



Stakeholder Interviews SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Sixteen stakeholders, identified in Table 1, participated in interviews with the consultant team between October and December 2021. Input gathered via the interviews contributes to the Comprehensive Plan update in the following ways:

- Informs the existing conditions and trends assessment,
- Shapes preliminary identification of community needs, opportunities, and potential action items,
- Uncovers topics to bring forth to the public for feedback, and
- Helps identify community priorities for the comprehensive plan update.

Table 1. Interviewees (in alphabetical order by first name)

	Name	Role	Organization
1	Alfred John	District 2 BOC Member	Forsyth County BOC
2	Alisa Tanner Wall	Citizen Stakeholder	Forsyth County business owner
3	Biju Eappen	Citizen Stakeholder	Forsyth County resident
4	Brandon Kenney	Assistant County Manager	Forsyth County Government
5	Cindy Jones Mills	District 4 BOC Member	Forsyth County BOC
6	Craig Holmes	Citizen Stakeholder	Forsyth County resident
7	James McCoy	President/CEO	Forsyth County Chamber of Commerce
8	Jennifer Losurdo	Citizen Stakeholder	Forsyth County resident
9	Kevin Tanner	County Manager	Forsyth County Government
10	Laura Semanson	District 5 BOC Member	Forsyth County BOC
11	Margie Carroll	Citizen Stakeholder	Forsyth County resident
12	Multiple Participants	Student Government Academy*	Forsyth County Government
13	Roy Rickert	Public Transportation Director	Forsyth County Government
14	Tim Allen	Assistant Director of Engineering	Forsyth County Government
15	Todd Levent	District 3 BOC Member	Forsyth County BOC
16	Vivian Vakili	Forsyth County Economic Development Director	Forsyth County Government

*Input from the Student Government Academy interview is not included in this summary as interview occurred on 01/13/22.

Two interviewers and one note taker from the project team facilitated each interview. Interviewees received questions unique to their role in the community prior to the interview. During each interview, the County's Community Character Map and a Google map of Forsyth County were on hand to facilitate discussion and assist in clarifying location-specific comments as needed.

COMMON THEMES & FINDINGS

Stakeholders generally feel the current Foster Forsyth 2017-2037 Comprehensive Plan has performed well in guiding the County's future growth and development decisions; however, due to changes both locally and nationally over the past five years, interviewees felt there are some updates and refinements that are needed.

- The Comprehensive plan needs to incorporate more flexibility to help encourage desired growth. Are the restrictions enhancing and helping meet the intent?
- Alignment of future development and growth plans with the County's transportation infrastructure is a priority to accommodate continued growth.
- Commercial corridors and mixed residential development options need to be addressed.
- A few interviewees noted that political views and issues can sometimes interfere with executing the plan as laid out.
- In this update, we need to have more young voices involved.
- Transparency and clear communications are key to community understanding and support.

Stakeholders were asked how they felt the County is doing at achieving and working towards the vision statement *"Forsyth County will promote responsible use of our natural assets and green space while advancing a balanced growth management strategy that strengthens and sustains quality of life for everyone."* The response fell into one of three categories:

- A majority of interviewees felt that the County is doing an excellent job or is on track working towards this vision.
- A couple of interviewees noted that the County is promoting the responsible use of our natural assets and green space; however, it is not advancing a balance growth management strategy.
- The four recently adopted ordinance changes pertaining to trees preservation, conservation subdivisions, mass grading, and low impact stormwater incentives, were given as evidence that the County was working towards a responsible use of natural resources and green space; however, one interviewee mentioned that these ordinances were adopted too late and important resources in Forsyth County have already been lost.
- Two interviewees mentioned that the County needs to do a better job balancing the county's growth particularly the need to attract corporate and high-tech business to the county to help balance the tax base. The City of Milton was mentioned as an example of the type of corporate business and development wanted for Forsyth County. The need for apartments and condominiums to support this type of corporate development was also mentioned.

