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**PLAN CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION ..... 6**

    BACKGROUND ..... 6

        Purpose ..... 6

        Process ..... 6

    STUDY AREA..... 8

    HISTORICAL CONTEXT ..... 8

**COMMUNITY PROFILE ..... 9**

    ASSETS AND KEY ISSUES..... 9

        Community Assets ..... 9

        Key Issues..... 9

    MAJOR POINTS OF REFERENCE .....10

    DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE .....10

    DEMOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS .....13

**LAND USE AND COMMUNITY DESIGN .....14**

    CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS .....14

        Current Land Use .....14

        Land Use Distribution .....15

        Site Development Patters and Land Design Trends.....16

    GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....17

    PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....18

**TRANSPORTATION .....22**

    CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS .....22

        Roads & Highways .....22

        Pedestrian System .....23

        Bicycle System .....23

        Transit System .....23

        Passenger Rail.....23

    GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....24

    PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....25

**COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES .....28**

    CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS .....28

        Schools .....28

        Parks and Greenways .....28

        Libraries .....29

        Water Service.....29

        Sewer Service .....30

        Emergency Services .....30

            Law Enforcement .....30

            Fire Protection.....30

            Emergency Medical Services .....30

    GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....32

    PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....33

**HOUSING .....34**  
 CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS .....34  
 GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....36  
 PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....37  
**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT .....39**  
 CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS .....39  
 GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....40  
 PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....41  
**NATURAL/ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES .....42**  
 CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS .....42  
 GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....44  
 PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....45  
**CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES .....47**  
 Murray’s Mill Historic District .....47  
 Religious “Campgrounds” .....47  
 Historic Residence .....47  
 GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....48  
 PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS .....49  
**APPENDIX A .....50**

**MAPS**

**following page number:**

**Map 1: Plan Boundary ..... 9**  
**Map 2: Census Tracts ..... 11**  
**Map 3: Current Land Uses ..... 15**  
**Map 4: Current Zoning ..... 15**  
**Map 5: Future Land Use and Residential Density Recommendations ..... 19**  
**Map 6: Future Transportation Recommendations ..... 27**  
**Map 7: Proposed Zoning Map Amendments ..... 38**  
**Map 8: Natural & Cultural Resources ..... 43**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Purpose**

The concept of conducting small area plans for Catawba County was one of sixteen growth strategies resulting from the County's long-range Strategic Growth Plan (1999). The Growth Plan stated that the Small Area Plans "would explore general development patterns and trends and evaluate public service/facility deficiencies needing attention." The document further stated that the plans should also "include conceptual sketch plans based upon appropriate land use and zoning concepts and be used for consideration for future zoning changes and subdivision standards."

Through the development of the small area plan, a committee would assess their area's current quality of life and sustainability on issues such as traffic congestion, residential development patterns, water quality, library service levels, utility capacities and school facilities. Upon reviewing these issues, the committee then would recommend measures for improvement. Specifically, the Small Area Planning Committee was asked to discuss and develop goals and action statements for the following issues: 1) economic development; 2) natural resources; 3) cultural resources; 4) community facilities and public services; 5) housing; 6) land use and community design; and 7) transportation. The plan would then include implementation strategies for the goals and action statements, whether it is through ordinance or policy amendments, modified capital improvement plans, or coordination with other agencies to complete specific tasks.

#### **Process**

The process for developing the small area plan was a grassroots effort that began with the appointment of the Balls Creek Small Area Planning (BCSAP) Committee in November 2000 by the Board of Commissioners. Thirteen committee members were interested citizens who live or own land in the Small Area Plan boundary and volunteered their time to develop a small area plan for their community. The committee also consisted of a Planning Board member who served as liaison to the Board. The Committee held its first meeting in February 2001. The County Planning staff and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments educated and assisted the committee in the development of their individual plan. During the process of developing the plan, the Committee solicited input from citizens in the planning area through a Community Input Meeting held in July 2001. At this meeting, citizens were asked how they saw their community developing in the future using a 10 to 20 year planning period. Twenty-eight residents participated in this meeting held at the Balls Creek

Elementary School. Results from this Community Input Meeting are provided in Appendix A. The committee used this input in the development of the plan's guiding principles and recommendations. Upon completion of a draft plan, the committee sponsored another public meeting on October 1, 2002, which also was held at the Balls Creek Elementary School. At this meeting, the Plan's maps and recommendations were presented to the community. Input from the seventeen residents who participated at this meeting was considered by the committee in amending the draft plan.

