

**Minutes of the February 10, 2020
Special Meeting of the Yancey County Board of Commissioners
Held at 10:00 am at the Burnsville Town Center -
Burnsville, North Carolina**

Present at the meeting held February 10, 2020 were Chairman Jeff Whitson, Commissioner Jill Austin, Commissioner David Grindstaff, Commissioner Mark Ledford, Commissioner Johnny Riddle, County Manager Lynn Austin, Planning and Economic Development Director Jamie McMahan, County Attorney Donny Laws, Clerk to the Board Sonya Morgan, members of the Chamber of Commerce, members of the media and members of the general public.

Present and representing the Burnsville Town Council at the joint meeting were Mayor Theresa Coletta, Bunnie McIntosh, Judy Buchanan, Denise Collier, and Town Administrator Heather Hockaday.

Present and representing the Yancey County Economic Development Commission at the joint meeting were Jamie McMahan, Jill Austin, and Judy Buchanan.

Call to Order

Chairman Whitson called the meeting to order for the Yancey County Board of Commissioners.

Approval of the Agenda

Chairman Whitson asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Ledford made a motion to approve the agenda, which was seconded by Commissioner Grindstaff. By unanimous vote, the motion was carried. (Attachment A)

Strategic Economic Development Plan 2019

Phillip Trew, Director of Planning and Development, and Corey Osborne, Regional Planner, both with High County Council of Governments (HCCOG) facilitated the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to consider for adoption the ***Yancey County Strategic Economic Development Plan 2019***. (Attachment B) Mr. Osborne presented an overview of the process, provided a summary of the contents, and facilitated a discussion regarding the ***Plan***. Mr. Osborne also presented corresponding GOALS for the ***Plan***. (Attachment C) Mr. Osborne indicated that the Plan horizon extends out 10 – 15 years, has 15 goals, and 107 recommendations. Attendees were given the opportunity to review and discuss ***Plan*** elements. Minor corrections were noted which included:

- Removal of “None currently offer RV hookups, however.” on pg. 9;
- Correct Black Mountain Campground to read 30 RV sites and 10 primitive with bathrooms/showers on page 10;
- Add Brown Bottom Group Campground on page 10; and,
- Correct South Tow River Park Campground to read 75 sites on page 10.

Hearing no other discussion, Commissioner Riddle made a motion to adopt the ***Yancey County Strategic Economic Development Plan 2019*** with the corrections duly noted. Commissioner Grindstaff seconded the motion. By unanimous vote, the motion carried.

Mr. Trew and Mr. Osborne indicated that the groups present would meet annually to review implementation and re-prioritize as necessary. Mr. Trew facilitated the prioritization process. Attendees were asked to prioritize the 80 recommendations, condensed from the 88 long term recommendations listed in the ***Plan***, for the next year by marking them. After the recommendations were marked, the data was assimilated. Mr. Trew presented the list of prioritized recommendations to the group for consideration. A discussion ensued. County Manager Austin and Planning and Economic Director Jamie McMahan suggested that the top eight recommendations be considered for implementation for the next year. It was the general consensus of the

group that the top eight would give guidance for Yancey County, the Town of Burnsville, and the Economic Development Commission. Those recommendations were as follows:

1. Increase the County's occupancy tax rate from 3% to 6%.
2. Follow the recommendations of Burnsville's Water and Sewer Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).
3. Expand water and sewer service in western Yancey as development warrants.
4. Organize an annual summit between non-profit leaders, County Commissioners, Town Council Members, and local representatives in the General Assembly.
5. Develop a master plan for a new greenway.
6. Develop a streetscape plan for downtown Burnsville. Increase street lighting.
7. Construct a permanent farmers market.
8. Adopt and enforce ordinances to address overgrown lots, abandoned vehicles, and dilapidated structures in Burnsville.

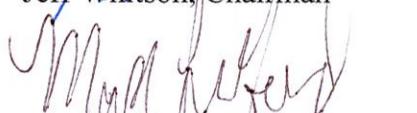
Adjournment

Having no further business, Commissioner Riddle made a motion to adjourn, with Commissioner Grindstaff seconding the motion. The Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to adjourn.

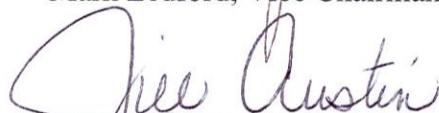
Approved and authenticated this the 9th day of March 2020.



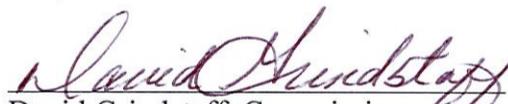
Jeff Whitson, Chairman



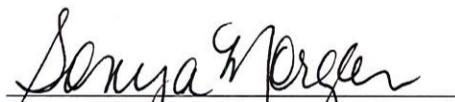
Mark Ledford, Vice Chairman



Jill Austin, Commissioner



David Grindstaff, Commissioner



Sonya Morgan, Clerk to the Board



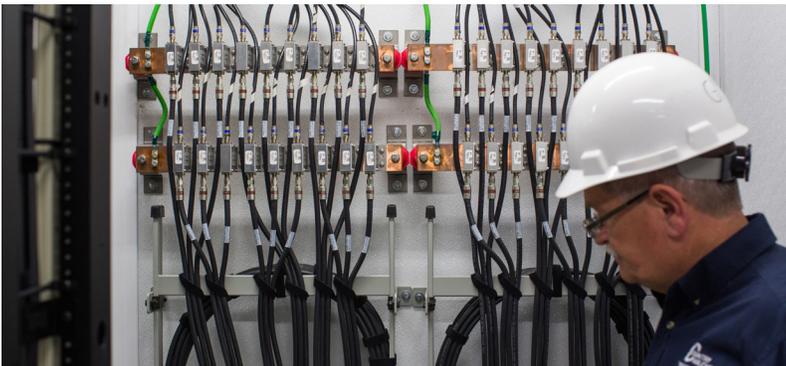
Johnny Riddle, Commissioner



Attachment A

**AGENDA
YANCEY COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 10, 2020
10:00 AM**

- I. Call to Order**
- II. Approval of the Agenda**
- III. Joint Meeting with Yancey EDC and Burnsville Town Council – Joint Economic Development Priorities and Ten Year Plan**
- IV. Adjourn**



Yancey County, NC STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2019



Acknowledgements

Yancey County Commission

Jeff Whitson, Chair
Mark Ledford, Vice Chair
Jill Austin
David Grindstaff
Johnny Riddle

Yancey County Economic Development Commission

John Ray, Chair
Warren Bare, Vice Chair
Schell McCall, Secretary
Erica Deaton, Treasurer
Jill Austin
Judy Buchanan
Kevin McCraw
Cynthia Deyton

Community Stakeholders

Chee Ammen
Jake Blood
John Boyd
Whitney Brasington
Monica Carpenter
Denise Collier
Allen Cook
Shane Dale
Ashley Fox
Chris Grasinger
John Greene
Bill Jones
Cherie Lee
Dennis Matelski
Marc Poland
Jerry Roberts
Van Roldan
Dean Russell
Becca Smith
Stephen Sparks
Eron Thiele
Donald Webb
Pam Wilson

Burnsville Town Council

Theresa Coletta, Mayor
Judy Buchanan
Russell Fox
Bunnie McIntosh
Shannon Peterson

Plan Steering Committee

Jim Ashton
Jill Austin
Lynn Austin
Warren Bare
Wesley Barker
Judy Buchanan
Mayor Theresa Coletta
Erica Deaton
Cynthia Deyton
John English
Russell Fox
Ginger Johnson
Tres Magner
Schell McCall
Kevin McCraw
Jamie McMahan
Jon Ray
Johnny Riddle
Ronnie Tipton
Jeff Whitson

*Prepared by High Country
Council of Governments
October 2019*



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Introduction

This plan builds on several previous efforts in Yancey County, which include the 21st Century Communities Plan (2002), Sanford Holshouser Strategic Economic Development Action Plan (2005), Certified Entrepreneurial Communities Initiative (2011), Burnsville Small Town Economic Prosperity Plan (2011), Economic Development Strategy for the IT Sector (2017), Magellan Hotel Market Analysis (2017), and a series of annual retreats held by the Yancey County Economic Development Commission (EDC). Many of the recommendations from those previous documents have already been completed. Those that have not are included in this plan where appropriate.

Successful economic development does not occur in a vacuum. It requires a network of partners coordinating across diverse programs, organizations, and backgrounds to advance a set of shared goals using limited resources. Together they must identify unique assets for the community to leverage, recognize liabilities to overcome, and set goals to strive toward. They must agree not only on the direction their community needs to go, but also how to best get there. This begins with a shared assessment of current conditions and agreement on how the community arrived at its current state. The plan development process facilitates these

conversations and brings together the right stakeholders to establish and advance a shared economic agenda.

This document is the result of that process. It captures the concerns, ideas, and priorities expressed by a wide range of community leaders and refines them into a set of goals and recommendations to guide decision-making over the next several years. Each subsection of the plan begins with an overview of existing conditions, which lends context to a series of goals and recommendations. It is up to Town and County leaders to work in partnership to bring those recommendations to fruition.

Though the plan is split into subsections for the purpose of formatting, it is important to recognize that economic development does not occur in silos. Many recommendations will have universal benefits to the community. Each completed recommendation will advance its respective goal(s) and increase Yancey County's economic prosperity and resilience. The ultimate value of this plan will be determined by how proactively it is implemented. It is now the task of Town, County, and community leaders to collaboratively act on the insights gained from the planning process, retain the momentum built by it, and regularly reassess their progress.

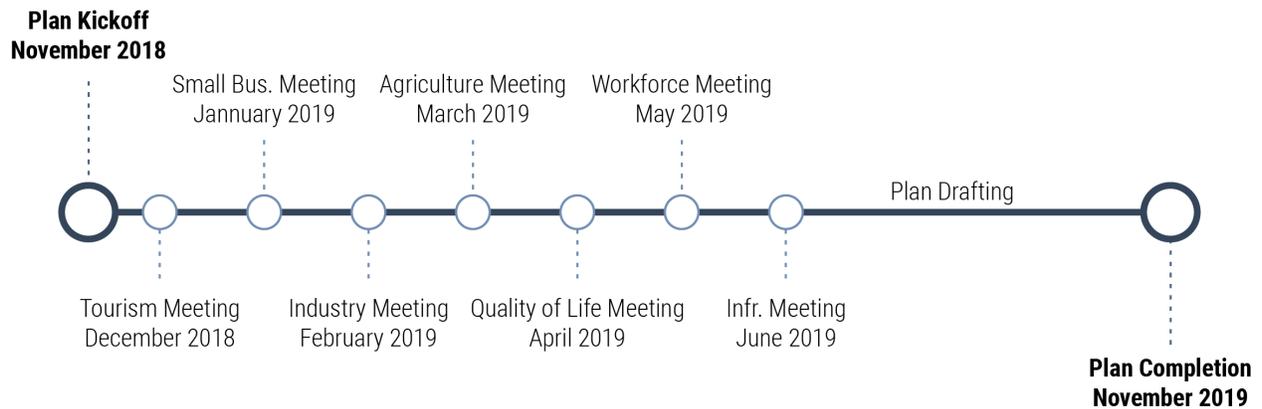


Photo Credit: Joye Ardyn Durham

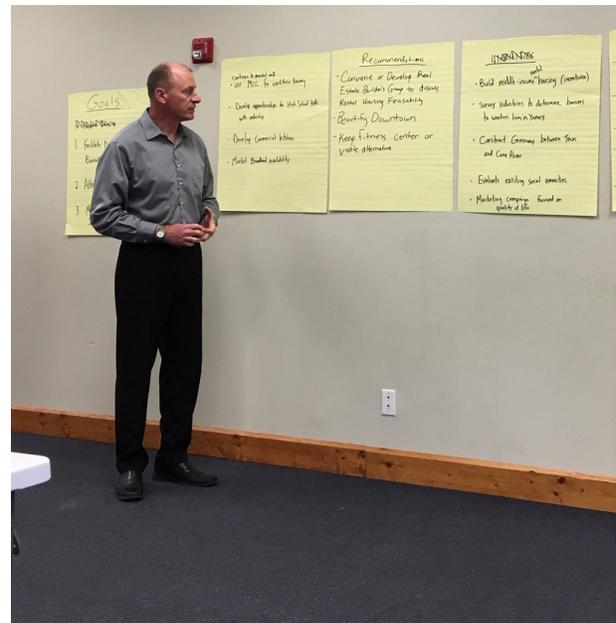
Planning Process

The planning process began in October 2018 with preliminary framework discussions. Staff decided to break the plan into seven sub-topic areas to adequately cover the diverse factors that influence economic development in Yancey County. These included tourism, small business, industry, agriculture, quality of life, workforce, and infrastructure. A steering committee was created to direct planning efforts and inform outcomes. Its membership included representatives from backgrounds such as agriculture, small business, government, education, healthcare, non-profits, and public works.

The steering committee held a meeting each month from November 2018 to June 2019 to discuss plan sub-topics in greater detail. Stakeholders from the community with expertise in each subtopic were invited to participate. Each meeting included an overview of relevant data, exercises to identify assets and liabilities related to the sub-topic, formulation of goals, and creation of recommendations to achieve desired outcomes. Staff from High Country Council of Governments gathered the feedback from the meetings and paired it with analysis of existing conditions and best practices to draft the plan.



Steering Committee members prioritize recommendations during the industry meeting



Staff from High Country Council of Governments facilitates one of the sub-topic meetings



TOURISM



Tourism

Tourism is an increasingly important sector of Yancey County's economy. Visitor spending creates jobs, generates local tax revenue, and provides business opportunities for residents. Thanks to an abundance of natural and cultural assets, recent tourism growth is poised to accelerate. This section will dive into the state and local statistics surrounding the tourism industry, examine areas of focus, explore case studies from other communities, identify assets and liabilities, set goals for the next 5-10 years, and suggest a series of targeted recommendations designed to best leverage the County's resources.

North Carolina

State-level data provides insights into visitor habits and demographics that are useful for the purposes of this plan. The North Carolina Economic Development Partnership (NCEDP) is responsible for statewide tourism marketing through the "Visit NC" program. In addition to compiling data sets related to the economic impact of tourism, the program surveys visitors to identify preferences and patterns. Each year, they compile this information into a publication called the *North Carolina Visitor Profile*.

Key findings from the 2017 *Visitor Profile*:

- most overnight trips are for leisure
- the average travel party size is just over 2 people

- 25% of travel parties include children
- the average trip expenditure for overnight visitors is more than \$500 higher than for daytrip visitors
- most overnight visitors prefer to lodge in a hotel or motel, despite the rise of alternatives such as airbnb and vrbo
- most tourists (over 64%) either rely on their own experience or recommendations from friends/relatives rather than marketing materials as their primary source of information for trip planning. Local websites and printed material only accounted for 13.6% combined.

These findings hold two primary insights for Yancey County. First, the County's efforts to recruit a hotel to downtown Burnsville in recent years are reinforced by the numbers. Most overnight travelers prefer to stay in a hotel, and overnight visitors spend nearly three times more per trip than daytrip visitors. Also, overnight trips are evenly distributed across seasons. Without a hotel, the community is failing to capture these high-value tourism opportunities. Second, improved marketing efforts and collateral will only achieve so much on their own. To see consistent growth in tourism and the local economy, the community must also focus on ensuring visitor satisfaction, providing memorable activities and locations, and fostering a culture of excellent customer service. A great advertising strategy must be paired with a great product to be successful.

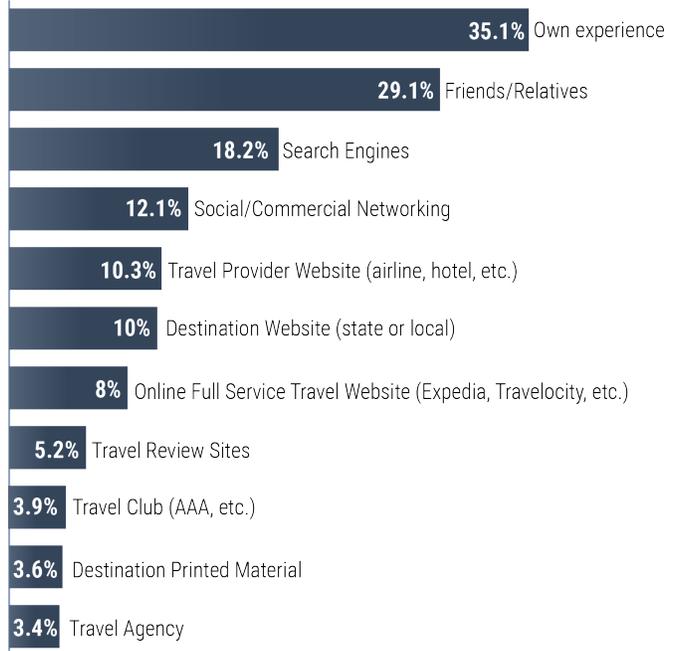


Yancey County

The impact of visitor spending on Yancey County has grown over the past decade as illustrated by the charts and table on the following page. Conversion of US Hwy 19-E into a 4-lane divided highway that connects the County to Interstate 26 will only accelerate this pattern. In addition to temporary visitors, Yancey has a large percentage of second home owners. 58% of vacant housing units in the County are for seasonal, recreational or occasional use (*American Community Survey, 2017*). This is 15% higher than the statewide average. Many of these owners list their homes on airbnb or a similar service. There were 85 active listings in the County in 2017, with average daily rates ranging from \$80 to \$209 (*Magellan Hotel Study, 2017*).

Top Sources of Information for Trip Planning

Source: 2017 NC Visitor Profile Information (Visit NC)



Tourism in North Carolina

Source: 2017 NC Visitor Profile Information (Visit NC)



89.9%
of overnight trips
are for leisure



7.7%
of overnight trips
are for business



\$738 → average trip expenditure
for overnight visitors
\$215 → average trip expenditure
for daytrip visitors



2.1
average travel
party size



46%
of overnight
visitors lodged
in a hotel/motel



36%
of overnight
visitors lodged
in private home



3%
of overnight visitors
lodged in an airbnb
or similar rental



25%
of travel parties
include children

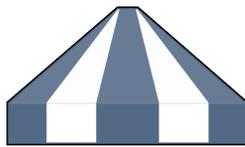
Impact of Visitor Spending in Yancey County, 2017



260
of jobs created
by visitor spending



\$246.49
tax savings per resident
due to visitor spending



Festivals and events in
Mitchell & Yancey counties
collectively attract

198,400
guests annually

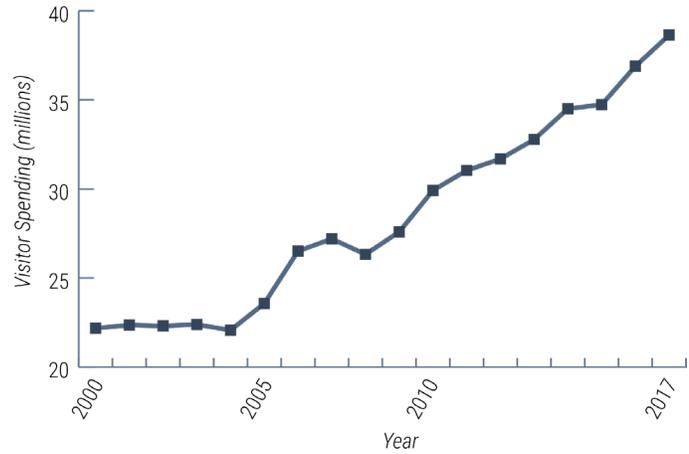
Source: Magellan Hotel Study, 2017

Yancey County Impact of Direct Visitor Spending, 2000-2017

Year	Expenditures (\$ millions)	Employment	State Tax Receipts (\$ millions)	Local Tax Receipts (\$ millions)
2000	\$22.18	260	\$1.08	\$1.70
2001	\$22.36	270	\$1.10	\$1.72
2002	\$22.31	260	\$1.08	\$1.71
2003	\$22.39	250	\$1.08	\$1.72
2004	\$22.07	230	\$1.06	\$1.69
2005	\$23.57	230	\$1.11	\$1.78
2006	\$26.51	250	\$1.22	\$1.99
2007	\$27.2	240	\$1.20	\$2.03
2008	\$26.33	230	\$1.18	\$1.98
2009	\$27.59	230	\$1.33	\$2.10
2010	\$29.92	230	\$1.49	\$2.24
2011	\$31.04	230	\$1.45	\$2.23
2012	\$31.69	230	\$1.39	\$2.20
2013	\$32.78	230	\$1.44	\$2.27
2014	\$34.51	240	\$1.50	\$2.39
2015	\$34.73	240	\$1.56	\$2.43
2016	\$36.89	250	\$1.67	\$2.59
2017	\$38.64	260	\$1.74	\$2.75

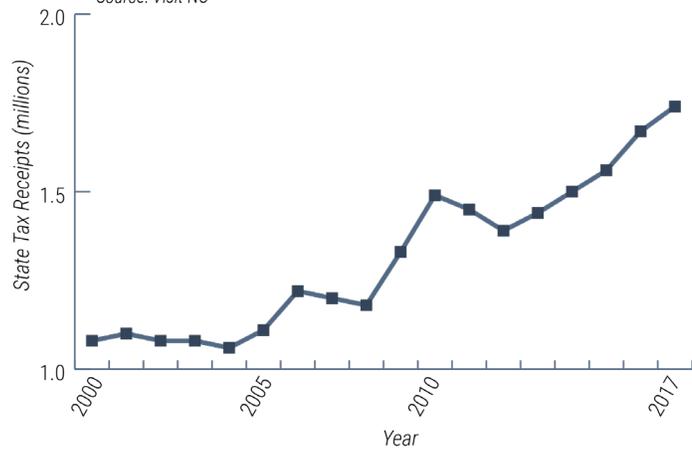
Direct Visitor Spending in Yancey County, 2000-2017

Source: Visit NC



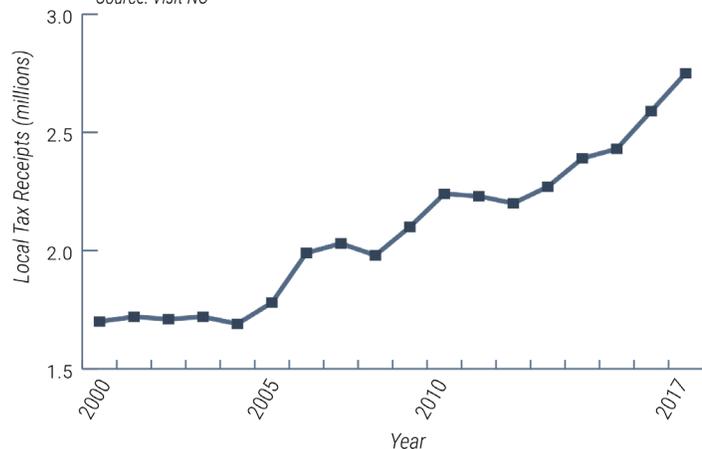
State Tax Receipts as a Result of Direct Visitor Spending in Yancey County, 2000-2017

Source: Visit NC



Local Tax Receipts as a Result of Direct Visitor Spending in Yancey County, 2000-2017

Source: Visit NC



Occupancy Tax

The North Carolina General Assembly permits local governments to collect an “occupancy tax” of up to 6% on overnight accommodations within their jurisdiction. At least two-thirds of generated revenue from this tax must be used to promote travel and tourism and the remainder must be used for tourism-related expenditures (expenditures designed to increase the use of lodging facilities, meeting facilities, and convention facilities, including capital expenditures). Collection can only occur following passage of a local act by the Assembly, which dictates the percentage to be levied, uses of the revenue, and the entity responsible for administering the funds. Yancey County has levied a 3% occupancy tax since 1987 (*SL 1987-140*). Proceeds are governed by the Yancey County Chamber of Commerce Tourism and Travel Development Committee and must be used for:

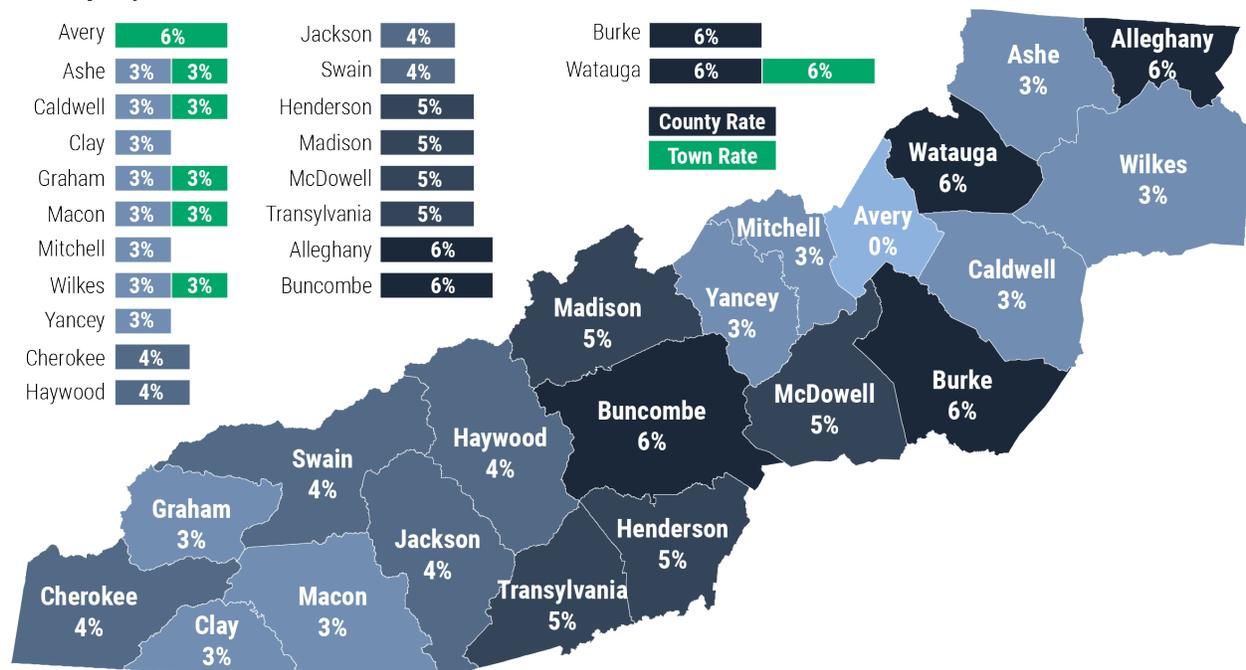
- Direct advertising for visitor promotions, conventions, travel, and tourism, including outdoor advertising, print media, broadcast media and brochures
- Marketing and promotions expenses, including test market programs, consultant fees, entertainment, housing expenses, travel expenses, and registration
- Other expenses that aid and encourage visitor promotions, conventions, travel, and tourism

Yancey County Occupancy Tax Collection

Source: Yancey County Tax Office



Occupancy Tax Rates in Western NC, 2017



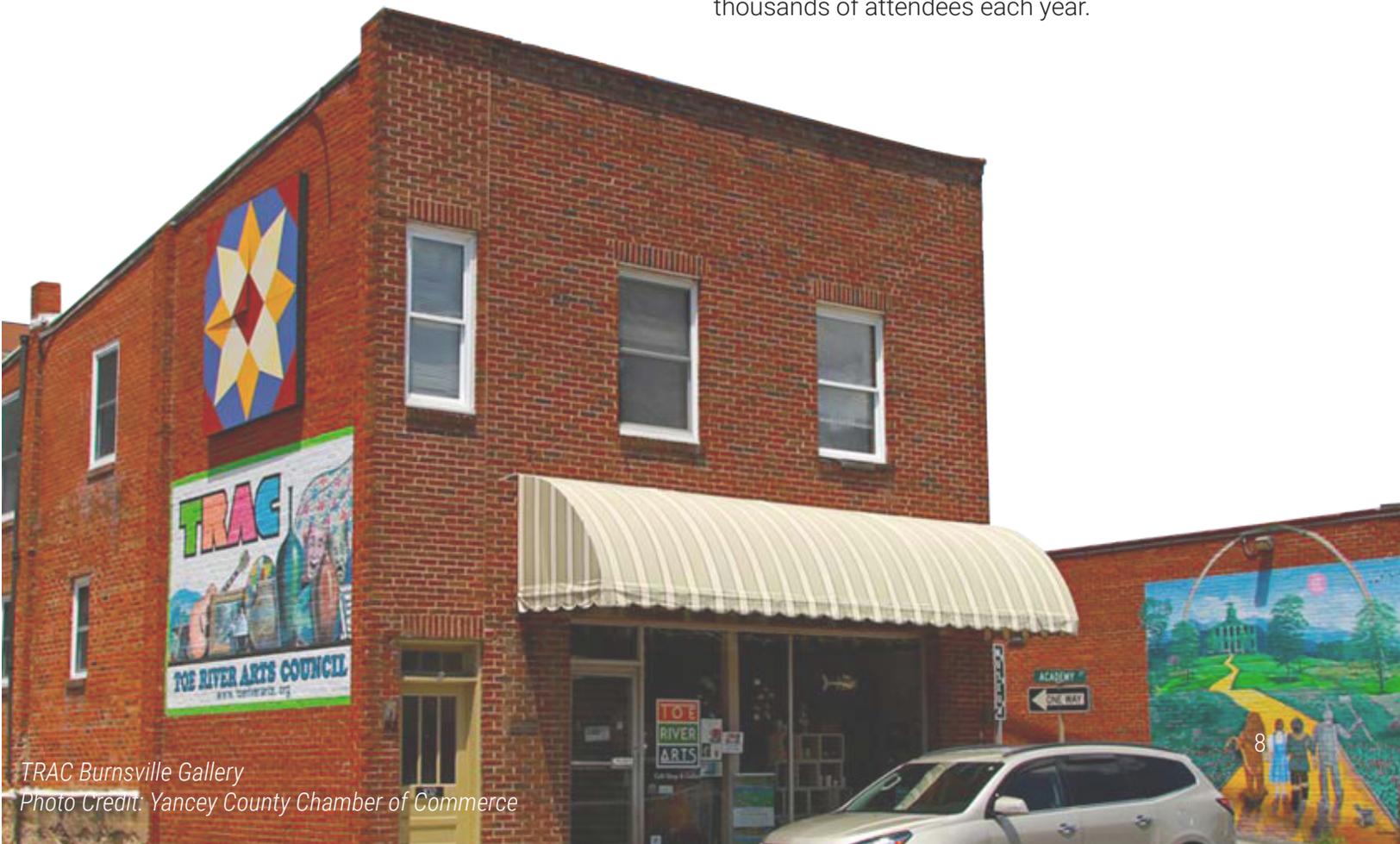
Arts

Yancey County has a world-class arts community that attracts thousands of visitors each year. Toe River Arts Council (TRAC) has promoted arts and individual artists within the region for the past 43 years. Their organization operates galleries in Burnsville, Bakersville, Micaville, Spruce Pine, Celo, and Penland. Collectively, these attract approximately 20,000 visits per year (*Magellan Hotel Study*). TRAC also coordinates tours of individual artist studios in the region. There are currently 112 participating artists spread across Mitchell and Yancey Counties. These tours attract approximately 3,000 visits per year (*Magellan Hotel Study*).

The Penland School of Crafts, located in neighboring Mitchell County, is an international center for craft education. They offer workshops, artists' residencies, local programs, and a gallery. It is estimated that the school attracts 1,500 resident students per year at their campus and 6,000 visitors per year at their information center and gallery.

Parkway Playhouse, located near downtown Burnsville, attracts an estimated 6,000 visitors per year (*Magellan Hotel Study*). The venue is home to an annual series of shows featuring singing, dancing, storytelling, and more. The Playhouse is heavily engaged with the community and hosts a number of initiatives that expose students to the performing arts, including junior conservatory classes, a high school apprentice program, and college intern program.

Burnsville places an emphasis on public art. In addition to murals in downtown, the community is also working on a project to install large telescope-like structures made of glass and steel to mark the entrances into downtown from US Highway 19-E. The project, which began in 2016, merges the Town's designation as a Dark Sky Community with the region's international reputation for glassworking. Each August, downtown Burnsville hosts the Mt. Mitchell Crafts Fair. The two-day event draws artists, craftspeople, musicians, and food vendors to Town Square. It is extremely popular, drawing thousands of attendees each year.



Outdoor Recreation

Yancey County enjoys abundant outdoor recreational opportunities. Much of the land area of the County falls within a national forest. Cherokee National Forest partially covers the northern end of the County, with the Appalachian Trail winding along the North Carolina and Tennessee state line in this area. The Pisgah National Forest covers a significant portion of the southern end of the County, and is home to Mt. Mitchell, the highest peak in the eastern United States. Yancey contains four rivers: the Cane, Nolichucky, North Toe, and South Toe. Collectively, they offer recreational opportunities ranging from fly fishing to rafting and kayaking. The County is a designated Dark Sky Community and is home to Bare Dark Sky Observatory, which is operated by Mayland Community College.

Mt. Mitchell State Park sits at 6,684 feet above sea level. The park attracted over 375,000 visitors in 2017 and there are plans to expand the Park towards Burnsville in the coming years with two new tracts of land. The Blue Ridge Parkway runs just south of the State Park. Combined, these two features are Yancey County's greatest outdoor recreation assets. The Parkway attracted an estimated 12,000,000 visitors in North Carolina in 2018. North Carolina Highway 80 serves as the

primary route for visitors leaving the Parkway to visit Micaville and Burnsville via US Highway 19E.

Highway 19E from the western Yancey County boundary to Micaville and Highway 80 from Micaville south to the Blue Ridge Parkway is designated as a scenic byway by the North Carolina Department of Transportation. This designation provides limited protection against signage and other activities that would detract from the natural beauty of the corridor. The corridor is also included in tourism marketing materials for the Scenic Byway Program produced by the Department of Transportation.

Yancey County hosts several outdoor recreation events annually. Perhaps most notable are the Quest for the Crest cross country run (with 50k and 10k options) and the Burnsville Metric bike ride, which features road cycling in either a 43-mile or 60.7-mile loop.

Visitors can take advantage of four campgrounds - Black Mountain Campground, Carolina Hemlocks Campground, Mount Mitchell State Park, or South Toe River Campground. All feature primitive campsites and two feature RV campsites. None currently offer RV hook-ups, however.



Trout fishing has become a lucrative tourism draw for many communities in western North Carolina. The NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) conducted a study in 2015 to quantify the economic impact of trout fishing in the state. It found that anglers average just under 11 trout fishing trips per year, primarily to hatchery-support waters, and spent approximately \$239,800,000 on fishing in 2014. The study estimated that the total economic impact of trout fishing in the state was \$383,000,000, which supported nearly 3,600 jobs. Unfortunately, NCWRC stocks less trout in Yancey County waters than in neighboring counties, as shown in the map at the bottom right. Yancey is scheduled to receive 28,775 trout in 2019, mostly in the Cane River and South Toe River between March and July. NCWRC has designated a 0.75-mile section of the South Toe River adjacent to Toe River Campground as Mountain Heritage Trout Waters. This designation allows visitors to fish in this section of stream with the purchase of a 3-day license for \$5.00. The reduced price is intended to attract tourists to the area.

CAMPING in Yancey County

Black Mountain Campground

- 40 primitive campsites

Carolina Hemlocks Campground

- 35 primitive campsites
- hot showers and restrooms

Mt. Mitchell State Park Campground

- 9 tent sites

South Toe River Park Campground

- 36 sites for tents & RVs
- no RV hook ups



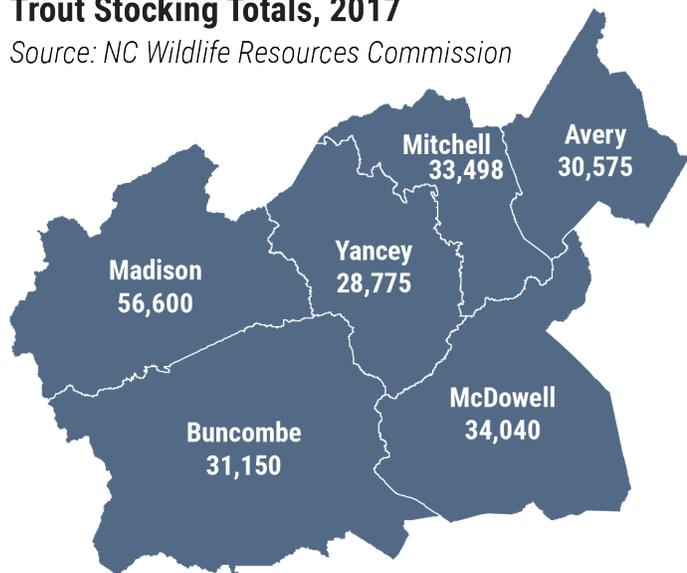
Yancey County Trout Stocking Numbers, 2019



Source: NC Wildlife Resources Commission

Trout Stocking Totals, 2017

Source: NC Wildlife Resources Commission



Downtown Burnsville

Downtown Burnsville's unique town square, historic buildings, and vibrant small businesses differentiate it from many mountain communities. Municipalities across the United States are experiencing economic reemergence in their downtowns. Traditional pre-war urban design patterns are highly sought out by tourists, business owners, and residents alike. Visitors in particular seek a unique experience and a built environment that "doesn't look like everywhere else." Burnsville is extremely fortunate in this regard. It's hallmark town square distinguishes it from other communities. The ring of historic buildings surrounding the square and the prominent statue of Otway Burns at its center, set against the backdrop of the surrounding mountains, lend to downtown's one-of-a-kind character.

Downtown enjoys all of these features while having easy access to a four-lane highway. Land uses surrounding the square are diverse and include retail, public services, restaurants, and medical. Free public parking is usually available and the area has a network of sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrian users. A visitor can reasonably park once and access multiple destinations downtown via foot. Downtown visitors have access to free WiFi courtesy of Country Cablevision. The Burnsville Town Center, located between Highway 19E and the town square, hosts numerous public and private events each year. Efforts are currently underway to recruit a hotel to the downtown area following completion of a feasibility study by Magellan Strategy Group in August 2017.



Goals & Recommendations



GOAL A: Yancey County will continue to grow as an outdoor recreation destination

GOAL B: Yancey County will expand its reputation as an arts destination

Growing the tourism economy in Yancey County requires an increase in offerings to visitors and expanded promotion efforts. Major assets for the County to build its tourism economy upon include:

- Outstanding natural beauty
- Excellent high-speed internet access
- Extensive State and Federal land and facilities
- A well-established arts and crafts industry
- Downtown Burnsville
- Existing support infrastructure - Chamber of Commerce, Toe River Arts Council, NC High Peaks Trail Association, Airbnb accommodations, modern highway access, County and Town event venues

Yancey County also has situational challenges to expanding its tourism economy. A relatively small local population, lack of business travelers, and seasonal variation in visitors means the community lacks the critical mass necessary to support weekend, nighttime, and year-round commerce. This has hampered efforts to recruit a hotel and increase overnight visitation. Also, the County's most popular attraction - Mt. Mitchell State Park - is only accessible via the Blue Ridge Parkway along the southern edge of the County. This location provides quick access to larger commercial centers such as Asheville and Marion, which siphons off potential visitors. Lastly, while many artists live and work in Yancey, not all have a retail presence to attract visitors. Other liabilities for growing the tourism economy in Yancey County include:

- Lack of RV campgrounds
- Lack of mountain bike trails

- Inadequate trailhead parking/restrooms
- Lack of full-time staff dedicated to tourism promotion

The following recommendations are designed to take advantage of Yancey County's assets and address its liabilities related to tourism:

Marketing Recommendations

1. **Increase the occupancy tax rate to 6%.**
2. **Once the occupancy tax rate is raised, establish a new Tourism Development position. Use occupancy tax and other County and Town revenue to fund a full-time staff position to increase marketing efforts. This position should be responsible for:**

- **developing a marketing strategy**
- **creating new marketing collateral**
- **running social media accounts**
- **running a consolidated marketing website**
- **developing and coordinating new events**
- **making an annual presentation to NC Travel and Tourism**
- **providing technical assistance to the hospitality service industry**
- **increasing the County's web presence on popular travel sites**
- **training local businesses to be ambassadors for the community**
- **regularly updating the information, data, and photographs on the Wikipedia entries for Burnsville and Yancey County**
- **Developing vacation packages centered on the arts, outdoors, and agritourism**

3. Add the Director of the Toe River Arts Council and a representative of the North Carolina High Peaks Trail Association to the Chamber Tourism and Travel Development Committee.
4. If the occupancy tax rate is not raised to 6%, divert the majority of revenues from the existing 3% collection away from advertising expenses and towards capital improvements that boost tourism.
5. Create an interactive online map of County attractions, road cycling routes, trails, etc. and embed it on the County's tourism website.

General Recommendations

5. Identify new events to attract tourists. These should be centered on outdoor recreation, the arts, music, or local food.
6. Expand Toe River Campground/Patience Park. Acquire adjacent property to develop RV campsites, create additional recreational facilities, and accommodate large events.
7. Establish a "Yancey Ambassadors" program to train business owners, residents, and service workers on tourism cross-promotion and the importance of a first impression. Offer scholarships to local businesses to offset the cost to employers to send their employees through the program.
8. Run shuttles on popular weekends to take visitors on the TRAC studio tours circuit with stops at local restaurants and shops.
9. Establish a series of economic development incentives for tourism-based small businesses, particularly in the arts and outdoor recreation sectors.

Downtown Recommendations

10. Continue efforts to recruit a hotel to downtown Burnsville.
11. Hold a seasonal music series in Town Square. Invite local vendors, and incorporate intergenerational activities. Schedule the events on the same days as the Farmers Market to increase participation and emphasize local foods.

CASE STUDY

Abingdon, VA Seasonal Concert Series



Each summer, the Town of Abingdon hosts a series of free concerts at their farmers market shelter. Town staff and organizers noticed there was no shortage of bluegrass and folk concerts in the region, so they made a deliberate decision to book Americana, indie, and jazz music to appeal to a younger crowd. The Town partnered with a local non-profit to offer a beer garden at each concert and allows food trucks to set up on-site. The concert series now draws hundreds of visitors each week, generating business for downtown and providing family friendly entertainment for the entire community.

Photo Credit: Abingdon Music Experience

12. Increase the presence of public art in downtown Burnsville. Possible projects include pole wraps, murals, or rotating installations. Rotating installations should be an object that has local significance such as miniature Otway Burns statues or Christmas tree statues. See the case study later in this section for examples.
13. Create an interactive online map of downtown Burnsville businesses.
14. Improve street lighting in the downtown area to foster a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Outdoor Recreation Recommendations

15. Develop a fishing map for the County or partner with Mitchell County to develop a joint map. It should include where to park, fishing season information, fishing restrictions, location of tackle and gear stores, information on guide services, and stream stocking numbers.
16. Work with NCWRC and NCDOT to increase and improve available public parking for fishing access.
17. Work with NCWRC to increase trout stocking numbers.
18. Increase and improve public parking for trail access, specifically at the Bolens Creek trailhead. Install directional signage following improvements.
19. Recruit the Road Scholar Program to Burnsville.
20. Develop mountain bike trails, preferably in collaboration with NC State Parks or the US Forest Service.
21. Establish a local bike club. Specific functions would be to maintain and promote the road cycling map, facilitate development of mountain bike trails, and organize additional rides and races. Emphasis should be placed on establishment of a Criterium race.

Beautification Recommendations

22. Work with NCDOT to carry out highway beautification along US 19E and Highway 80 from Micaville to the Blue Ridge Parkway.
23. Adopt and enforce land use ordinances in the Town of Burnsville that address nuisances such as overgrown lots, abandoned vehicles, and dilapidated structures.

Measures of Success



CASE STUDY

Erwin, TN Great Outdoors Festival



Erwin, TN is located just across the state line from Yancey County. Much like its North Carolina neighbor, it enjoys a scenic mountain setting and many outdoor recreation opportunities. In 2015, the community launched a Great Outdoors Festival to bring attention to the natural assets of its region and attract recreation seekers from surrounding metro areas. The festival continues to grow and is now a key component of Erwin's effort to brand itself as a premier outdoor destination. An endurance race called the "Noli Triple Threat" has been added in recent years. Modeled after a triathlon, it challenges participants to either kayak or cycle, complete an obstacle course, and run a 5k.

Photo Credit: Jackson Kayak

Successful tourism development for Yancey County and the Town of Burnsville will be measured by:

- increased direct visitor spending
- increased employment as a result of direct visitor spending
- increased local tax receipts as a result of direct visitor spending

CASE STUDY

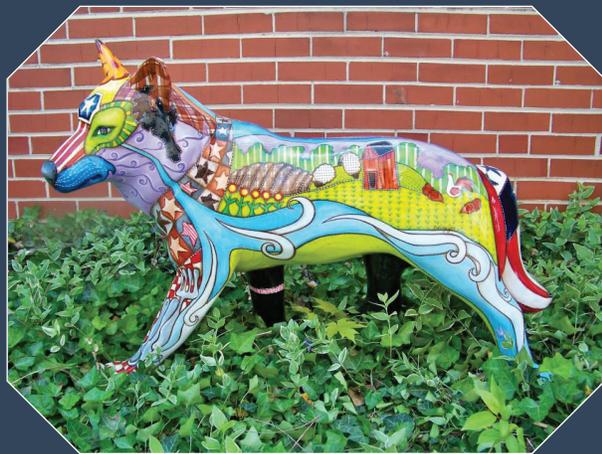
Rotating Art Installations Draw Tourists and Enhance Community Identity

The towns of Erwin, TN and Abingdon, VA have paired art with local history for successful placemaking initiatives. Each year, they enlist the aid of area artists to paint dozens of ceramic animal sculptures that have local significance. For Erwin, it is a series of small elephant statues to re-frame the Town's infamous hanging of a circus elephant in the early twentieth century. The statues are installed in prominent areas downtown before being auctioned off, with all proceeds going to an elephant sanctuary in Tennessee. For Abingdon, which was originally called "Wolf Hills" in the colonial era, it is a series of ceramic wolf statues. In both communities, artists add their own creative interpretation to each statue. Abingdon provides a map to visitors and locals showing the location of each statue. The similar initiatives have become a tourism draw and source of pride in both communities.

Photo Credit:

Ryan Taylor Photography (top)

Abingdon Wolf Project (bottom)



The NCDOT Highway Beautification Process

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) partners with local governments to carry out highway beautification projects on state maintained roadways. Typical projects include installation of flower beds, fencing, rock work, etc. When a community requests a beautification project, the local NCDOT division engineer works with landscape designers and local officials to produce a series of design options. Once designed, DOT and the local government enter into a landscape agreement which states that DOT will pay for design, installation, and one year of maintenance for new beautification features. After the first year, the community assumes maintenance

responsibility using either in-house staff or a contractor. To request a beautification project, communities should submit a memo to their DOT Division Engineer. Once requested, it usually takes a year to design and install the project. Communities may submit requests year-round. Funding from DOT is available on a first-come, first-serve basis.





SMALL BUSINESS



Small Business

Small businesses are vital to Yancey County's economy. How vital? 96% of all business establishments in the County have less than 50 employees. 57% have less than five employees. Nearly 7% of the County's working age population, approximately 549 people, are self-employed. Despite common perception, these businesses are not just retail establishments. They cover a wide array of diverse sectors such as construction, information, health care, the arts, agriculture, and more. In fact, many homegrown manufacturing companies such as Mountain Electronics in Micaville can be considered small businesses too. North Carolina estimates that 88% of exporters in the state are small and medium-size enterprises. Simply put, small business and entrepreneur development is economic development in Yancey County.

Entrepreneurs and existing small businesses generally need four components to succeed: a product or service, operating capital, a market, and a strong workforce to hire from.

For businesses that require a physical location, availability of a suitable site is also necessary. These components collectively form the environment that businesses operate within. Their presence or absence determines small business success and, by extension, community success. The role of Yancey County and Burnsville is to implement policies and take actions that create and maintain a healthy environment for entrepreneurs and existing businesses.