Top opportunities related to future growth and development

- The development and growth of commercial corridors.
- Carve out land for industrial and office space.
- Develop strategies to balance the transition from residential to commercial areas. (Transitional corridors include SR 141, SR 20, SR 369, and SR 306).
- Mixed-used development should be planned with a sense of scale and appropriateness to the surrounding area. Several interviewees feel mixed-use development plays a key role in the community's livability and quality of life now and in the future.
- Balance the tax base with commercial, high-tech, and corporate businesses.
- Leverage future mixed. Use live/work/play developments to further connectivity and accommodate a diversifying community with a range of needs.

- How can parks and trails be integrated into these developments?
- How are we connecting people to amenities?
- Lake Lanier is under-utilized as an asset. Is there potential for commercial development?
- The County has planned for several transportation improvement projects to accommodate future development in alignment with the Comprehensive Plan. Project implementation takes time.
- County placemaking and branding is a priority for some interviewees.
- Further connectivity via sidewalks, bike lanes, and common gathering spaces

Top concerns related to future growth and development

- Keeping the suburban community feel, particularly when it comes to redevelopment, commercial development, and mixed-use development. (Example of job done well is the City of Milton.)
- Traffic and congestion are the number one concern as growth continues.
- Mobility of workers from Hall to Forsyth and Cherokee to Forsyth is very limited right now.
- Some developers find the County's land development policies confusing or difficult to work within.

Suggested development node adjustments

- Revisit Freedom Parkway (Between the *Lake Lanier/Mary Alice Park Community Node* and the *Hammond's Crossing Regional Node*) with the new government facility being developed. The *Hammond's Crossing Node* could be stretched down to include new development. [Note: This node was amended to incorporate the new county campus, which was adopted on 12.06.2021.]
- The *Highway 20 Community Node* and the *Highway 20 Neighborhood Node* have had rezonings inconsistent with the future land use plan.
- In the *Chestatee Neighborhood Node* there is no sewer, resulting in no development at all.
- The *Silver City Neighborhood Node* has no development happening, it is a tiny little area right now.
- The *South GA 400/Hwy 141 Regional Node* and *Peachtree Parkway Community Node* need uniquely carved out areas for commercial and light industrial. If these spaces are not specifically identified, then it is hard to attract these types of development.

Short term (next 5 years) planning actions to facilitate high-quality of life in the long-term

- Standardize quality development by utilizing the Unified Development Code and other pertinent ordinances.
- Keep a forward vision as it pertains to transportation routes. Plan for roadway improvements that are needed to accommodate project growth.
- Utilize suburban designs not urban designs that will work with our community.
- Encourage environmentally sound development practices (e.g., require more pervious surfaces as a part of development).
- Purchase more space for parks as development grows.
- Stay ahead of growth by improving the County's transportation infrastructure and plan for future transportation opportunities and transportation alternatives (e.g., autonomous vehicles and micro transit).
- Preserve space for high-tech and corporate business and utilize different strategies to attract top talent to the County.
- Make Forsyth a more connected community using greenways, bicycles paths and sidewalks.

Top growth and development-related priorities

- Transportation needs to be forward thinking to stay ahead of growth and improve infrastructure.
- Attracting high-tech and corporate business by making identified areas attractive to those businesses (e.g., infrastructure already in place).
- Balance the tax base to continue to provide a high level of service while shifting some of the tax burden to commercial taxpayers.
- In the long-term, maintaining quality schools, expanding parks and greenspace, and addressing transportation congestion and traffic are key elements to the County's attractiveness.

Affordable housing was one topic that lacked consensus across the interview conversations. There were opposing views about whether the County should be concerned with the potential lack of affordable housing now and in the future for people with different income levels, including people that work in Forsyth County. Interviewees provided a couple of suggestions to accommodate economic development goals related to workforce housing:

- Develop multi-modal transportation solutions to help bring workers into Forsyth.
- Facilitate mixed-residential development and mixed-use development that can offer diverse types of housing and at a greater variety of price points.