When the committee's recommendations were complete, their final document was presented to the Planning Board and Board of Commissioners for review and consideration for adoption. Presentation to these Boards was through a public hearing process, where the public was invited to express its comments on the proposed plan. The committee and the Planning Board held a joint work session on April 28, 2003 to review the plan recommendations in detail. The committee then presented the final document to the Planning Board at a public hearing held on May 19, 2003. Upon hearing citizens' comments at the meeting, the Planning Board recommended the plan to the Board of Commissioners with an amendment to the residential density along Hwy. 16 between Balls Creek Road and Bethany Church Road to one-acre lot sizes.

The Board of Commissioners reviewed the plan during one-on-one meetings with representatives of the committee during February 2003. The Board of Commissioners then conducted its public hearing and unanimously adopted the plan at its June 16, 2003 meeting.

Over the next five years issues may arise that have not been addressed in this document. Since the plan is intended to be an active document, it must be capable of adapting to changes and new challenges. The BCSAP Committee recommends reviewing the plan every five years, or as conditions change. Amendments to the Plan have a potential impact on all residents and businesses in the Balls Creek area and therefore should be treated in a manner that would allow for public input, through notice and hearings, during the amendment procedure.

## **STUDY AREA**

The Balls Creek Small Area Plan (BCSAP) study boundary follows the Maiden and Newton Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) boundaries to the west; NC Highway 10 on the north; Murrays Mill Road/Buffalo Shoals Road to the east; NC Highway 16 south of Buffalo Shoals Road to the Catawba/Lincoln County line on the east and then follows the County line west to the Maiden ETJ boundary. The Balls Creek SAP study area encompasses 30,802 acres, including land in dedicated rights-of-way.

See *Map 1, Balls Creek SAP Boundary*.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Within decades after Adam Sherrill crossed the Catawba in the 1740s, white pioneers began settling the land that was to become Catawba County. Mostly these men and women were engaged in farming, drawn to the area by cheap land and abundant opportunities for farming. By the 1770s between 400 and 500 families were estimated to have settled the land west of the Catawba River, according to reports Governor William Tryon sent back to London.

Settlement continued throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and into the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, surviving the conflicts caused by the Civil War and its aftermath. Towns grew but rural living and farming predominated throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and into the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even as manufacturing began to make its presence felt in the firsts decades of the previous century.

Present day Balls Creek reflects the largely agricultural heritage of the community. Nearly 28% of the land in the Balls Creek area is dedicated to farming with almost 8,000 acres still farmed today; more than 50 people are actively engaged in farming and livestock production. Residents still identify churches as significant contributors to the community, and Murrays Mill Pond, the Mill itself and Anderson Mountain are community landmarks that residents are committed to protecting and preserving.

## **COMMUNITY PROFILE**

### **ASSETS AND KEY ISSUES**

During the July 2001 community meeting, Balls Creek residents participated in small group discussions to identify their likes, dislikes and future visions of the community. As a result of the discussions, the committee identified broad categories of assets and key issues to direct their work. In the following sections of the report, more specific comments from the community meeting comprise the guiding principles of each topic.

#### **Community Assets**

- Rural setting of the community
  - Open space and farmland
  - Quiet and clean place to live
  - Centrally located to cities and towns
  - Churches and friendly neighbors
- Cultural heritage
- Public services
  - Good schools
  - Fire department
  - Low crime

#### **Key Issues**

- Concern about the quality of leadership and public policy
- Maintaining high quality of schools in face of overcrowding
- Controlling residential growth/density and balancing growth with rural character
- Traffic congestion
- Increasing availability of public water

## **MAJOR POINTS OF REFERENCE**

The Balls Creek Small Area Plan encompasses 30,802 acres, over one-fourth of which is still used for agricultural purposes. The major land feature is Anderson Mountain, the second highest ridge in Catawba County at 1,542 feet, behind Baker's Mountain at 1,780. Anderson Mountain is located at the southeast corner of the Balls Creek study area, near the intersection of NC Highway 16 and NC Highway 150. Other prominent geographic features in the Balls Creek area include Balls Creek and Murrays Mill Pond, and Maiden Creek and the Maiden Reservoir.

