



**imagine**  
**2035**  
HILLSBOROUGH NEEDS YOU

# Economic Potential Evaluation of the Future of Hillsborough County Comprehensive Plan

Case Study No. 1: Charlotte/Mecklenburg, North Carolina

FINAL  
9/7/2011



## Representative Case Studies

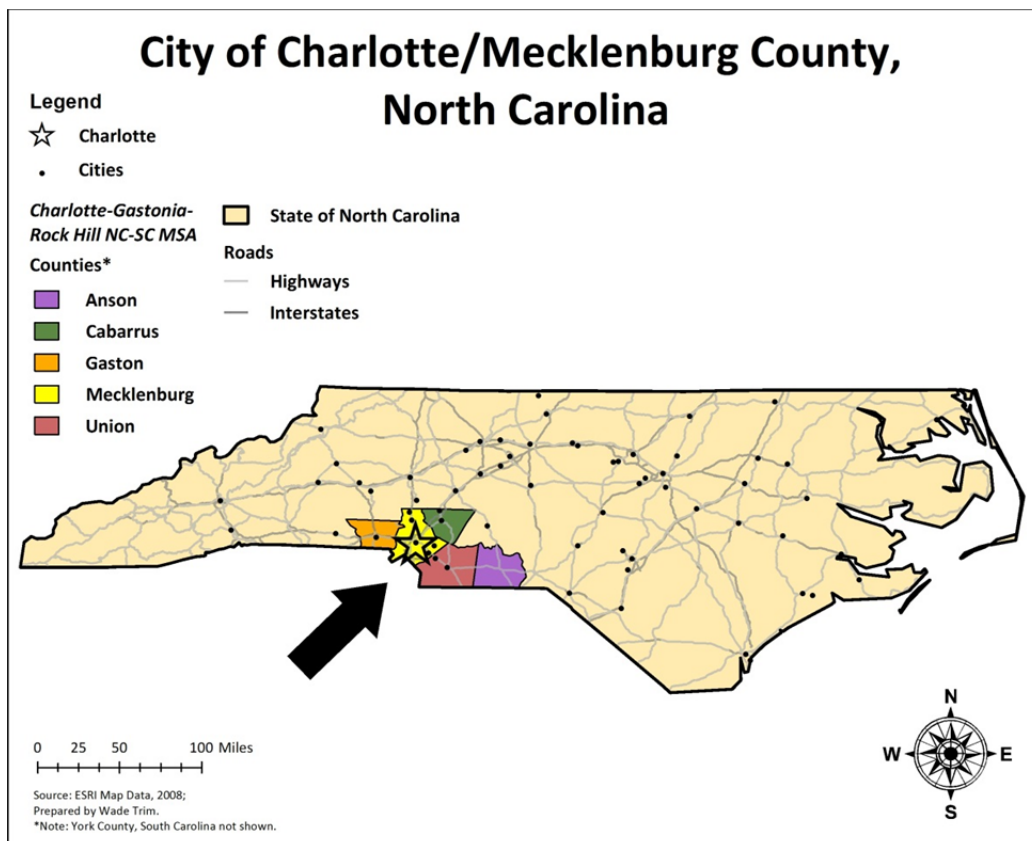
### Case Study No. 1: City of Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, North Carolina

#### BACKGROUND

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg area provides an interesting case study given that the area's Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) characteristics are similar to that of Hillsborough County. Located on the southwest side of North Carolina near the South Carolina border, the Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill NC-SC MSA (see Map 1, below) is ranked number 33 out of the top 50 largest MSAs in the nation and is ranked number 13 out of the top 20 fastest growing MSAs.<sup>1</sup>

There are also many similarities between Mecklenburg County and Hillsborough County. Mecklenburg County is both urban and rural, its historical growth rate is comparable, its demographic and income characteristics are very similar, and the planning framework and planning agency functions of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission are nearly identical to that of the Hillsborough County City-County Planning Commission. The County also includes several cities with which it coordinates, including Charlotte, Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill and Pineville.

**Map 1: Location**



<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Chamber, "MSAs Fastest Growing," secondary citations of data collected by Neilson Claritas, 2008-2009; 2010 U.S. Census; and American Community Survey (ACS) 2005-2009.

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

### *Population*

The 2010 population of Charlotte was 731,424, Mecklenburg County 919,628 and the Charlotte MSA 1,758,038.<sup>2</sup> The population of the County grew by 32 percent between 2000 and 2010. Like Hillsborough County, a significant majority of the population growth has been in the suburbs. The land area of the City is 299 square miles and the County 543 square miles. Median age is 35 (Hillsborough County is 36).

