



CAPE FEAR
A REGIONAL FRAMEWORK
FOR OUR FUTURE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APRIL 2015

A CALL TO ACTION

The Cape Fear Region is home to a high quality of life. We enjoy a mild climate year-round, access to beaches, fishing on the rivers, relatively easy travel to and from daily destinations, and many distinctive commercial districts and neighborhoods people call home. It is this very quality of life that is fueling our economy. It drives people to visit here, come to school here, raise their families here and want to stay for a lifetime.

Over the next twenty five years, we could see a **doubling of our population**. While this growth is likely inevitable, our response to it is not. We want a future that enhances our existing quality of life. This requires a **call to action** and mobilizing in new ways as a region to retain and attract quality employers, provide jobs that enable our college educated youth to stay local, improve opportunities for all people to step up the economic ladder, provide a range of attainable quality housing, improve our travel choices, protect our environment, and continue to be a destination of choice for retirees and visitors. To accomplish this, there are **10 key strategies** that we must implement to create a positive blueprint for growth and development in our region for years to come.

We want to live 5 minutes from where we play or work. I don't mind driving a little bit if it means I can live on the beach.

—Mid-career citizen living in Southport, working in Ogden

Our family loves it here, but we worry if our kids will leave after they graduate.

—Citizen in New Hanover county

I want...
I hope...
I wish...

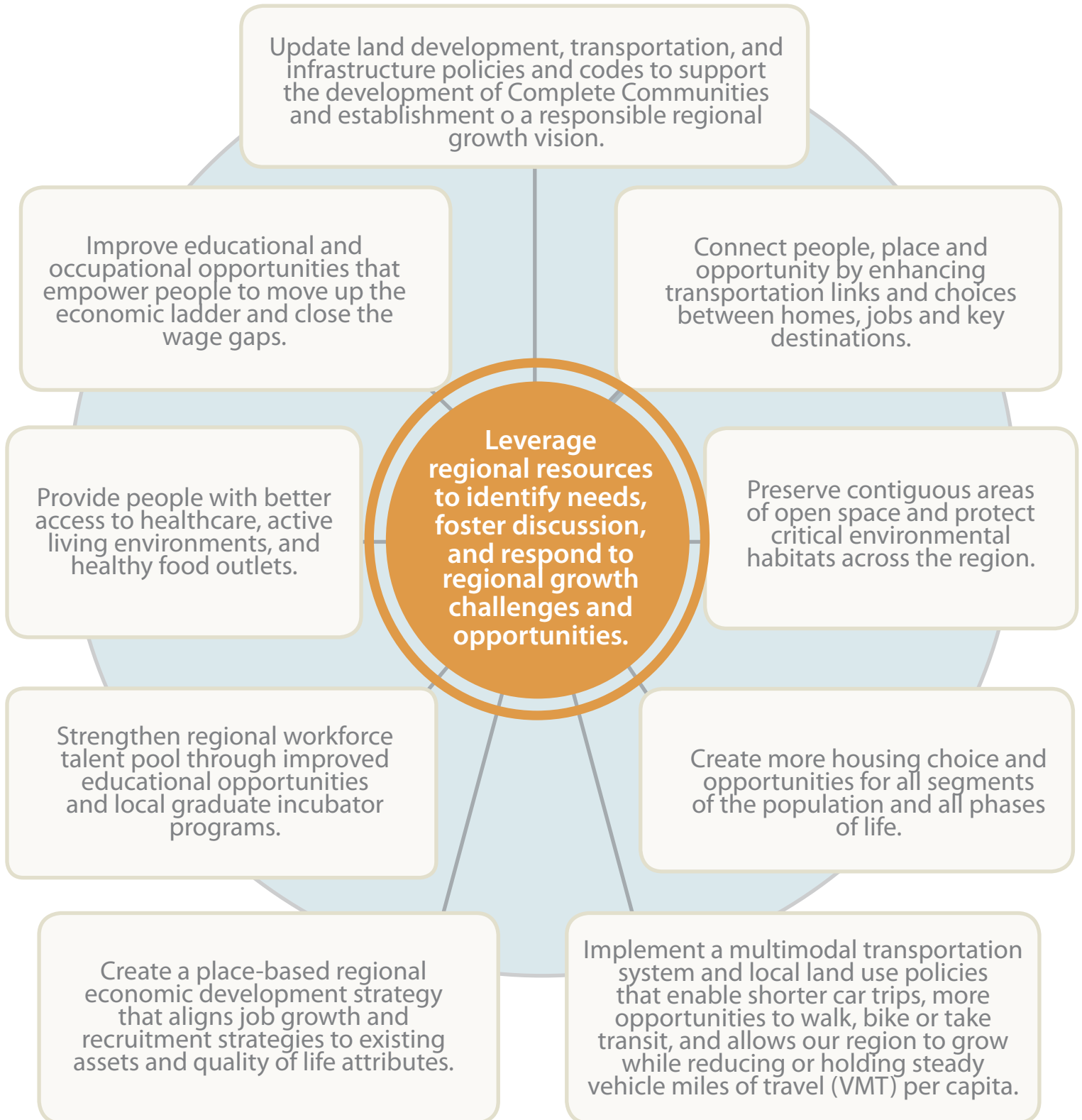
Finding affordable places to rent is difficult.