Small Business by the Numbers

549 Yancey County residents are self-employed

96% of County businesses have less than 50 employees

57% of County businesses have less than 5 employees

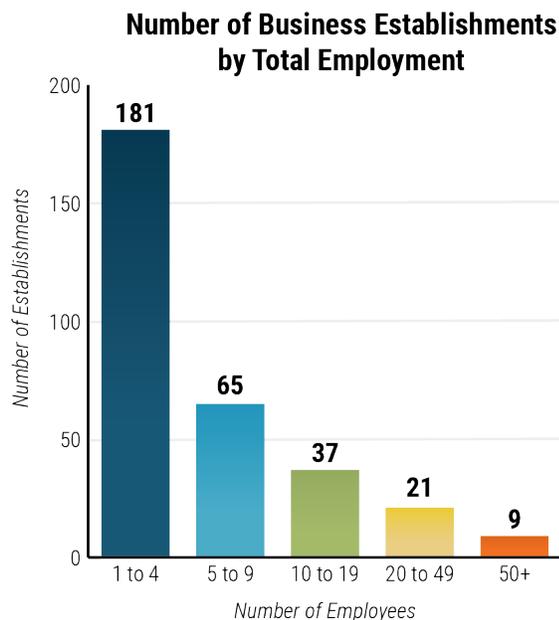
88% of exporters in NC are small and medium-size enterprises

28.8% of County firms are women-owned

2.22% of County firms are minority-owned

1.63% of County firms are Hispanic-owned

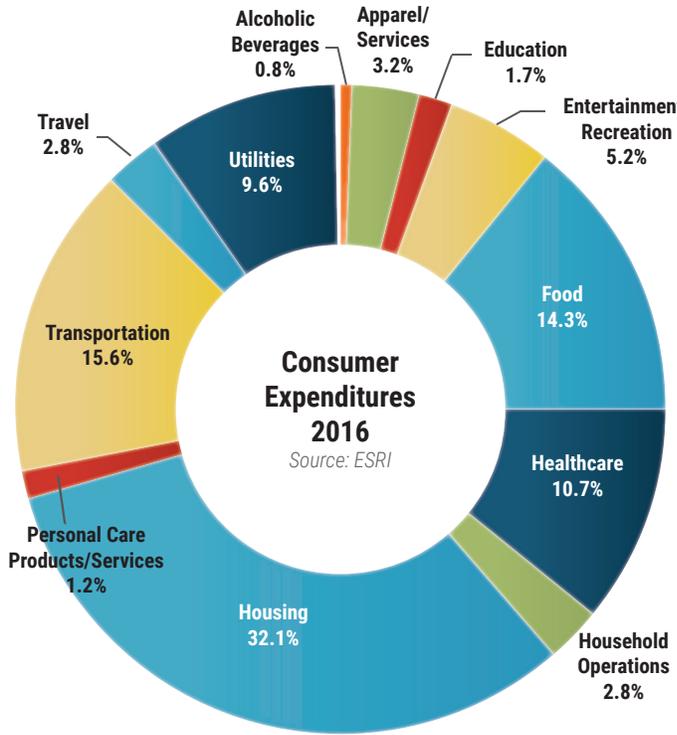
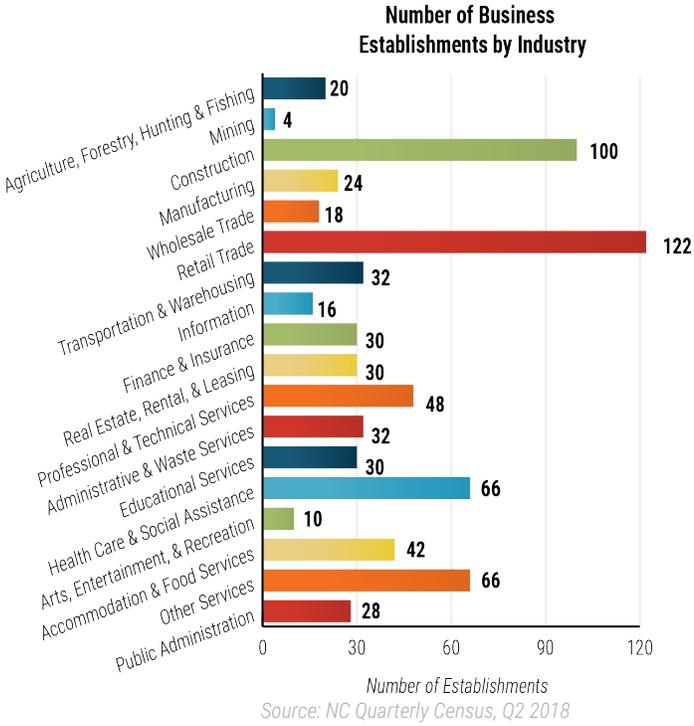
Sources: American Community Survey and ESRI Retail Marketplace



Source: American Community Survey, 2016



Fortunately, a strong network of local and regional programs and organizations exist to foster this type of environment. The Yancey County Chamber of Commerce and EDC provide networking opportunities, workforce development, and general support. Local non-profits like Toe River Arts Council and TRACTOR provide specialized support to their respective members. The High Country Workforce Development Board helps connect jobs seekers to openings and promotes training opportunities. Local financial institutions provide start-up and working capital. Three other regional agencies – the Mayland Community College Small Business Center, Mountain BizWorks, and the MAY Coalition – are especially critical in supporting small business in Yancey County. Their services are profiled in greater detail on the following pages.



Retail Businesses by Sector

Sector	Businesses	Sales (\$ millions)
Bldg./Garden Equip./ Supply Stores	15	\$15.98
Clothing/ Accessories Stores	4	\$2.50
Electronics & Appliance Stores	3	\$1.35
Food Services & Drinking Places	21	\$10.46
Food & Beverage Stores	7	\$44.80
Furniture/Home Furnishing Stores	3	\$1.32
Gasoline Stations	7	\$10.50
General Merchandise Stores	9	\$13.24
Health & Personal Care Stores	3	\$8.79
Misc. Store Retailers	22	\$5.78
Motor Vehicle Parts and Part Dealers	24	\$37.96
Nonstore Retailers	-	\$-
Sports/Hobby/ Book/Music Stores	8	\$58.74

Source: ESRI, Retail Marketplace, 2016

Mayland Small Business Center

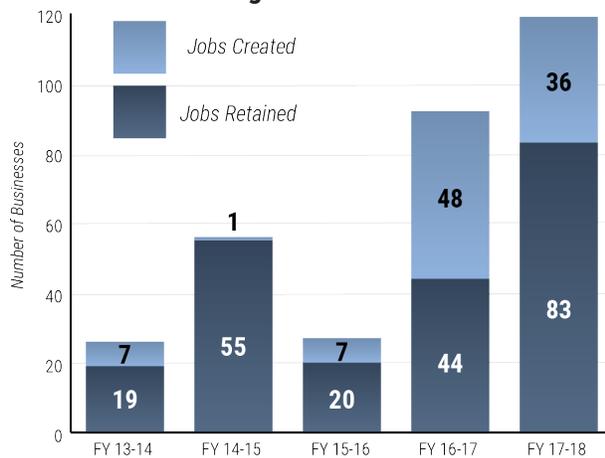
The Small Business Center (SBC) at Mayland Community College provides training and assistance to start-ups and existing businesses through one-on-one counseling, seminars, and classes. They serve the extended region of Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties from the college's main campus in Spruce Pine. The SBC provides comprehensive technical assistance on topics ranging from incorporation to business plan development and marketing. They frequently host free workshops covering social media, bookkeeping, taxes, and other topics of interest to business owners. Their impact on the region's economy cannot be overstated. From July 2016 to June 2018 the

SBC helped create 127 jobs, retain 84 jobs, and served 1,756 participants at their seminars. They assisted 35 new startups during the same time period.

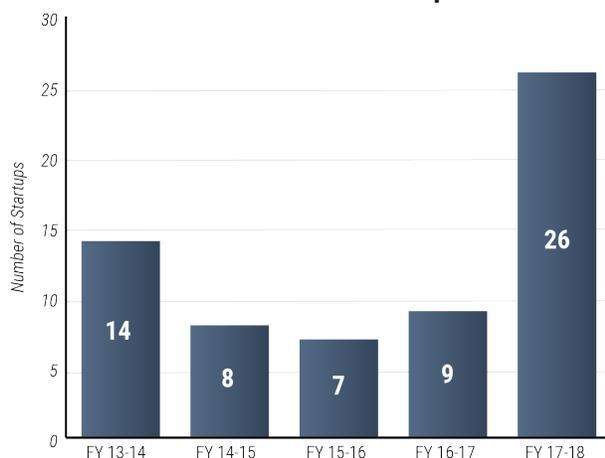
Mayland recently acquired the former Pinebridge facility in Spruce Pine. Plans for the refurbished space include development of the Resource Center for Entrepreneurs, a 4,500 square foot space which will accommodate expansion of the SBC. New services/facilities planned for the Center include:

- office computers loaded with business software and video conferencing capabilities
- business conference area available for larger group meetings or networking events
- computer lab area/resource room
- computers equipped with accounting software and e-commerce linkage
- technology linkage for video conferencing and use of rapid prototype software and printers available in the Anspach Manufacturing Center
- video production area for marketing
- photography equipment designed to take high quality photos of merchandise
- computer linkage to photo/video editing features
- color printer to produce marketing materials
- small 3D printer for production of prototypes

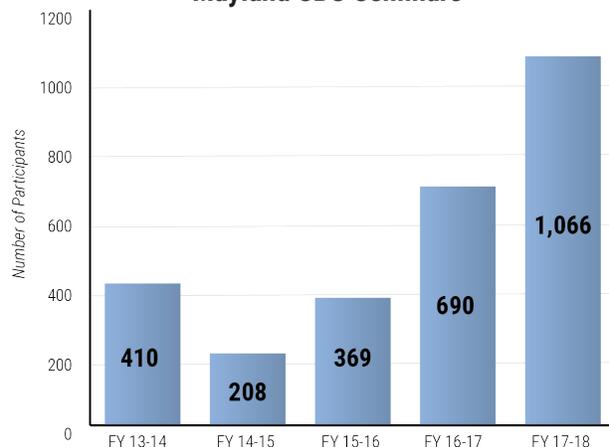
Jobs Created & Retained through SBC Assistance



SBC Business Startups



Participants Served by Mayland SBC Seminars



MAY Coalition

Operating as a non-profit corporation, the MAY Coalition provides low interest loans to business owners in Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey counties. These loans come via two programs. The first provides loans of up to \$250,000 to qualifying businesses that agree to create new employment opportunities in the region. Companies qualify for \$20,000 in loan funds for every new, full-time job they create that pays at least \$6.00 per hour. The second program, which is designed for low and moderate income business owners, provides up to \$25,000 of loans without any job creation requirements.

The MAY Coalition was set up through a grant from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, but has received supplemental funding from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, and the United States Treasury Department CDFI Fund. Since its creation, the Coalition has provided an estimated 45 loans to Yancey County businesses totaling \$2,455,600 and creating approximately 157 jobs.



Photo Credit: Mountain BizWorks

Mountain BizWorks

Mountain BizWorks is a community development financial institution and non-profit that helps local small businesses start, grow, and create jobs through the organization's loans, classes, and coaching. They serve the 24 westernmost counties in North Carolina from their offices in Boone and Asheville. Their primary services are lending, business coaching, classes, and financial education.

Mountain BizWorks bridges the lending gap between small businesses and traditional financial institutions. They can provide small business loans ranging from \$1,000 to \$250,000 in instances where banks and credit unions deem clients too risky. They consider non-traditional collateral and offer flexible loan structures. Loan decisions are typically made as soon as 2-3 weeks after application. They have made over \$18,000,000 in loans over the past 27 years, benefiting over 1,000 companies.

In addition to lending, Mountain BizWorks offers customized business coaching to startups and existing enterprises. They provide coaching through a network of local business owners throughout the region. The organization also offers formal courses designed for business owners at differing skill and growth levels, including classes on financial management.

Mountain BizWorks by the Numbers

\$18,000,000+ *in total loans made to small businesses in WNC*

1,000+ *loans made to small businesses in WNC*

\$3,300,000 *in new loans to small businesses in 2016*

Goals & Recommendations



GOAL A: Provide a cohesive system of small business support

GOAL B: Improve the attractiveness of the County and Town

Yancey County's primary economic development mission should be supporting small businesses and fostering an environment where they can thrive. Modern rural economies recognize that homegrown jobs are more sustainable, easier to come by, and less costly to pursue than external business recruitment. The community has several existing advantages in small business development, including:

- Mayland Community College (MCC) Small Business Center
- Community development financial institutions (MAY Coalition, Mountain BizWorks)
- High-speed internet throughout the County
- Business friendly ordinances and pro-business government boards
- Little competition to local businesses from big box stores
- Access to a 4-lane highway
- The Yancey Advancement Foundation, a non-profit agency that furthers community development in the County

The County also has significant challenges to supporting a healthy environment to small businesses. These include:

- Stagnant population growth
- Workforce issues, including an aging population
- The seasonal nature of local retail
- Dilapidated property, which creates a poor impression of the community
- Poor wayfinding signage in downtown Burnsville

The following recommendations are designed to take advantage of Yancey County's assets and address its liabilities related to small business development and support:

Business Support Recommendations

1. **Support MCC's plans to develop the Resource Center for Entrepreneurs at MCC's new campus in downtown Spruce Pine by not developing a duplicate facility in Burnsville. Promote the Center to Yancey County residents by partnering with MCC to conduct regular office hours and workshops in Burnsville.**
2. **Conduct an annual business survey in coordination with the Chamber of Commerce. Analyze the responses to identify trends and common issues, threats, opportunities, workforce needs, and other concerns. Share the results with survey participants and local elected officials in the form of an infographic report. Use the results to inform future policy decisions, initiatives, and infrastructure investments.**
3. **Partner with MCC's Small Business Center to host quarterly workshops in Burnsville on technical assistance topics such as website development, social media marketing, search engine optimization, taxes, accounting, human resources, graphic design, and other topics relevant to small businesses. Develop a team of consultants and/or volunteers to provide breakout sessions, one-on-one exercises, and professional assessment of participants' plans or existing approaches.**

CASE STUDY

Growing Entrepreneurs Marion (GEM) Program

Seeking to reverse downtown business losses, Marion, NC created a free eight-class training series to teach participants about entrepreneurship, area demographics, networking, and other skills necessary in business. The program prepares residents to open successful ventures in downtown. Following completion of the program, participants receive certification and become eligible to apply for \$5,000 in grants for rental and utility help if they locate in downtown. They must also agree to participate in downtown events, job creation, and operating hour minimums. This money is only available to those who complete the course, and acts as an incentive to draw participants.



The GEM Program has successfully led to downtown business growth since its launch in 2016. Course graduates have completed more than \$46,000 in downtown facade improvements. Downtown investment from 2016-2018 passed \$2,000,000. The program recently won the Best Economic Development Incentive Award from the NC Department of Commerce.

Photo Credit: Here We Grow NC

4. Partner with MCC's Small Business Center to establish a multi-week, in-person business development course that teaches basic entrepreneur skills to participants. To attract participants, offer grant funds that are only available to persons who complete the course and agree to open their business in Yancey County. Funds should be significant enough to entice participants. See the case study above for an example of this type of program in Marion, NC.
5. Start a program at Mountain Heritage High School focused on entrepreneur development. The program should require students to visit a variety of local businesses over the course of the school year or semester to learn how they operate and what challenges they face. Students should complete an end-of-course project where they write their own business plan and practice "pitching" their concept to their peers.
6. Develop and distribute model business plans for entrepreneurs in target industries such as outdoor recreation or the arts.
7. Develop market studies and cut sheets for vacant commercial property that will provide potential businesses with the information they need to select a location and mitigate some of their risk aversion. Information should include items such as market saturation, market demand, zoning, utilities, permitting, etc.
8. The Town and County should "test the waters" before developing a co-working space or small business incubator that requires a heavy up-front investment. Instead, leaders should identify an existing space to experiment with the concept and establish demand for such a facility. This provides a low-cost way of gauging community interest. See the case study on the following page for an example of this approach.
9. Start a young professionals association for Yancey County. These groups provide fresh ideas, networking opportunities, and a sense of community for their members. They also get younger residents engaged in local government.

10. Create peer-to-peer networking groups for business owners in related industries. These will facilitate discussion about shared challenges and solutions. An example group is Airbnb owners.
11. Hold an annual business awards luncheon or dinner to recognize excellence, create networking opportunities, and boost business attachment to the community.

Community Attractiveness Recommendations

12. Install wayfinding signage and map kiosks in downtown Burnsville.
13. Strengthen design and maintenance codes for the Town of Burnsville.
14. Explore creation of a municipal service district (MSD) in downtown Burnsville. Properties within a MSD pay additional property taxes, which are deposited into an account earmarked specifically for infrastructure improvements in the MSD area. This framework allows the Town to improve the downtown area in a way that increases visitation and sales for the businesses that pay the tax.
15. Develop a streetscape plan for downtown Burnsville that focuses on Town Square and Main St.
16. Work with NCDOT to beautify US 19E and Highway 80 from Micaville to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

CASE STUDY

"Tactical" Co-Working Space



Community developers used a brewery in the Westwood neighborhood of Cincinnati to test demand for co-working space. They advertised the pilot program, brought in light refreshments, and drew 25 to 50 people each day. Developers observed how people used the space, asked them what changes would help, and tweaked the setup based on their feedback. The test was so successful that the brewery decided to operate as a co-working space past the trial period. Organizers found crucial elements of success to be presence of necessary essentials like internet and tables, a cool space that isn't boring, supportive programming, and effective marketing.

Photo Credit: Joe Nickol

Measures of Success



Successful small business development for Yancey County and the Town of Burnsville will be measured by:

- Increased number of business establishments
- Increased use of the Mayland Small Business Center
- Increased employment figures
- Implementation of measures to improve community attractiveness
- Improved downtown visitation



Photo Credit: Yancey County EDC

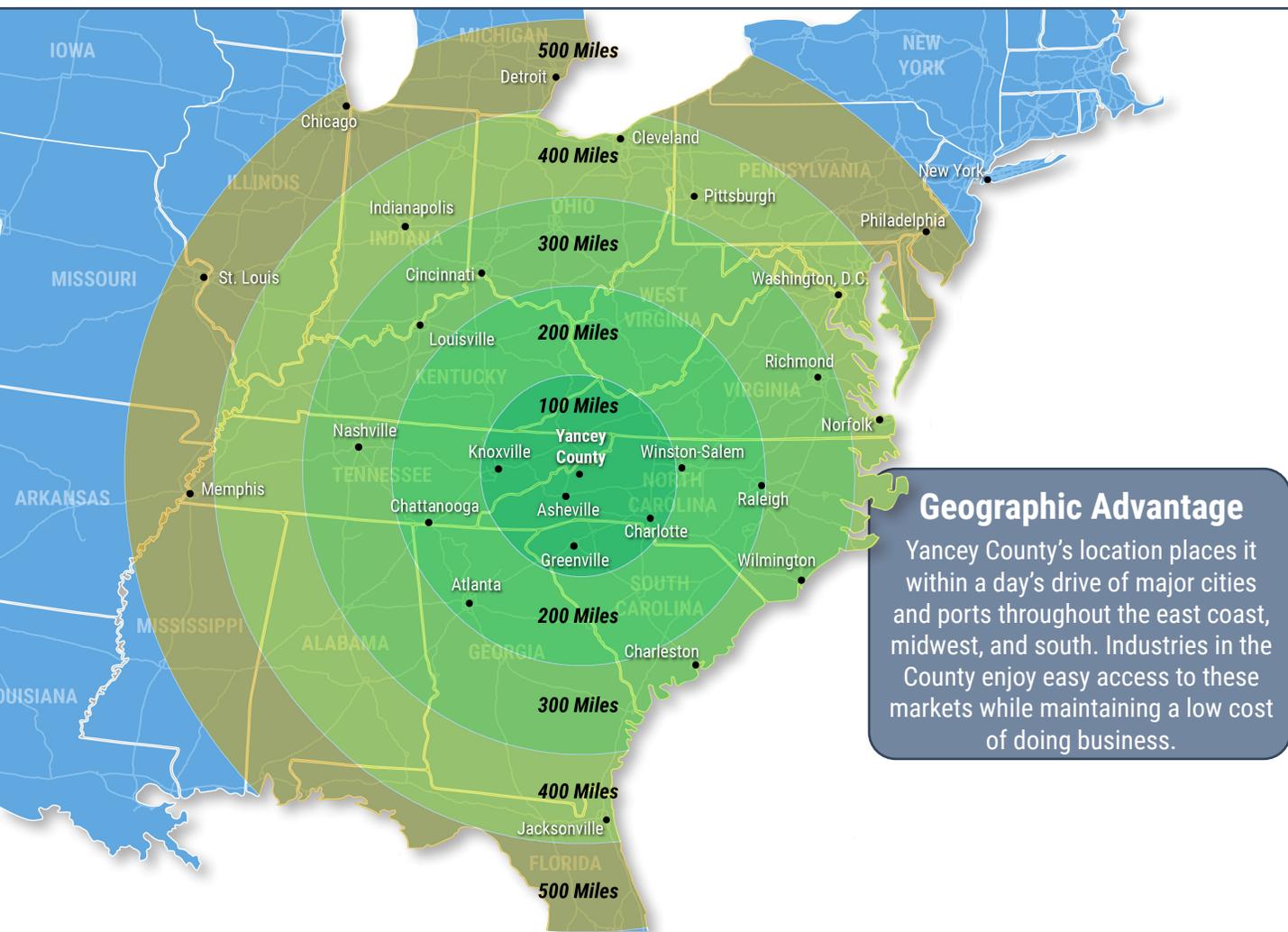
Industry

While manufacturing firms only account for 3.4% of total business establishments in Yancey County, they provide 37% of the County's total wages (*NC Dept. of Commerce, Q4 2018*). The three biggest firms - Altec, Glen Raven, and Hickory Springs - collectively provide thousands of high-paying jobs for residents of the region. Though these three companies immediately come to mind when discussing industry, it is important to note that Yancey is home to several smaller manufacturing firms. Some of these, such as Mountain Electronics, are homegrown companies that have successfully expanded within the County.

Excluding market factors, which fall outside of local government's control, industrial firms typically need six components to be successful: a good workforce, geographic proximity to markets, adequate transportation access, supporting industries (such as machine shops), a suitable physical location (topography, surrounding land use, etc.), and infrastructure

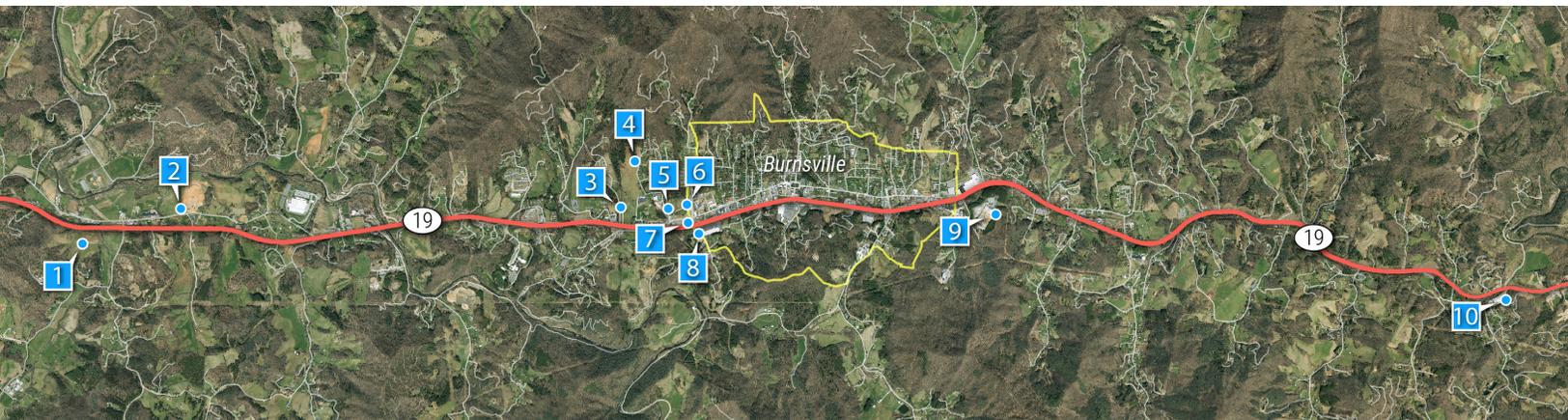
(water, sewer, 3-phase electric, etc.). The most important of these factors is workforce, which will be addressed in its own section later in this plan. Infrastructure will be addressed in a standalone section as well.

Yancey County's location in western North Carolina makes it accessible to most of the east coast, south, and midwest markets. The recent conversion of US-19 into a four-lane divided highway running the length of the County connected existing manufacturers to Interstate 26, and will give the community a boost in industrial retention and recruitment efforts. These advantages are tempered by a lack of suitable land for new development and a shortage of available buildings and sites to market. The following pages will summarize available industrial properties in the County, explore properties that may be suitable for new industrial development, and review the EDC's existing incentive policy.



Geographic Advantage

Yancey County's location places it within a day's drive of major cities and ports throughout the east coast, midwest, and south. Industries in the County enjoy easy access to these markets while maintaining a low cost of doing business.



