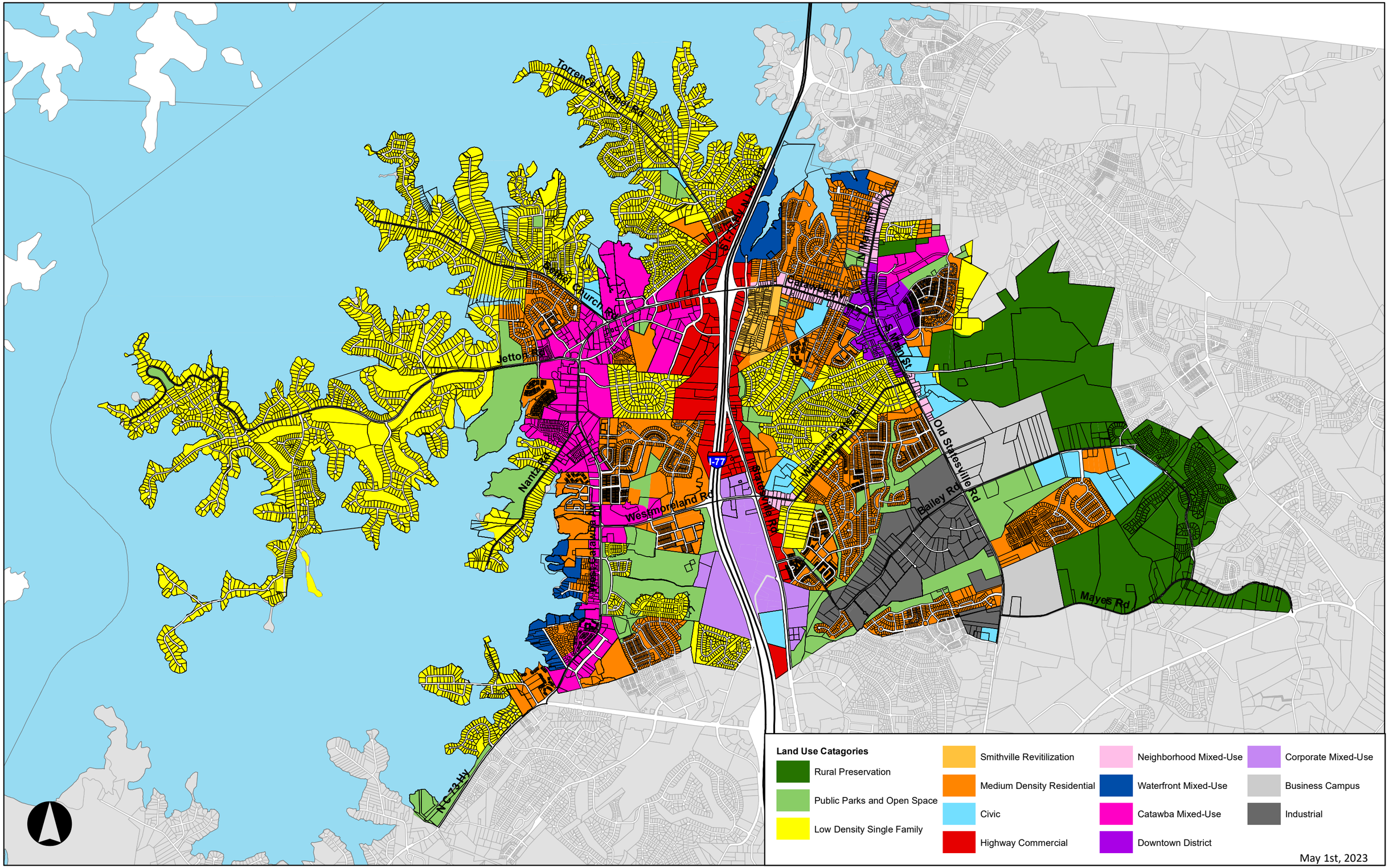
TOWN OF
CORNELIUS

LAND USE PLAN

ADOPTED
MAY 1, 2023



2023 Land Use Plan



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Introduction

North Carolina General Statute 160D, Article 5, requires a local government to adopt and reasonably maintain a land use plan as a condition of adopting and applying zoning regulations. Originally adopted in 1999, the Town of Cornelius Land Use Plan is updated periodically in accordance with the wants and needs of the community, the built environment, and market conditions.