—Student/lifetime citizen at CFCC



STRATEGIES

BUILD LIVABLE PLACES. PROVIDE ABUNDANT CHOICES. CONNECT VOICES.



KEY FINDINGS

The call to action and key strategies reflect the findings of a three-year regional planning process. In 2011, a number of local governments, regional agencies, and non-profit organizations from across the Cape Fear region came together and formed the Lower Cape Fear Sustainable Communities Consortium to prepare jointly for our region's future. This planning effort, branded as FOCUS, prompted a robust dialogue about the projected growth and development in our region. FOCUS initiated outreach and studies to identify how the next twenty-five years would impact our economy, public health, transportation, equity, housing and environment. The following presents some key findings about our future.



GROWTH IS AN OPPORTUNITY & A CHALLENGE

Our region's population is expected to nearly double between 2010 and 2040. We are likely to see between **120,000 to 350,000 more people living here** over the next twenty-five years.



OUR ENVIRONMENT IS A CRITICAL ASSET THAT SUSTAINS LIFE, FUELS GROWTH & PROTECTS PROSPERITY

Rare species add economic value through tourism and their potential use to science and industry. Access to our beaches and rivers is a major economic driver of our region.



RESIDENTS WANT MORE TRANSPORTATION & HOUSING OPTIONS

To address changing market preferences and demand, the region will need more housing options (price and type) and more opportunities for people to walk, bike and take transit.

Our region is changing every day. There are positive changes happening – new jobs, new homes, and new amenities – but there are also some negative consequences of this growth too. Traffic is getting worse, the character of our rural areas is changing, housing prices are increasing, our environmental assets continue to be threatened, and some neighborhoods continue to decline while new neighborhoods sprout up further away from existing resources.

My girlfriend and I moved here after visiting her parents, then looked for jobs. Good paying ones are difficult to find.

–Mid-career citizen in Leland

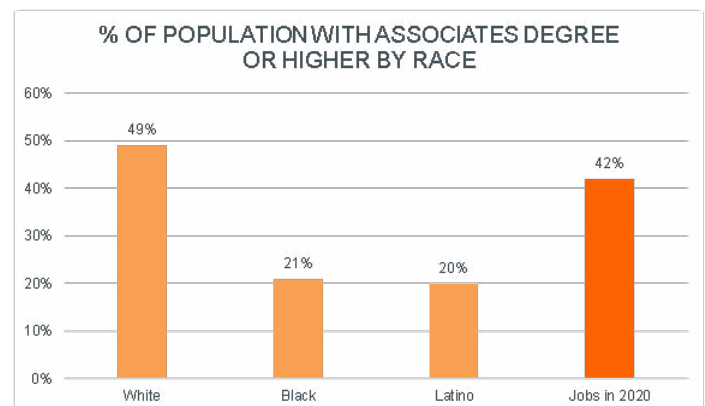
A CONNECTED REGION IS EMERGING

Brunswick, New Hanover, and Pender counties are linked through their economies, social networks, housing markets, and a regional transportation system. Strengthening these connections will require additional regional planning and investments.