Available Sites & Buildings

- 1. Yancey County Farms LP Parcel**
 - 44 acre undeveloped, ungraded site
 - no water or sewer
- 2. Banks Parcel**
 - 8 acre undeveloped, ungraded site
 - no sewer
- 3. True North Equities Parcel**
 - 4.59 acre undeveloped, ungraded site
 - ideal for commercial development
- 4. Brown Property**
 - 84.5 acre undeveloped, ungraded site
 - no sewer
- 5. 153 Love Fox Rd. Building**
 - 16,000 sf building
 - constructed in 1969
 - 5.37 acre parcel
- 6. 700 West Main St. Parcel**
 - 14 acre undeveloped, graded site
 - water and sewer available
- 7. 701 West Main St. Parcel**
 - 1.57 acre undeveloped, graded site
 - water and sewer available
- 8. Burnsville Business Park Building**
 - 28,500 sf building
 - constructed in 1965
 - 14ft ceiling height
 - 14,000 sf of building is currently available
 - TRACTOR occupies part of the building
 - public ownership
- 9. OMC Site**
 - 62 acre parcel, 19 acres are graded
 - former industrial building demolished
- 10. Former Taylor Toggs Building**
 - 59,700 sf building
 - constructed in 1968
 - 30,000 sf currently available
 - low ceiling height

Burnsville Business Park Building



700 West Main St. Parcel



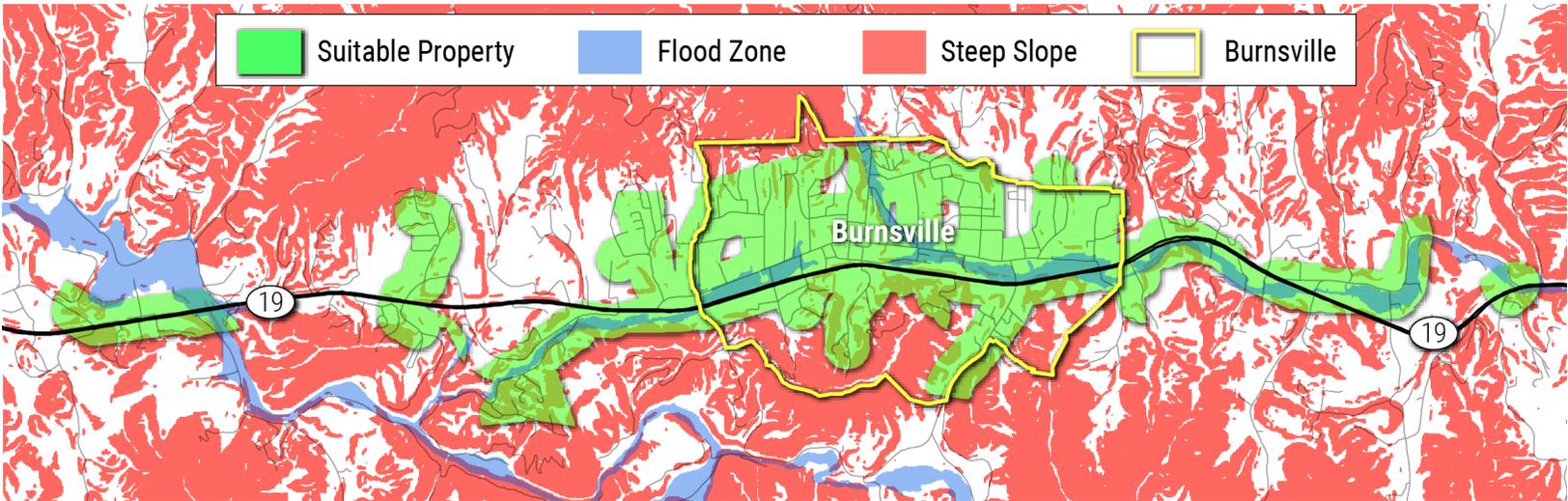
Suitable Land for New Industrial Development

Land suitable for industrial development is typically scarce in rural mountain communities such as Yancey County. Steep slope, limited water and sewer infrastructure, and confined access to 4-lane highways restrict the amount of viable acreage. The top map below illustrates the location of property in Yancey County that is within a half-mile of a 4-lane highway and within 500 feet of both water and sewer mains. Some of this property falls within the flood zone or features steep slopes (20% grade or higher). Much of it is already developed for residential or commercial use. The area comprises 1,382 acres, not excluding land that

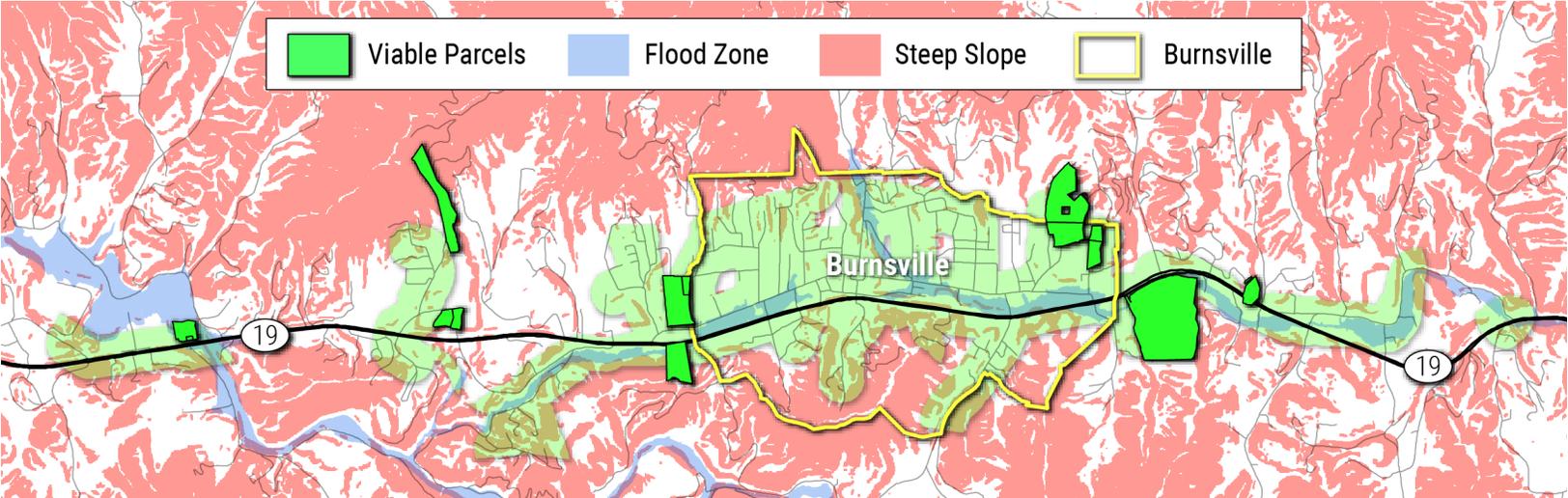
features steep slopes or falls within a flood zone.

The bottom map more accurately represents the amount of suitable land for new industrial construction. The highlighted parcels meet the following criteria: within a half-mile of US-19, within 500 feet of both water and sewer service, has over 2 acres of contiguous land without steep slopes or floodplain, and no existing structures valued at over \$20,000. It does not take surrounding land use or potential demolition into account, but does convey the limited nature of development-ready property in the County.

Land with access to a 4-lane highway, water, & sewer



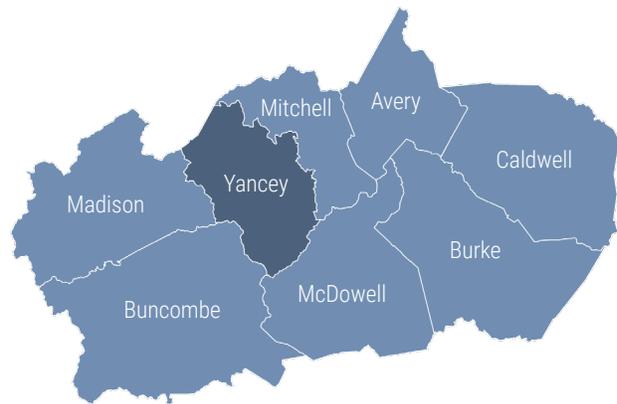
Viable parcels for industrial development based on topography, utilities, highway access, and lack of development



Regional Competition

North Carolina

As of August 2019, surrounding counties in North Carolina (shown on the map to the right) had the following available properties according to the NC Department of Commerce:



16 Buildings

- ranging in size from 5,416 sf to 613,000 sf, average size is 142,859 sf
- situated on parcels ranging from 0.4ac to 70ac, average size is 12.3ac
- sale prices range from \$187,500 to \$10,500,000, average is \$2,264,962
- lease prices range from \$1.85/sf to \$8/sf, average is \$3.43/sf
- Age of buildings ranges between 3 and 72 years, average is 38 years
- Ceiling heights range between 10ft and 34ft, average is 19.5ft
- 12 are sprinklered
- 14 have sewer, 14 have natural gas, all have water
- average distance to a highway is 0.59 miles
- average distance to an interstate is 5.06 miles

9 Sites

- ranging in size from 17.9ac to 1,000ac, average size is 267.2ac
- sale prices range from \$5,000 to \$1,200,000, average is \$251,000
- 7 have sewer
- 7 have natural gas
- 8 have water
- average distance to a highway is 0.21 miles
- average distance to an interstate is 1.39 miles

Tennessee

As of August 2019, surrounding counties in Tennessee (shown on the map to the right) had the following available properties according to the TN Department of Commerce:

7 Sites

- ranging in size from 16ac to 101ac, average size is 43ac
- sale prices range from \$22,000 to \$30,000, average is \$27,333 (*some prices not listed*)
- 6 have sewer and water
- 7 have natural gas
- average distance to a highway is 0.03 miles
- average distance to an interstate is 5.29 miles

13 Buildings

- ranging in size from 23,364 sf to 383,156 sf, average size is 119,440 sf
- situated on parcels ranging from 3ac to 70ac, average size is 12.3ac
- sale prices range from \$750,000 to \$3,039,000, average is \$2,048,429
- lease prices range from \$2/sf to \$4.25/sf, average is \$2.92/sf
- Age of buildings ranges between 17 and 56 years, average is 39 years
- Ceiling heights range between 10ft and 31ft, average is 20.39ft
- all have sewer, natural gas, and water
- average distance to a highway is 0.43 miles
- average distance to an interstate is 3.8 miles



Local Incentives

Yancey County offers a Local Business Investment Grant Program to attract new businesses and encourage existing businesses to expand. Unlike most state-level grants, Yancey’s model is structured on investment rather than job creation. This distinction is useful in attracting smaller firms or growing local firms that don’t have large enough employment numbers to fully leverage state programs. Grant amounts are based on the increase in tax value of all real property, machinery, and improvements above the base year prior to investment.

The grant amount is equal to a portion of increased property tax revenue resulting from the project. Industrial category grants are available in different amounts and for different lengths of time depending on the level of investment over \$1,000,000. Retail category grants are available for aggregate investments over \$40,000,000

and are spread out over five years. Only “net new taxable” purchases and assets transferred into Yancey County from other locations outside Yancey County apply for grant consideration. This stipulation, coupled with the requirement to enter into a binding agreement, protects the County from financial harm resulting from a grant.

To qualify, projects must create full time jobs that pay at least the median industrial wage for the County and provide health insurance and other benefits. Companies in the manufacturing, warehousing, data processing, and retail sectors are eligible to apply. All grants under this program are made at the discretion of the County Commission, who have the ability to set job requirements in addition to investment thresholds.

Goals & Recommendations



GOAL: Maintain and expand the County's industrial base through retention, recruitment, and fostering homegrown companies

Industrial development depends heavily on workforce and infrastructure. However, for the purposes of organization and clarity, recommendations related to those areas will be confined to their respective sections of the plan. Likewise, many of the recommendations previously listed in the small business section will benefit small homegrown manufacturers, but are not repeated here.

Yancey EDC should focus its industrial development efforts on retention and expansion of existing manufacturers. The County is fortunate to have a strong industrial presence and it is likely that employment growth in the sector will occur mostly from within. Aggressive industrial recruitment, while potentially rewarding, is costly and often unsuccessful for communities like Yancey. The County should work to attract new

employers, but not to the neglect of retention efforts or the other economic development priorities listed elsewhere in this plan.

Mountain communities face many of the same challenges to industrial development. As shown previously, Yancey suffers from a lack of suitable property for industrial development due to topography, natural features, and limited public infrastructure. Other liabilities include:

- a limited workforce
- inadequate rental housing for employees
- limited available capacity for the Burnsville sewer system
- site-specific utility limitations, including absence of natural gas, 3-phase electric, or close access to the sewer system.

Despite those challenges, Yancey County is able to maintain a healthy industrial base due to a number of assets, including:

- exceptional quality of life
- low cost of doing business
- strategic location in western North Carolina
- recently expanded water and sewer infrastructure in the Micaville area
- recent widening of US Highway 19 into a 4-lane running the length of the County and connecting to I-26
- Yancey County Schools Career and Technical Education (CTE) program
- Mayland Community College
- broadband availability throughout the County
- an incentive policy based on capital investment rather than jobs
- strong history of coordination between the County and Town of Burnsville

The following recommendations are designed to take advantage of Yancey County's assets and address its liabilities related to industrial development:

1. **Facilitate development of privately-owned properties that are prime areas for industrial construction. Potential methods include marketing properties, providing/upgrading infrastructure, offering permitting assistance, and providing incentives.**
2. **Maintain an active business retention program with yearly visitation benchmarks and frequent communication between the EDC, private industry, Yancey County Schools CTE, the Economic Development Partnership of NC, and Mayland Community College.**
3. **Conduct an annual business survey in coordination with the Chamber of Commerce. Analyze the responses to identify trends and common issues, threats,**

opportunities, workforce needs, and other concerns. Share the results with survey participants and local elected officials in the form of an infographic report. Use the results to inform future policy decisions, initiatives, and infrastructure investments.

4. **Coordinate an annual tour of local manufacturers for County Commissioners and Town Council members.**
5. **Launch a program to build relationships with the parent companies of local manufacturing facilities that are headquartered outside the County. The goal is to ensure decision makers are knowledgeable of the benefits of doing business in Yancey and the local incentives that are available.**
6. **Hold an annual or semi-annual industry forum where community, business, and education leaders can discuss and troubleshoot challenges.**
7. **Focus industrial recruitment efforts on firms with less than 50 employees. Yancey's workforce, available properties, infrastructure, and incentive policy are conducive to companies of this size.**

See the Small Business, Workforce, and Infrastructure sections for more recommendations to benefit industry.

Measures of Success



Successful industrial development will be measured by:

- Retention & expansion of existing firms
- Growth in manufacturing wages
- Improvement of available sites & buildings





Agriculture

Yancey County has a strong agricultural economy. Many local farms have operated for decades, while new farms and entrepreneurs join the landscape each year. According to the 2017 USDA Census of Agriculture, Yancey had 369 farm operations spread across 30,284 acres (just over 15% of the total land area in the County). That share of acreage is significant considering Yancey's mountainous terrain and the large amount of land in public ownership. As is common in most mountain communities, the majority of these operations are small to medium-sized. Over half are situated on less than fifty acres and 84% have annual commodity sales of less than \$25,000. Cumulatively, however, farm operations have a large impact on the County's economy, with \$6,822,000 in total agricultural commodity sales in 2017. Just over 4% of employed persons in Yancey County worked in an agricultural-related field in 2017 (*American Community Survey*).

Farmers in Yancey County face a distinct set of challenges. The decline of tobacco as a cash crop resulted in a loss of income for many growers, especially part-time growers. Vegetable farming has partially filled the gap, but not fully. The area's rocky and mountainous terrain makes it difficult to find suitable land. Due to its scarcity, farmers must compete with developers

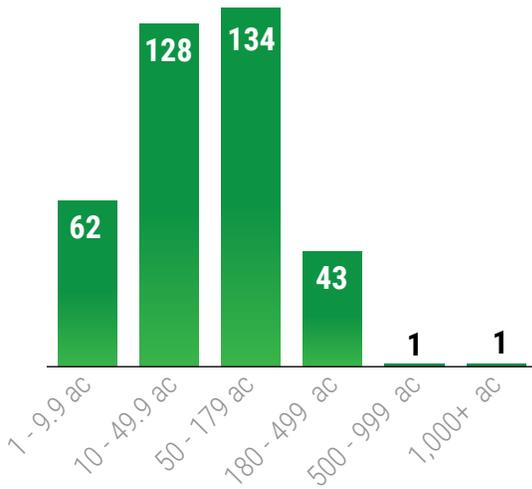
for flat land, which drives up the cost of entry into the profession. An aging farmer population and shrinking workforce also pose significant challenges to the industry. Compounding this, Mayland Community College is ending their agriculture program due to low enrollment.

Despite these challenges, Yancey County's agriculture industry has many reasons for optimism. Farm products have diversified since the decline of tobacco, which enhances economic resiliency. Also, the County Commission has adopted Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) and Present Use Value (PUV) programs to benefit farmers. The VAD program provides protection against nuisance lawsuits and the PUV program offers reduced tax bills to properties with active agricultural or forestry operations. Mountain Heritage High School has an active and expanding Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter capable of teaching the next generation of growers. A much needed cattleman's association was recently formed and now has 60-70 members. Three other important assets - Yancey County Cooperative Extension, TRACTOR, and the Yancey Farmer's Market - will be discussed in greater detail on the following pages.

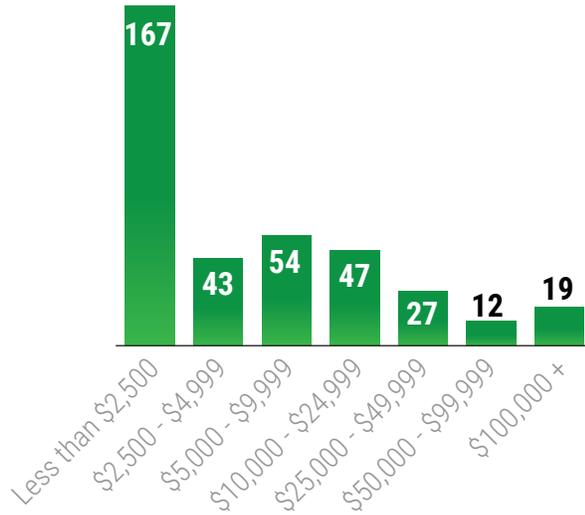


2017 USDA Census of Agriculture Yancey County Statistics

Number of Farm Operations by Acreage



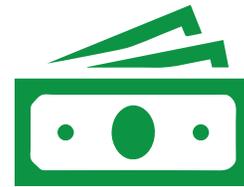
Number of Farm Operations by Annual Commodity Sales



**369 Farm Operations
on 30,824 acres**
average size is 84 acres
median size is 48 acres



\$454,909
average value of agricultural
land & buildings per
operation



\$6,822,000
total agricultural commodity
sales in 2017, with an average
of \$18,489 per operation



277
HOGS



4,386
CATTLE



181
SHEEP



3,059
CHICKENS



**10,204 acres of
Cropland**
spread across
308 operations

\$40,731
total value of
machinery assets
per operation



NC Cooperative Extension

North Carolina Cooperative Extension's office in Yancey County is a valuable resource for farmers in the community. They provide education to small and large-scale growers on topics such as livestock management, nursery horticulture, farm health and safety, field crops, food safety and processing, pest management, specialty crops, local foods, soils, and more. Their staff has an excellent reputation among experienced growers in the County, but new growers are sometimes unaware of their offerings. Connecting agricultural entrepreneurs and the broader community with Extension staff should be a priority.

North Carolina Cooperative Extension also operates FarmLink - an online platform designed to connect land owners with farmers



*Yancey County Extension Office
Photo Credit: Yancey Chamber*

looking for land. Its database currently contains 37 listed properties and nearly 200 farmers. Unfortunately, no property in Yancey County is listed on FarmLink as of August 2019.

Yancey County Farmers Market

The Yancey County Farmers Market has connected producers with shoppers for 25 years. The market takes place next to the Burnsville Town Center every Saturday from April to November. It has grown over the decades and now has approximately 17 regular vendors selling locally grown produce, meats, eggs, value-added

foods, crafts, and artisanal products. The market hopes to gain 501(c)3 status in coming years. Finding a permanent location for the farmers market is a top priority for the Town and County to ensure its continued growth and viability.



*Yancey County Farmers Market
Photo Credit: Yancey Chamber*

TRACTOR

TRACTOR (Toe River Aggregation Center Training Organization Regional Inc.) is a non-profit food hub headquartered in Burnsville. Its primary mission is to promote the Appalachian heritage of small farms and build a vibrant food economy, securing access of local food for a healthier economy. One way the organization carries out this mission is by connecting local farmers to markets through aggregation. Many distributors and grocery chains set specific standards for quantities, processing, and packaging that bar small growers from entry into the market. TRACTOR established a GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certified facility to accumulate produce from multiple small growers then process and package it in a way that is acceptable for grocery chains, restaurants, and other wholesale buyers. TRACTOR currently sells goods to Ingles, SAVMOR, and Lowe's Foods as well as numerous local restaurants and caterers.

Farmers can become TRACTOR members for just \$20 a year. Growers receive 80% of sales revenue for their products, while the non-profit retains 20% to cover operational expenses. The organization now offers direct-to-consumer CSA agreements as well, which provides an additional revenue stream for members. Members also benefit from logistical, technical, and sales support.



*TRACTOR Processing Facility and Growers
Photo Credit: TRACTOR*

Beyond its aggregation services, TRACTOR provides educational training and access to shared equipment that can be rented by members. It also leases 25 acres of prime farmland at Bowditch Bottoms to support growers without land of their own. The organization has approximately 44 farmers from Yancey, Mitchell, Burke, McDowell, Avery, Madison, and Buncombe counties. However, they keep 90% of all funds in Yancey and Mitchell. TRACTOR is currently in the process of completing an organizational strategic plan.



*Bowditch Bottoms
Photo Credit: Yancey Chamber*

Goals & Recommendations



GOAL A: Expand support for existing and new farmers

GOAL B: Increase agricultural output

GOAL C: Foster the next generation of farmers

Yancey County is fortunate to have a strong agricultural economy supported by proactive leaders and dynamic organizations. The work of maintaining and growing that economy is continuous. In 2017 the community completed the “Action Plan to Increase Local Food Production and Farmer Income in Yancey County, North Carolina.” That report surveyed farmers and FFA students to identify challenges and opportunities they face. It resulted in five primary recommendations:

1. *Approve the creation of voluntary agricultural districts*
2. *Hire an agricultural economic development coordinator*
3. *Invest in the expansion of TRACTOR*
4. *Improve red meat infrastructure (install cattle scales, aggregate shipments, create a cattlemen’s association, develop a red meat processing facility)*
5. *Develop partnership opportunities for vegetable and fruit processing, don’t process in-house*

The County and partner organizations have completed several of the recommendations, including establishment of a VAD, expansion of TRACTOR, installation of cattle scales, and creation of a cattlemen’s association. Completion of these add to the County’s existing agricultural assets, which also include:

- Diverse farm products
- NC Cooperative Extension
- Mountain Heritage High School FFA
- Young families joining local food production
- Yancey County Farmers Market
- Available land
- Proximity to Asheville markets

The County also has several liabilities that hamper agricultural development, including:

- Mayland Community College’s discontinuation of its agricultural degree programs. No neighboring colleges offer a similar program.
- No permanent location for the Yancey County Farmers Market
- Rocky and mountainous terrain
- Farmers must compete with developers for scarce flatland, which increases costs
- Aging farmer population
- Inadequate workforce
- Small and new growers often do not utilize NC Extension

The following recommendations are intended to maintain and grow the County’s agricultural economy:

Public Facilities Recommendations

1. **Obtain 501(c)3 status for the Yancey County Farmers Market and establish a permanent location to hold it.**
2. **Develop a livestock aggregation facility. Work with High Country Council of Governments to identify possible grant funding for the project.**
3. **Provide a licensed commissary to support off-site food businesses.**

Farmer Support Recommendations

4. **Develop a farmland protection plan meeting the requirements found in N.C.G.S. 106-735.**
5. **Send information about NC Cooperative Extension’s FarmLink program to property owners participating in the PUV and VAD programs, with the goal of connecting farmers to land.**
6. **Provide the support and staffing required for the agriculture program at Mountain Heritage High School to maintain certifica-**

tion and fill the gap left by the closure of agricultural programs at Mayland Community College.

7. Foster mentorship opportunities between new and experienced farmers.
8. Develop a partnership between NC Cooperative Extension and the Mayland Small Business Center to guide new farmers in production and business management.
9. Set aside a percentage of back taxes collected by the County when a property loses its PUV designation. Use this money to assist with farmland preservation.
10. Hold semi-annual or annual farmer round-table discussions about shared issues, challenges, and opportunities. Potential topics might include federal and state services, business planning, marketing, technical assistance, succession planning, new crops, farmland protection, exporting, etc.

