



Planning Conditions Report: Summary

March, 2014



Planning Conditions Report: Summary

This document presents a summary of a Planning Conditions Report, prepared for the City of Graham. This is the first report prepared for the project to prepare a new long-range Comprehensive Plan for the City.

The objective of the 2025 Comprehensive Plan is to create a vision for the future of Graham, along with specific goals and strategies that will help achieve that future.

The objective of the Planning Conditions Report is to synthesize the technical and community inputs available to date to develop an initial set of planning issues and conditions for consideration as work on the new Comprehensive Plan moves forward.

The Planning Conditions Report is divided into four sections:

1. Community Issues

Summarizes and documents community input aimed at identifying critical community issues that should be considered in the development of future city policies. This input was provided by members of the 2035 Graham Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and numerous stakeholders representing various community and business interests, and will be supplemented with input received at the upcoming community event.

2. Key Opportunity Areas Map

Identifies key opportunity areas in the city with respect to land use, development, and transportation infrastructure.

3. Supplemental Information

Provides additional community information and trends with respect to community health and the local economy. This information is a supplement to the Graham Community Profile published in February 2013.

4. Plans and Policies

Summarizes existing plans and policies relevant to the plan project, and highlights critical aspects of these documents that should be considered in this planning effort.

A summary of the Community Issues that have been identified follows immediately. The final page of this Summary displays the Key Opportunity Areas Map.

1. Community Issues

The following community conditions have been identified as key issues to be addressed in the planning process. These issues were repeatedly raised by city stakeholders and business interests in the early stages of this planning process, and attention to these issues will likely have a large impact on the future of Graham

Graham Has Many Assets

Graham is viewed as a stable, historic, residential community. Its historic character and amenities support its small town identity and are the foundational pieces for an evolving downtown environment. Its location between the Triad and Research Triangle regions and being located at the heart of the convergence of Interstates 40 and 85 are critical economic development assets.

Graham Should Better Define Itself

Graham has the benefit and challenge of being located between two of the most dynamic economic centers in the state: the Triad and Research Triangle regions. It is a benefit because of the wealth of assets and opportunities that this locational position provides. It is a challenge because Graham is in the position of competing with more economically active communities for businesses and investment. Graham needs to think strategically about how the outside world views Graham, and develop strategies for improving that image.

Downtown Should Be a Key Focus for Economic and Public Investments

Internally, Graham's key asset is its historic downtown. The downtown area has a well-defined physical character and over the last decade both public and private investments in and around downtown have made an impact on its vibrancy. But more is needed to fully realize the potential of downtown.

A Renewed Community Focus on Public Schools is Paramount

Graham and Alamance County are in a period of transformation. Textile manufacturing was the leading industry across the county for generations, but that job environment has changed. Student achievement levels in Graham lag behind County and State levels. Community and parental involvement in local schools is variable. The physical condition of schools serving Graham is an issue. And changing demographics, especially the growing number of families with limited English proficiency, present an additional challenge. The state of schools affects the quality of life in Graham, and as a result, has a direct impact on the community and economic development efforts to recruit new businesses and new residents to the area. Schools and education are linked to almost every other issue identified to-date in this Comprehensive Plan initiative

Graham has a Changing Population with Evolving Needs

Like many communities across North Carolina and the nation, the "face" of Graham is changing. With the baby boomers reaching retirement, the age of the population is shifting and becoming older. The city's Hispanic and Latino population has also been growing. In 1990, only 1% of the local population described themselves as Hispanic or Latino. In 2010, that increased to 16%. Continued efforts to reach out to and engage Hispanic and Latino families are critical to the achievement of an inclusive, connected community.

Graham's Economy is Largely Based in a Few Industry Sectors

In 2007, most of the jobs found in the city were in manufacturing. This was followed by retail trade and accommodation and food services, two of the lowest wage industries. Employment opportunities in Graham could be expanded to provide higher wage opportunities.

Graham Has a Need for Enhanced Transportation Options

Like many communities in North Carolina, most people in Graham drive everywhere they go – to work, home, to shop, and to recreate. However, changing demographics of seniors and immigrant populations, and changing market preferences are changing this dynamic. People want better access to the places they frequent and they often want options for how to get to these destinations – by car, by bus, by bicycle, or on foot.

Aging Housing and North Graham Neighborhoods Could Benefit from Revitalization

The majority of new residential development occurring in Graham is happening in the south Graham and Hawfields areas. These developments are typically lower-density, single-family subdivisions with few local amenities. There are potential opportunities to reinvest in and redevelop the aging housing stock in neighborhoods north of Interstates 40 and 85 in the vicinity of downtown. Many young professionals and young families are looking to locate into neighborhoods that provide more urban-like experiences within a small town environment. In addition, while the city may provide an affordable lifestyle to many, there are still sectors of the population that would like to find quality housing at an affordable rate.

Coordination with Regional Partners is Critical

Graham is a small community within a broad and diverse region. The success of Graham's future as a vibrant small town and an expanding business market is largely tied to the success of the region to draw new businesses to the area. Coordination with Alamance County, Burlington, Mebane, and other neighbors for future growth and infrastructure is critical.

Community Efforts are Focusing on Improving Health of Residents

Partner organizations throughout Alamance County are working to assess the health conditions of local populations. Alamance County ranks 31 out of 100 counties in North Carolina for health outcomes. There is also a focus on providing healthier food sources in Alamance County, particularly by fostering a stronger local food network.

Investments in Aging Infrastructure

Graham is an old and historic community, which also means that much of the city's basic infrastructure is aging and in need of repair/replacement. The City has a Capital Improvements Program that is now 10 years old; preparation of a new Program that takes into account the needs and objectives highlighted in the new Comprehensive Plan can be a good vehicle for considering public investment strategies and defining priorities.

2. Key Opportunity Areas Map

The following Key Opportunity Areas Map identifies the potential opportunity areas for the city with respect to growth, development, and conservation. This map is the first step in generating an updated land use plan – the plan element that will guide the development and conservation of lands into the future.