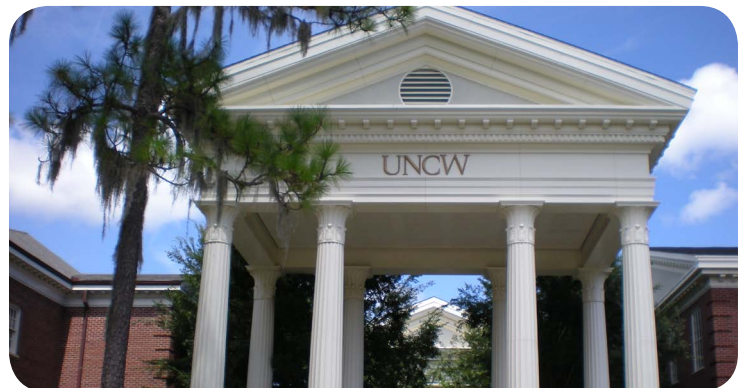
INEQUITY IS HOLDING THE REGION BACK

The region has high and persistent levels of income and educational attainment inequity. The region needs to work collectively on closing the educational and skills gaps in order to address this issue.



OUR ECONOMY HAS UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

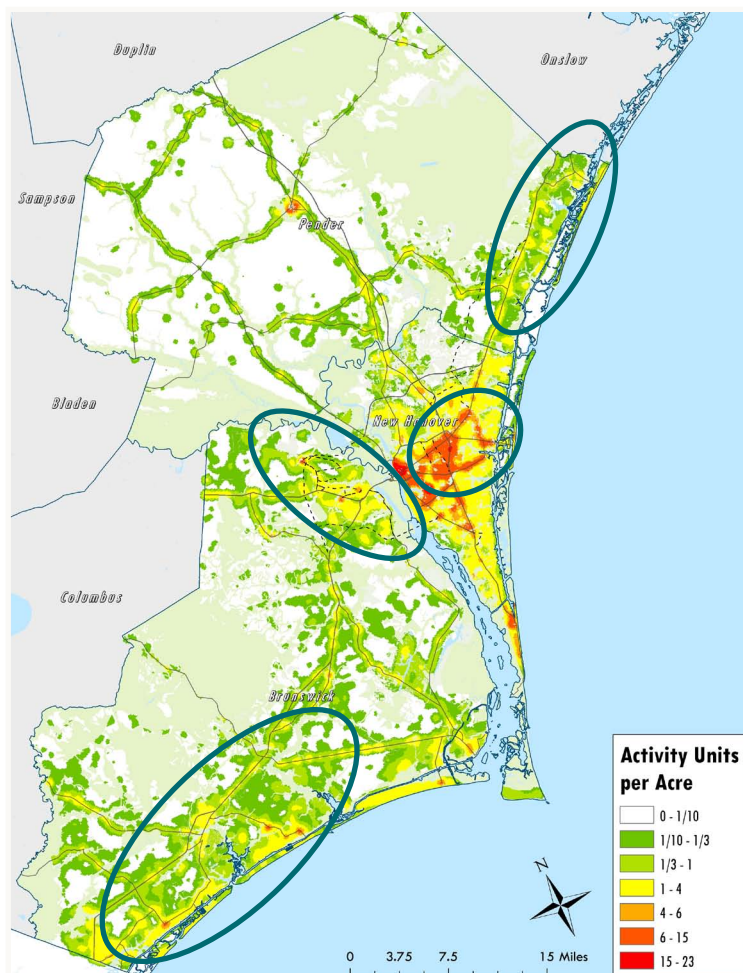
Our region has several ingredients needed to grow knowledge-based industries and nurture entrepreneurship. Fostering this growth requires new efforts to ensure that we organize and speak with one regional voice on economic development issues.