## **DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

The Balls Creek area experienced a significant population growth from 1990 to 2000. The number of people residing in the area grew at a rate of 26.5%. The population in 1990 for the area was 7,920 while the 2000 Census indicated a population of 10,778, an increase of 2,858 persons (see chart below). The growth rate for the entire county was 19.7%, somewhat less than the growth rate of the study area. The study area's net gain of 2,858 persons represented 12% of the total County population increase of 23,273.

<b>Balls Creek Small Area Plan, Study Area Growth: 1990 to 2000</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Net Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Persons</b>	7,920	10,778	2,858	26.5
<b>Households</b>	2,913	4,103	1,190	40.9
<b>Persons/Household</b>	2.72	2.63	-0.09	-3.3

Source: US Census, 1990, and 2000; compiled by WPCOG Data Center, May 2002.

The number of households grew significantly faster than the number of persons in the study area, resulting in a lower average of persons per household. This trend is consistent with county, state and national trends, all indicating a lower number of persons per household.

<b>Catawba County Population Growth: 1990 to 2000</b>				
<b>Year</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Net Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Persons</b>	118,412	141,685	23,273	19.7
<b>Households</b>	45,700	55,533	9,833	21.5
<b>Persons/Household</b>	2.59	2.55	-0.04	-1.5

Source: US Census, 1990, and 2000; Catawba County GIS, 2000; as compiled by WPCOG Data Center, May 2002.

The Balls Creek study area is comprised of portions of Census Tracts 114 and 116. See *Map 2, Balls Creek SAP Census Tracts*. The remaining demographic information is broken down by the Balls Creek SAP, Census Tracts 114 and 116, and Catawba County.

The population in the study area, as well as that of Catawba County, is predominately white. Hispanics and “other,” which most likely includes Asians such as Hmong, outnumber the African-American population.

<b>Race and Ethnicity, 2000</b>				
<b>Place</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Hispanic (any race)</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	92.8%	2.8%	4.4%	3.5%
<b>Census Tract 114</b>	87.2%	7.9%	4.9%	3.1%
<b>Census Tract 116</b>	91.1%	4.3%	4.6%	4.0%
<b>Catawba County</b>	85.0%	8.4%	6.6%	5.6%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000; WPCOG Data Center 2002.

Residents ranging in age from 19 to 64 comprise the largest population group of residents in the study area, Census Tracts 114 and 116, and Catawba County.

<b>Age of Population, 2000</b>			
<b>Place</b>	<b>Persons Age 18 and under (% of all persons)</b>	<b>Persons Age 19 to 64 (% of all persons)</b>	<b>Persons Age 65 and older (% of all persons)</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	2,665 (24.7%)	6,820 (63.3%)	1,293 (12.0%)
<b>Census Tract 114</b>	1,769 (24.5%)	4,413 (61.0%)	1,046 (14.5%)
<b>Census Tract 116</b>	2,150 (24.1%)	5,840 (65.4%)	939 (10.5%)
<b>Catawba County</b>	34,392 (24.3%)	89,868 (63.4%)	17,425 (12.3%)

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000; WPCOG Data Center 2002.

Between 1985 and 1990 60% of Balls Creek residents remained in the same home compared to 55.1% in Catawba County. However, during that same time period, Balls Creek experienced 13.3% in-migration, which is slightly less than to the 16.1% in-migration experienced across Catawba County.

<b>Change in Housing and Migration</b>		
<b>Place</b>	<b>% of Persons living in the same house between 1985 and 1990</b>	<b>In-migration 1985 and 1990 (% of population)</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	60.0%	1,056 (13.3%)
<b>Census Tract 114</b>	63.2%	732 (12.1%)
<b>Census Tract 116</b>	58.4%	966 (13.9%)
<b>Catawba County</b>	55.1%	19,027 (16.1%)

Note: In-migration refers to those persons that moved into the listed place from another MSA between 1985 and 1990.  
Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

In 1990 the average commute time to work for Balls Creek residents was 19.3 minutes, which is lower than the County average of 21.6 minutes.