Agritourism Development Recommendations

11. Develop an annual farm tour to attract visitors and raise awareness of local foods.
12. Conduct training workshops on agritourism business development. Introduce farmers to potential business opportunities such as corn mazes, farm weddings, haunted houses, hay rides, pumpkin patches, choose-n-cut Christmas trees, “u-pick” produce, or similar ventures.
13. Connect farmers with local bed and breakfast owners to develop unique agricultural experiences for overnight guests.
14. Develop marketing materials to attract more choose-n-cut Christmas tree customers to Yancey County.

Measures of Success



Successful agricultural development will be measured by:

- Preservation of prime farmland
- Growth of TRACTOR and the Yancey County Farmers Market

CASE STUDY

Appalachian RC&D Council Field School & “Farmacy” Program



The Appalachian RC&D Council is a non-profit organization headquartered in Johnson City, Tennessee. Their mission is to conserve natural resources and improve rural economies through community leadership and enhanced educational opportunities. Each year, the organization hosts two farmer training sessions collectively referred to as the “Field School.” One session includes 9 classroom meetings from November - March that focus on writing business, financial, and marketing plans for small farm operations. The summer session, which takes place from May-September and includes 8 sessions at local farms, explores production methods and thriving business models. Students can register for individual sessions at a cost of \$15 per session, or register for all sessions to receive a discount.

Appalachian RC&D also offers an innovative “Farmacy Fit” program to promote fitness and healthy local foods. The free program allows anyone to walk a 1-mile loop at local farmers markets in exchange for \$3 of tokens to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.

Photo Credit: Appalachian RC&D Council

- Improved public facilities to support farmers
- Continued student participation in the Mountain Heritage High School FFA
- Increased agritourism offerings



QUALITY OF LIFE



Quality of Life

20th century economic development operated on the principle that people relocated primarily for jobs, and that companies could be enticed to create jobs in a community when offered the right mixture of public incentives, cheap land, and low labor costs. Simply put, *attract the companies and people will follow*. While there is still some truth to that model, modern economic development practice recognizes that the dynamic has largely reversed. Now a community must first cultivate and retain a healthy workforce before businesses will consider a location viable. *Attract the people and companies will follow*.

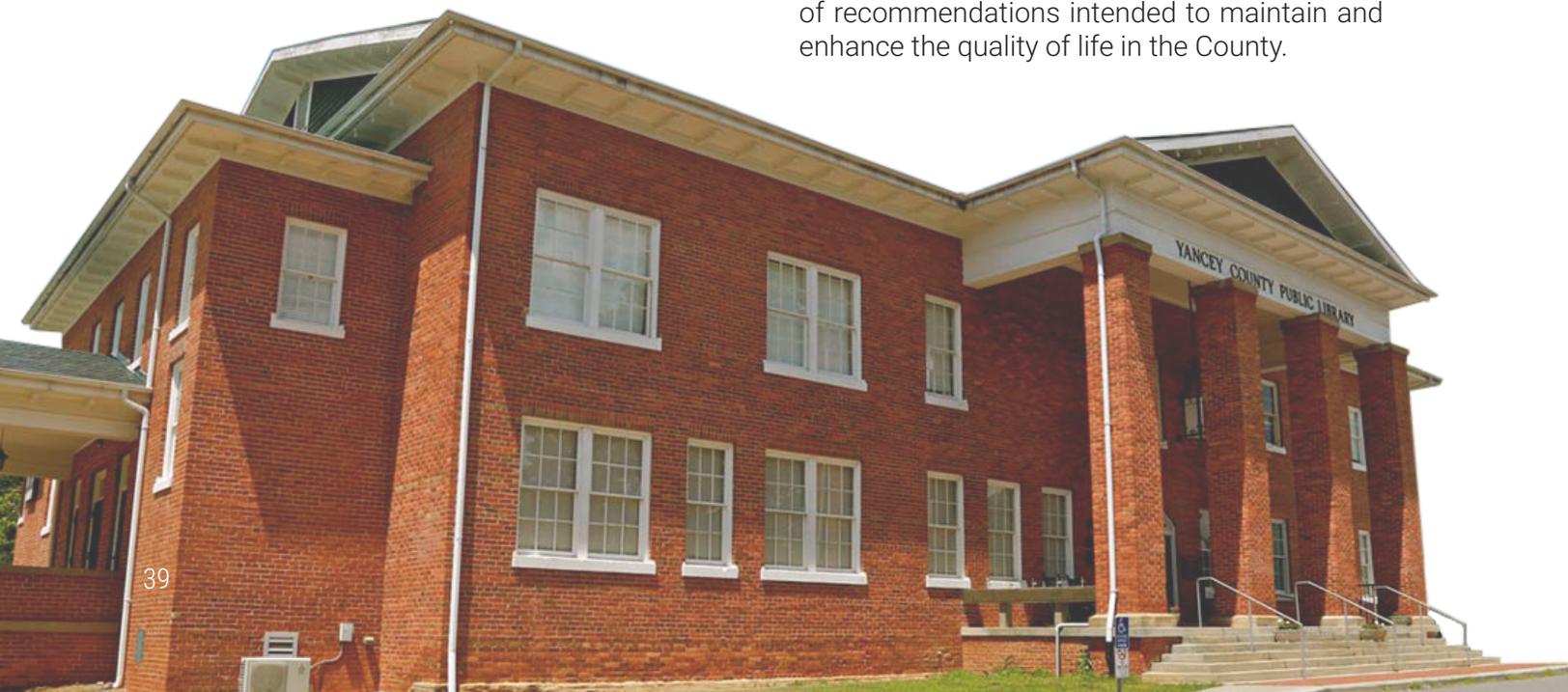
A community's quality of life directly impacts its ability to retain and attract residents. Population growth often correlates to a healthy and expanding economy. Increasing the number of residents in a community strengthens its workforce, leads to business creation, generates community involvement, and grows the local tax base. This triggers a virtuous cycle where the expanding tax base increases the amount of funding available for public amenities, services, and schools, which in turn attracts new residents. For this reason, addressing quality of life factors is a key component of any effective economic development strategy.

Modern technology is heightening the impact of quality of life on economic development. Increasingly, skilled employees

can work remotely and live anywhere. Yancey County's rural setting, low cost of living, high performing schools, proximity to Asheville, and excellent high speed internet network make it an ideal location for these types of workers. Similarly, attracting retirees offers a chance to increase the County's tax base and the number of customers patronizing local businesses. Drawing new residents who work in neighboring communities such as Buncombe County also generates economic activity for Yancey.

Enacting policies and projects to enhance quality of life does not elicit the same level of positive press that recruiting a new manufacturing facility does. However, these types of activities cumulatively have a larger positive impact on a community's long-term economic development. The link may be less tangible, but is nevertheless present. By investing in quality of life projects, local leaders demonstrate their commitment to making Yancey a better place for residents, businesses, and newcomers. They also convey to younger generations that this is a place to build a future.

Yancey County's natural beauty, welcoming community, low cost of living, and excellent public services and facilities make it a desirable place to live. This section will look at housing, education, childcare, healthcare, parks and recreation, the aging population, land use, and public safety before offering a series of recommendations intended to maintain and enhance the quality of life in the County.



Housing

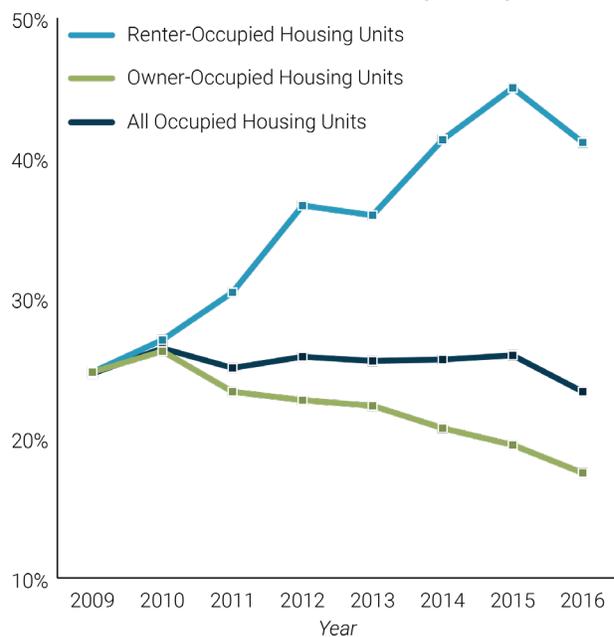
Housing affordability and availability is often the primary factor in determining an area's cost of living, which directly affects quality of life. Housing costs are the biggest monthly expense for most residents, and homes are frequently their owners' largest investment. An ideal community should have diverse housing options suitable for a broad spectrum of incomes, steadily increasing home values, and regular reinvestment in the housing market in the form of renovation and new construction.

Yancey's housing market mostly consists of owner-occupied homes. 75.2% of all occupied housing units in Yancey County were owner-occupied as of 2016. The number of renter-occupied housing units has increased over the past decade, but not significantly. Nearly one-third of the County's housing units are classified as vacant, which is double the statewide average. This is primarily due to a large presence of homes for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

The median value of owner-occupied homes has increased steadily over the past few decades, reaching \$140,500 as of 2015. As shown by the chart on the following page, this places the county in-line with the rest of the surrounding area. Median rent has increased steadily as well, reaching \$600 in 2015.

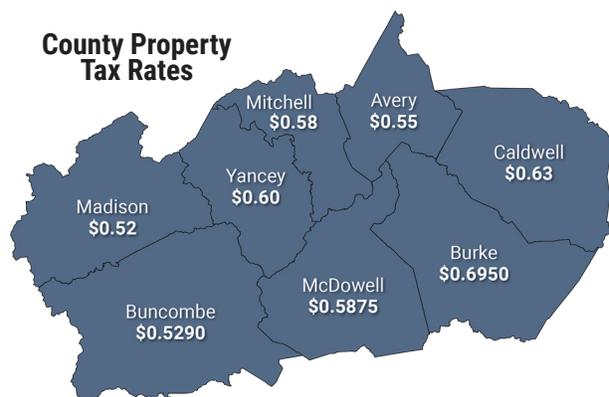
These increases indicate a healthy housing market, but can pose affordability challenges when they outpace wage growth. This has been the case for renter-occupied housing units in Yancey County over the past several years. As shown by the chart and table to the right, the percentage of renter-occupied housing units with monthly housing costs exceeding 30% of household income jumped from 24.7% in 2009 to 41.1% in 2016. The declining affordability of rental housing can likely be attributed to an insufficient amount of rental options and lower incomes among renters than homeowners on average. Since renting is often the path to home ownership and the preferred housing choice for relocating residents, increasing affordable rental options in Yancey is crucial to population growth and retention.

Percentage of Total Housing Units with Monthly Housing Costs Exceeding 30% of Household Income
Source: American Community Survey



Percentage of Total Housing Units with Monthly Housing Costs Exceeding 30% of Household Income
Source: American Community Survey

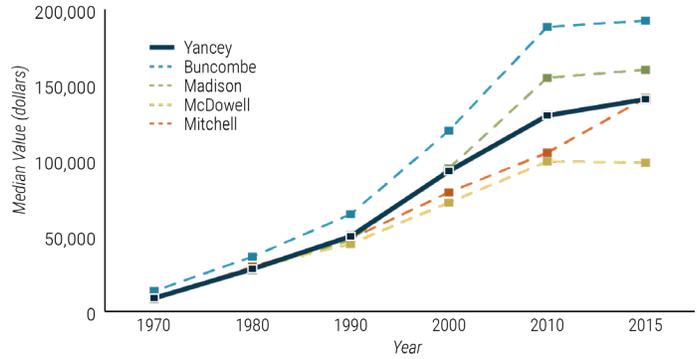
Year	Owner-Occupied Housing Units	Renter-Occupied Housing Units	All Occupied Housing Units
2009	24.7%	24.7%	24.6%
2010	26.2%	27%	26.4%
2011	23.3%	30.4%	25%
2012	22.7%	36.6%	25.8%
2013	22.3%	35.9%	25.5%
2014	20.7%	41.3%	25.6%
2015	19.5%	45%	25.9%
2016	17.5%	41.1%	23.3%



Median Value of Owner Occupied Homes

Source: US Census Bureau

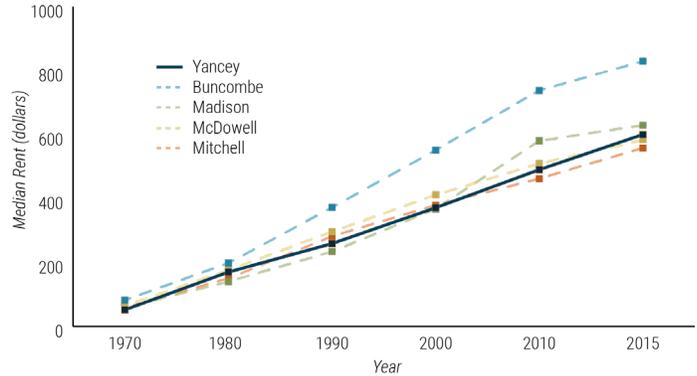
Year	Buncombe	McDowell	Madison	Mitchell	Yancey
1970	\$13,500	\$9,700	\$8,000	\$8,400	\$8,900
1980	\$36,200	\$28,900	\$27,300	\$29,700	\$28,200
1990	\$64,300	\$44,800	\$47,200	\$48,100	\$49,800
2000	\$119,600	\$72,000	\$94,600	\$78,800	\$93,000
2010	\$188,300	\$99,200	\$154,600	\$105,000	\$129,700
2015	\$192,400	\$98,400	\$159,900	\$141,100	\$140,500



Median Gross Rent

Source: US Census Bureau

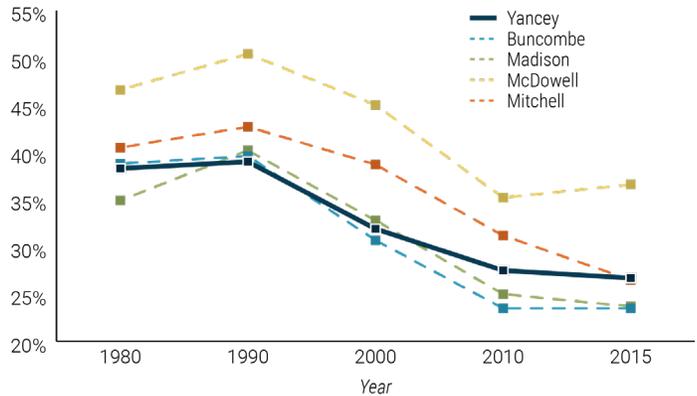
Year	Buncombe	McDowell	Madison	Mitchell	Yancey
1970	\$82	\$64	\$59	\$59	\$52
1980	\$198	\$176	\$140	\$150	\$170
1990	\$372	\$296	\$234	\$282	\$259
2000	\$551	\$411	\$367	\$379	\$371
2010	\$738	\$509	\$580	\$462	\$490
2015	\$829	\$583	\$629	\$558	\$600



Median Household Income as a % of Median Value of Owner Occupied Homes

Source: US Census Bureau

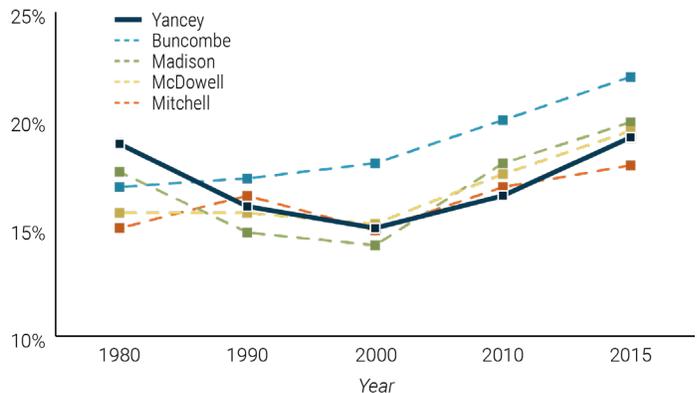
Year	Buncombe	McDowell	Madison	Mitchell	Yancey
1980	38.8%	46.6%	34.9%	40.5%	38.3%
1990	39.6%	50.4%	40.2%	42.7%	39%
2000	30.7%	45%	32.8%	38.7%	31.9%
2010	23.5%	35.2%	25%	31.2%	27.5%
2015	23.5%	36.6%	23.7%	26.5%	26.7%



Median Gross Rent as a % of Median Household Income

Source: US Census Bureau

Year	Buncombe	McDowell	Madison	Mitchell	Yancey
1980	16.9%	15.7%	17.6%	15%	18.9%
1990	17.3%	15.7%	14.8%	16.5%	16%
2000	18%	15.2%	14.2%	14.9%	15%
2010	20%	17.5%	18%	16.9%	16.5%
2015	22%	19.5%	19.9%	17.9%	19.2%



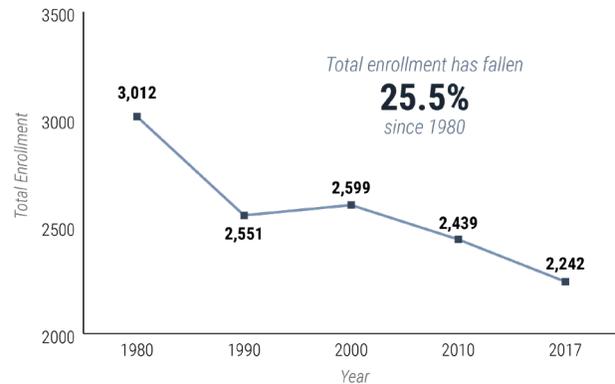
Education

School system quality is an important consideration for many residents when choosing to relocate or remain in a community. Fortunately, Yancey County enjoys an exceptional school system with strong performance. As of 2019, the system had zero “low performing” schools as designated by the State. Teacher turnover is less than half the statewide rate, and teachers have more experience on average than the state as a whole. In 2017, Yancey schools had the 6th highest district proficiency in North Carolina for end-of-grade assessments/grade level proficiency. Additionally, students have better access to technology in Yancey County than statewide rates.

The system currently has four elementary schools, two middle schools, and a single high school. The recent consolidation and creation of Blue Ridge Elementary School is emblematic of a necessary step to maintain instructional quality and control facility costs in the face of declining enrollment. As shown in the chart to the right, school system enrollment has dropped considerably over the past few decades. Further consolidation is likely as this trend continues and existing facilities age. Despite consolidation, the average number of students in elementary and middle schools in Yancey County is significantly

Yancey County School Enrollment, 1980-2017

Source: NC Department of Public Instruction



lower than statewide averages. Yancey has 161 students per elementary school and 259 students per middle school as compared to statewide figures of 483 per elementary and 626 per middle.

County residents are also fortunate to have access to Mayland Community College (MCC), which is one of the highest rated two-year institutions in North Carolina. In addition to their main campus in Spruce Pine, MCC also has a campus in Burnsville to better accommodate students. The college offers 15 associates degree programs, 7 diploma programs, and 16 certificate programs.

Childcare

Much like schools, the availability of affordable daycare options is an important factor affecting the quality of life for residents who have children. Unfortunately, few options exist in Yancey County outside of public preschools. While these preschools offer a valuable and affordable option, their age requirements limit the number of students they can accept. This leaves a provider gap for those with infants and toddlers.

Extensive state licensing requirements, expensive insurance policies, and a host of other challenges limit the number of daycare facilities operating in Yancey County. According to state records, there are only three licensed childcare facilities currently operating in the community - Genesis Academy, Little Hands Learning Center, and the Yancey County Head Start Center. Lack of available and affordable childcare options has

a negative impact on a community's workforce. It forces parents into part-time employment, to miss work days, or to leave the community in search of better offerings.



Rendering of Blue Ridge Elementary School
Photo Credit: Architectural Design Studio

Healthcare

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ranks Yancey County 30th in Health Outcomes and 27th in Health Factors in North Carolina. Health Outcomes is a composite score that accounts for rates of premature death, poor bodily and mental health, and low birthweight. Health Factors is a composite score that accounts for health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, and physical environment.

Despite being ranked in the top third of North Carolina counties, Yancey faces several health challenges. Like many rural communities, the County has felt the negative effects of the opioid abuse epidemic. While solutions to this epidemic fall outside the scope of this plan, it is important that the community recognize the severity of the challenge and the negative impact it has on the County. Mitchell and Yancey counties have formed a Substance Abuse Task Force, which is looking at collaborative, community-based solutions to the opioid crisis.

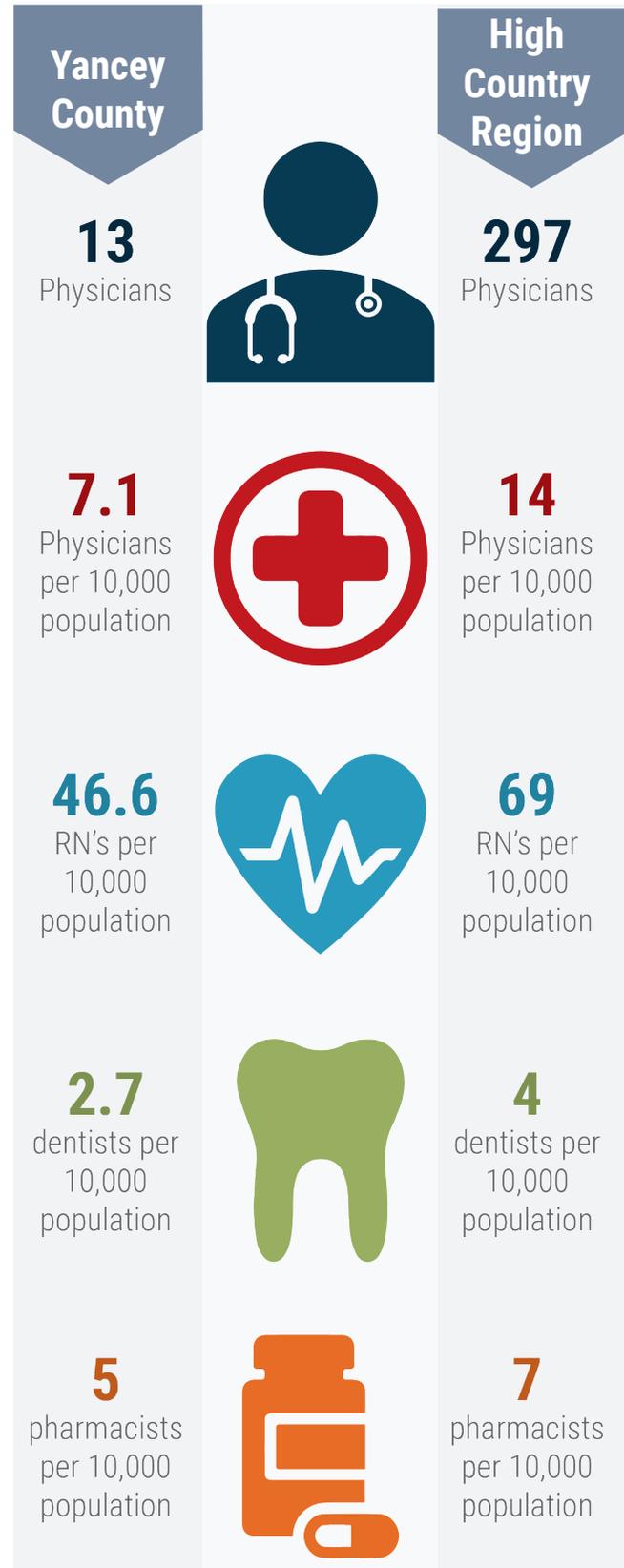
Yancey County also faces a medical provider shortage. As shown in the infographic to the right, Yancey has half as many physicians as the High Country region on average (the High Country region consists of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes, and Yancey counties). The County also has 32% less registered nurses, 33% less dentists, and 29% less pharmacists.

New medical facilities, including a recently opened urgent care clinic in Burnsville, help to address the provider disparity. Innovative technologies like telemedicine promise to increase access to healthcare as well. Public healthcare is vital to bridging the gap. The Yancey County Health Department offers services including adult health, dental public health, communicable disease control, child health, family planning, and more.

Inadequate healthcare and inability to lead a healthy lifestyle directly affect quality of life and workforce effectiveness. It forces residents and employees to spend more time and money driving to and from providers, to forego medical services altogether, or to relocate in search of better provider offerings.