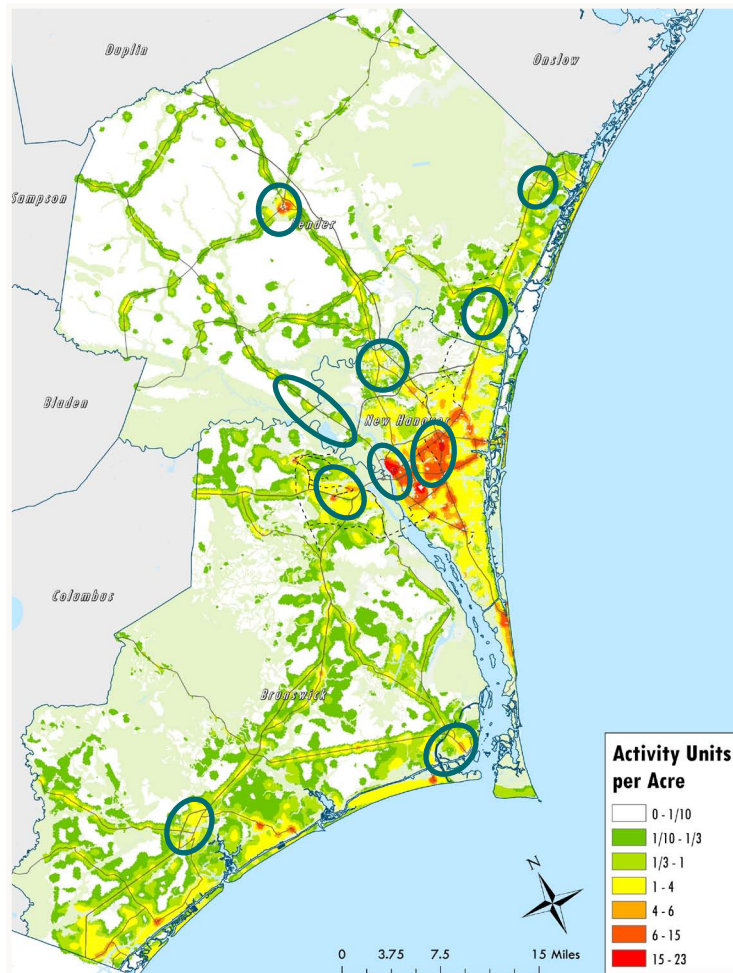
ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

Given the challenges we face, we have some choices to make about how and where we guide growth and development in the future. The four maps present four different ways our region might grow over the next twenty five years.

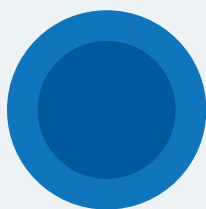
DISPERSED GROWTH



GROWTH IN NEW CENTERS ACROSS THE REGION

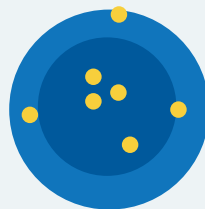


BUSINESS AS USUAL



Assumes moderate population growth and a continuation of past development patterns with development spreading out in a more dispersed pattern across the region and maintaining a low to moderate density pattern. Rural areas begin to see suburban residential growth, people live farther away from daily destinations and rely primarily on autos to get around. This pattern will require significant expansion of public infrastructure to serve dispersed growth.

