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## Information and Update Links on COVID-19 (/covid-19)

# 2005 Land Use Plan

## The Land Use Plan Update

### Town of Highlands

State of North Carolina

As adopted by the Board of Commissioners

July 20, 2005

### Vision

*"We envision an attractive mountain community, which is founded on the beauty of the plateau's natural environment, the uniqueness of Highlands' village character, and the richness of the area's culture and history". (K&G)*

### Statement of Mission

To protect the natural environment of the Highlands Plateau, enhance the town's village character, and preserve the community's cultural and historic heritage. (K&G)

### Recommendation

It is the wish and recommendation of the present Planning Board that, once adopted by the Town of Highlands, this 2005-2010 Land Use Plan be annually reviewed, updated, and re-prioritized by the Town Commissioners. In 2009, we recommend that the Planning Board begin developing a Land Use Plan for 2010-2015.

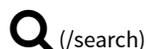
### Residential Areas

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**I: Goal:** Promote a small-town neighborhood atmosphere, comprised of primarily low-density housing that blends with the natural environment and reflects the town's historical roots.

**Objectives:**

- (a) Refine the Town's residential development ordinances including zoning and subdivision regulations.



**Strategies:**

(1) **Development on steep slopes.** Consider including limits on the footprint of structures, limits on the removal of vegetation, and requiring the submission of topographic information when making application for a development permit.

(2) **Ridge top development.** Discourage development on ridge tops especially where property owners have alternative building sites. Also, consider options to limit the removal of trees for the sole purpose of increasing views.

(3) **Overbuilding relative to lot size.** Consider relationship issues between house size and lot size. Propose maximum footprint standards.

(4) **Construction impact fees.** Develop and implement impact fees to minimize construction impact on neighborhoods. Encourage timely completion of projects, as well as site safety and appearance.

(5) **Setback and buffer requirements.** Review existing regulations to determine if adequate setback and screening is provided between structures. Review uses permitted in setback areas and the need to protect large trees. Consider adjustments to Town ordinances consistent with findings.

(6) **Multi-family opportunities.** Consider "limited" multi-family opportunities on a "site specific basis" consistent with the village character of Highlands. Examine all zoning districts. Multi-family development could include duplex, triplex, quadruplex, apartments, condominiums, and townhouses.

(7) **Zoning map revision.** Examine the zoning map to identify potential problem areas consistent with the mission and goals of the Land Use Plan. This may include changing residential areas to commercial areas or vice versa. Changes would protect the central business district and residential areas, with regard to the best use of property. The examination would also include light industrial uses and conflicting or incompatible adjoining land uses.

(b) Amend subdivision regulations to accommodate environmental concerns in road design.

**Strategies:**

(1) **Road width and grade requirements.** Seek to improve the appearance and design of roads and their curb cuts.

(2) **Regulations for roads, access roads, and driveways.** Consider the issues of increasing public safety, reducing sedimentation, protecting natural vegetation, and enhancing landscaping.

(3) **Various Provisions.** Consider adding variance provisions for accomplishing strategies #1 and #2 above.

(c) Develop a town housing code

**Strategies:**

(1) **Maintenance and upkeep of structures.** Consider standards for the general upkeep and maintenance of structures and enforcement provisions for compliance.

(2) **Removal of abandoned and dilapidated structures.** Consider removal provisions

(d) Enhance residential appearance and landscaping.

**Strategies**

(1) **Residential development guidelines.** Develop guidelines describing the types of building materials, construction styles, and colors consistent with those found in western North Carolina and the Town of Highlands. The guidelines would be written for residential and commercial property owners and added to the Appearance Commission guidelines.

(2) **Residential tree ordinance.** Residential standards may be different from commercial standards. Ordinance may require special enabling legislation.

(3) **Native Landscaping.** Encourage homeowners to consult local garden clubs and landscapers for advice and guidance in preserving and planting native vegetation.

(4) **Visibility of utilities.** Develop underground extension policies. Encourage replacement of existing utilities with underground utilities wherever feasible.

(5) **Screening storage areas, junk and rubbish.** Consider requirements to screen vehicles without valid inspection sticker, stored construction materials and other unsightly items from public view.

