

TOWN OF FRANKLIN PRINCIPLES OF GROWTH

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Principles of Growth for the Town of Franklin
Preamble

What can we do now to ensure that in 20 years Franklin will still be recognized as a great place to live? This question is critical as we grapple with the formidable challenge of managing growth. In North Carolina in the past 30 years, population has increased 50 percent while vehicle miles traveled have increased 300 percent. Historically, we have handled growth in ways that have resulted in all of us living farther and farther from our destinations, be they work, school, worship, play or shopping. These extra miles have far-reaching consequences: more congestion and air pollution resulting from our increased dependence on automobiles; the loss of precious open space; the need for costly improvements to roads and public services; the inequitable distribution of economic resources; and the loss of a sense of community.

We believe that in order to help maintain what we love about Franklin, and still accommodate growth, we have to change our planning approach to create safe and friendly streets for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists and to encourage attractive and affordable housing choices closer to our daily destinations. We believe our land use policies should recognize Franklin's architectural heritage, replicate its best-loved patterns of building, encourage building approaches that create legacies instead of tear-downs or franchise styles and, thus, preserve and enhance the special sense of place that is Franklin, North Carolina.

In our region, where the economy is driven by tourism, second home ownership, and retiree migration, it is clear that sense of place is an asset as surely as a navigable waterway or a mountain of buried coal was an asset in previous eras. Destinations that attract investment are those that distinguish themselves from competitors by virtue of their natural and man-made environments. Such communities are not sought out because they have the biggest retail boxes or the most chain restaurants. They are valued because they have deliberately preserved their traditional character and protected their sense of place.

The principles contained in this document are intended to guide the Town's future land use decisions. We recognize that many of the principles are dependent upon fiscal capacity and support, as well as a commitment from the community and elected officials. With that foundation of community commitment and support in place, we are

confident these principles will foster the continued vitality that has made Franklin a great town and an original place.

Principles of Growth for the Town of Franklin

Principle #1. Mix Land Uses.

The Town of Franklin should continue to grow in a manner that encourages and rewards the integration of land uses. Mixing land uses promotes connectivity, walkability, and a sense of community. The integration of land uses provides denser cores of development which are supportive of transportation alternatives, such as walking, bicycling and public transit. In addition, the mixing of land uses promotes connectivity and walkability, thereby helping revitalize community life by providing inviting places for people to live, work, and play.

Policies and Strategies

- Ensure that zoning regulations allow a mix of uses in most classifications.
- Provide incentives, such as increased densities, to make it attractive for developers to undertake mixed-use projects.
- Permit planned urban village zoning districts, where appropriate, through special use zoning, thereby allowing the creation of entire communities consisting of an urban core and associated residential development.
- Allow live/work units (structures which are used for business purposes and which also serve as the principal residence of the business proprietor) in some zoning districts and exempt them from density calculations.
- Actively promote Franklin as a “Smart Growth” town. Consider partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and Board of Realtors in establishing a committee whose job is to promote Franklin as friendly to Smart Growth and to search for developers who are interested in developing mixed use buildings.

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Principle #2. Take Advantage of Compact Building Design.

The Town of Franklin should support compact building design, a principle which promotes the efficient use of land and resources by directing communities to grow vertically rather than horizontally. This reduces the footprint of new development, thereby preserving more open space and reducing impervious surfaces and stormwater runoff and, therefore, the amount of surface water pollution discharged into our streams. This type of design also enables wider transportation choices including public transit, walking and biking.

Policies and Strategies

- Ensure that zoning regulations facilitate compact building design by allowing multi-family and attached housing, by eliminating or reducing minimum lot sizes and minimum yard requirements, and by taking care that height and density standards are adequate to accommodate this principle.
- Educate the community , including the development community, of the benefits of compact building design, via public meetings and informational sessions.
- Adopt parking standards which encourage compact building design by reducing the amount of land needed for vehicular use. Examples include allowing shared parking and on-street parking to count toward minimum parking standards. Alternatively, the Town may wish to consider maximum parking standards in lieu of, or in addition to, minimum standards.

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Principle #3. Create a Range of Housing Opportunities and Choices.

