



State OF THE Town 2015

VISION STATEMENT FROM THE 2007-2027 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

“Lake Lure, the gem of the Carolinas, is a mountain-lake community that has a harmonious balance of interests of our citizens, businesses and visitors, achieved through open communication and managed growth that emphasizes fiscal responsibility and stewardship of our natural beauty and environment.”

It's time to take a step back

In 2007, after much hard work, our community completed a 20-year Comprehensive Plan, complete with nearly 400 recommendations spanning all areas of our civic life. This plan continues to serve as a guide for policymaking, projects and investment toward the goals identified by the community.

Eight years into the plan, we are pleased to report we have completed and implemented 57 percent of the recommendations. It's a good time to come back together to pause, reflect and assess what is in store for the next five to eight years.

- Are the remaining, unfinished recommendations still relevant?
- What new opportunities, challenges or threats have emerged since 2007?
- What are the community's highest priorities?
- What efforts will have the biggest positive impact on our future?

Answers to these and other questions do not solely rest on the shoulders of your elected officials and appointed boards to determine. Because it's your future too.

This report contains an overview of current conditions in Lake Lure. And while it provides a recap of our unique assets to be leveraged, it takes stock of our challenges and the opportunities before us.

Armed with information, you will be in a stronger position to contribute your ideas and preferences to guiding Lake Lure's future.

Ultimately, the goal is to chart our course together. To do it right and do it well, we need your voice at the table.

Thank you,

**Town Manager Chris Braund, Mayor Bob Keith
& Your Lake Lure Town Council**

At the end of this report you will find a link to a three question survey. Please respond to it no later than Oct. 12th. Then mark your calendar to join us Oct. 19th at Town Hall for a Visioning Workshop and to learn the results of the survey.

The 2007-2027 Comprehensive Plan Revisited

The 2007-2027 Comprehensive Plan contained 372 recommendations from ten major sections in the plan:

- Economic Development
- Transportation / Circulation
- Utility Infrastructure
- Parks & Recreation
- Lake Management
- Boat Management
- Community Services & Facilities
- Community Appearance & Design Standards
- Government & Administration
- Natural Environment & Open Space
- Land Use

For the past eight years, town staff, town council and citizen advisory boards have used the plan to guide projects, budgets and regulatory changes. Of the numerous recommendations that have been implemented, examples include:

- Creating a school
- Expanding medical services
- Creating more detailed plans for areas like the Town Center and Highway 9 corridor
- Addressing issues with lake water infiltration into the sewer lines
- Acquiring and developing more parkland (Buffalo Creek Park)
- Creating settling basins for sediment dredged from the lake
- Regularly conducting scientific studies of the fishery resource
- Staffing a Lake Operations Director
- Expanding & improving Washburn Marina
- Developing design guidelines for commercial buildings
- Defining and improving gateways into Lake Lure
- Developing and improving regulations to address noise pollution
- Seeking grants, totaling nearly \$4 million awarded
- Redesigning the town's website
- Implementing a regulatory program for vacation rental operations
- Incorporating tree protection provisions to restrict clear cutting
- Adopting regulations to protect steep slopes during development

About 151 recommendations remain from the Comprehensive Plan that have had minimal or no activity. With the goal of guiding our plans and efforts over the next five to eight years, the community is again coming together to examine these remaining recommendations.

That's where your involvement is requested.

THE COMP PLAN BY THE NUMBERS:

372 recommendations

10 categories

57 percent have been completed since 2007

151 recommendations remain undone

And we completed a few things that weren't in the 2007 recommendations. These include:

- Implementing a curbside recycling program
 - Developing a community brand
 - Enhancing financial reporting and transparency
 - Improving preparedness and response to snow and ice events
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Plenty to Boast About:

Before we proceed, let's pause and recap some of Lake Lure's many unique assets, but let's do so with these questions in mind:

P Of our various assets and characteristics, which of these can be best leveraged and promoted to benefit our community? What particular strengths do we have that give us a competitive advantage or distinction?