What is the Land Use Plan?

The Land Use Plan is the policy document that guides decisions related to land use patterns within Cornelius' planning and zoning jurisdiction, which covers 15.2 square miles (Town Limits=13.13 square miles). It is the Town's goal to allow for flexibility to promote creativity through practices such as conservation subdivision planning and unique site design that preserves the character of the area and site.

How Does the Land Use Plan Relate to Zoning?

In North Carolina, municipal zoning consists of both a zoning map and a written ordinance that divides communities into zoning districts, including various residential, commercial, mixed-use, and industrial districts. Zoning regulates the specific uses allowed in each zoning district, and how buildings, signs, parking, and structures may be placed on a lot. Zoning regulations also provide procedures for rezoning and other planning applications. The Cornelius Land Development Code is the Town's zoning ordinance and the Cornelius Land Development Map is the Town's zoning map.

The Land Development Map and the Land Development Code provide properties in Cornelius' planning and zoning jurisdiction with certain rights to and restrictions on development, while the Land Use Plan serves as a guide for making future decisions regarding rezonings and updates to development regulations. The Future Land Use Map and related policies contained in this Land Use Plan should be used as a guide for future rezoning decisions and Land Development Code amendments made by the Town.

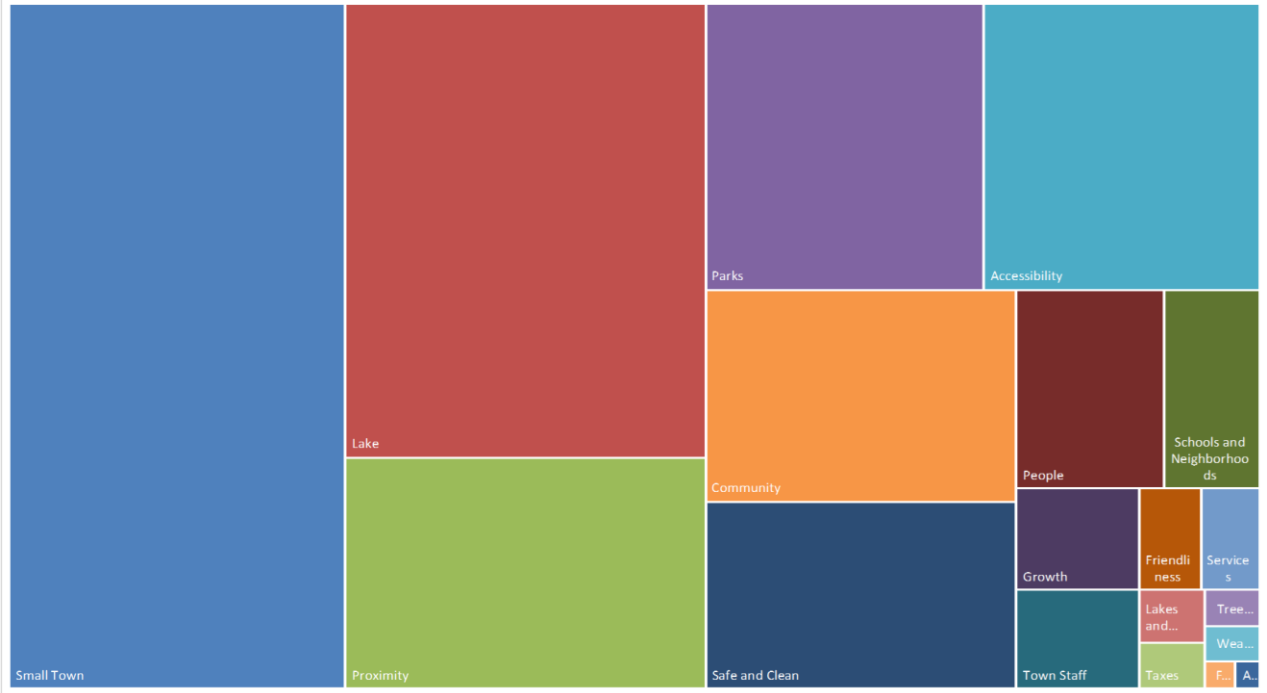
Updating the Land Use Plan

In December 2021, the Town Board adopted a Growth Management Resolution (Resolution No. 2021-01042) that indicated the Town Board would most likely pause any decision regarding new residential development projects of more than ten units until the Town conducted a review and potential update of the Land Use Plan. With population growth and recent new developments approved, the Town wanted to study building height and residential density guidance provided in the Land Use Plan.