<b>Commuting Time to Work, 1990</b>		
<b>Place</b>	<b>Average Work Commute Time</b>	<b>% of Workers commuting over 40 minutes to work</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	19.3 minutes	9.0%
<b>Census Tract 114</b>	19.9 minutes	9.7%
<b>Census Tract 116</b>	19.7 minutes	9.4%
<b>Catawba County</b>	21.6 minutes	12.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

Balls Creek had a higher percentage of workers employed outside of Catawba County than the County as a whole. This may be due to the number of residents who commuting to the Charlotte area for work.

<b>Place of Work, 1990</b>	
<b>Place</b>	<b>% of Workers Employed Outside County of Residence</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	15.0%
<b>Census Tract 114</b>	11.4%
<b>Census Tract 116</b>	19.3%
<b>Catawba County</b>	11.9%
<b>Hickory-Morganton MSA</b>	21.4%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

In 1990 (the most recent year for which commuting data is available), 11.1% of Balls Creek residents were employed in professional occupations compared to 17.6% in Catawba County. Employment in service and professional support occupations showed a small difference between Balls Creek (31%) and Catawba County (35.6%). Catawba County as a whole had more workers employed in manufacturing occupations (45.8%), although Balls Creek had a higher percentage of workers employed in manufacturing occupations (56.8%). Farming occupations, near 1%, were low for both Balls Creek and Catawba County.

<b>Employment, 1990</b>				
<b>Place</b>	<b>% Employed in Professions</b>	<b>% Employed in Service &amp; Prof. Support</b>	<b>% Employed in Manufacturing</b>	<b>% Employed in Farming</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	11.1%	31.0%	56.8%	1.1%
<b>Census Tract 114</b>	10.7%	28.2%	59.5%	1.6%
<b>Census Tract 116</b>	11.9%	32.4%	54.9%	0.8%
<b>Catawba County</b>	17.6%	35.6%	45.8%	1.0%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

Household income data from 1989 indicates a lower median household income in Balls Creek than in Catawba County. In the County as a whole, a higher percentage of household incomes over \$60,000 were noted in the 1990 Census.

<b>Household Income, 1989</b>			
<b>Place</b>	<b>1989 Estimated Median Household Income</b>	<b>% of 1989 Households with Incomes Below \$10,000</b>	<b>% of 1989 Household Incomes over \$60,000</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	\$28,385	14.3%	6.2%
<b>Census Tract 114</b>	\$31,076	12.2%	7.4%
<b>Census Tract 116</b>	\$27,640	15.2%	5.5%
<b>Catawba County</b>	\$31,212	13.0%	15.7%

Source: US Census Bureau, 1990.

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS

If the long-term trend of increasing job demand continues in Catawba County, the population in the Balls Creek area is projected to continue increasing at a substantial rate. By 2015 the population of Balls Creek area could exceed 14,000 persons. The trend of fewer people per household is expected to continue.

<b>Balls Creek Small Area Plan, Projected Study Area Growth: 2000 to 2015</b>						
<b>Year</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Growth 2000 to 2015</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Persons</b>	10,778	11,964	12,958	14,115	3,337	31.0
<b>Households</b>	4,103	4,577	5,003	5,492	1,389	33.9
<b>Persons/Household</b>	2.63	2.61	2.59	2.57	-0.06	-2.3

Source: WPCOG Data Center, May 2002.

This significant population growth for the Balls Creek area is predicated on growth rates that are more than 31% for the area. Future population growth within the Balls Creek Area Plan boundary will be largely affected by the availability of public water and sewer and the County subdivision policy restricting development in school districts at or near 110% of their school capacity. If current subdivision policies remain in place, population growth will be limited in part by pre-existing or potential small lot development. However, if County policies on school capacities change, or if multi-family or new residential subdivision growth is stimulated by the extension of water or sewer services, the potential growth will increase significantly. These population projections would then need to be revised or updated extensively.