(6) **Removing trash in the community.** Review, update, and enforce the Town's trash regulations.

(e) Promote the development of green space and walkways in residential areas.

**Strategies**

(1) **Green-space.** Consider adding and/or strengthening provisions for new subdivisions and for multi-family developments to allow clustering, to provide green space and to tie in with a community system of greenways.



(2) **Walkways and trails.** Initiate a study to inventory existing walkways and recommend areas of improvement, purchase easements or acquire fee simple ownership. The study should consider pedestrian safety, access to places of interest, quality of the pedestrian experience and labeling and signage of walkways. The study should consider all types of trails, including paved sidewalks and paths surfaced with gravel, wood chips and other materials. Evaluate and implement recommendations. Extend Master Sidewalk Plan to include residential areas.

(f) **Strategy** Initiate mandatory training and education for building contractors, developers, and individual property owners.

Require all contractors and developers working in Highlands to complete a training program familiarizing them with local development regulations. Develop a short film for individual property owners to see and discuss with the Zoning Administrator before receiving a building permit.

## Commercial Areas

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**II: Goal:** Promote the village character of the town's commercial districts by enhancing the condition and appearance of buildings, facilitating pedestrian access, and improving the compatibility of adjoining land uses.

**Objectives:**

(a) Review and update the town's commercial ordinances, zoning, and operating practices.

**Strategies:**

- (1) **Building and sign codes.** Implement commercial building and sign codes for maintenance, upkeep and appearance.
- (2) **Commercial buffering.** Review sufficiency of commercial buffering, i.e., fencing and landscaping requirements.
- (3) **Parking ordinance.** Review the town's parking ordinance for effectiveness, aesthetics, and environmental impact.
- (4) **Impact criteria.** Develop and implement impact criteria to minimize construction impact on community. Encourage timely completion of projects, as well as site and community safety and appearance, by imposing penalties.
- (5) **Big box development.** Prohibit development of "big box" stores and large parking lots. This includes over-development of existing commercial properties.
- (6) **Business zoning districts.** Review all business zones (B-1, B-2, B-3, and B-4) for incompatible adjoining land uses i.e., light industrial use vs. retail/commercial/residential uses; and, consider rezoning to facilitate change in use. Review the Town's ordinances regarding sun setting non-conforming uses.
- (7) **Tree Ordinance.** Review and strengthen the Town's commercial tree ordinance, especially for the CBD, including replacement trees and fines.
- (8) **Historic Buildings.** Preserve historic buildings in commercial districts.

(b) Review and update the ordinances, zoning, and operating practices in the Central Business District (CBD).

**Strategies:**

- (1) **CBD boundaries.** Define the boundaries of the Central Business District, which includes B-1 and portions of B-2 and B-3.
- (2) **Pedestrian traffic.** Expand, prioritize, and implement the Master Sidewalk Plan in CBD and adjoining residential areas. Review type of sidewalk brick for pedestrian safety. Establish additional pedestrian seating along Main Street. Improve pedestrian crossing light cycles.
- (3) **Lighting and utilities.** Develop uniform commercial lighting with regard to pole design and intensity and color of light. Place utilities underground.
- (4) **Streetscape design and appearance.** Implement the Streetscape Committee's streetscape and landscape recommendations for CBD. Plant trees, upgrade trash cans for consistent appearance, and initiate an anti-litter department.
- (5) **Environmental concerns.** Review and update CBD storm water controls. Develop adequate public restrooms in the CBD.
- (6) **Green spaces.** Develop green spaces in the CBD: a mini park on Main Street (e.g., the Loafers' Bench lot) a central location for a town commons (e.g., the old post office site on Fifth Street), and greenway trails. Seek public-private partnership to develop these projects.
- (7) **Residential use.** Increase residential use in the CBD.

## Cultural and Historic Resources

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**III: Goal:** Preserve and promote the rich cultural and historic resources of Highlands.

**Objectives:**



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(a) Promote the cultural heritage of Highlands and its diverse forms of expression.

**Strategies:**

(1) **Cosmopolitan interests and mountain culture.** Promote and publicize the dynamic interaction between the cosmopolitan interests and the traditional mountain culture of Highlands - in the areas of theatre, art, music, continuing education, etc.