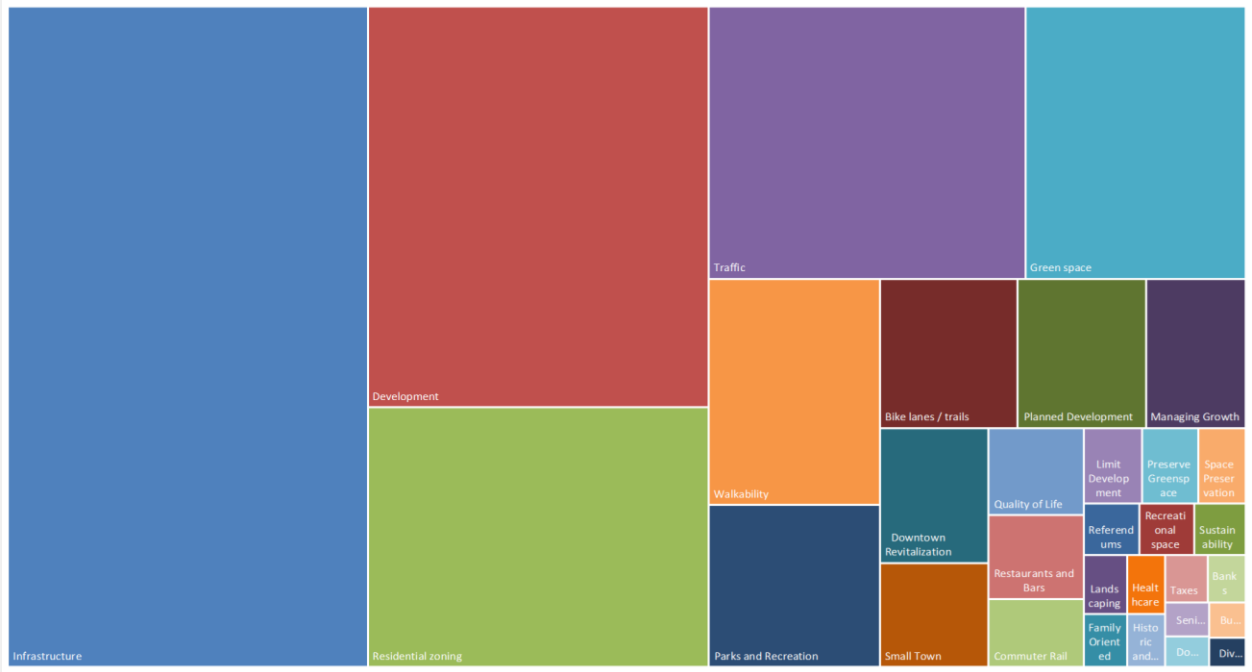
In January 2022, the Town Board appointed a Growth Management Task Force (GMTF) to study the Town's Land Use Plan and make recommendations. The GMTF charter was to create a current Land Use Plan that is citizen driven which would protect and enhance the quality of life in Cornelius. The GMTF met 14 times throughout 2022 to study and make recommendations regarding the Town's future land use incorporating citizen feedback through surveys and community meetings. The result would be a Land Use Plan to address a period of five to seven years.

Following is a summary of survey responses from, and community meetings with, citizens. The majority of respondents were from the west side of Town, particularly the northwest. Over 50% of the respondents were over the age of 55.

1. What makes the Town of Cornelius a great place to live and why? As illustrated in the graphic below, the top 5 reasons citizens like living in Cornelius are:
   1) The 'small town' feel;
   2) Lake Norman;
   3) Proximity to Charlotte;
   4) Park facilities; and
   5) Accessibility.



2. What should the Town of Cornelius Land Use Planning Team focus on to build a better future? The graphic below tells elected officials and staff to focus on:
   1) Infrastructure improvements;
   2) Cautious development;
   3) Careful residential zoning;
   4) Traffic management; and
   5) Availability of green space to build a better future for Cornelius.