The Town of Franklin should work in partnership with private enterprise to create a range of housing opportunities and choices. In order for our town to grow and prosper, we must provide many different types and prices of living quarters. To support a growing economy, it is imperative that we find a way to provide affordable housing options both for current residents and, also, to make the town an attractive option to potential employees and employers.

Policies and Strategies

- Seek sources of funding, both public and private, which can be used to provide down payment assistance and rent subsidies, and to finance the acquisition, construction, and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Ensure that the zoning ordinance allows auxiliary housing (e.g., garage apartments), both attached and detached. Investigate the feasibility of reducing impact fees for such units.
- Establish a housing committee, composed of stakeholders from the Town and the County, whose purpose will be to focus on public education and to investigate and recommend to the Town realistic solutions for affordable housing.

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Principle #4. Create Walkable Neighborhoods.

The Town of Franklin should strive to make our town a walkable community. Walkable communities are pedestrian-friendly, desirable places to live, work, learn, worship and play. They stimulate economic viability and distinctive character, as well as improve residents' health and safety and regional air quality. The benefits of walkable communities include lower transportation costs, greater social interaction, improved personal and environmental health, expanded consumer choices and an overall healthier way of living.

Policies and Strategies

- Adopt walkability standards designed to accommodate pedestrian connectivity, pedestrian safety and mixed land uses.
- Develop gateway corridor plans for major entrance ways into town which address pedestrian facilities, signage, landscaping and appearance.
- Ensure that new development contributes to the principle of walkability by installing pedestrian connections or, where that is not feasible, by contributing a fee-in-lieu thereof, into a pedestrian facilities fund.
- Adopt a master pedestrian facilities plan for the Town.

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Principle #5. Foster Distinctive, Attractive Communities with a Strong Sense of Place.

The Town of Franklin should strive to maintain and create a high quality urban environment which reflects the unique character of our community. In doing so, we believe there is a greater likelihood that buildings (and, therefore, entire neighborhoods) will retain their economic vitality and value over time.

Policies and Strategies

- Ensure that land use regulations encourage reusable, multi-generational buildings that instill pride over time and through a variety of owners and uses.
- Ensure that land use regulations permit the adaptive reuse of the best of our older buildings. Every historic building we save bolsters sense of place. Educate developers and property owners about the NC Rehabilitation Building Code and coordinate with the Macon County Building department on the administration of this Code.
- Conduct an inventory of historic resources and, if justified, establish a Historic Preservation Commission to help preserve historic structures and districts, thereby helping to sustain Franklin's architectural heritage.
- Develop design standards for the downtown business district in order to protect and enhance the sense of place provided by Main Street. Consider developing design codes for other neighborhoods as appropriate.
- Commit to building civic spaces and buildings that are lasting landmarks which distinguish Franklin. Public buildings should be built for their value over a lifetime, not for short-term capital savings.
- Protect the natural environment. Our sense of place is tied forever to the quality of our rivers and mountain landscapes. Sacrificing environmental quality for short term economic gains spends down our legacy and puts us at a disadvantage in the competition for our best customers.

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Principle #6. Preserve Open Space, Natural Beauty and Critical Environmental Areas.

The natural environment in and around our mountain community is one of our greatest treasures. The availability of open space and, significantly, greenways provides important benefits to the quality of life and health of our community. As Franklin grows in population, open space and greenway availability will become even more important and, potentially, more difficult to preserve. Thus the Town of Franklin should commit today to ensure we have ample open space in the future.

Policies and Strategies

- Create a working relationship with the county and FROGs (Friends of the Greenway) to complete the Greenway Project. At a minimum this should include extending the greenway to Suli Marsh in the north and Recreation Park in the south, bridging the Little Tennessee River, and providing opportunities for water recreation, physical exercise activities, picnic and playground facilities and an amphitheater.
- Develop a collaborative strategy between the city, county, and FROGs for developing, funding, operating, and maintaining the greenway system.
- Connect the greenway to other facilities by having walks to Southwestern Community College (SCC), the Macon County Library, and other areas that would benefit Greenway users.
- Adopt a master plan for developing and funding additional greenways, walking and biking paths throughout the city, linking businesses, open space, and recreational and other community facilities.
- Ensure that zoning and subdivision ordinances support the development of open space, and walking and biking areas.
- Establish minimum open space requirements for specific types of development including multi-family and mixed use developments. Ensure that these requirements provide for open spaces that are functional, and allow for recreation or conservation. Require inclusion of walking and biking trails in developments, where feasible.
- Analyse the potential for “pocket parks”—a series of small (approximately ¼ acre) parks throughout the city minimal facilities for relaxation, picnics, children’s play, and as a gathering place for seniors.