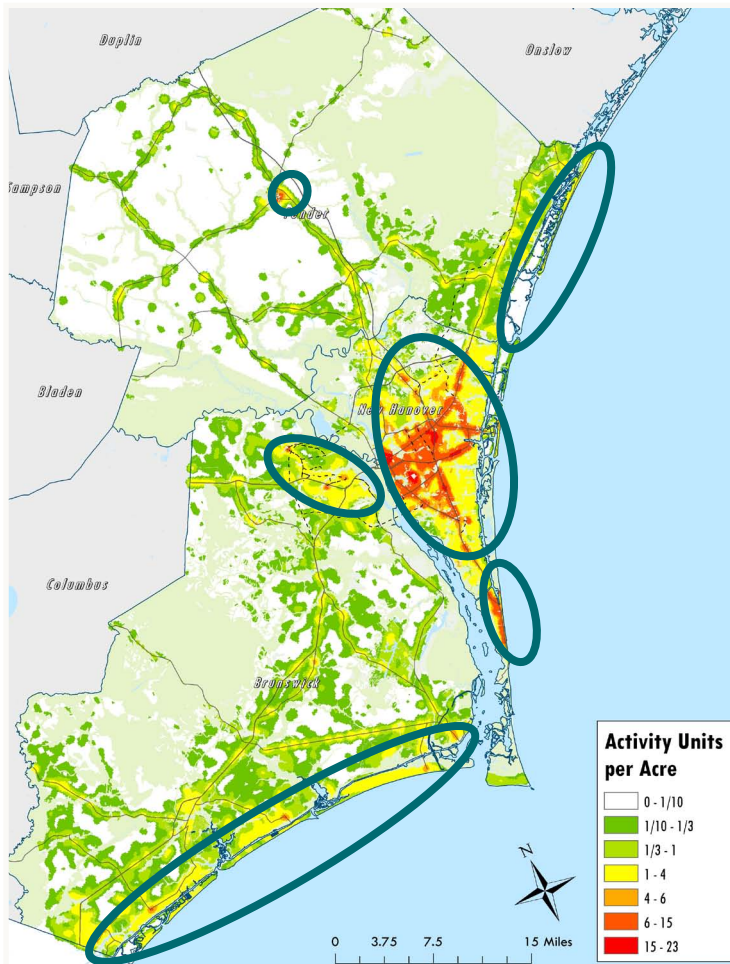
MIXED USE



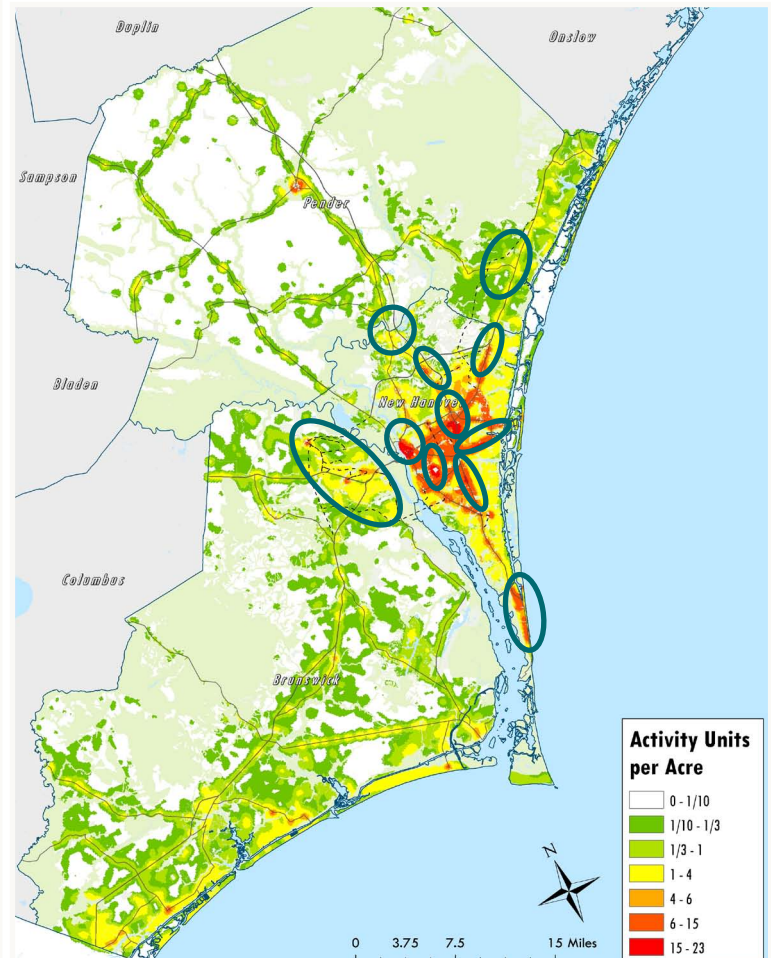
Assumes moderate population growth and urbanization continues to shift further away from downtown center of Wilmington. Much of this new growth occurs in a higher density pattern with a greater mix of housing, retail, and employment occurring in existing centers and new centers across the region. Provides more opportunities for a wider range of housing choices and some new opportunities to live within walking distance of daily destinations.