(2) **Central Location.** Encourage location of cultural activities in or near the village center.

(3) **Public-private partnerships.** Support public-private partnerships with non-profit organizations that support the above objective.

(b) Identify, protect, and publicize the town's historic buildings, sites, and architectural heritage.

**Strategies:**

(1) **Historic commission.** Identify and protect historic sites and structures worthy of preservation and protection - including the establishment of a historic commission for Highlands.

(2) **Historic education.** Initiate an education awareness program of key historic buildings and sites in Highlands, the procedures for protecting them, and the economic benefits of their preservation.

(3) **Architectural styles.** Identify architectural styles and themes of Highlands' historic architecture and incorporate these findings in the guidelines of the Appearance Commission.

(4) **Walking tours.** Develop a walking tour of Highlands' historic properties.

(5) **Public-private partnerships.** Support public-private partnerships that support the above objective.

## Natural Environment

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**IV: Goal:** Preserve and enhance the natural environment and scenic beauty of Highlands.

**Objectives:**

(a) Protect the watershed.

**Strategies:**

(1) **Natural buffers.** Protect streams and lakes with natural, vegetative buffers i.e., natural foliage, not landscaped.

(2) **Larger lots.** Preserve watershed by increasing minimum lot sizes.

(3) **Hickory Hill Road.** Define right of way and pave the portion of Hickory Hill Road adjacent to Big Creek to prevent silt intrusion into the creek. (See "Residential Areas" Objective B.)

(4) **Watershed preamble.** Incorporate a preamble in the watershed ordinances to clarify the intent of the ordinances.

(5) **Perennial stream inventory.** Update the Town's perennial stream inventory to comply with the State's new watershed ordinance.

(6) **Conservation easements.** Seek conservation easements in watershed areas.

(b) Expand green space.

(1) **Greenways trail.** Expand and publicize the town's greenways trail through cooperative efforts of local civic-environmental groups.

(2) **Town commons.** Identify and acquire land for a centrally located town commons. Explore possibility of selling or trading land currently owned by the Town.

(3) **Additional green space.** Seek to preserve the green space properties identified on Ran Shaffner's map, such as the Loafer's Bench property on Main Street and the old post office site on Fifth Street.

(4) **Funding.** Seek public and private funding to implement 1-3 above.

(5) **School green space.** Create covered picnic area inside present track. Macon County schools could do much of this work, along with community volunteers.

(6) **Conservation easements.** Seek conservation easements and public-private cooperation wherever possible.

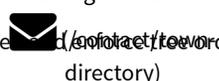
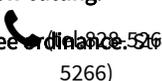
(c) Control development.

(1) **High impact.** Oppose any high impact or incompatible development.

(2) **Ridge tops.** Prohibit any construction that rises above the ridge tops.

(3) **View cutting.** Prohibit clear cutting for views and promote aesthetic pruning of trees. Require tree replacement.

(4) **Tree ordinance.** Strengthen the tree ordinance for residential and commercial development. (5266)



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(5) **Buffers.** Require natural, vegetative buffers. Prohibit removal of existing vegetation, and encourage additional landscaping to increase density of buffers.

(d) Maintain scenic beauty.

(1) **Highway buffers.** Require natural vegetative buffers along highways.

(2) **Litter control.** Enforce existing anti-litter laws, and create a Town department to eliminate litter.

## Plateau Governance

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**V: Goal:** Protect the Highlands Plateau, including the Town's water supply, the natural environment, and the highway corridors, by establishing one local governance for the Plateau.

### Objectives:

(a) Establish an extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) outside of Highlands.

#### Considerations:

(1) Protect the highway corridors.

(2) Protect environmentally sensitive areas, such as the watershed for the Town's water supply.

(3) Identify and qualify areas for future annexation.

(4) Reduce the potential for high impact development.

(5) Insure compatible development adjacent to Town limits through zoning.

(b) Promote voluntary annexation, balancing the mutual interests of the Town and the property owner.

#### Considerations:

(1) The expense of providing Town services should be examined.

(2) The proposed annexation should fit with the vision of the Town Plan.

(3) The process should be user-friendly and mutually beneficial.