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Principal #7. Direct Development Toward Existing Communities.

The citizens of Franklin have made significant investments in the existing streets, sidewalks, utilities, schools, and public spaces which make up the Town's infrastructure. The Town of Franklin should ensure that new development is directed towards existing communities which are already served by this infrastructure. This will help to conserve open space on the urban fringe, strengthen the Town's tax base, allow for closer proximity of jobs and services, and improve the efficiency of government and public resources.

Policies and Strategies.

- Review and, if necessary, revise the Town's Utilities Extension Policy to ensure that extensions of water and sewer are consistent with these Principles of Growth and with other land use plans and policies the Town may adopt.
- Maintain a brown field redevelopment resource center whose mission will be to educate the development community about the benefits of brown field redevelopment and the availability of qualifying sites.
- Adopt a fast-track policy whereby qualified redevelopment projects are given priority in the development review process.
- Locate and promote suitable areas for development in order to realize efficiencies from infrastructure and service investments. Provide incentives, such as density bonuses, to encourage development in such areas.
- Adopt a policy where governmental and community services are located and encouraged to locate downtown in the central business district, where feasible.

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Principal #8. Provide a Variety of Transportation Choices.

We believe a community and its citizens should have multiple transportation choices. Those choices should be affordable and available to all members of the community. Pedestrian transportation is especially important as our community expands and fossil fuel costs direct more people to use alternative modes of transportation. The Town of Franklin should resolve to strive for a balanced, walkable community with a variety of transportation options.

Policies and Strategies.

- Ensure that transportation goals and needs are addressed in land use planning decisions by providing or requiring an analysis of traffic impacts as part of the development review process. Take care that transportation impacts are considered, as well, when evaluating petitions to rezone property.
- Infrastructure planning should include multiple modes of transportation and provide for growth and diversity.
- Road improvement plans should include safety planning for motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists and transit users.
- Future development should encourage connections to adjacent properties. Provide foot/cycle path connections to adjacent residential and business properties. Parking areas should provide safety and ease of access.

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Principal #9. Making Development Decisions Predictable, Fair, and Cost-Effective.

The Town of Franklin should strive to make all of its development-related processes (zoning applications, rezoning, multi-family development applications, and sign applications) as simple and straightforward as possible, with known time frames for making a decision.

Policies and Strategies.

- Land use regulations should be written so that they can be understood by, or readily explained to, those who must abide by them. This material needs to be readily available in hard copy at the Town office and on the Town's web site.
- The Town should identify and remove any barriers that may exist to ensuring that the benefits of these initiatives accrue to all segments of the population, including women, racial and ethnic minorities, people of low income, and people who are developmentally disabled.
- The Town should work closely with Macon County regulatory officials to ensure that local ordinances are enforced and that information regarding permits and development is shared.

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Principal #10. Encourage Community and Stakeholder Collaboration.

The Town of Franklin should engage all sectors of the community as partners, early in the process of planning, to ensure that they will have a continued say in changes that take place. The Town should offer opportunities for people to gather at convenient and comfortable locations at a variety of times for sustained involvement and expertise by community stakeholders employing clear, open, and consistent communications.

- Develop a more consistent dialogue with Macon County government, its elected officials and key staff, in order to work more closely on issues of mutual interest. The town should meet with the County Commission on a regular basis.
- Conduct periodic “planner’s luncheons” to educate and inform the public about planning initiatives and new development.
- Incorporate into the Zoning Ordinance a process whereby Town staff facilitates neighborhood compatibility meetings between developers and neighboring property owners and residents for developments likely to have considerable impact.