### *Race/Ethnicity*

Fifty-five percent of Mecklenburg County's population reported as white during the 2010 U.S. Census. Approximately 31 percent reported as black or African-American and five percent reported as Asian. Less than one percent reported as American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Another six percent reported as some other race than those identified above. Twelve percent of Mecklenburg County's population reported as Hispanic or Latino compared to 25 percent of Hillsborough County's population. Like Hillsborough County, this population has grown since 2000. The Hispanic or Latino population of Mecklenburg County grew by six percent from 2000 to 2010, compared to Hillsborough County which grew by seven percent.

### *Income*

Median household income in Mecklenburg County is \$45,950 (Hillsborough County is \$49,594). In 2010, Charlotte ranked No. 8 (Tampa was No. 7) on the Cost of Living Index for the Top 40 Metro Markets.

### *Education*

Notably, there are 28 colleges/universities located in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area with the largest being University of North Carolina at Charlotte with 22,388 students and Central Piedmont Community College with 61,744 students. The 2010 Charlotte Mecklenburg School System enrollment was 135,951 students (pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) in 176 school facilities. In terms of degree attainment, 89 percent of persons age 25 and older living in Mecklenburg County are high school graduates and 41 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>3</sup>

### *Government*

Mecklenburg County is a Commission and Manager form of government and the City of Charlotte a Council-Mayor and Manager form of government. The 2010 County Budget was \$1,420 billion and the City \$1,856 billion.

### *Intermodal/Infrastructure*

Charlotte's intermodal transportation facilities includes Charlotte Douglas International Airport ranked 8<sup>th</sup> nationwide in total operations, 14<sup>th</sup> nationwide in total passengers and 40<sup>th</sup> nationwide in cargo

---

<sup>2</sup> 2010 U.S. Census.

<sup>3</sup> American Community Survey (ACS), 2005-2009.

(freight/mail) with approximately 640 flights daily; direct rail and interstate highway access (I-77 & I-85 and I-485 loop); import/export facilitation and intermodal shipping. The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) operates a commuter light rail line (LYNX) as well as many bus routes. Expansion of the commuter rail service is in process.

### *Workforce/Economy*

The total labor force is 457,286 with the 2010 unemployment rate at 9.6 percent. Approximately 146,000 persons who reside outside Mecklenburg County work in the County. Almost one out of every three jobs in Mecklenburg County is held by a non-county resident. Mean travel time to work is approximately 25 minutes,<sup>4</sup> somewhat analogous to Hillsborough County.

Approximately 4,500 new residential permits were issued in Charlotte-Mecklenburg area in 2009 down sharply from the previous eight years which averaged approximately 13,900 permits per year. In 2010, total office space in the Downtown was approximately 15,126,000 square feet with 7.10 percent space available and in suburban locations 31,863,000 square feet with 20.8 percent space available.

## **PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK**

### *Comprehensive Planning, Policy Plans and Geographic Plans*

Historically, growth has been and will continue to be a central issue. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission is a joint City-County agency for unified planning. Unlike the Hillsborough County and the City of Tampa, Charlotte-Mecklenburg does not have a countywide/city-wide Comprehensive Plan as North Carolina does not require a municipality to adopt such a plan.

There are two types of plans developed by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission: Policy Plans and Geographic Plans. Policy Plans include the 2015 Plan "Planning for Our Future" and General Development Policies (GDP). The 2015 Plan is a general policy plan that served to update the 2005 *Generalized Land Use Plan* and set the stage for development of Area Plans from the late 1990s to the present. The GDP are broad policies, which provide guidance for the location, intensity and form of future development. They are used to provide direction in developing new land use plans, making decisions in rezoning cases, updating zoning and subdivision ordinances and for integrating land use planning with capital facilities planning.

Geographic Plans include District Plans and Area Plans:

### *District Plans*

In order to organize planning in the mid 1980s, Charlotte-Mecklenburg was split into seven districts – the North, Northeast, East, South, Southwest, Northwest and Central Districts. Parcel-specific land use plans were developed for these districts between 1986 and 1992. They fleshed out the general policies and recommendations of the 2005 *Generalized Land Use Plan*, while focusing on specific physical development issues of the district. District plans serve as the currently adopted land use plans for Charlotte-Mecklenburg County. However, they are continuously updated by the adoption of area plans, and through plan amendments and rezonings.

---

<sup>4</sup> American Community Survey (ACS), 2005-2009.