Based on community goals and preferences voiced throughout the FOCUS planning process, there is clear support for embracing a blueprint for growth that includes more transportation and housing options, fosters reinvestment in existing neighborhoods, provides more compact and efficient patterns of growth and reduces pressures on our environmental and agricultural resources. How we grow will depend on the individual actions of our local governments and the regional actions.

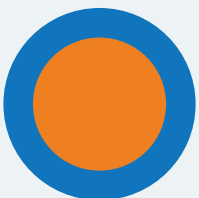
GROWTH IN EXISTING AREAS



GROWTH IN EXISTING AND NEW CENTERS

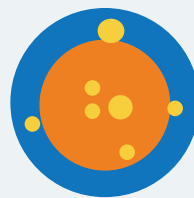


REDEVELOPMENT AND INFILL



Assumes high population growth and the highest density of mixed use through infill, redevelopment, and revitalization of existing neighborhoods and commercial corridors. Creates more housing and transportation options and reduces pressures on development in undeveloped and rural areas. Requires upgrades to existing public infrastructure and increases the need for multimodal transportation investments as more people can reach destinations by walking, transit and shorter car trips.

HIGH GROWTH NODE



Assumes high population growth and moderate density with a balance of growth occurring in new centers and within existing neighborhoods and commercial corridors. Creates more housing options and requires both expansion and upgrades to existing public infrastructure. This scenario creates the highest opportunities for people to walk, ride transit and drive shorter distances.

A NETWORK OF COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

Complete Communities represents a model for growth in our region. Complete Communities are places where life is close at hand. People have a range of housing options and transportation choices living or working in rural, town, suburban and urban neighborhoods and commercial districts. Creating a network of Complete Communities across the region is what the public continues to speak passionately about when asked to describe a vision for our future. Complete Community attributes already exist in many areas today – from Burgaw’s main street, to Leland’s emerging new town center, to Wilmington’s historic walkable neighborhoods, to Surf City’s emerging town center and new growth happening in Carolina Beach – this pattern is alive and well.

We need strategies to ensure we can create Complete Communities in the future. This will enable us to position key areas for future job growth and provide more opportunities to retain open space, preserve agricultural lands and more efficiently use our infrastructure. The network of Complete Communities includes encouraging more compact, mixed use growth in undeveloped areas, and fostering more infill and redevelopment to provide more housing and jobs within some of our existing neighborhoods and commercial corridors.

**I don't mind driving a bit
if it means I can walk out
my door to restaurants
and socialize when I have
time off from work.**

*–Citizen/Teacher living in
Wilmington, working in
Pender County*

**My husband and I
decided to retire here
after visiting our
children who relocated
from Raleigh for jobs.**

–Citizens/Retirees in Leland



COMPLETE COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENTS

- ▶ Provide a mix of housing types including single-family homes, townhomes, condominiums, and apartments of various sizes and prices.
- ▶ Support shorter travel distances between places, making it easier for people to walk, bike and make shorter car trips to meet their daily needs.
- ▶ Provide access to nature and open space for passive and active recreation and help preserve critical natural resources.
- ▶ Allow people of all stages of life and income levels to access a variety of jobs and services easily.
- ▶ Tap into existing infrastructure so that local governments can make efficient use of their previous investments in water, sewer, and streets.
- ▶ Relieve development pressure off existing undeveloped agricultural and rural lands to ensure long-term viability of local food systems.
- ▶ Create a connected network of Complete Community centers across the region linked by a robust multimodal transportation system.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF COMPLETE COMMUNITIES



Vehicle miles of travel per capita increases **at a slower rate**.



People have **more job choices** within a shorter commute of their homes.



More walkable neighborhoods which support **active lifestyles** and **better health**.



Greater access to **transit** from homes, workplaces, and key destinations.



More people live and work near parks and **open spaces**, including beaches.



More growth can be accommodated while allowing for **preservation** of fragile ecosystems and agricultural lands.



More **housing options** available for all income levels with greater access to educational opportunities and jobs.