- **Standout beauty:** We have a stunning setting of mountain-lake scenery, conserved forests and charming rural character within easy driving distance of major urban cities.
- **Two Distinct, but Complementary Communities:** Along with Chimney Rock Village, we are adjacent communities that offer attractive and distinctly different visitor experiences in one place. Together we have a well-defined community brand, articulated in a deeply moving brand statement.
- **Well-known Tourism Destination:** We maintain a strong tourism economy that drives overnight stays and spending.
- **Great Visitor Attractions:** We have several noteworthy attractions including, Chimney Rock State Park, Lake Lure Beach & Tours, the Flowering Bridge, Morse Park, local restaurants and Rumbling Bald Resort.
- **High-quality Outdoor Recreational Assets:** These include hiking trails, rock climbing, road and mountain biking, lake and whitewater paddling fishing, waterskiing/ wakeboarding, zip lining and golf.
- **Plenty of Lodging Options:** Lake Lure offers a variety of lodging options and price points: inns, lodges, motels, B&B's, resorts, cabins and vacation rental homes.
- **A New School:** We have a growing K-12 charter school on a beautiful new campus.
- **Quality Medical Care:** Professional healthcare services are conveniently located next to a thriving grocery store.
- **Safe & Family-Friendly:** Our community has a very low crime rate and is a family-friendly community.
- **A Well Managed Lake:** We have a highly desirable, carefully managed lake that is safe and rarely crowded. It has excellent water quality and little variation in water level that allows for fixed docks and boathouses.
- **Strong Volunteer Spirit:** We are blessed with a high level of civic and community involvement. This supports many festivals, events and town administered boards.



- **Skilled Town Staff:** Our community has an experienced and committed local government staff that provides a level of service and quality not typically found in a community of this size.
- **Large Housing Inventory:** There is a wide variety of mountain and lake front options for buying or building a home.
- **Low Municipal Debt:** Debt payments represent just five percent of the overall budget. This is a conservative position that protects us from default, but also leaves room for additional debt to fund needed enhancements.
- **Plentiful Water Resources:** We are blessed with numerous productive wells and a massive storage reservoir in the lake. Should population growth and climate change make water scarce in our region, these assets will become even more valuable.
- **A Great Backdrop for Festivals:** We are well-suited to support a variety of festivals.
- **Ideally Located:** Easy access to/from nearby metropolitan areas including Charlotte, Greenville & Asheville.
- **Guiding Principles & Standards:** Documents like the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Regulations, Commercial Design Guidelines and Lake Structures Design Standards foster a protection of our natural resources, quality of life and property values.



The Other Side of Lake Lure's Strengths

As together we revisit the 20-year Comprehensive Plan and determine our future over the next five to eight years, we will be unable to make our best decisions unless we look at those things about our community that may be limiting our potential. Far from being discouraging, evaluating our challenges will help us focus on ways in which we can enhance all of our offerings.

Therefore, in the same way that we play to our strengths, we must continually evaluate our challenges.



What are the structural, political, social or financial factors that need to be addressed?

- Although Lake Lure and Chimney Rock Village are proximate, **we lack an appealing and accessible walking connection** between them.
- **Affordable housing is sparse.** Most service employees must commute to the area.
- There is **little in the way of senior care facilities** (progressive care, assisted living).
- Our **new school has no gymnasium/auditorium** and lacks the funding to build it.
- There is **no nearby indoor exercise facility** for the community as a whole.
- Envisioned in the 1920's, the **Town Center/Main Street Plan** never materialized, resulting in a lack of retail offerings to draw walking visitors to the area.
- **Much of the community is not served by the existing water or sewer infrastructure.** The number of homes receiving this service is insufficient to offset the cost of maintaining it. This may result in significant rate increases.
- Despite the community's beauty and the strong desire by residents and visitors to enjoy it, **our community is not fully bicycle or pedestrian friendly** for casual and family use.
- Relative to the level of assets and affluence among local property owners, our area has a **weak tradition of significant financial philanthropy** to support local causes and community-building projects.
- Many property owners have their primary residence located elsewhere. They have a genuine and vested interest in Lake Lure, but they do not vote here and they are **not fully engaged participants in community life or local elections.**
- Our community is **geographically dispersed and highly segmented** by full-time versus weekend and seasonal residents, lake front owners or resort associations. There are few events and venues that pull the entire community together on a regular basis.
- Effective, centralizing communication is a persistent challenge in a community that is so segmented socially and geographically. Local organizations struggle to reach the population with information as there is **no dominant communication outlet.**
- We remain a **highly seasonal economy** with heavy tourism in the summer and fall. There is more year-round activity than ever before, but the winter is still very low in visitation and spending, making it tough for many businesses.