## *Area Plans*

Area Plans are policy documents that address issues and define how land should be used in the future. The future land uses adopted as part of an area plan are policy, not regulatory. Area Plans generally have a smaller geographic focus than a district plan. Between 1992 and the present, the Planning Commission prepared and adopted approximately 65 separate Area Plans. Because of their narrower focus, they provide more detailed recommendations for a specific area. The plans typically address land use and zoning, transportation, environment, infrastructure, economic development/ revitalization, community appearance and urban design and community safety. Area plans have various titles, such as a Strategic Plan, Revitalization Plan, Interchange Study, Small Area Plan and Corridor Plan. The various kinds of area plans typically fall into one of four categories:

- *Neighborhood/Strategic Plans* – Focus on one neighborhood, a portion of a neighborhood, or several neighborhoods that have similar characteristics and issues and normally have a large residential component.
- *Business Corridor Plans* – Focus on strengthening economic vitality along business corridors and complimenting the stabilization of neighborhoods. A large commercial component characterizes business area plans.
- *Pedscape and Land Use Plans* – Intended to facilitate compact, pedestrian oriented development. They set curb lines, setbacks and required streetscape elements, while also providing land use and zoning guidance. An adopted pedscape-type plan is required prior to applying a PED overlay zoning district.
- *Station Area Plans* – Focus on an area within a half mile walking distance of a future rapid transit station. The purpose of these plans is to promote pedestrian friendly development around rapid transit stations. They address land use and urban design, infrastructure, and street design.

Once adopted, area plans serve as the future land use plan for the area, amending the respective District Plan, and along with the zoning code serve as the basis for review of development proposals.

Because the planning staff typically receives many more requests for area plans than they have resources to accommodate, an “Area Plan Assessment Process” is used to define and prioritize where planning efforts are needed and where resources should be focused. Each January, an interdepartmental team reviews and requests based on considerations, such as recommendations of previous planning initiatives, increases in rezoning activity inconsistent with the adopted plan, policy changes, demographic changes, transportation/infrastructure improvements, and gaps in planning initiatives. Two to three Area Plans are completed annually.

## *Centers – Corridors – Wedges Growth Framework*

In August 2010, the *Centers, Corridors, Wedges Growth Framework* (see Attachment, page 8) was adopted which updated the original *Centers and Corridors* concept by refining the vision for future growth and development. It did this by identifying three geographic types used to categorize land.

- *Activity Centers* – focal points for economic including: Center City, Mixed Use Activity Centers and Industrial Centers. 22 centers are in place.
- *Growth Corridors* – five elongated areas that stretch from Center City to the edge of Charlotte. Within the Growth Corridors are: Transit Station Areas, Interchange Areas, Established Neighborhood Areas and General Corridor Areas.

- Wedges – large areas between Growth Corridors where residential neighborhoods have developed and should continue to grow. Consist mainly of low density housing, as well as a limited amount of moderate and high density housing and support facilities and services.

*The Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework* provides an overall development vision and is intended to be general in nature and is be used in three main ways:

- As a foundation for development of more detailed policies, plans and regulations found in the referenced Area Plans.
- To establish a consistent framework for capital planning, and
- As a basis for evaluating Charlotte’s success in addressing growth and redevelopment issues and maintaining a livable community.

### *Implementation*

As noted, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department develops Area Plans encompassing the City and the County to guide growth and development so that it occurs in a manner that is consistent with the vision for the unincorporated area and City. Area Plans are policy documents addressing land use issues and defining how land may be used. Each Area Plan includes an implementation plan which is used by staff to identify the priorities, preliminary costs and responsible agency for implementing concept plan recommendations. Staff initiated rezoning is a primary tool for implementing land use recommendations. A rezoning changes the zoning classification on a property, thereby changing the allowed uses and development standards. Area Plans can be amended or changed through a plan amendment process or rezoning process

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

### *Primary/Targeted Industries*

Historically, Charlotte/Mecklenburg County has been perceived as a textile center and more recently as a banking/financial center. Economic development interests have sought to build a more diverse economic foundation over the past two decades. A more balanced economy has emerged with diverse business interests that have helped partially shelter the area from recent economic challenges (e.g. slowdown in certain economic sectors, corporate mergers, buyouts, plant closures). Mecklenburg County has more than 63 percent of the total employment in the Charlotte region. Targeted and emerging industries include automotive/motor sports, aviation, defense, bioscience, computer software engineering, energy production, financial services, international firms, logistics/distribution, optics, and plastics.