Yancey's Medical Provider Shortage

Data Source: Access NC



Parks & Recreation

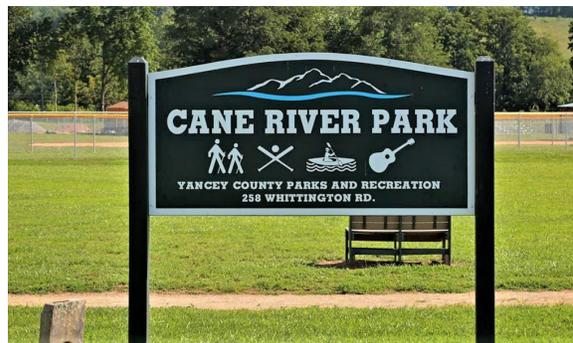
Yancey County has several public parks for residents to enjoy. These include:

- Old Burnsville Gym
- Ray-Cort Recreation Park and Pool
- Kid Mountain Playground
- Patience Park and Pool
- Toe River Campground
- Lincoln Park Field
- Cane River Park

The Yancey County Parks and Recreation Department is active in maintaining and upgrading these facilities. The County is in the process of completing major upgrades at Ray-Cort Park in Burnsville. The \$500,000 project will include a new outdoor fitness station, nature playground, relocation of the volleyball court, an outdoor classroom, new trails, pedestrian bridges, expanded parking, and improved stormwater management and landscaping. The County provided \$172,000 towards the project and secured \$328,000 in grant funding from North Carolina and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Providing exceptional parks and recreation facilities gives residents spaces to enjoy the area's scenic beauty, maintain an active lifestyle, let their children play, and congregate with one another. Creating new parks and maintaining existing ones is an opportunity for local government to directly improve quality of life.



Event at Ray-Cort Park in Burnsville



*Cane River Park
Photo Credit: Yancey Chamber*



*Toe River Campground Pool
Photo Credit: Yancey Chamber*



Shelter at Ray-Cort Park

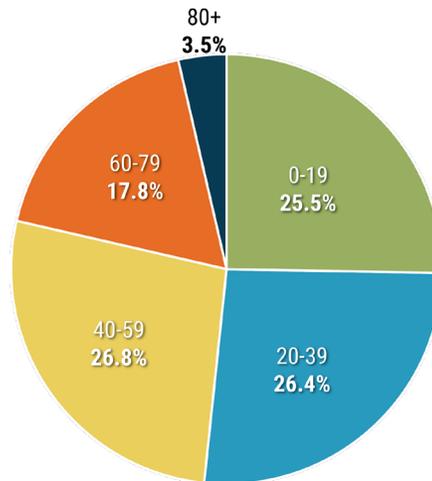
Quality of Life for an Aging Population

The population of Yancey County is growing older. As shown in the chart below, the share of the population aged 50-69 increased from 21.7% of the total population to 28.8% between 1970 and 2016. The share of the population age 70 and older has increased from 7.7% of the total population to 16.4% during the same time frame. The median age in the County is older than every surrounding county with the exception of Mitchell, and is more than 10 years older than North Carolina population centers like Wake and Mecklenburg. The charts on the right illustrate how Yancey's population skews older than the statewide average, particularly among persons age 60 and over.

Given these changing demographics, it is important that leaders encourage policies to accommodate this section of the population and allow residents the ability to age in place. This includes improving access to medical providers, ensuring affordable housing for those on a fixed income, supporting the Yancey Senior Center, and providing sufficient public transportation. The County should also look to attract new assisted living facilities. These policies will have the added benefit of attracting retirees and second home owners.

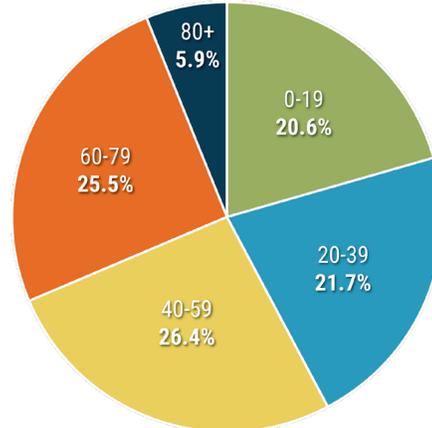
NC Population by Age Bracket

Source: State of NC



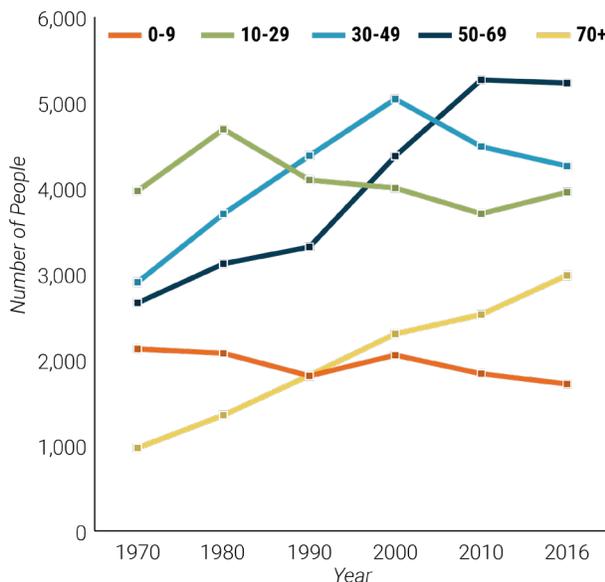
Yancey County Population by Age Bracket

Source: State of NC



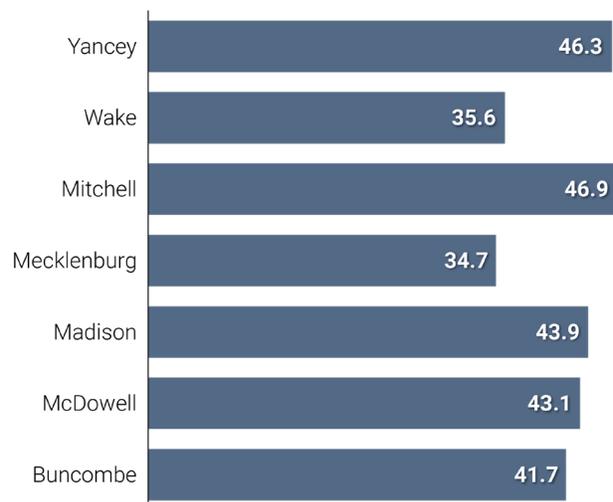
Yancey County Population by Age Group

Sources: US Census, State of NC



Median Age of Area Counties

Source: ACS 2016 Data



Land Use

Land use regulations in North Carolina generally take the form of zoning or subdivision ordinances. Zoning ordinances govern land use while subdivision ordinances govern the division of property. The State authorizes both counties and municipalities to adopt these regulations within their planning jurisdiction if they so choose. The Town of Burnsville has created and adopted both a zoning and subdivision ordinance, while Yancey County has not adopted either.

Burnsville's zoning ordinance is well constructed and embraces many of the recent trends in planning theory. Unlike most municipalities, the Town permits development of two-family and multi-family housing in all residential districts. This allows developers to construct affordable "missing middle" homes like duplexes. Zoning ordinances that heavily favor single-family development patterns are prevalent in many communities across the state and often artificially constrict housing supply. Burnsville's ordinance also contains a set of detailed design guidelines for commercial and multi-family development that are appropriate for a community of its size and character. These guidelines help preserve and enhance the aesthetic beauty of the Town.

Subdivision regulations are needed to ensure orderly and safe growth and to protect those purchasing property within the County. The Yancey County Commission has explored adoption of subdivision regulations in the past, but has taken no action in that direction. With

growth expected over the next several years in the western portion of the County, it is best to draft these regulations and get them in place now. Once adopted, these regulations will facilitate new construction and provide financial institutions with added confidence when lending to owners. Regulations will also help with environmental protection and emergency response.

North Carolina also permits jurisdictions to create and adopt standalone ordinances targeted at specific land uses. These ordinances address topics such as high impact land use, adult establishments, signs, or cell towers. A high impact land use ordinance is needed in Yancey County to prohibit improper placement of high intensity land uses that would be detrimental to the surrounding community and environment.

An area of concern among both Town and County leaders is the number of unmaintained properties and derelict buildings in the community. Burnsville's zoning ordinance requires that "vacant lots and open spaces located adjacent to major thoroughfares" be maintained, but has no such requirement for buildings. There are no requirements for vacant lots or buildings in the unincorporated portion of the County. Both jurisdictions would benefit from adoption of property maintenance standards to address stated concerns and help make the County attractive for visitors and prospective residents.

Public Safety

Yancey County is fortunate to have exceptional emergency services. The County, Town of Burnsville, and volunteer organizations work together to ensure a safe community. The County enjoys an extremely low crime index rate of 712.7 per 100,000 people, which is over 76% lower than the statewide rate. Crime index rate is a measurement used by the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation that accounts for the total number of burglaries, murders, rapes, aggravated assaults, larcenies, and motor vehicle thefts in a jurisdiction.



*Yancey County Sheriff's Department Patrol Division
Photo Credit: Yancey County Sheriff's Department*

Goals & Recommendations



GOAL: Elevate the quality of life in Yancey County and increase the community's population by focusing on improvements in the areas of recreation, healthcare, land use, and education

People increasingly choose where they live based on quality of life rather than employment considerations. As will be discussed in the following section, successful economic development relies on the presence of an adequate workforce. In order to retain and attract population to Yancey County, and thereby cultivate a healthy workforce, community leaders must pay close attention to the quality of life for residents. Fortunately, the County has several assets working in its favor, including:

- a scenic natural environment with clean air and water, little light pollution, and little noise pollution
- a strong network of non-profit organizations that are active in a variety of sectors
- excellent public school system and a top-tier community college
- low crime rate
- relatively low housing costs
- a vibrant and active downtown
- parks and outdoor recreation opportunities

Together, these characteristics make Yancey County an attractive place to live. However, there are still areas in need of improvement, including:

- a shortage of physicians, lack of specialists including behavioral services, and a lack of dental providers who accept Medicaid
- poorly maintained properties that reduce property values, pose safety risks, and act as eyesores
- lack of entertainment options in the evening
- no land use regulation in the unincorporated portions of the County
- limited staffing for parks & recreation

The following recommendations are intended to maintain and enhance Yancey County's quality of life:

Parks & Recreation Recommendations

1. **Develop a joint parks and recreation plan between Yancey County and Burnsville that covers maintenance, identifies new projects, and assesses staffing.**
2. **Increase funding and staffing for the County Parks and Recreation Department.**
3. **Provide secure bike parking throughout downtown Burnsville and at all public facilities in the County.**
4. **Hold regular pop-up events in Burnsville Town Square to entertain residents and attract visitors. Use these events to increase exposure of local community service organizations through sponsorships or partnerships.**
5. **Develop a masterplan for construction of a new greenway in the vicinity of Burnsville.**

Community Facilities & Capacity Recommendations

6. **Encourage and incentivize high quality childcare centers.**
7. **Hold an annual volunteer fair at Mountain Heritage High School to recruit younger volunteers, engage teens in community projects, and increase awareness of specific volunteer needs and opportunities.**
8. **Invest in community facilities, services, and public spaces.**

9. Increase the teacher pay supplement for Yancey County Schools.
10. Regularly promote the County's high-performing school system to prospective residents and employers.
11. Organize an annual summit between non-profit leaders, County Commissioners, Town Council members, and local representatives in the General Assembly.
12. Develop a streetscape plan for downtown Burnsville. The plan should address elements such as street lighting, seating, and multimodal facilities. As part of the process, work with business owners to establish a capital improvement plan for the downtown area.
13. Develop a grant program to facilitate upper story and multi-family residential development in downtown Burnsville.
14. Compile a new homebuyer welcome packet, including information about community events and amenities, organizations, coupons for local shops/restaurants, and information on how to start a business. These packages could be distributed by building/zoning staff or the Register of Deeds Office.
15. Support the Senior Center and Yancey County Transportation Authority to ensure that current levels of service are maintained or improved.
16. Continue to grow the Yancey County remote employees group as a forum for workers who telecommute. Regularly seek feedback from members on how to attract other remote workers to the community.

Healthcare Recommendations

17. Utilize the North Carolina Medical Society Foundation's Community Practitioner Program to attract providers.
18. Cultivate a relationship with the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) to promote Yancey County as a destination for NHSC scholarship recipients to complete their required post-graduation service.
19. Recruit assisted living facilities, skilled nursing centers, and retirement homes to allow residents to remain in the community close to family.
20. Expand hours and services at existing healthcare facilities, including behavioral health.

Land Use Recommendations

21. Develop and adopt subdivision regulations for the unincorporated areas of the County. These will improve public safety and protect property owners by ensuring development meets minimum standards.
22. Adopt and enforce property maintenance regulations for buildings and vacant lots in the Town of Burnsville.
23. Adopt a high impact land use ordinance for the County to protect property owners from projects that could harm neighboring land values, the environment, and the scenic nature of the community.
24. Encourage construction of new multi-family rental housing.

Measures of Success



Quality of life enhancement efforts will be measured by:

- Growth in the quality and quantity of public recreation offerings in the community
- Well-maintained and highly utilized public facilities and spaces
- Continued high performance by Yancey County schools
- Development of downtown Burnsville as a community and tourist center
- Population growth and retention of residents
- Adoption of land use regulations designed to protect and promote quality of life
- Reduction in the medical provider shortage



WORKFORCE

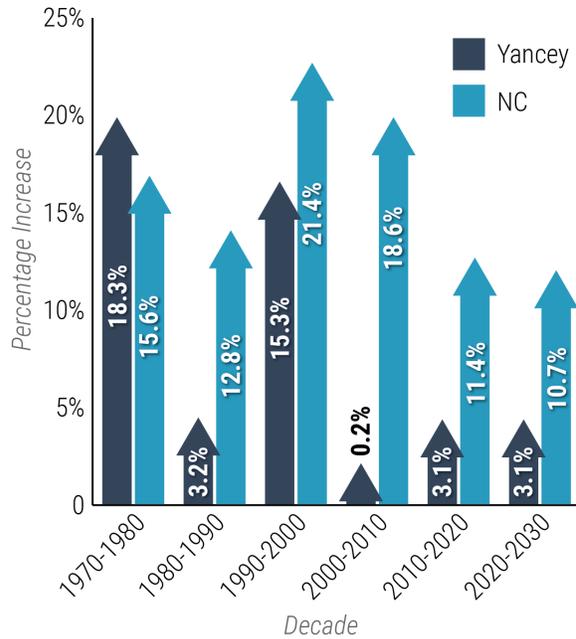


Workforce

A community's workforce impacts its ability to attract, retain, and grow businesses. In the absence of a strong workforce, companies find it more difficult to hire, train, and keep qualified personnel. This increases costs, which can outweigh other financial benefits of locating in a community such as public incentives or available sites and buildings. Today, rural communities must focus on cultivating a healthy workforce if they hope to successfully develop their local economies. As mentioned in the previous section, attracting and keeping residents is the first step in this process. Providing training and education is the second. This section will examine the demographics of Yancey County, analyze characteristics of the working age population, and summarize existing programs for workforce development.

Population Growth, Yancey vs. NC

Source: NC OSMB



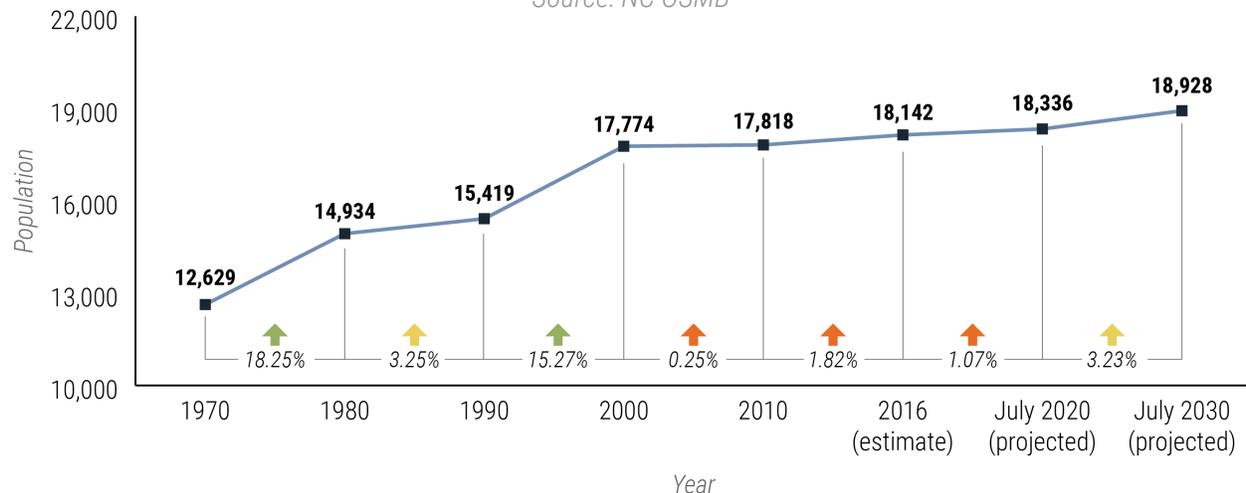
Population

Yancey County's population grew steadily from 1970 to 2000, but has largely remained stagnant since. Currently estimated at 18,142, it is projected to only grow by 4% over the next 20 years. As indicated in the chart to the right, this growth rate lags severely behind population trends statewide. Of further concern, all of the County's population gain is attributable to migration rather than natural increase. Absent

migration, Yancey would be losing population at an increasing rate. Statistics shown in the previous section indicate that the population is skewing older, suggesting that younger residents are leaving and being replaced by older residents migrating into Yancey. This trend poses a problem for employers as they seek to fill job openings in a community where the working age population is declining.

Yancey County Population, Past and Projected

Source: NC OSMB



Yancey County Components of Population Change

Source: NC OSMB

Year	Population Change	Natural Increase	Net Migration
2010	-22	-11	-11
2011	+228	-57	+285
2012	+50	-99	+149
2013	+100	-144	+244
2014	+96	-197	+293
2015	+123	-246	+369
2016	+325	-312	+637

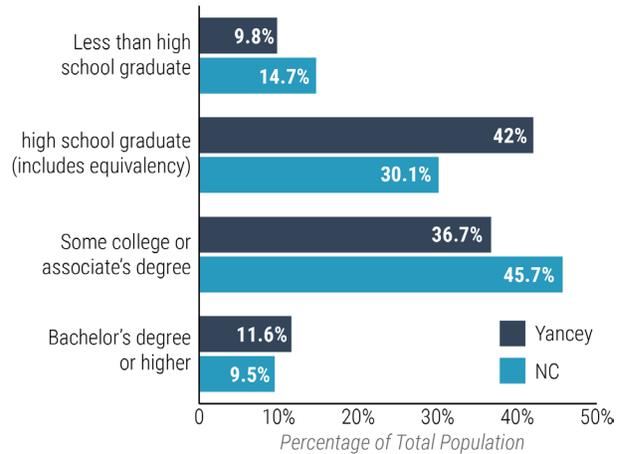
Workforce Characteristics

Many of the top paying industries in Yancey County - information, finance, education, health - require post-secondary education. Residents who hold a Bachelor's degree or higher earn nearly double the annual wages of those without a high school diploma. Fortunately, Yancey's workforce is better educated than North Carolina averages. As shown in the chart below, a larger share of County residents than statewide averages are high school graduates or hold a Bachelor's degree or higher. However, based on the data below, the community should focus on increasing the number of high school graduates who go on to pursue post-secondary education, particularly at the associate's degree level.

Unemployment in the County has declined steadily over the past few years. This is a positive trend for the community, but also tightens the labor market for employers when coupled with stagnant population growth. Also, unemployment rates can fail to capture cases of underemployment or withdrawal from the labor force entirely. As shown on the chart to the right, the percentage of Yancey County residents who do not work increased by 4.2% from 2009 to 2016. Much of this may be attributable to the aging pattern discussed earlier. Connecting underemployed and unemployed residents to training for in-demand skills will simultaneously address both problems.

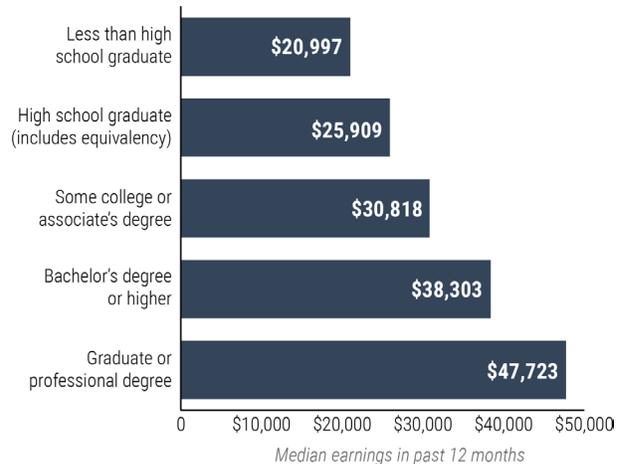
Educational attainment, age 25 years and over

Source: American Community Survey, 2016



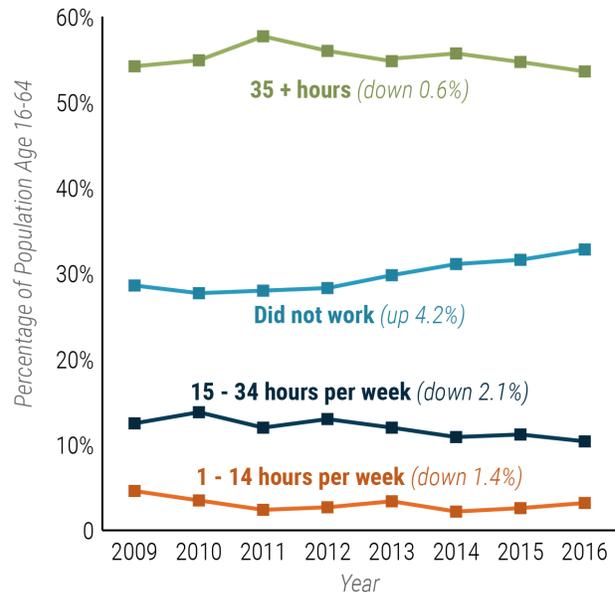
Yancey County median earnings by educational attainment, age 25 years and over with earnings

Source: American Community Survey, 2016



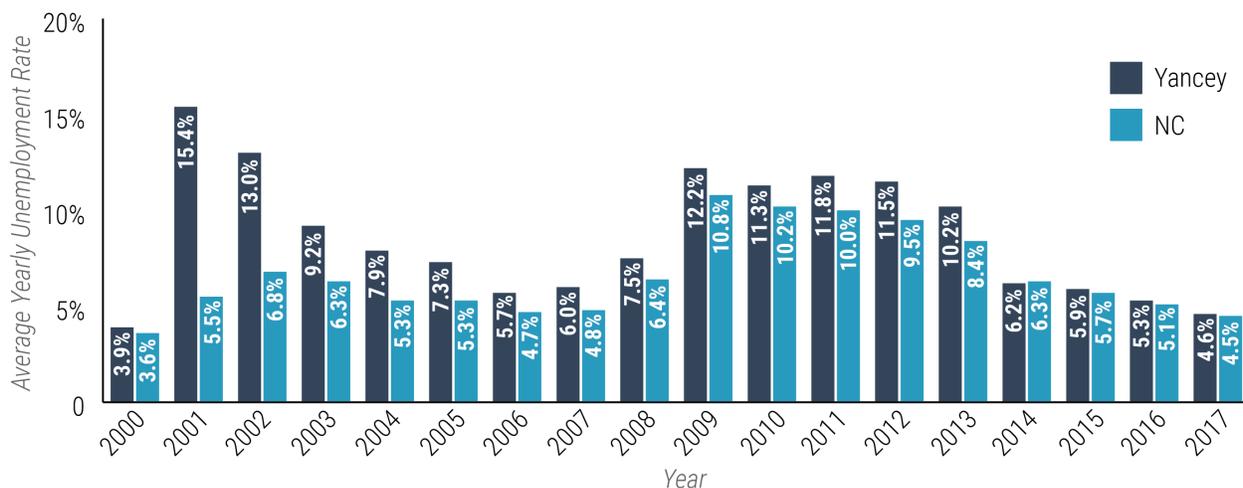
Working Habits of Yancey County Residents Aged 16-64

Source: American Community Survey



Unemployment Rate, 2000-2017 Yancey County vs. NC

Source: American Community Survey, 2009-2013



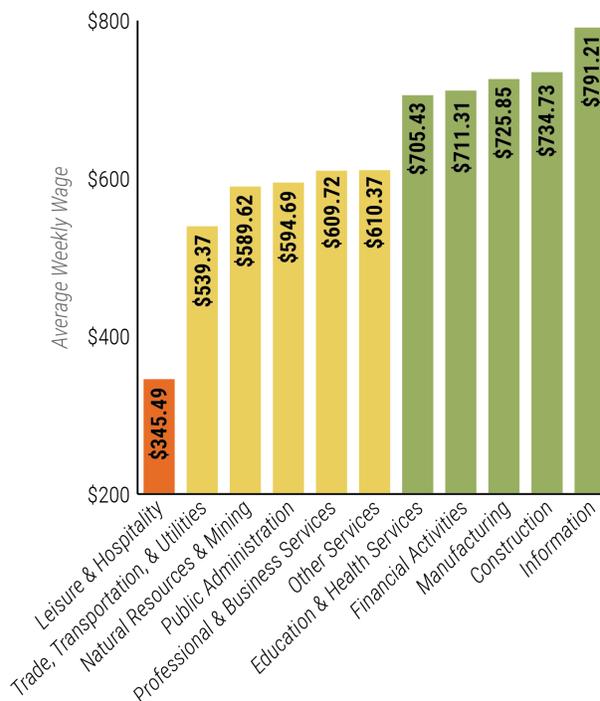
Yancey County Daily Commuter Flow Patterns

Source: American Community Survey, 2009-2013



Yancey County Average Weekly Wage by Industry, 2017

Source: American Community Survey



Commuting Patterns

As illustrated by the graphic above, more people leave Yancey County for work each day than enter it from neighboring communities. This disparity suggests that residents are able to find better living arrangements in Yancey (lower cost-of-living, higher quality of life) and more job opportunities outside of it. While employment opportunities exist in Yancey County, the

community does not have the diversity or quantity of employers as some neighboring counties. Unfortunately, available commuting data does not provide greater detail beyond approximate totals. Recent improvements to US 19E will continue to make commuting to and from Mitchell and Buncombe counties more feasible.