3. What land use accomplishments would you like the Town of Cornelius to deliver in the next 5 – 7 years? In the short-term, citizens would like the Town to deliver:
   1) More balanced infrastructure;
   2) The means to avoid over development;
   3) An active downtown;
   4) Walking and cycling improvements; and
   5) Reduction in traffic.



The GMTF recommended changes to the Land Use Plan were initially presented to the Planning Board on January 9, 2023. On February 13, 2023 the Planning Board received additional information on the proposed changes and continued the discussion at the March 13, 2023 meeting, when a recommendation for Town Board action was made. The Planning Board agreed with the GMTF recommendation, with the exception of the Downtown District (formerly known as Town Center). The Planning Board recommended a form-based review for the Downtown District, utilizing the Conditional Zoning process and considering art, character, and compatibility of the surrounding area.

The Town Board conducted a public hearing on the proposed plan on April 3, 2023. Following much conversation, the Town Board elected to send the proposed plan back to the Planning Board for further review, particularly the height and density in the Catawba Mixed Use, Waterfront Mixed Use, and Downtown District land use areas. At a Special Meeting on April 25, 2023 the Planning Board made a final recommendation for the Town Board to consider including a form-based review option for all non-residential land use categories when the proposed development exceeds the Typical Development Characteristics for building height and/or residential density.

The Town Board adopted the updated Land Use Plan on May 1, 2023.

How to Use This Document

A key characteristic of an actionable Land Use Plan is its ease of use. Using the Land Use Map and the development policy identified in the Land Use Plan helps developers design projects in the respective areas to integrate into the existing built environment. Simply:

1. Find the parcel(s) of interest on the Land Use Map; and
2. Identify the land use category associated with the parcel(s) and read the category description in this document.

Form-Based Review Option

The Land Use Plan specifies appropriate land uses and Typical Development Characteristics. However, sometimes proposed development requests exceed the Typical Development Characteristics for building height and/or residential density. Developers have an option for a project to be considered under a *form-based review* in the Civic, Highway Commercial, Neighborhood Mixed-Use, Waterfront Mixed-Use, Catawba Mixed-Use, Downtown District, Corporate Mixed-Use, Business Campus, and Industrial land use categories. The *form-based review* shall include, but not be limited to consideration of how the following elements are incorporated into creative proposed development requests:

1. Affordable Housing
2. Architectural and Site Planning Innovation
3. Open Space and Landscaping (exceeding requirements)
4. Public Amenities
5. Transportation Improvements (vehicular and/or pedestrian)

Civic

Civic facilities are focal points in the region. They typically include a building or complex of buildings that serve a public purpose, including a library, school, community center, or a place of worship. Visual qualities and the surrounding grounds often make civic facilities a landmark within the area.

Primary Land Uses:

- School
- Place of worship
- Government administration building
- Library
- Community Center
- Fire and police station

Secondary Land Uses:

- Neighborhood Park
- Other government buildings

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 3 Stories/45’

PUBLIC PARKS & OPEN SPACE

Public Parks and Open Space

Public parks and open space include active and passive land dedicated for permanent conservation. These areas are typically undisturbed and protected from development by government agencies or by public, private, and nonprofit organizations. Development of recreational uses should limit impervious surfaces of facilities and infrastructure.

Typical Primary Land Uses:

- Community park
- Natural area
- Golf course

Typical Secondary Land Uses:

- Small lakes
- Cemetery
- Greenway
- Dedicated open space within residential neighborhoods

Rural Preservation

Contains very low density rural residential development, farms, equestrian uses, and environmentally sensitive lands. Rural preservation areas promote the protection of environmentally sensitive lands from more intense development. Development should only include very low-density residential uses, up to a maximum of one dwelling unit per five acres.

Typical Primary Land Uses:

- Farm
- Single-family residence
- Equestrian Services/Business

Typical Secondary Land Uses:

- Places of worship and civic uses
- Natural areas
- Open space and recreation

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Residential Density: 1 Dwelling Unit/5 Acres

LOW DENSITY SINGLE FAMILY

Low Density Single Family

Low density single-family residential neighborhoods are generally formed as subdivisions or communities, with a relatively uniform housing type and density throughout. Homes are oriented interior to the site and typically buffered from surrounding development by transitional uses, water bodies, or natural areas. Low-density single-family neighborhoods are found in close proximity to suburban commercial and suburban office centers and provide the rooftops necessary to support the commercial and office uses within the centers. The extension of public utilities within low-density single-family areas is appropriate.