Charlotte/Mecklenburg County has experience steady growth in international business with nearly 900 foreign-owned businesses in operation representing 16 of 19 major industry classifications (NAICS). International business recruitment is accomplished utilizing two full time Chamber staff members focusing exclusively on Europe and Asia. With more than \$2.3 trillion in assets, it is the nation’s second largest banking/financial center behind New York which is the most widely recognized sector of the area’s economy. Charlotte Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ #57) and an inland port facility are located in Mecklenburg County. The area is also known for its economical utilities with rates approximately 15 percent below the national average. The Charlotte region is also the center of the country’s largest consolidated rail system (Norfolk Southern Railway and CSX Transportation).

### *Economic Partnerships*

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg economic development program is undertaken in partnership with several allies, including the North Carolina Department of Commerce, The City of Charlotte Economic Development Office, the Charlotte Regional Partnership (16 county regional focus), The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce (primary business recruitment entity), Charlotte Center City Partners (focus on Uptown Growth and fringe South End), Lake Norman Economic Development Corporation (focus on Davidson, Cornelius and Huntersville), Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority (focus on conventions/tourism), and the Centralina Council of Governments. The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Economic Development Departments focus almost exclusively on incentive programs and redevelopment activities and local business recruitment.

In discussions with several individuals representing the municipal planning and economic development entities, it was obvious that there is a very high level of coordination between all the partners regarding economic growth and prosperity within the County and region, which has always exhibited a strong pro-growth mentality. Moreover, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission includes an Economic Development Division which gets involved with a market analysis/study for each of the Area Plans (usually completed by an outside consultant) and coordinates with the economic development department of the City/County and the economic development partners noted above, playing a strong, supportive role.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg planning and economic development programs and strategies include several things worthy of recognition and potential applicability to Hillsborough County.

- The *2010 Centers – Corridors – Wedges Growth Framework and General Development Policies* provide an overall vision for future growth and development and general guidance for the development of future area plans.
- In the absence of a single city-wide or county-wide comprehensive plan, District Plans and Area Plans are the vehicles utilized to address issues and define how land should be used in the future. The Community Plans prepared by the HCCPC are very similar to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Area Plans. Staff or developer initiated rezonings coupled with the guidelines or provisions of the Area Plans dictate the form and function of development.
- Area Plans typically fall into four categories guiding the form and function of development: Neighborhood/Strategic Plans, Business Corridor Plans, Pedscape and Land Use Plans, and Station Area Plans. Each Area Plan includes a Market Analysis unique to the geographic area providing an economic foundation upon which to build the plan and coordinate with other ongoing economic development activities.
- Clearly, the Area Plans are very fluid and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission is very supportive of economic development initiatives within the County as evidenced by the significant number of annual rezonings and plan amendments. Notwithstanding, the form and function of new development and redevelopment is very positive.
- Planning policies tend to be more general and Area Plans more specific focusing on accommodating growth and development and supporting infrastructure as opposed to limiting or restricting growth. The likely cause for this is absence of state mandated growth management legislation in North Carolina.

- A typical rezoning or land use plan amendment can be accomplished within four or five months, which is viewed positively by the development community and economic development partners.
- In the forthcoming update of the Future of Hillsborough County Comprehensive Plan, consideration should be given to developing a standalone Economic Development (or Prosperity) Element while continuing to develop and implement Community Plans with a greater focus on economic issues and opportunities within those plans. One of the underlying reasons Charlotte-Mecklenburg County has weathered the national economic downturn is the unified, common pursuit of a regional economic vision and the flexibility built into its *Area Plan* planning and implementation process where plan amendments and rezonings are routine and processed in an expeditious manner to accomplish economic development objectives. Regardless of the specific approach to be taken by Hillsborough County, proactively and consciously integrating economic development or prosperity goals, objectives, policies, and strategies/action items into the comprehensive planning process (at the county wide level and community level) is of parallel importance to the County's historical focus on managing growth and development.