(c) Implement forced annexation of areas that qualify under N.C. statutes.

#### Considerations:

(1) Quality of the development and its infrastructure.

(2) Quality of the natural environment to be protected.

(3) Integration of individual communities into a single Highlands Plateau community.

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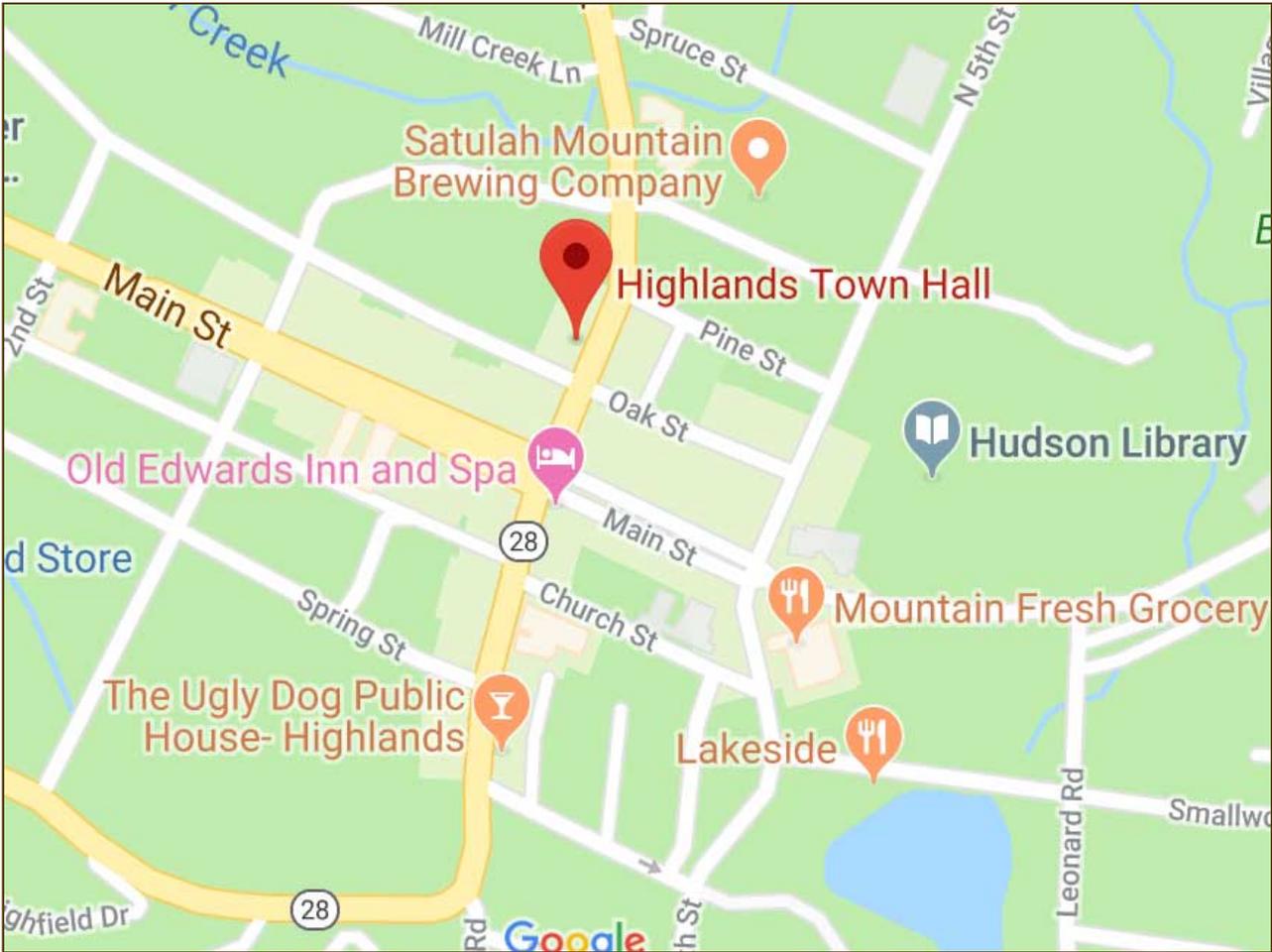
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