## **LAND USE AND COMMUNITY DESIGN**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

#### **CURRENT LAND USE**

Residential uses and open space occupy the vast majority of land in the Balls Creek study area. Accordingly, most parcels are zoned R-1, R-2 and R-3 with the bulk of the area falling into the R-2 district. The R-2 zoning district is intended to accommodate low density residential development, agriculture, and the necessary governmental and support services in the more rural portions of the County. It permits modular and site-built homes, single-wide, and double-wide manufactured homes. It also includes bona fide farms. (See *Map 3, Balls Creek SAP Current Land Uses* and *Map 4, Balls Creek SAP Current Zoning*.)

Commercial activity is sparse. Scattered businesses exist along Highway 16 as well as at the intersections of Claremont Road/Mount Olive Church Road, Bandys Cross Road/Buffalo Shoals Road and at East Maiden Road/Anderson Mountain Road. The commercial areas are primarily zoned C-2, which allows regional type businesses. Fewer commercial parcels are zoned C-1, which permits community service type businesses. The few parcels zoned C-3, previously non-conforming businesses, are not allowed to expand their land use.

Industrial and office-institutional uses within the study area are limited at this time. A lumberyard and frame shop are located off Prison Camp Road. Another frame shop is located on Walter Road. A furniture manufacturer is on Claremont Road, a salvage yard is on NC Highway 16 and a corrugated metal facility is on NC Highway 10. The only office-institutional zoned land, Burke Christian Tours, is located off NC Highway 16.

Anderson Mountain lies in the southeastern portion of the study area. Development on Anderson Mountain consists of communication towers, manufactured homes and a horse farm. New single-family residential development is encroaching at the base of the mountain. Murray's Mill and associated pond are located near the northeast portion of the study area boundary.

Land uses in much of the Balls Creek area are subject to State-mandated watershed regulations. Three watersheds are found in Balls Creek: the Maiden and Allen Creek watersheds, both of which have WS-II Critical Areas, which require one lot per two acres, and WS-II Protected Areas, which require one lot per one acre. These watersheds are located on either side of Water Plant Road and stretch east and north to NC Highway 16 and the Balls Creek-Little Mountain Road intersection. A portion of a third watershed drains to Lake Norman and

includes a WS-IV Protected Area, which requires one lot per one-half acre. This area is located in the northern and eastern portion of the Balls Creek study area. Since the Town of Maiden has experienced serious water losses from its reservoir on Maiden Creek, the Town has entered into contractual relations with the City of Hickory to provide water to Town residents. Once the necessary water line connections are made, the Maiden water plant and reservoir will no longer be used. The Town could then petition the state to have the Maiden and Allen Creek watersheds removed from the list of water-supply watersheds protected under state law. If that request succeeds, the state-mandated watershed restrictions on density could be removed and more dense development allowed if County zoning is revised to permit increased density.

**Land Use Distribution**

The Balls Creek SAP encompasses 30,802 acres of land (including rights-of-way), but 28,979 if R-O-W is excluded. Of these 28,979 acres, over 20% are entirely vacant and another 66% are in large tracts, which could be subdivided.

	<b>Total Zoned Acreage</b>		
	<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>Total Vacant Acreage</b>	<b>% Vacant</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	28,979	6,133	21%

Land use in the study area consists of industrial, commercial, office-institutional and residential uses. Industrial zoning occupies the most acreage of non-residential zoned land, though commercial zoned land has the greatest percent of vacant land.

	<b>Acreage Zoned Non-Residential</b>		
	<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>Total Vacant Acreage</b>	<b>% Vacant</b>
<b>Industrial</b>	171	8	5%
<b>Commercial</b>	64	9	14%
<b>Office-Institutional</b>	7	0	0%

Total vacant acreage zoned non-residential reflects only parcels without a structure. Some parcels may have a structure that is unoccupied, which would increase the amount of vacant space.

Residential uses occupy the greatest percentage of land in the study area. Yet, over 52% of the residentially zoned land is vacant. Over 6,000 acres are entirely vacant while approximately 17,600 acres are in lots of four acres or more that could be subdivided into two lots. Assuming that 85% of the total vacant land available for residential use were developed, the Balls Creek area could see an additional 12,687 acres developed for residential purposes.

	<b>Acreage Zoned Residential</b>		
	<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>Total Vacant Acreage</b>	<b>% Vacant</b>
<b>Balls Creek SAP</b>	28,549	14,926	52%

The land use statistics suggest that a substantial amount of additional development could occur in the Balls Creek area.