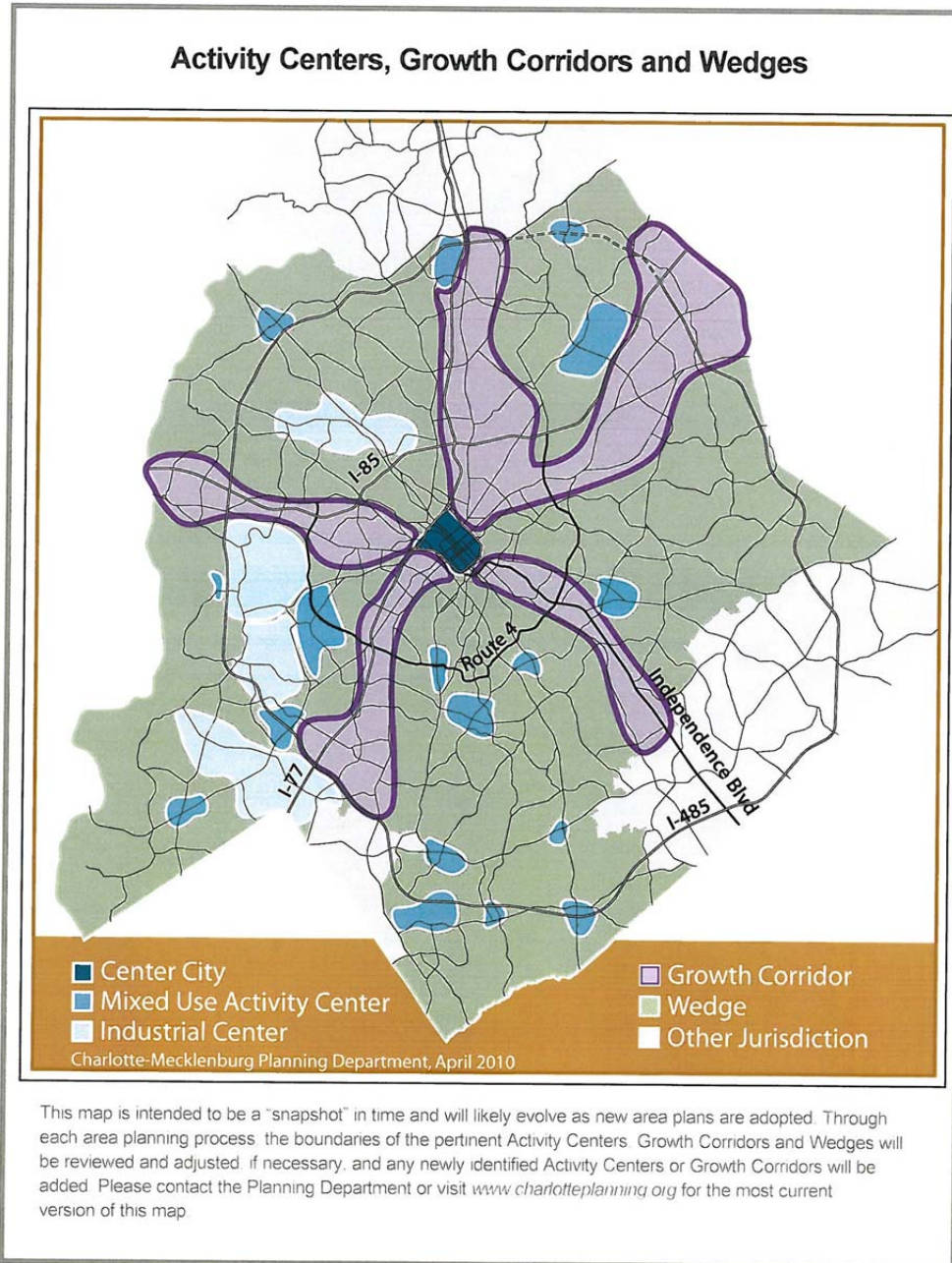
#### Sources

- Charlotte Chamber of Commerce
  - The Essence of Charlotte, May 2011.
  - Target and Emerging Industries, 2011.
  - Demographics & Economic Profile, 2010
  - Transportation, 2011
  - Airport Fast Facts, 2009
  - Charlotte Chamber Economic Development, Research & Information Monthly Economic Indicators
  - Benchmark Charlotte 2010, May 2011
  - Incentives Summary, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, undated.
  - Innovations and Excellence in Education, September 2010
  - Commuting in Charlotte, 2011
  - Economic Forecast 2011
  - Balanced Economy with Broad Opportunity, 2011
  - International Affairs, 2011
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission
  - Centers – Corridors – Wedges Growth Framework, August 23, 2010
  - Plans (General/Policy: District & Area), 2011
  - Types of Plans – Policy & Geographic, 2011
- Telephone Interviews:
  - Natalie Dick, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce
  - Kent Main, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission
  - Dan Thilo, RLA, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission
  - Melony McCollough, Planner, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission
  - Jeff Edge, CEED, Senior Vice President, Economic Development, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce
- Mecklenburg County Economic Development Office, Economic Development 2011



**Attachment (Re: Charlotte/Mecklenburg)**

The attached figure,\* shown below, provides a visual illustration of the *Centers, Corridors, Wedges Growth Framework* referenced in Case Study No. 1.



\* Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department, April 2010.