUT

Community feedback regarding inter-jurisdictional collaboration issues to be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan is summarized by the following themes:

- **Consideration of Joint City and County Planning Coordination/ Collaboration –** Planning efforts in Wilson County and in the City of Wilson are inextricably linked. The original 1990 Growth Plan was developed using a collaborative planning model in which the two jurisdictions (and the other municipalities) jointly developed a future plan for growth. This type of planning coordination/collaboration should again be considered. Additional opportunities to share review of development proposals in areas of joint interest should also be reviewed.
- **Collaboration on School Siting and Provision of Infrastructure –** The City and Wilson County Schools need to collaborate and develop common criteria for siting and designing new schools to ensure that school development and future growth plans for the community are aligned.

RELEVANT POLICIES AND STUDIES

Collaborative planning strategies are found in many community planning documents. The Wilson 20/20 Vision goals support the following collaborative efforts:

- Encourage better working relationships between local governments
- Expect community organizations to work together

As mentioned previously, the City and County jointly developed a Growth Plan in 1990 to guide land development in the County and jointly adopted community policies. The two also partnered to develop the 1993 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The County's new Comprehensive Plan identifies collaboration as the most important goal of the Plan. Strategies for achieving this goal include development of a Technical Review Committee to include the City, County, and Wilson County Schools to review development proposals, to establish partnerships for public facility location and development, to share tracking of new development permits, joint hazard mitigation planning, and jointly updating the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

PRELIMINARY POLICY DIRECTION

City-County Efforts – There is strong support from the Wilson community to achieve better collaboration with the County. There are a number of City-County advisory boards currently working on issues of joint interest. Working off of current efforts, the City wishes to create a more formal partnership with the County to achieve community goals.

City-School Efforts

The City is interested in developing formal mechanisms for sharing information with the Wilson County School system related to the development of new schools and infrastructure improvements needed for schools.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Additional investigation into collaboration efforts with the County and Wilson County Schools can help inform development of Comprehensive Plan policies and strategies. Areas to be further explored include the following:

- Models for sharing review of development projects of joint interest.
- Negotiating growth, services, extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) extension, and annexation agreements with Wilson County.
- Identification of additional collaborative opportunities with the two jurisdictions.

11. NEXT STEPS

The next step in developing the Wilson 2030 Comprehensive Plan is to review information on existing community conditions, including transportation, development capacity, public facilities and infrastructure, and a real estate market analysis. This information will serve as the foundation for developing the goals, policies and strategies for the Plan.