**Site Development Patterns and Land Design Trends**

Historically, rural and agricultural uses predominated in Balls Creek. Active farming in other parts of Catawba County is becoming sparse; however, an estimated 197 land parcels or nearly 8,000 acres (7,992 acres) are dedicated to farming in Balls Creek. An estimated 28 persons in Balls Creek are engaged in commodity production while another 30 produce livestock.

Gradually, housing developments are taking over the open space that residents value. The greatest residential growth has occurred in the northern and western portion of the study area toward Maiden and Newton. Generally, residential activity has consisted of a mixture of manufactured home communities and site-built subdivisions. A doublewide manufactured home subdivision of 130 homes was developed on Anderson Mountain in the 1990s.

Commercial uses have developed primarily along Highway 16 and at several major intersections in the study area. However, large strip centers and big box retailers have not yet emerged in Balls Creek. Maiden, Newton and Hickory offer larger shopping alternatives for Balls Creek residents.

Industrial activity to present has consisted mainly of established uses. While the parcels may have changed owners or uses over the years, the industrial activity has primarily been confined to the same parcels of land. Several newer industrial uses have been attracted to the western portion of the study area, closer to US 321-Business.

Both commercial and industrial activity has been limited in the Balls Creek study area due to the lack of infrastructure.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **RESIDENTIAL**

- Balance growth with the community's rural character
- Organize and plan residential development
- Encourage aesthetically pleasing subdivision design
- Provide affordable housing for people in all stages of life
- Reserve open space in new subdivisions
- Maintain the primarily residential character of Balls Creek

### **COMMERCIAL**

- Limit commercial growth
- Focus on quality, community-oriented businesses
- Require more aesthetically pleasing designs from commercial uses
- Buffer residential areas from commercial uses
- Prepare for potential commercial growth at the three commercial nodes along NC Highway 16

### **OFFICE-INSTITUTIONAL**

- Focus office-institutional uses in the Highway 16 corridor
- As with commercial uses, require more aesthetically pleasing designs and buffers from residential areas

### **INDUSTRIAL**

- Limit industrial growth within the study area

### **OPEN SPACE**

- Preserve open space, pastures and scenic views
- Support and encourage agricultural uses
- Protect natural resources

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RESIDENTIAL**

- Designate two areas for higher density residential uses, as shown on *Map 5, Balls Creek SAP Future Land Use and Residential Density Recommendations*.
- A “Village” area, indicated on *Map 5*, is proposed for multi-family and mixed-use development.
  - Multi-family homes should be permitted in the Villages area, and might include a mixture of apartments, patio homes, cluster developments and zero lot line developments. Multi-family homes should adhere to the following design concepts:
    - Limited access/internal access that is landscaped;
    - 30 foot landscaped buffer along road frontages;
    - Limited signage, such as monument style sign that is low to the ground.
  - Internal open space is proposed in the “Village,” either for passive or active use, at a rate of 5% of the property or 10,000 square feet, whichever is greater. A community building, bicycle path, tennis courts, etc. could be included; the 30-foot landscaped road frontage buffer, however, may not be included in this calculation.
- The second area of high-density residential development for the Balls Creek community (as shown on *Map 5*). This area should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre.
  - Require subdivisions in the high-density areas to preserve or create a 30 foot naturalized or landscaped buffer along road frontage and around the perimeter of the subdivision. Developers are especially encouraged to preserve trees in common areas as well as in these buffered areas.
- Designate two areas for medium-density residential uses, as shown on *Map 5*. Residential development in these areas should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per acre.

- Require subdivisions in the medium-density areas to preserve or create a 30 foot naturalized or landscaped buffer along road frontage and around the perimeter of the subdivision. Developers are especially encouraged to preserve trees in common areas as well as in these buffered areas.
- The area proposed for low-density residential is located in the remaining area of the Balls Creek SAP, those portions east of Providence Mill Road/Balls Creek Road, as shown on *Map 5*. Residential development in this area should adhere to the following design concepts:
  - Single-family homes should be developed at a maximum density of 1 unit per 2 acres.
- Residential subdivisions should incorporate the following additional design criteria:
  - Landscaping/buffering – perimeter, entry, 30 foot buffer on road frontage and around perimeter of subdivision; the purpose of this buffer is to help preserve the rural character of the Balls Creek community
  - Clustering is an option encouraged for density averaging
  - Subdivision signs
  - Designs should encourage the preservation of existing trees
- Provide owners of historic properties with information regarding resources to preserve historic sites – Murray’s Mill, Balls Creek Campground, David Franklin Propst House, located at Providence Mill and Campbell Roads