Primary Land Uses:

- Single family residence

Secondary Land Uses:

- Natural areas
- Places of worship and civic uses
- Community center
- Pool and amenities

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Residential Density: 2 Dwelling Units/Acre

MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

Medium Density Residential

Medium Density Residential neighborhoods are generally formed as subdivisions or communities, with a relatively uniform housing type and density throughout. Homes are oriented interior to the site and typically buffered from surrounding development by transitional uses, water bodies, or natural areas. Medium Density Residential neighborhoods are found in close proximity to suburban commercial and suburban office centers and provide the rooftops necessary to support the commercial and office uses within the centers. The extension of public utilities within Medium Density Residential areas is appropriate.

Primary Land Uses:

- Single family residence

Secondary Land Uses:

- Natural areas
- Places of worship and civic uses
- Community center
- Pool and amenities

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Residential Density: 4 Dwelling Units/Acre

Neighborhood Mixed Use

Neighborhood mixed use areas offer residents the ability to live, shop, work, and play in one community. They include a mixture of housing types and residential densities integrated with goods and services residents need on a daily basis. A residentially focused design, and the scale of the development encourages active living, with a comprehensive and interconnected network of walkable streets. Neighborhood mixed-use areas support multiple modes of transportation and are located along the corridors leading into the Downtown District.

Primary Land Uses:

- Condominium
- Apartment
- Restaurant
- Community-serving commercial
- Professional office
- Civic use
- Single-family detached home

Secondary Land Uses:

- Pocket or community park
- Place of worship
- Natural areas

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 2 Stories/30’
- Residential Density: 3 Dwelling Units/Acre

Waterfront Mixed Use

Waterfront mixed use offers the opportunity to activate the water's edge in areas along Lake Norman and Lake Cornelius to encourage public use. Any non-single-family development shall include a public waterfront boardwalk. A variety of water-oriented, non-residential uses can be appropriate in a working waterfront; considering environmental impacts and design qualities. Development should maximize being near, seeing, and interacting with the lake. Building architecture and site design should emphasize public over private uses and activities. Commercial areas should be designed to minimize impervious surfaces and maintain natural stormwater flows. In mixed-use buildings, residential is not allowed on the ground/first floor.

Primary Land Uses:

- Single family residence
- Restaurant
- Hotel
- General office

Secondary Land Uses:

- Civic uses
- Pocket park

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 4 Stories/60'
- Residential Density: 5 Dwelling Units/Acre

Catawba Mixed Use

The Catawba Mixed Use area serves local economic, entertainment, and community activities. Uses and buildings are located on small blocks with streets designed to encourage pedestrian activity. Non-residential development in these areas should focus on providing services to residents of the Town and visitors. These areas should provide an appropriate pedestrian experience, with bicycle amenities, ample sidewalks with appropriate lighting, and wayfinding signage to orient visitors to points of interests. In mixed-use buildings, non-residential uses are required on the first floor and should focus on providing services to the residents.

Primary Land Uses:

- Townhome
- Condominium/apartment
- Restaurant
- Community-serving commercial uses
- Professional office

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 2 stories/30’
- Residential Density: 4 Dwelling Units/acre

DOWNTOWN DISTRICT

Downtown District

Downtown is a focal point of Cornelius. It is the hub of civic, cultural, and governmental activities for the entire Cornelius community. Uses and buildings are located on small blocks with streets designed to encourage pedestrian activity. Buildings typically stand two or more stories in height. Residential units may be found above storefronts. Parking is satisfied using on-street parking and shared rear-lot parking strategies. The compact, walkable environment and mix of residential and non-residential uses in the Downtown District support multiple modes of transportation.