Workforce Development

The primary workforce development entities in Yancey are the County School System, Mayland Community College (MCC), and the NC Works Career Center. Together, these three organizations provide training opportunities, connect job seekers to openings, and respond to employers' workforce needs. They collaborate closely to integrate, supplement, streamline, and adapt their services and offerings as needed.

In addition to preparing students for post-secondary education, Mountain Heritage High School's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program offers technical training designed to ready students for immediate employment following graduation in several career fields. Their programs also position students for further study at Mayland Community College where they can gain advanced skills. The CTE program works closely with MCC to design training pathways that meet the need of regional employers and the local market. A table containing greater detail on CTE program offerings can be found later in this section.

Mayland Community College consistently ranks as one of the best two-year institutions in North Carolina. MCC offers a wide variety of diplomas, certificates, and associate degrees across 18 disciplines, as shown in the table on the next page. In addition to its main campus in Mitchell County, MCC also operates a satellite campus in Burnsville, which includes the Anspach Advanced Manufacturing School (pictured below). This state-of-the-art facility provides students with the opportunity to train on technologically-advanced equipment

that is common in modern manufacturing environments. Opened in 2015, it creates a pipeline of skilled employees for some of the region's premier industrial companies such as Altec, Glen Raven, and BRP.

MCC also provides a wide array of continuing education programs that allow residents to upgrade their professional skills, obtain a high school equivalency degree, improve gaps in their employability, or learn specialized skills required by individual employers. Example programs include Basic CAD, Industrial Maintenance, Pharmacy Technician, Physical Therapy Aide, Small Engine Repair, and more. In conjunction with the NCWorks Career Center (operated by the High Country Workforce Development Board), MCC offers skills training for job seekers with classes designed to help participants complete job applications, write resumes, and prepare for interviews. Much of this training focuses on development of a positive self-concept, employability skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and basic technology.

In addition to its work with MCC, the High Country Workforce Development Board maintains close relationships with the region's employers to ensure they are able to hire skilled individuals. The Board often holds career fairs and employer-specific hiring events to facilitate recruitment. Its membership is filled by private sector employers from across the High Country region, making it a useful forum to discuss shared challenges, successful strategies, and regional closures/openings.





MAYLAND
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Mayland Community College Programs of Study

Program of Study	Diploma(s) Offered	Certificate(s) Offered	Associate(s) Offered
Applied Engineering Technology (AET)	AET - Design, AET - Machining	Machining Processes, Mechanical Design, Mechatronics	Applied Engineering Technology AAS
Basic Law Enforcement Training		Basic Law Enforcement Training	
Business Administration	Business Administration	Business Administration	Business Administration
Computer Engineering Technology		Computer Engineering Technology	Computer Engineering Technology
Cosmetology	Cosmetology	Cosmetology	Cosmetology
Criminal Justice Technology		Criminal Justice Technology	Criminal Justice Technology
Electronics Engineering Technology		Electronics Engineering Technology	Electronics Engineering Technology
General Occupation Technology			RN to BSN Pathway AAS
Human Services Technology		Human Services Technology	Human Services Technology
Information Technology		Computer Programming, Industry Recognized IT Certifications	Information Technology AAS
Medical Assisting	Medical Assisting	Medical Assisting, Medi- cal Office Administration	Medical Assisting
Nursing			Nursing, Advanced Place- ment Nursing
Nurse Aide		Nurse Aid	
Practical Nursing	Practical Nursing		
Welding Technology	Welding Technology	Basic Welding, Intermediate Welding	
Arts			Associate in Arts
General Education Nursing			Associate in General Education Nursing
Science			Associate in Science

Yancey County Schools

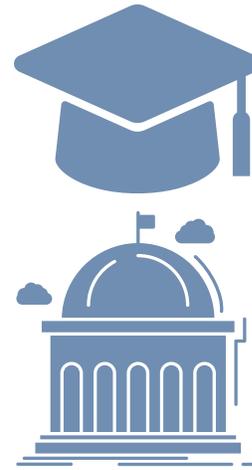
Ranked **16th** out of 116 NC School Districts



56% of teachers have 10+ years of experience



Ranked **3rd** out of 16 western NC districts based on 3rd and 12th grade high proficiency exam scores



92% high school graduation rate

71.5% of graduates enroll in post-secondary schools

CTE Programs

	NC Career Cluster	Available Pathways	Student Credentialing Opportunities	Career & College Promise Certificate Aligned with MCC
	Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources	Natural Resources Systems; Plant Systems (Horticulture)	NC Private Pesticide Applicator	
	Architecture & Construction	Construction; Drafting; Interior Design	NCCER Credential; OSHA 10-Hour Construction Industry Certification	Carpentry; Masonry
	Arts, A/V Technology & Communications	Apparel and Textile Production		
	Business Management & Administration	Entrepreneurship; General Management	Microsoft Office Specialist User 2016 Excel, Word, and PowerPoint Certification; Venture Entrepreneurial Expedition	Business Administration
	Health Science	Biomedical Technology Healthcare Professional	CPR/Automatic Electric Defibrillator & First Aid; OSHA 10-Hour Industry Healthcare Industry Certification	Medical Assisting; Nurse Aid
	Human Services	Counseling and Mental Health; Early Childhood Education; Food and Nutrition	CPR & First Aid; NC Early Childhood Credential (NCECC) Equivalency; Accredited Food Handler; Certified Food Protection Manager	Social Work
	Information Technology	Computer Science; Computer Programming (Python)		Web Design; Computer Programming
	Law, Public Safety, Corrections, & Security			Criminal Justice
	Manufacturing			Welding
	Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics			Machining Processes; Mechatronics; Mechanical Design
	Transportation, Distribution & Logistics	Automotive Services	S/P2 Mechanical Safety; S/P2 Mechanical Pollution Prevention	

Goals & Recommendations



GOAL A: Expose students to local career paths

GOAL B: Increase the number of adult learners utilizing available training programs

GOAL C: Retain and attract working age residents

At its core, workforce development seeks to increase the amount of skilled individuals in a laborshed. When successful, workforce development contributes to a healthy economic environment that fosters growth of local businesses, creates opportunities for entrepreneurs, and attracts outside employers to relocate into a community.

Yancey County already has the organizations, facilities, and networks to train residents for in-demand careers. Instead, the local barriers to workforce development are under-utilization of existing resources and a declining working age population. Retaining and attracting working age residents will be difficult to achieve, primarily because there is no single solution. However, following recommendations from other sections of this plan, particularly Quality of Life, will better position the community for growth.

The following recommendations are intended to improve utilization of workforce development resources in Yancey County and increase awareness of local career paths:

1. Carry out a talent recruitment marketing campaign to attract new residents.
2. Create an externship program for high school teachers and guidance counselors where they work for a day at local large employers. The experience will give them a better sense of career opportunities and allow them to more effectively communicate those opportunities to their students.
3. Collaborate with local employers to increase available internship sites for students in high school.
4. Following adequate preparation, test high school students for National Career Readiness Certification in order to gain designation as an ACT Work Ready Community. This will give the County a measurable marketing tool to attract employers and provide students with a credential to demonstrate competency during job searches.
5. To combat negative stigmas associated with manufacturing, coordinate factory tours of local facilities for students. Show students financial breakdowns of potential earnings and career trajectories.
6. Develop a database of email addresses for graduating high school students. Use these to distribute a quarterly newsletter with marketing materials designed to retain them or attract them back to Yancey County. The newsletter should contain information about community events, new businesses, housing, available commercial space, and job openings. Use a service such as MailChimp to ensure the newsletter is visually appealing and functional across different devices.
7. Form a focus group of non-traditional students at Mayland Community College to identify common barriers for adult learners and what actions the college could take to ease the process of returning to school.
8. Establish a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program as a partnership between Yancey County Sheriff's Office, Burnsville Police Department, the Substance Abuse Task Force, and the Yancey County Court System. These programs provide alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders and prevent them from building a criminal record. Contact the NC Harm Reduction Coalition for assistance in developing a program.
9. Pursue a partnership with the NC School of Science & Mathematics western campus.
10. Enhance STEM education in Yancey schools.
11. Build upon the "1 to 1" technology program in Yancey County Schools.

Measures of Success



- Increased enrollment in CTE programs
- Decreased hiring time for local employers
- Increased enrollment in MCC programs



INFRASTRUCTURE



FRENCH BROAD
ELECTRIC

Infrastructure

The term “infrastructure” is used in a variety of contexts. For the purposes of this section, “infrastructure” will be limited to water, wastewater, natural gas, electricity, internet service, and the transportation network. Together, these components influence the location, scale, and viability of residential, commercial, and industrial development in a community. For example, dense residential and commercial development requires access to public water and wastewater services. Industrial development often requires all the above-mentioned services, particularly access to highways. As technology becomes more ubiquitous, high-speed internet service is becoming as important as traditional utilities like water or wastewater in supporting business.

Having these services in place is a prerequisite for successful economic development. Without them, development and growth are artificially capped. Fortunately,

infrastructure provision is a component of economic development where local government has tangible control. Governments can choose the level of resources they dedicate to expansion and maintenance of public infrastructure and prioritize the areas where those investments take place. Their decisions produce a physical outcome with a defined benefit. Investment in maintenance of existing systems is just as valuable as system expansion, if not more so, because any expansion will incur additional long-term maintenance liability. For this reason, expansions should be heavily scrutinized to ensure the private sector investment they leverage will cover the cost of long-term liability. This section will provide information on existing conditions and location of each type of infrastructure in Yancey County, examine trends, identify needs, and detail previous planning efforts related to them.

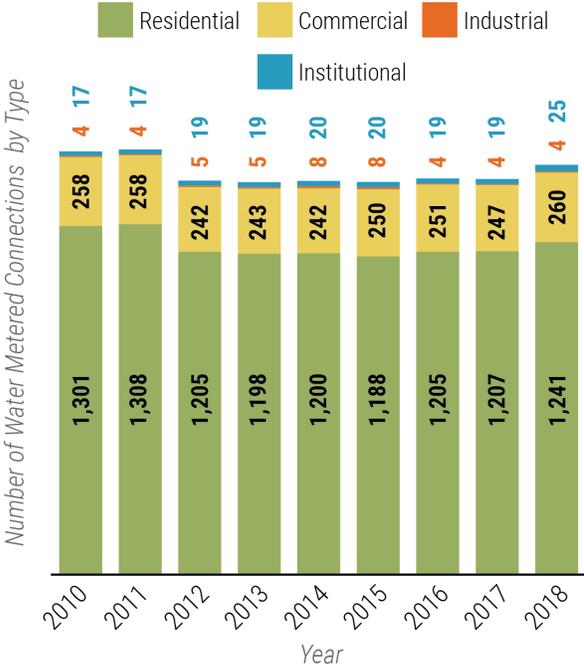
Water & Wastewater

The Town of Burnsville is the only public water provider in Yancey County. It has operated its system for over 100 years, which has grown to now include approximately 46 miles of water main. As of 2018, the system had 1,530 metered connections serving a year-round population of 3,825. The majority of these connections are residential, but other user types (commercial, industrial, institutional) consume more water per connection. This is illustrated by the chart to the right and on the following page.

The system’s primary water source is a raw water intake on the Cane River, south of Town. There are also two emergency raw water intakes on Bowlens Creek. Burnsville operates a single treatment plant, which pumps potable water to a 275,000 gallon clearwell, 2,000,000 gallon primary storage tank, and 300,000 gallon tank near Altec. The current treatment plant was constructed in 1989.

Number of Water Connections by User Type

Source: Yancey Local Water Supply Plan, 2018



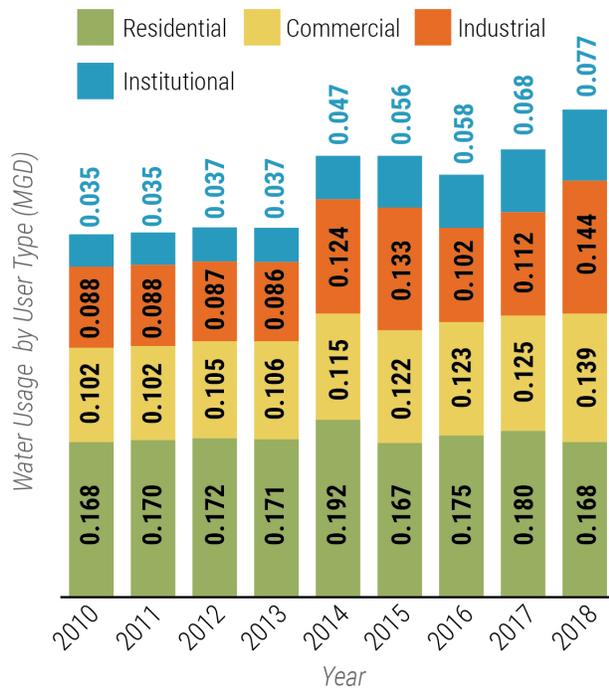


As shown in the map above, public water service is confined to Burnsville and the surrounding area, primarily extending along U.S. Hwy 19E. The majority of distribution lines are cast iron, ductile iron, or polyvinyl chloride (PVC), though some older asbestos cement lines are still in operation. From 2010-2018 Burnsville replaced 28,273ft of water main, added 23,029ft of new water main, and replaced 953 water

meters. Water demand has risen over the past eight years, particularly among industrial users. Fortunately, as shown in the chart at the bottom right of this page, demand is still only 47% of available supply. The Town's storage capacity (2.575 MG) is also more than adequate given current usage.

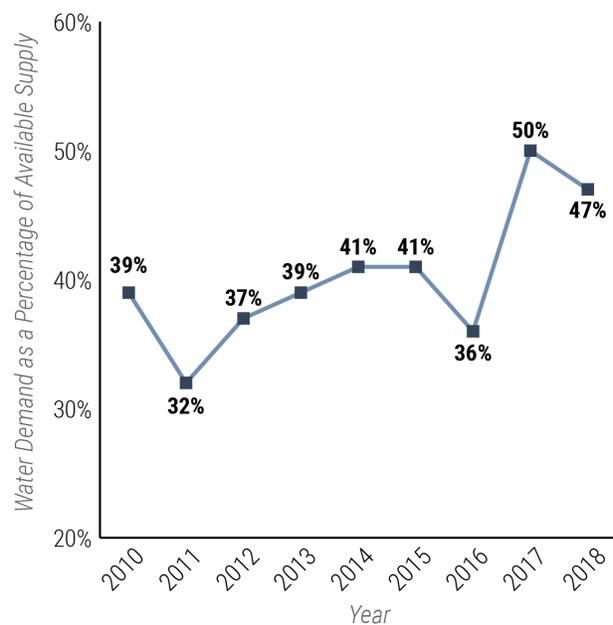
Water Consumption by User Type

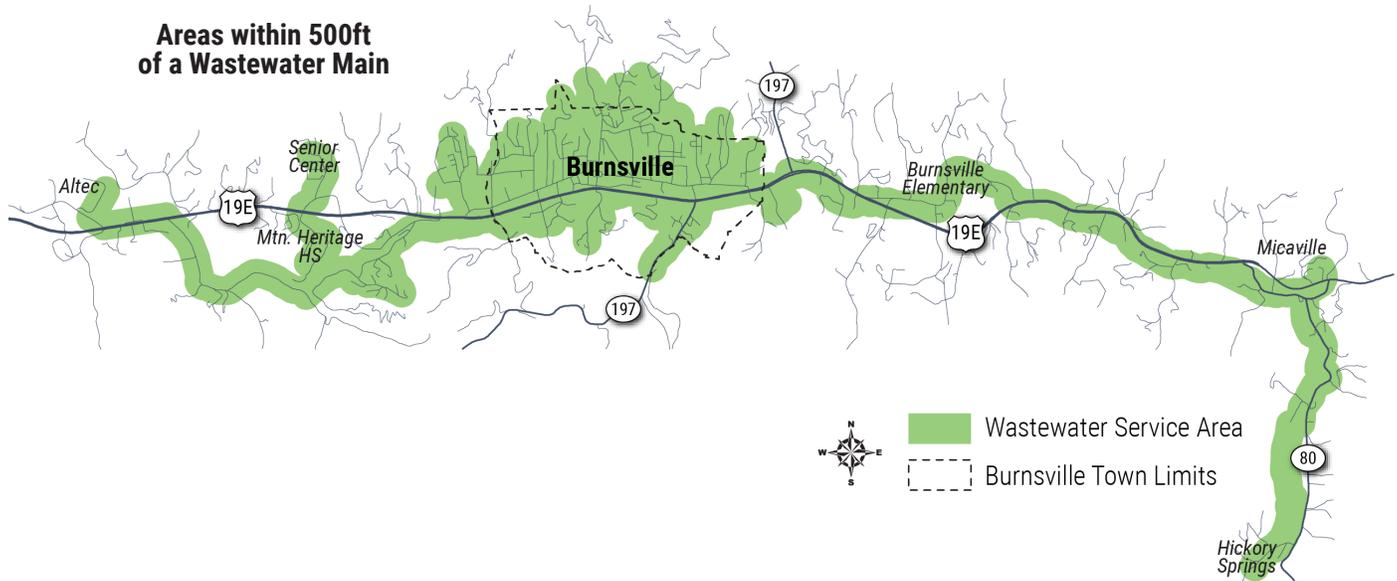
Source: Yancey Local Water Supply Plan, 2010-18



Water Demand as a % of Supply

Source: Yancey Local Water Supply Plan, 2010-18

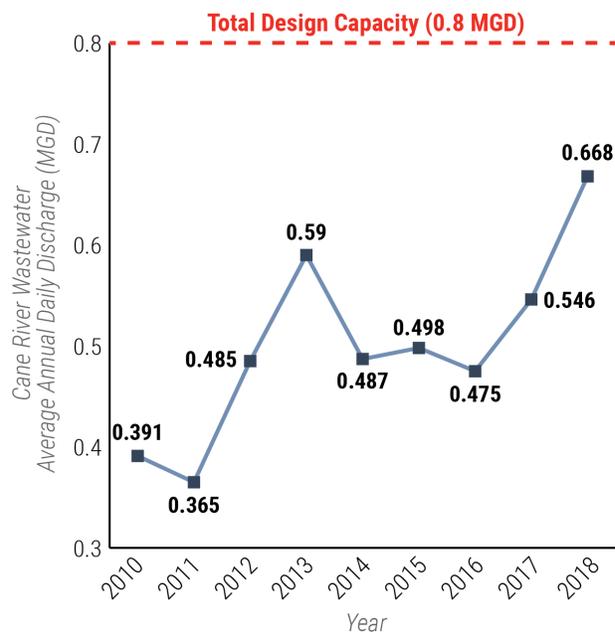




Burnsville and the East Yancey Sewer District are the only wastewater providers in the County. The map on the following page shows the extent of their service area. The two providers are in the process of integrating their systems, which is expected to be complete in late 2019. Wastewater discharge has increased over the past two years, as shown in the chart directly above. The treatment plant has a current design capacity of 800,000 gallons per day. The average annual daily discharge from the facility in 2018 was 668,000 gallons. Some of this increase may be attributable to an abnormally wet year. Rainwater can infiltrate older, worn sewer lines. Heavy rain events cause the amount of water coming into the wastewater treatment plant to surge. Identifying leaks and repairing older lines may reduce the average level of wastewater treated at the plant each day and conserve capacity at the treatment plant.

Burnsville charges the same rate for water and sewer service - \$35.09 per 5,000 gallons. The top two dials on the next page show how these rates compare to other utilities in North Carolina with 1,000 to 3,000 connections. The Town's water rate is near the median for similar sized utilities, while the sewer rate falls nearly 20% lower than the median. The Cost Recovery dial shows the operating ratio for Burnsville's utility system on a scale developed by the UNC Environmental Finance Center. The ratio divides

Total Wastewater Permitted Capacity vs. Average Annual Daily Discharge, 2010-2018
 Source: Yancey Local Water Supply Plan, 2010-18



a system's operating revenues by its expenses, including depreciation. Burnsville's ratio is 1.01, indicating that the system is breaking even. However, sustainable systems need a ratio much higher than 1.0 in order to cover the cost of long-term maintenance without subsidy from the local government's general fund. As shown on the Median Affordability dial, Burnsville's rates are affordable for most residents.

Burnsville Water and Wastewater System Metrics vs. Similar Size Systems in NC

Source: UNC EFC Water and Wastewater Rates Dashboard, January 1, 2019

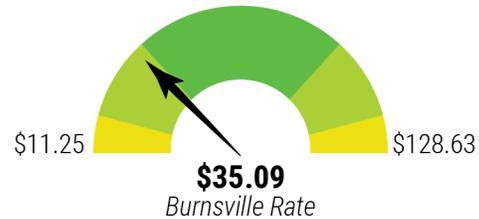
Water Bill at 5,000 gallons

Median: \$33.38



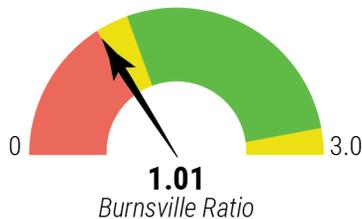
Sewer Bill at 5,000 gallons

Median: \$43.85



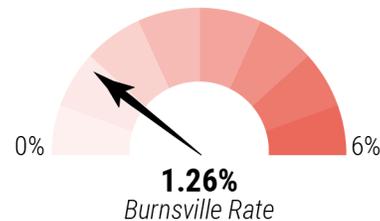
Cost Recovery

(operating ratio including depreciation)



Median Affordability

(annual water bill as % of MHI)



Natural Gas

Piedmont Natural Gas offers service along US Hwy 19E from the Mitchell County/Yancey County border to just west of Burnsville. Downtown Burnsville and Main Street are also served. Two of the County's largest employers - Altec and Glen Raven - are connected to this system. Piedmont has excess capacity to serve new customers, but Burnsville's location at the end of their distribution network requires careful consideration of any extensions or hook-ons. New customers, particularly large users like a manufacturing facility, must work with Piedmont to determine feasibility of connecting to natural gas service. Piedmont's staff estimates that the timetable for natural gas installation to serve a new industry would range from 6 months to 1.5 years from request to full installation.