## **COMMERCIAL**

- Businesses should adhere to the following appearance and design criteria:
  - landscaped areas along road frontage
  - limitation on size of signs
  - driveway cuts – interconnectivity

- The Village area, as proposed above (see “Residential Recommendations,” p. 15, and *Map 5*), will allow a mixture of residential, commercial, office and institutional uses. It is especially designed to encourage multi-family residential uses with open space and landscaped internal access.
- Neighborhood commercial nodes should be designated at the following intersections:
  - Bethany Church Road and NC Hwy. 16
  - Balls Creek Road and NC Hwy. 16
  - Buffalo Shoals Road and NC Hwy. 16
  - Bethany Church Road and NC Hwy. 10
  - Balls Creek Road and NC Hwy. 10

*See Map 5, Balls Creek SAP Future Land Use and Residential Density Recommendations.*

- Neighborhood commercial nodes should include highway business type uses with a site area of 10 to 25 acres and maximum gross leasable area of 50,000 square feet per lot.
- Rural commercial nodes should be designated at the following intersections:
  - East Maiden Road and Buffalo Shoals Road
  - East Bandys Cross Road and Buffalo Shoals Road

*See Map 5, Balls Creek SAP Future Land Use and Residential Density Recommendations.*

- Rural commercial nodes should serve residents of the immediate neighborhood with a maximum site area of 10 acres and a maximum gross leasable area of 15,000 square feet per lot.

## **OFFICE-INSTITUTIONAL**

- Pursue a high quality business park along the Highway 16 corridor near Highway 150
- Include office and institutional uses in Village area as well as in Neighborhood and Rural Commercial nodes

## **INDUSTRIAL**

- Industrial uses should be focused in the US 321 Business Corridor between Newton and Maiden and on adjacent properties. No additional future industrial zoning is suggested for the Balls Creek Community.

## **OPEN SPACE**

- Assist property owners of rural farms in preserving those uses by providing information on conservation easements and tax credit measures.
- Develop a mechanism for preservation of open space resources by creating voluntary agricultural districts and conservation easements or by purchasing development rights and buffers in floodplains.
- Require subdivisions in the high-and medium-density areas (1 lot per  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre and 1 lot per 1 acre) to preserve or create a 30 foot naturalized or landscaped buffer along road frontage and around the perimeter of the subdivision. Developers are especially encouraged to preserve trees in common areas as well as in these buffered areas.
- Open space of 15% of total acreage is required in single-family subdivisions (excluding those in the Village area), which may be located within the development as community-use, open-space along the perimeters of the development as well as a required 30-foot buffer along road frontage. (Existing vegetation is allowed to provide this open-space buffer if deemed adequate.)

# **TRANSPORTATION**

## **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

### **ROADS & HIGHWAYS**

Transportation systems within the Balls Creek study area are primarily planned by the Hickory-Newton-Conover Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Catawba County Thoroughfare Plan. Though various areas of Catawba County have experienced significant growth in retail, commercial and residential development with consequential increases in traffic, growth has been slower in Balls Creek as evidenced by more moderate traffic increases.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) State Route system serves the Balls Creek study area with the exception of North Carolina Highway 16 and North Carolina Highway 10. NC Highway 16 is the major thoroughfare serving the Balls Creek community. NC Highway 10 borders the study area. The following table illustrates the higher volume traffic counts in the study area.

