

Attainable Housing and Stable Neighborhoods

The significance of housing extends far beyond basic shelter, affecting communities and residents in many ways. Housing can instill a sense of place and pride, provide stability, and even create an opportunity for residents to build generational wealth. While housing can provide multiple benefits, it is also the largest expense for most households and has a substantial impact on personal financial health. In recent years, the influx of new residents to Forsyth County has placed additional pressure on housing availability and prices. With local housing development failing to keep pace with population growth and the changing needs of residents, these issues, along with labor shortages and sharp increases in the cost of construction materials, have combined to create a distinct rise in housing prices that has outpaced gains in income, even pushing some residents into homelessness.

While increased housing prices have effects across the entire community, discriminatory development practices have worsened housing prospects for generations of historically disadvantaged residents. Redlining, highway construction, and urban renewal projects between the 1930s and 1960s destroyed many successful Black neighborhoods and physically segregated the city along racial lines. One of the results of this history is that today, Forsyth County faces significant challenges when it comes to upward economic mobility compared to other counties in the country, meaning underprivileged families remain stuck in poverty across generations. Policies that lead to the racial and economic desegregation of our community will offer the best opportunity to reverse this trend.

Where and how housing is developed at the neighborhood level can help generate successful, affordable communities. After World War II, Winston-Salem and Forsyth County's towns and villages changed their development pattern to one that separates residential and commercial and requires driving a private automobile for almost all daily activities. This shift has led to the loss of rural areas, more expensive housing, the creation of food deserts, increased air pollution, negative health impacts, and continued racial segregation. This type of sprawling development pattern also strains and increases the costs for our infrastructure, such as roads, water supply, sewage systems, and utilities to accommodate the spread-out development. By prioritizing a greater mix of uses and transportation options, we can pave the way for vibrant neighborhoods where residents can live, work, play, and thrive while lowering barriers to accessibility and affordability.

Winston-Salem and Forsyth County recognize the importance of housing to community vitality and to the quality of life for residents. Therefore, the goals of *Forward 2045* focus on the need to provide housing opportunities that promote equity, resiliency, and livability and create an efficient and functional local economy. A mixture of market-based and government-led solutions will be necessary to accomplish these goals.

Goal 1: Make housing abundant to ensure access to a safe, affordable, and dignified place to live for all residents.

- Prioritize higher density housing close to services, schools, workplaces, and transit.
- Allow duplexes, triplexes, and quadruplexes in single-family residential districts.
- Modify land use regulations to allow middle density housing (buildings with up to 8 housing units) in more areas.
- Consider allowing manufactured homes in single-family residential districts by right as an additional affordable housing option.

- Promote the conversion of non-residential buildings to housing.
- Investigate ways office buildings can be used for housing, including the possibility of single room occupancy arrangements.
- Advocate for changes to the state building code to encourage energy efficiency and housing variety.
- Evaluate incentives for the development of disability-friendly, senior-friendly, and family-friendly housing (for purchase and rental), including units with multiple bedrooms in multifamily developments.
- Identify infill development opportunities and market them to developers.
- Strategically invest in transportation and sewer/water infrastructure to support housing density and choice.
- Reduce bureaucratic hurdles that delay or impede the development of housing to address housing shortages faster.

Goal 2: Use City and County resources to create and preserve more affordable housing for low- and moderate-income individuals and households.

- Prioritize and incentivize the development of affordable housing in neighborhoods with access to high-performing schools, workplaces, grocery stores and other services. (Also See Strong Economic Opportunities, Goal 4.)
- Partner with non-profits and the Housing Authority to develop publicly owned land for affordable housing.
- Explore the development of community land trusts to offer additional options for affordable housing and to develop generational wealth.
- Develop and promote programs to help individuals and families access affordable housing.
- Maintain long-term affordability for residents through energy and water conservation development practices.
- Explore targeted property tax relief to preserve long-term affordability of housing.
- Evaluate incentives for the reuse and upkeep of existing affordable rental housing.
- Continue funding programs that provide financial assistance for rent or home maintenance.

Goal 3: Reform policies that perpetuate racial segregation.

- Prioritize investment in neighborhoods that were devalued by redlining, urban renewal, and racial zoning, while maintaining affordability and ensuring the investments benefit current residents.
- Encourage the development of housing that integrates residents of multiple income levels throughout Winston-Salem and Forsyth County, providing access to high-performing schools, workplaces, grocery stores, and other services.
- Eliminate exclusionary zoning laws and other City/County policies that reinforce, whether intentional or not, racial and economic segregation.
- Discourage development that isolates low-income residents and leaves them without access to jobs, services, and retail opportunities.
- Study the many causes of displacement, including gentrification and disinvestment. Formulate specific solutions to each cause.
- If investing in low-income or minority neighborhoods puts residents at risk of displacement, protect residents from displacement and continue to prioritize equitable neighborhood investment.

Goal 4: Create well-designed neighborhoods that provide access to services for daily living.

- Increase the number of housing units and provide greater housing choice near retail nodes, transit service, and within walking distance to parks.
- Create pedestrian-oriented places that prioritize safety and convenience over fast automobile access.
- Modify land use regulations, such as parking minimums, setbacks, and minimum lot sizes to improve walkability and affordability.
- Connect housing to activity centers and growth corridors via multimodal transportation options.
- Improve the safety and accessibility of transit, walking, and bicycling options.
- Encourage the redevelopment of underused parking lots.
- Prioritize high-density housing in activity centers and along growth corridors.
- Prioritize the creation of neighborhood retail nodes.
- Develop housing that includes options for different generations to live in close proximity to each other and allows residents to age in place.
- Support incentives and expedited processes for grocery stores and fresh food markets locating in underserved communities and identified food deserts. (Also See Sustainable and Healthy Environment, Goal 6.)

Goal 5: Minimize the factors that lead to housing insecurity and homelessness.

- Use City and County resources to create new affordable housing and preserve existing affordability.
- Explore the development of zoning policies for areas where residents are most at risk of displacement.
- Continue to support the City's Human Relations Department, which investigates housing discrimination complaints.
- Expand investments in housing and services for people experiencing homelessness, including innovative and pragmatic housing solutions.
- Partner with organizations to develop permanent and transitional housing affordable to very low-income populations.
- Continue to support organizations that provide emergency housing.
- Modify land use regulations to allow housing types affordable to those experiencing, or transitioning out of, homelessness.
- Study the scale of and reasons for evictions and homelessness locally.
- Maintain and create housing opportunities and housing choices for residents as neighborhood values increase.