OUR CHALLENGES AT A GLANCE:

- Lake Lure's tax base is **99 percent residential vs. one percent commercial.** Most communities depend on a larger portion of commercial businesses to pay comparatively higher taxes and to shift some of the burden away from residential taxes.
- Of the commercial properties we have in town, **a high percentage of them are vacant**, at least 15 buildings as of June 2015.
- Without a diversity in age, race and economic status, the **median age in Lake Lure has steadily risen.**
- Our community **lacks an event space** for any type of gathering or function for more than 300 people.
- The **sewer treatment plant is old**, out of compliance, under-sized and has limited room to expand.
- One of the most visible and visited amenities in town is the **boardwalk** connecting the marina and the beach. It has reached the end of its life and **needs replacement.**

A World of Opportunity Awaits

If you have lived or visited here for any length of time, it isn't long before you hear someone speaking of Lake Lure's unrealized potential. Despite differences about exactly what that means to each of us and how we might capitalize on that potential, few would disagree that many opportunities exist to cultivate our under-developed assets.

P What are the societal and business trends that we could be well positioned to exploit? And what are some of our under-developed assets?

- **Retail & Residential:** Build out the Town Center as per concept plans to attract visitors, commerce, residents and entrepreneurs. Recruit new retail businesses in segments identified in the 2012 Market Study. Create more in-town residential areas and mixed-use facilities.
- **Land & Buildings:** Repurpose the under-utilized 9-hole golf course to enhance the local economy and quality of life. Repurpose other prime pieces of property, such as the ABC Store and its adjacent lakefront property to enhance its tourism value.
- **Infrastructure:** Decommission Lake Lure's sewer treatment plant and build a pipeline interconnect (Green Line) to Rutherfordton/Spindale.
- **Employment:** Promote the area as an appealing destination for home-based workers, including teleworkers, consultants and Internet-based businesses.
- **Weddings:** Expand the destination wedding business in Lake Lure.
- **Athletics:** Attract or develop regional athletic training and tournament facilities such as – triathlon, rowing, soccer, wrestling and cross-country – to increase recreation-based tourism.
- **Adventure Recreation:** Develop and promote more adventure recreation facilities and businesses, such as trail or guide services and outfitters. Complete the Summits Trail circumnavigating the lake to provide a 30+ mile hiking destination that can be promoted as a regional attraction featuring sectional day hikes or multi-day through-hikes.
- **Education & Lifelong Learning:** Establish Lake Lure and the Hickory Nut Gorge as a nationally-known center of education and self-development through the expansion of schools, camps, resorts, retreats, conference facilities and cultural programming.
- **Food & Farming:** Leverage the growing appreciation for local food and agriculture and the nearby farmlands in Rutherford and Polk counties: supporting farming as a local business, farmer's markets, farm-to-table dining, viniculture and farm-based tourism.
- **Equestrian Impact:** Leverage the growth and expansion of the Tryon International Equestrian Center to maximize the benefit to Lake Lure's residents and visitors.
- **Population Growth:** Take advantage of the significant population growth projected for North Carolina over the next 20 years. Growth trends: retirees moving to the state and people moving to nearby urban areas.
- **Water:** In the event that water becomes scarce in our region, Lake Lure is in a position to be a water provider.
- **Occupancy Taxes:** Utilize room occupancy taxes collected locally to fund enhancement and promotion of the visitor experience, thus allowing our community to take advantage of some of the opportunities listed above.



The Consequences of Doing Nothing

In a 2012 Market Assessment & Branding Initiative, our community was told in very clear language that Lake Lure would continue to change regardless of how we individually felt about it. On some level, we know this. We know change is inevitable. And yet, when we think back to the strengths outlined at the beginning of this report – the wonderful assets that we’re all so proud of – we see that much of it is a result of actually embracing smart change and exploring new ideas.

Within this examination of our present conditions and future possibilities, it is impossible to come away with a fully informed picture of how we should proceed unless we also take stock of those things that could diminish our strengths or leave us at great risk.