Primary Land Uses:

- Community-serving commercial uses
- Restaurants
- Professional offices
- Townhomes
- Condominiums
- Government buildings, post office
- Fire/Police Station
- Public Plaza
- Mixed Use Buildings

Secondary Land Uses:

- Daycare
- Farmers Market
- Pocket Park

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 3 Stories/45’ on street front; stepping back to 4 Stories/60’.
- Residential density follows form-based review utilizing conditional zoning process focused on art, design and compatibility.
- Non-residential on the 1st floor
- No 100% residential buildings

Corporate Mixed Use

This category is applied to particular areas of Cornelius where it is expected that office-oriented businesses will be concentrated. The expectation is development of quality corporate offices, and related uses may include medical offices, corporate centers, and technology centers. A small level of residential activity may be included, as a secondary use, with the expectations that residential space will not be developed without non-residential space, and that if a development project is phased, non-residential space should be the first phase. Clusters of uses that support or serve one another are encouraged to locate in the same business center.

Primary Land Uses:

- Corporate center
- Multi-tenant professional offices
- Research and technology centers
- Medical offices
- Hotel

Secondary Land Uses:

- Supporting commercial uses
- Restaurant
- Bank
- Copying/printing services

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height (Adjacent to I-77): 4 Stories/60’
- Residential Density: 3 DUA (not allowed on 1st floor)

Business Campus

Business Campus areas include a wide range of business, light industrial, office, research and development, and related ancillary uses, such as restaurants and small-scale retail and convenience shopping. They generally take on the appearance of an office development, yet with warehousing capabilities. Business Campus centers may take the form of a "campus" in the integration and coordination of uses and quality and character of the development. These areas are prime locations with good access to major road networks and should be reserved for high-return employment generating uses such as office buildings or light manufacturing or warehousing operations.

Primary Land Uses:

- Corporate offices
- Research and Development
- Light industrial and warehousing
- Flexspace

Secondary Land Uses:

- Bank
- Copy and printing services
- General government services
- Business-campus-supporting retail and restaurants
- Recreation uses

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 3 Stories/45'

Highway Commercial

Highway commercial areas include retail and commercial uses that serve the greater community and visitors. These areas may include some regional-scale establishments designed to fit within a smaller town context. Highway commercial development should be located in development nodes or centers, reducing access points from main roadways. Where possible, master planning of multiple development sites is the preferred method for designing commercial centers to enhance the character of the development, consolidate access points onto the highway, and ensure accessibility and safety. Non-residential development in these areas should focus on providing services to residents of the Town and to visitors. Regional retail establishments are also appropriate if they are designed in a manner that upholds the small-town character and design aesthetic. Automotive sales uses are not appropriate in this district.

Primary Land Uses:

- General commercial services
- Sit down or fast food restaurants
- Multi-tenant commercial
- Big box commercial
- Bank
- Hotel
- Professional office

Secondary Land Uses:

- Recreation facilities
- Natural areas
- Places of worship and civic uses
- Open space and recreation

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 3 Stories/45’
  (Hotels may be considered to 6 Stories/90’)

Industrial

Industrial centers provide employment opportunities in the Cornelius planning area. Each center supports manufacturing and production uses, including warehousing, light manufacturing, and assembly operations. These areas are found in close proximity to major transportation corridors and are generally buffered from surrounding development by transitional uses or landscaped areas that shield the view of structures, loading docks, or outdoor storage from adjacent properties. Clusters of uses that support or serve one another are encouraged to locate in the same light industrial center.

Primary Land Uses:

- Light manufacturing and assembly
- Processing facilities
- Laboratory
- Warehouse
- Distribution

Secondary Land Uses:

- Small scale commercial uses

Typical Development Characteristics:

- Building Height: 1-2 Stories

Revisions

Approval Date	Change
May 1, 2023	• Growth Management Task Force – Comprehensive Review
September 20, 2021	• Village Center
April 5, 2021	• Removed Low Density Rural category • Modified Town Center
January 7, 2019	• Smithville – Changed Neighborhood Commercial on west side of South Hill St. to Neighborhood Residential. Portion of lots fronting Statesville Rd. remain Neighborhood Commercial
January 6, 2014	• Comprehensive Land Use Plan Update
February 21, 2005	• Changed 3 parcels from Open Space/Conservation to Campus Business • Changed 15 parcels from Medium Density/Mixed Residential to Campus Business
December 6, 1999	• Original Cornelius Land Use Plan

Smithville Revitalization Plan