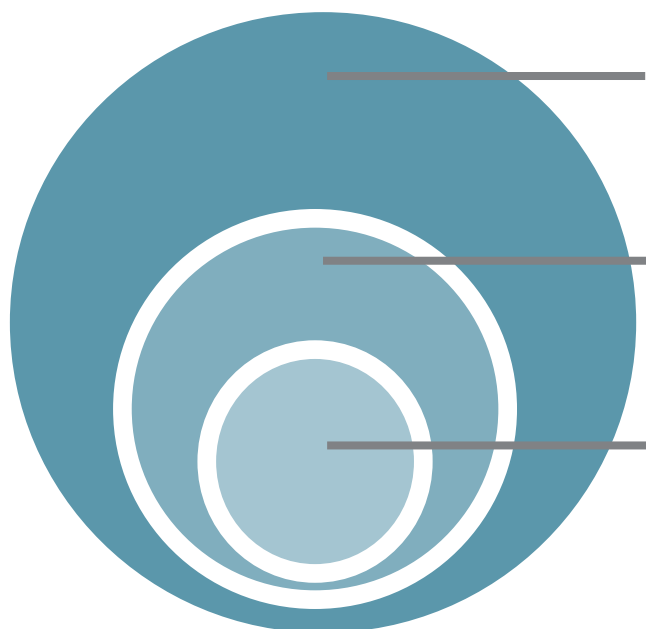
MOVING FORWARD

This executive summary highlights the key findings and recommendations of the *Regional Framework for Our Future*. Many of the local governments involved in this process are already changing local land use policies and rethinking their economic development strategies to help create a network of Complete Communities and ensure that our existing quality of life only gets better. However, more effort will be needed.

As a result of this regional planning process, the Consortium members have agreed to keep meeting to ensure the coordination, communication, and regional planning necessary to advance the 10 implementation strategies. The diagram on the following page illustrates the organizational steps necessary to move the regional planning process forward. Additionally, the Consortium will need and continue to seek new partnerships with the private sector, other organizations, and the general public to ensure long term success.

CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

- AMEZ HOUSING
- BRUNSWICK HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES
- CAPE FEAR COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
- CAPE FEAR REGIONAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
- CITY OF WILMINGTON
- NEW HANOVER COUNTY
- PENDER COUNTY
- TOWN OF BURGAW
- TOWN OF CAROLINA BEACH
- TOWN OF LELAND
- TOWN OF SURF CITY
- WILMINGTON METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
- WAVE TRANSIT
- WILMINGTON HOUSING AUTHORITY



SUPPORTERS

individual residents of the community who support the *Regional Framework for Our Future* and are interested in its implementation.

PARTNERS

private and non-profit organizations working with the FOCUS Consortium to help implement specific projects, foster communications, and support other activities.

FOCUS CONSORTIUM

an alliance of local governments, regional agencies and other business and community organizations that is the driving force of regional collaboration and implementation of the *Regional Framework for Our Future*.

NEXT STEPS

The Consortium will develop an **Annual Action Plan** to promote key efforts and strategies to be advanced or implemented each year.

Consortium members will work with community groups to address each **Annual Action Plan** component. The Consortium will continue to **identify key funding or resource gaps** and work with other partners, organizations and supporters to help advance additional planning, communication or implementation efforts.



The Consortium will work with the Cape Fear Council of Governments to **annually convene a Summit and update the strategies** within the *Regional Framework for Our Future* to highlight continued progress.

At quarterly meetings, the Consortium will **monitor progress** and share findings on the efforts and strategies identified in the **Annual Action Plan**.

The FOCUS effort is about “US” - our ideas, our region, our future. It is up to us to do something about it. The challenges we face also present great opportunities to improve quality of life for people living here today and for the generations to come. **This won't be possible without you!** If you are inspired and interested in working with other committed public and private sector partners to plan for a better future in the Cape Fear region, please reach out to the chair@focussenc.org to find out how you can be involved.



WWW.FOCUSSENC.ORG

CONSORTIUM CHAIR | chair@focussenc.org
INFORMATION | info@focussenc.org

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the Lower Cape Fear Sustainable Communities Consortium. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government.