P What factors or trends could diminish Lake Lure’s ability to grow and meet our goals? What existing challenges or risks could worsen in the next five to eight years?

- **Pervasive silt shrinks the lake:** Lake Lure is continually at risk of filling in from silt delivered through the Rocky Broad River and over forty other tributaries. If we do not commit to fund and maintain a consistent dredging program sufficient to stay ahead of regular siltation and extraordinary floods, we will see diminished capacity in the lake and a negative impact on the economy, visitation and property values.
- **Traffic jams:** Growth in tourism and visitation could exceed the carrying capacity of Memorial Highway, resulting in gridlock, lengthy traffic jams, and unsatisfying experiences that visitors equate with our communities. Visitor growth will be fueled by a strong economy, promotional efforts by the Park/Town/Chamber/TDA/Hotels and the success of the nearby Equestrian Center.
- **School enrollment:** We have a healthy and vibrant new school campus. However, enrollment could plateau or shrink without growth in the resident population, threatening the financial viability of the school. Lake Lure Classical Academy needs to maintain an enrollment of between 500-600 students to remain viable.
- **Compliance issues at the sewer treatment plant:** Continually facing compliance issues can restrict the growth of residences and businesses.
- **Failure to protect the natural environment:** To overlook the role we all play as stewards of our forests and parks that surround us will diminish the scenic beauty and attraction of our area, impacting the economy and property values.
- **Motorcycle muffler noise:** Excessive noise can become enough of a problem that it affects our community brand and impacts tourism, particularly weddings.
- **Loss of experienced staff:** The town staff is lean and highly efficient due to the depth of experience among a long-tenured staff. As people retire or leave, we need to ensure that we don’t lose knowledge and effectiveness. We need succession plans for each position.
- **Lack of diversity:** Since its long history as a retirement destination, the median age in Lake Lure risen steadily over the years. However, without greater diversity in age, additional families and more jobs, it will be increasingly difficult in the future to provide needed services and desired amenities to other demographic segments. As such, we will be unable to compete effectively for new visitors and residents.

OUR CHALLENGES AT A GLANCE:

- The town maintains a dam and hydro plant that is nearly 100 years old
- The town maintains 30 miles of roads in steep terrain, 30 miles of water lines & 15 miles of sewer lines
- For some time, we have been minimally funding only the most critical capital improvements. Over time, the costs of repair, refurbishment or replacement could overwhelm our current tax rates, utility fees and capital reserves, bringing severe financial challenges.
- We can realistically expect three to five percent annual growth in residential tax rates unless we can grow tax revenues by expanding the tax base via:
 - Home construction and improvement
 - New businesses and productive use of vacant commercial property
 - Increasing the population
- While short-term rentals are a viable investment and provide a great way for visitors to enjoy the area, a disproportionate number of short-term rentals could diminish the sense of community and thus Lake Lure could become an area dominated by off-site investors rather than residents. This can make it difficult to find volunteers for local boards and fire departments and impact school enrollment. Currently around 10 percent of our housing stock is dedicated to short-term rentals.

Conclusion

The preceding report has provided a broad overview of current conditions – our amazing and unique attributes, as well as our challenges and opportunities. Rather than being seen as a daunting array of obstacles, it should be viewed as an important crossroads where many positive opportunities stretch out before us.

These challenges and opportunities cannot all be addressed in any immediate sense.

Whether it's a long-term commitment to dredging our lake or identifying a specific strategy for decommissioning our aging sewer plant, some of these challenges represent big projects with a big price tag and a growing demand for an implementable action plan.

It is impossible for any of us to be fully prepared to meet all of the things that may threaten our community's well-being and sustainability. But having the courage and the willingness to discuss Lake Lure's challenges is something we must do together.

In 2015, Lake Lure is positioned as strongly as we have been for decades. Since the original development in 1927, conditions have never been better to achieve the vision of a year-round resort and residential community with thriving commercial areas and a vibrant Main Street. To achieve the vision, it requires collaboration, smart investment of resources, aspiration and community spirit.

What's Next?

Your elected officials need to hear from you soon.

- Please thoughtfully respond to a three question survey by Oct. 12th

[Take the survey now](#)

- Attend the Oct. 19th visioning workshop at Lake Lure Town Hall from 1 to 4:30 pm



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