3-Phase Electric

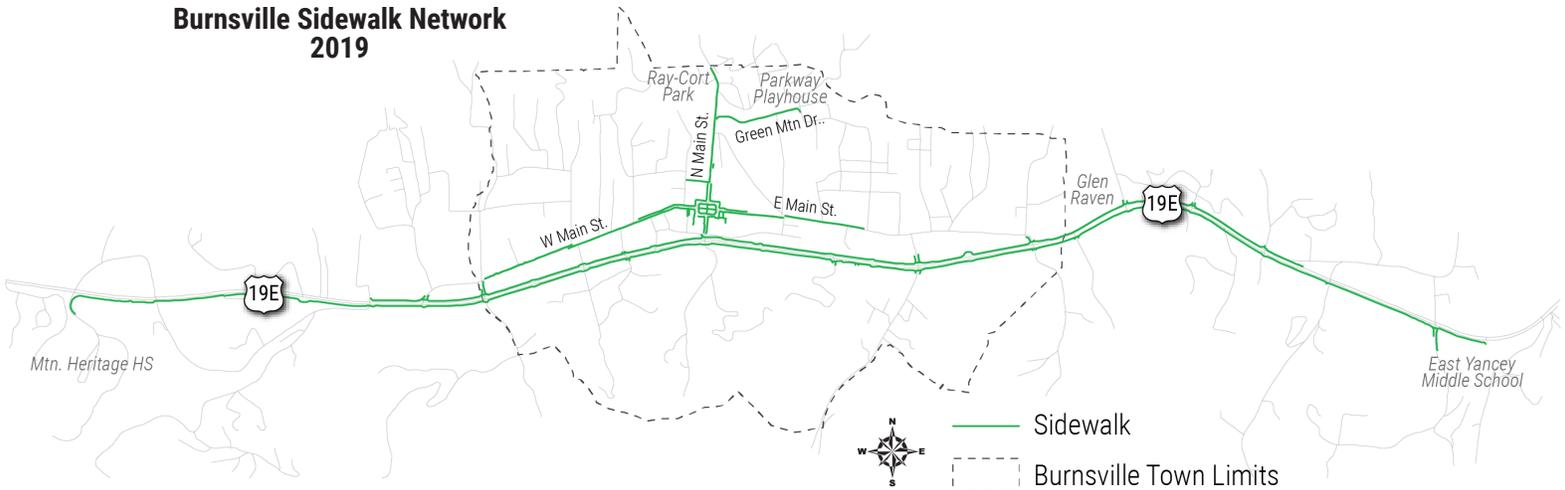
3-phase electric service is often required by industrial facilities and other heavy electric consumers. French Broad Electric Membership Corporation provides 3-phase coverage around Burnsville and along US Hwy 19E and Hwy 80. French Broad operates six substations in

Yancey and provides basic electric service to the rest of the County as well. French Broad also partners with USDA to offer the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) program, which provides funding to local non-profit organizations for projects that will create and retain employment in rural areas.

Broadband Internet

Unlike many rural counties in western North Carolina, Yancey has broadband internet service available to the majority of its residents. Beginning in 2010, Country Cablevision used a \$25,300,000 grant from USDA's Rural Utilities Service to run over 909 miles of fiber optic cable in Yancey and Mitchell counties. 4,372 homes and businesses are now connected to their service and enjoy internet speeds more than capable of handling modern bandwidth demands. The number of connections is quickly growing, with an average of 50 customers added each week and a waiting list of 640. County Cablevision also provides free Wi-Fi in the downtown area for visitors and shoppers. They are currently testing 1GB service, which may soon be available county-wide.

Burnsville Sidewalk Network 2019



Transportation

Transportation infrastructure serves automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. Yancey County has 389 miles of roadway maintained by the North Carolina Department of Transportation and 7 miles maintained by the Town of Burnsville. However, most automobile traffic in the County is confined to US Hwy 19E, Hwy 19W, Hwy 80, and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The Yancey County Comprehensive Transportation Plan, prepared in 2008 by NCDOT and the High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO), set priorities for future roadway projects in the County. It identified improvement of US 19E as a top roadway need. Expansion of US Hwy 19E into a four-lane stretching from the Mitchell County border to I-26 in the west began in recent years and is now almost complete. This expansion will accommodate future residential, industrial, and commercial growth. NCDOT and the High Country RPO will begin the process of updating Yancey's Comprehensive Transportation Plan in 2020. With most of the County's auto traffic needs now met, the upcoming planning process presents an opportunity to prioritize multimodal projects.

The 2008 CTP and the 2014 High Country Bike Plan identified several roadway improvements to better accommodate bicycle users. Among their recommendations were on-road improvements for US 19E, US 19W, NC 80, NC 197, NC 226, and NC 128. Most of the proposed improvements involved expansion of roadway shoulders to allow more room for

cyclists. The soon-to-be completed US 19E project will add shoulder width to accommodate cyclists for its entire length as well as separated bike lanes within the corporate limits of Burnsville and vicinity.

Sidewalk infrastructure in the County is primarily limited to Burnsville and the surrounding area, as illustrated by the map above. Maintenance responsibility for the approximately 10.9 miles of sidewalk falls on the Town and County. Several stakeholders consulted during the planning process mentioned disrepair of sidewalk and roadway infrastructure in the downtown area as detrimental to the community's aesthetic attractiveness and economic development, particularly with regards to tourism.

Yancey County Transportation Authority (YCTA) provides demand-response transit service to residents. Regular routes run 7:30am-4:30pm Monday through Friday. Some passengers receive reduced fares through government assistance.



Bike lanes included in the recent US 19E enhancement

Goals & Recommendations



GOAL A: Improve bicycle and pedestrian transportation infrastructure

GOAL B: Prioritize maintenance and fiscal sustainability of the water and wastewater system

GOAL C: Expand water and wastewater capacity as needed

Infrastructure has an influence on every previous section of this plan. It supports growth of tourism, small business, industry, and agriculture while guiding residential development and contributing to quality of life. Yancey County has several distinct advantages in its existing infrastructure, including:

- expansion of US 19E into a 4-lane divided highway with a direct connection to I-26
- existence of a professionally developed water and sewer asset management and capital improvements plan, last updated in 2016
- availability of natural gas and 3-phase electric service in areas of the County most likely to attract future industrial development
- high speed internet service available to most County residents

Disadvantages facing the County include:

- low operating ratio for water and wastewater services
- aging water and wastewater infrastructure
- poor sidewalk connectivity and physical condition in some areas
- mountainous terrain raises the cost of infrastructure projects

The following recommendations are intended to advance infrastructure provision to better support economic development efforts listed previously in this plan:

1. Complete connection of the Burnsville and East Yancey wastewater systems.
2. Develop a capital improvement and maintenance plan for sidewalks.
3. Advocate for the improvements identified in the High Country Bike Plan.

4. Develop a roadway improvement plan for the Town of Burnsville to identify outstanding pavement needs and prioritize maintenance funding over the next 10 years.
5. Apply for the NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Grant to identify needs and potential projects in Burnsville.
6. Add free public Wi-Fi to all County owned parks.
7. Follow the recommendations outlined in the Burnsville Water and Sewer Asset Management and Capital Improvements Plan. Place particular emphasis on the Main Sewer Interceptor East and West improvements and Main Street water line improvements.
8. Expand water and sewer service in the western part of the County as development warrants.
9. Build a pedestrian connection between Cane River Middle School and Blue Ridge Elementary School.
10. Prioritize multimodal projects and designs during the upcoming Comprehensive Transportation Plan update.
11. Work with the University of North Carolina's Environmental Finance Center to evaluate an increase in water and sewer rates.
12. Collaborate with NCDOT to create additional angler parking along state roadways.

Measures of Success



- Increased operating ratio for Burnsville's water and wastewater system
- Improved appearance of downtown sidewalks and pavement
- Increased pedestrian connectivity
- Inclusion of multimodal projects in the State Transportation Improvement Plan



IMPLEMENTATION



Implementation

This plan outlines over 100 unique recommendations to advance economic development in Yancey County. Each will require different people, resources, and timeframes to complete. Given the diversity and quantity of recommendations, the best strategy for implementation is a team approach.

This plan suggests creating 11 working teams each tasked with achieving a set of recommendations. Recommendations are grouped by similarity to take advantage of team members' interests and expertise. The work of these teams will be monitored and guided by an Implementation Committee (IC) made up by the Yancey County EDC Board, County Manager, EDC Executive Director, and a Burnsville staff member. The membership of the working teams will initially be set by the IC. Once up and running, working teams should be able to recruit their own additional members based on project demands and needed expertise.

The IC should convene quarterly to review progress, discuss challenges, and provide direction to the working teams. The membership of each of the 11 working teams should include at least one representative from the IC. This member will serve as a liaison between his/her working team and the full IC. Community members and IC members can serve on more than one working team. A diagram of the proposed structure is below.

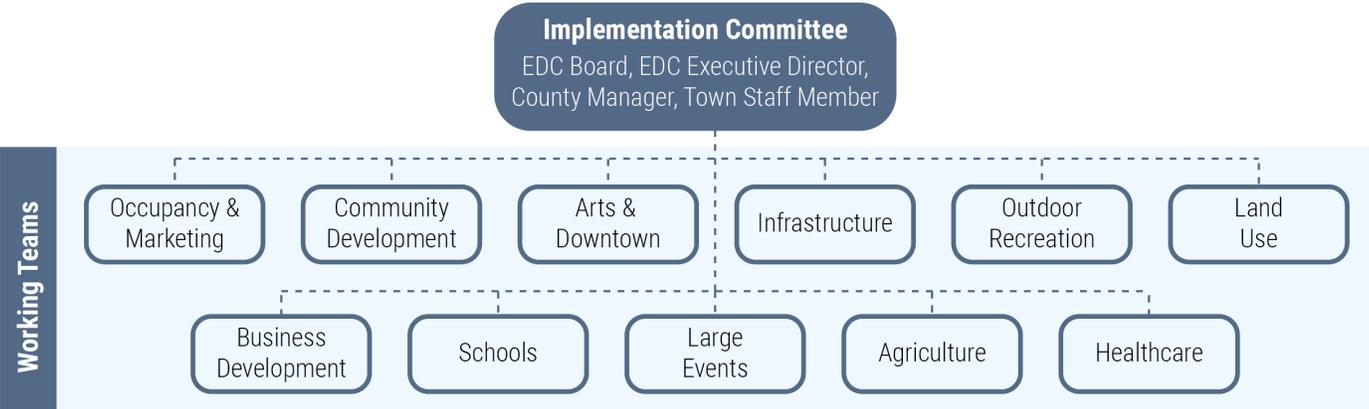
Each working team should develop a strategy to complete each recommendation

they are tasked with. This will require them to identify steps that need occur, stakeholders that need to be consulted, and timelines for completion. They should present their strategy for each recommendation to the IC for approval. Once approved, the working team will be the lead entity to carry out their strategy to completion, keeping the IC informed along the way. Strategies can, and should, change as the project progresses. The EDC, Town Council, and County Commission should review progress on plan recommendations at their annual retreat.

Policy/Passive Recommendations

Some recommendations from this plan are policy-centric or passive in nature. Given this characteristic, they were omitted from the list of recommendations assigned to working teams. This should not detract from their importance or immediacy. Each should be present in the minds of community leaders during future actions. They include:

- Support MCC's plans to develop the Resource Center for Entrepreneurs at MCC's new campus in downtown Spruce Pine by not developing a duplicate facility in Burnsville. Promote the Center to Yancey County residents by partnering with MCC to conduct regular office hours and workshops in Burnsville.



- The Town and County should "test the waters" before developing a co-working space or small business incubator that requires a heavy up-front investment. Instead, leaders should identify an existing space to experiment with the concept and establish demand for such a facility. This provides a low-cost way of gauging community interest.
- Facilitate development of privately-owned properties that are prime areas for industrial construction. Potential methods include marketing properties, providing or upgrading infrastructure, offering permitting assistance, and providing incentives.
- Focus industrial recruitment efforts on firms with less than 50 employees. Yancey's workforce, available properties, infrastructure, and incentive policy are

conducive to companies of this size.

- Invest in community facilities, services, and public spaces.
- Support the Senior Center and Yancey County Transportation Authority to ensure that current levels of service are maintained or improved.
- Continue to grow the Yancey County remote employees group as a forum for workers who telecommute. Regularly seek feedback from members on how to attract other remote workers to the community.
- Encourage construction of new multi-family rental housing.
- Advocate for the improvements identified in the High Country Bike Plan.
- Prioritize multimodal projects and designs during the upcoming Comprehensive Transportation Plan update.

Immediate Action/ Staff Level Recommendations

Some recommendations from this plan are straightforward or are best handled at the discretion of the EDC Executive Director. Like the policy recommendations, they are omitted from the list of recommendations assigned to working teams. This should not detract from their importance or immediacy. They include:

- Add the Director of the Toe River Arts Council and a representative of the North Carolina High Peaks Trail Association to the Chamber Tourism and Travel Development Committee.
- Develop market studies and cut sheets for vacant commercial properties.
- Create peer-to-peer networking groups for business owners in related industries.
- Maintain an active business retention program with yearly visitation benchmarks and frequent communication between the EDC, private industry, Yancey County Schools CTE, the Economic Development Partnership of NC, and Mayland Community College.
- Coordinate an annual tour of local manufacturers for County Commissioners and Town Council members.

- Launch a program to build relationships with the parent companies of local manufacturing facilities that are headquartered outside the County. The goal is to ensure decision makers are knowledgeable of the benefits of doing business in Yancey and the local incentives that are available.
- Complete connection of the Burnsville and East Yancey wastewater systems.
- Apply for the NCDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Grant to identify needs and potential projects in Burnsville.
- Continue efforts to recruit a hotel to downtown Burnsville.



REDLG funds awarded to TRACTOR.

Working Teams



Occupancy Tax & Marketing Working Team

The Occupancy Tax & Marketing working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Increase the County's occupancy tax rate from 3% to 6%.
- Once the occupancy tax is raised, establish a new Tourism Development position. Use occupancy tax and other County and Town revenue to fund a full-time staff position to increase marketing efforts.
- If the occupancy tax is not raised to 6%, divert the majority of revenues from the existing 3% collection away from advertising expenses and towards capital improvements that boost tourism.
- Identify new events to attract tourists. These should be centered on outdoor recreation, the arts, music, or local food.
- Recruit the Road Scholar program to Burnsville.
- Create an interactive online map of County attractions, road cycling routes, trails, etc. and embed it on the County's tourism website.
- Establish a "Yancey Ambassadors" program to train business owners, residents, and service workers on tourism cross-promotion and the importance of a first impression. Offer scholarships to local businesses to offset the cost to employers to send their employees through the program.
- Carry out a talent recruitment marketing campaign to attract new residents.



Healthcare Working Team

The Healthcare working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Utilize the North Carolina Medical Society Foundation's Community Practitioner Program to attract providers.
- Cultivate a relationship with the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) to promote Yancey County as a destination for NHSC scholarship recipients to complete their required post-graduation service.
- Recruit assisted living facilities, skilled nursing centers, and retirement homes to allow residents to remain in the community close to family.
- Expand hours and services at existing healthcare facilities, including behavioral health.
- Establish a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program as a partnership between Yancey County Sheriff's Office, Burnsville Police Department, Substance Abuse Task Force, and the Yancey County Court System. Contact the NC Harm Reduction Coalition for assistance in developing a program.
- Encourage and incentive high quality childcare centers.



Outdoor Recreation Working Team

The Outdoor Recreation working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Work with NCWRC to increase trout stocking numbers.
- Work with NCWRC and NCDOT to increase and improve available public parking for fishing access.
- Expand Toe River Campground/Patience Park. Acquire adjacent property to develop RV campsites, create additional recreation facilities, and accommodate large events.
- Develop a fishing map for the County or partner with Mitchell County to develop a joint map.
- Develop mountain bike trails, preferably in collaboration with NC State Parks or the US Forest Service.
- Establish a local bike club. Specific functions would be to maintain and promote the road cycling map, facilitate development of mountain bike trails, and organize additional rides and races. Emphasis should be placed on establishment of a Criterium race.
- Develop a joint parks and recreation plan between Yancey County and Burnsville that covers maintenance, identifies new projects, and assesses staffing.
- Develop a masterplan for construction of a new greenway in the vicinity of Burnsville.
- Add free public WiFi to all County owned parks.
- Increase funding and staffing for the County Parks and Recreation Department.



Arts & Downtown Working Team

The Arts & Downtown working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Increase the presence of public art in downtown Burnsville. Possible projects include pole wraps, murals, or rotating installations. Rotating installations should be an object that has local significance.
- Hold regular pop-up events in Burnsville Town Square to entertain residents and attract visitors. Use these events to increase exposure of local community service organizations through sponsorships or partnerships.
- Run shuttles on popular weekends to take visitors on the TRAC studio tours circuit with stops at local restaurants and shops.
- Hold a seasonal music series in Town Square. Invite local vendors, and incorporate intergenerational activities. Schedule the events on the same days as the Farmers Market to increase participation and emphasize local foods.
- Create an interactive online map of downtown Burnsville businesses.
- Explore creation of a municipal service district (MSD) in downtown Burnsville.
- Develop a streetscape plan for downtown Burnsville that focuses on Town Square and Main Street. Increase street lighting to foster a pedestrian-friendly environment.



Community Development Working Team

The Community Development working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Develop a grant program to facilitate upper story and multi-family residential development in downtown Burnsville.
- Start a young professionals association for Yancey County.
- Compile a new homebuyer welcome packet, including information about community events and amenities, organizations, coupons for local shops/restaurants, and information on how to start a business.
- Develop a database of email addresses

for graduating high school students. Use these to distribute a quarterly newsletter with marketing materials designed to retain them or attract them back to Yancey County. The newsletter should contain information about community events, new businesses, housing, available commercial space, and job openings. Use a service such as MailChimp to ensure the newsletter is visually appealing and functional across different devices.

- Establish a series of economic development incentives for tourism-based small businesses, particularly in the arts and outdoor recreation sectors.



Land Use Working Team

The Land Use working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Work with NCDOT to carry out highway beautification along US 19E and NC Highway 80 from Micaville to the Blue Ridge Parkway.
- Adopt and enforce land use ordinances that address nuisances such as overgrown lots, abandoned vehicles, and dilapidated structures in the Town of Burnsville.
- Install wayfinding signage and map kiosks in downtown Burnsville.
- Strengthen design and maintenance codes for the Town of Burnsville.
- Develop and adopt subdivision regulations for the unincorporated areas of the County. **These will improve public safety and protect property owners by ensuring development meets minimum standards.**
- Adopt a high impact land use ordinance for the County to protect property owners from projects that could harm neighboring land values, the environment, and the scenic nature of the community.



Large Events Working Team

The Large Events working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Hold an annual business awards luncheon or dinner to recognize excellence, create networking opportunities, and boost business attachment to the community.
- Hold an annual or semi-annual industry forum where community, business, and education leaders can discuss and troubleshoot challenges.
- Organize an annual summit between non-profit leaders, County Commissioners, Town Council members, and local representatives in the General Assembly.
- Hold an annual volunteer fair at Mountain Heritage High School to recruit younger volunteers, engage teens in community projects, and increase awareness of specific volunteer needs and opportunities.



Business Development Working Team

The Business Development working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Conduct an annual business survey in coordination with the Chamber of Commerce. Analyze the responses to identify trends and common issues, threats, opportunities, workforce needs, and other concerns. Share the results with survey participants and local elected officials in the form of an infographic report. Use the results to inform future policy decisions, initiatives, and infrastructure investments.
- Partner with MCC's Small Business Center to host quarterly workshops in Burnsville on technical assistance topics such as website development, social media marketing, search engine optimization, taxes, accounting, human resources, graphic design, and other topics relevant to small businesses. Develop a team of consultants and/or volunteers to provide break-out sessions, one-on-one exercises, and professional assessment of participants' plans or existing approaches.
- Partner with MCC's Small Business Center to establish a multi-week, in-person business development course that teaches basic entrepreneur skills to participants. To attract participants, offer grant funds that are only available to persons who complete the course and agree to open their business in Yancey County. Funds should be significant enough to entice participants.
- Develop and distribute model business plans for entrepreneurs in target industries such as outdoor recreation or the arts.



Schools Working Team

The Schools working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Start a program at Mountain Heritage High School focused on entrepreneur development. The program should require students to visit a variety of local businesses over the course of the school year or semester to learn how they operate and what challenges they face. Students should complete an end-of-course project where they write their own business plan and practice "pitching" their concept to their peers.
- Provide the support and staffing required for the agriculture program at Mountain Heritage High School to maintain certification and fill the gap left by the closure of agricultural programs at MCC.
- Create an externship program for high school teachers and guidance counselors where they work for a day at local large employers. The experience will give them a better sense of career opportunities which they can then communicate to their students.
- Enhance STEM education.
- Collaborate with local employers to increase available internship sites for students in high school.
- Following adequate preparation, test high school students for National Career Readiness Certification in order to gain designation as an ACT Work Ready Community.
- To combat negative stigmas associated with manufacturing, coordinate factory tours of local facilities for students. Show students financial breakdowns of potential earnings and career trajectories.
- Form a focus group of non-traditional students at MCC to identify common barriers for adult learners and what actions the college could take to ease the process of returning to school.
- Build upon the "1 to 1" technology program in Yancey County Schools.
- Pursue a partnership with the NC School of Science & Mathematics western campus.



Agriculture Working Team

The Agriculture working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Obtain 501(c)3 status for the Yancey County Farmers Market and establish a permanent location to hold it.
- Develop a livestock aggregation facility. Work with High Country Council of Governments to identify possible grant funding for the project.
- Provide a licensed commissary to support off-site food businesses.
- Develop a farmland protection plan that meets the requirements found in N.C. G.S. 106-735.
- Send information about NC Extension's FarmLink program to property owners participating in the PUV and VAD programs, with the goal of connecting farmers to land.
- Foster mentorship opportunities between new and experienced farmers.
- Develop a partnership between NC Cooperative Extension and the Mayland Small Business Center to guide new farmers in production and business management.
- Set aside a percentage of back taxes collected by the County when a property loses its PUV designation. Use this money to assist with farmland preservation.
- Hold semi-annual or annual farmer round-table discussions about shared issues, challenges, and opportunities. Potential topics might include federal and state services, business planning, marketing, technical assistance, succession planning, new crops, farmland protection, exporting, etc.
- Develop an annual farm tour to attract visitors and raise awareness of local foods.
- Conduct training workshops on agritourism business development. Introduce farmers to potential business opportunities.
- Connect farmers with local bed and breakfast owners to develop unique agricultural experiences for overnight visitors.
- Develop marketing materials to attract more choose-n-cut Christmas tree customers in Yancey County.



Infrastructure Working Team

The Infrastructure working team will be responsible for addressing the following recommendations:

- Develop a capital improvement and maintenance plan for sidewalks.
- Develop a roadway improvement plan for the Town of Burnsville to identify outstanding pavement needs and prioritize maintenance funding over the next 10 years.
- Build a pedestrian connection between Cane River Middle School and Blue Ridge Elementary School.
- Follow the recommendations outlined in the Burnsville Water and Sewer Asset Management and Capital Improvements Plan, with particular emphasis on the Main Sewer Interceptor East and West improvements and Main Street water line improvements.
- Work with the University of North Carolina's Environmental Finance Center to evaluate an increase in water and sewer rates.
- Provide secure bike parking throughout downtown Burnsville and at all facilities in the County.
- Expand water and sewer service in the western part of the County as development warrants.



- ▶ Yancey County will continue to grow as an outdoor recreation destination.
- ▶ Yancey County will expand its reputation as an arts destination.



- ▶ Provide a cohesive system of small business support.
- ▶ Improve the attractiveness of the County and Town.



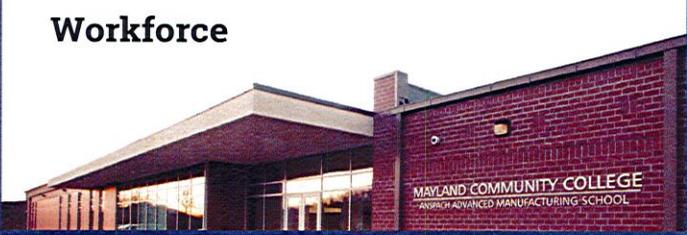
- ▶ Maintain and expand the County's industrial base through retention, recruitment, and fostering homegrown companies.



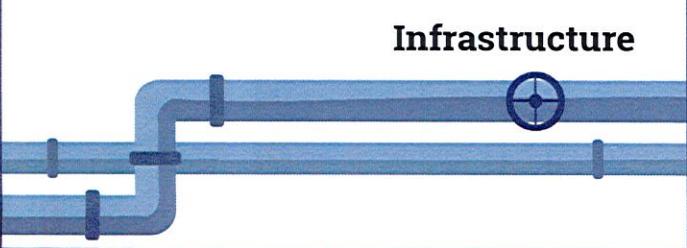
- ▶ Expand support for existing and new farmers.
- ▶ Increase agricultural output.
- ▶ Foster the next generation of farmers.



- ▶ Elevate the quality of life in Yancey County and increase the community's population by focusing on improvements in the areas of recreation, healthcare, land use, and education.



- ▶ Expose students to local career paths.
- ▶ Increase the number of adult learners utilizing available training programs.
- ▶ Retain and attract working age residents.



- ▶ Improve bicycle and pedestrian transportation infrastructure.
- ▶ Prioritize maintenance and fiscal sustainability of the water and wastewater system.
- ▶ Expand water and wastewater capacity as needed.