	<b>NC Hwy 16 NW of Buffalo Shoals Rd</b>	<b>Providence Mill Rd SW of NC Hwy 16</b>	<b>NC Hwy 16 SE of Coley Fish Pond Rd</b>	<b>NC Hwy 10 W of Bethany Church Rd</b>
<b>1988</b>	5,900 VPD	N/A	8,700 VPD	N/A
<b>1994</b>	8,500 VPD	N/A	N/A	6,000 VPD
<b>1999</b>	7,100 VPD	4,300 VPD	9,000 VPD	6,400 VPD
<b>2025</b>	N/A	N/A	15,700 VPD	N/A

Source: NCDOT ADT maps

VPD = Vehicles Per Day

To reduce traffic congestion and adequately provide for future travel demands, the MPO adopted the Hickory-Newton-Conover Urban Area Transportation Plan in 1986 and updated the plan in 1996. The most current update, the 2025 Hickory-Newton-Conover Urban Area Transportation Plan, includes two projects affecting the Balls Creek study area. NC Highway 16 is scheduled to be a four lane divided road from Tower Road to Balls Creek Road and a five lane road with curb and gutter from Balls Creek Road to Claremont Road. This is a funded project, scheduled in three phases, on the State Transportation Improvement Plan. Right-of-way acquisition is scheduled to begin in 2002 and construction in 2004 on the first phase from Caleb Setzer Road to Claremont Road. Phase two, from Claremont Road to Balls Creek Road, and phase three, from Balls Creek Road to Tower Road, are scheduled for right-of-way acquisition to begin beyond 2008. The Thoroughfare Plan also recommends upgrading St. James Church Road to twenty-two feet with two foot paved shoulders.

Catawba County has an adopted thoroughfare plan that includes the Balls Creek study area. The underlying concept of the County Thoroughfare Plan is to provide a functional system of streets, roads and highways that permit direct,

efficient and safe travel. Catawba County began a revision of the Plan in June 2001 with an anticipated completion date in the summer of 2003. The Plan will include recommendations to widen NC Hwy. 10 to twenty-four feet and to widen Balls Creek Road, East Maiden Road and Water Plant Road from twenty to twenty-four feet. Special legislation allows Catawba County to acquire right-of-way for future thoroughfares. *Map 6, Balls Creek SAP Future Transportation Recommendations*, illustrates the current and planned transportation system in the Balls Creek area.

### **PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM**

Presently, Catawba County does not regulate or require sidewalk construction in new developments. In general, Balls Creek lacks a pedestrian system with sidewalk connections between residential areas. However, it is now policy of the MPO and NCDOT to evaluate any new road construction project for potential pedestrian needs (i.e. sidewalks and crossover) and bicycle accommodations.

### **BICYCLE SYSTEM**

The Balls Creek study area does not currently have an integrated system of bicycle trails. NCDOT has funded a Bicycle Route Map and signing project that began in summer 2001 with expected completion in 2003. In compliance with NCDOT's policy, the NC Highway 16 and St. John's Church Road widening projects should be evaluated for their potential to provide bicycle lanes.

### **TRANSIT SYSTEM**

The Piedmont Wagon Transit System (PWTS) offers limited transit service to Balls Creek residents. Five days per week vans are available through the Piedmont Wagon to transport senior citizens and disabled residents in the Balls Creek area. A Rural General Public Route runs two days per week linking Newton and Sherrills Ford via the Balls Creek area with the urban system. Plans are underway to expand this service in terms of frequency and service areas as well as by adding bicycle racks to the minibus.

### **PASSENGER RAIL**

The NCDOT has determined that the next major expansion of passenger rail service in the State will be in Western North Carolina. Plans are underway to initiate service between Raleigh and Asheville with a stop in downtown Hickory. A portion of the former Hickory depot, now entirely occupied by a restaurant, will return to a passenger waiting area. This service is expected to be operational by 2005.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **ROADS & HIGHWAYS**

- Alleviate traffic safety problems and congestion on major highways
- Eliminate hazardous road configurations at area schools and create a smoother traffic flow for both parents dropping off students, student drivers and other through traffic
- Anticipate and plan for growth that will result from road improvements and widening
- Minimize speeding
- Preserve good roads, areas of low traffic and scenic drives

### **PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM**

- Provide safe alternatives for pedestrians
- Protect children walking to school

### **BICYCLE SYSTEM**

- Provide safe options for bicyclists

### **TRANSIT SYSTEM**

- Increase opportunities to link with existing transit routes

### **PASSENGER RAIL**

- Study connections, via the Piedmont Wagon Transit System, with the Western North Carolina Passenger Rail Service

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

Catawba County does not maintain roads and therefore the following recommendations will be forwarded to NCDOT or used in areawide thoroughfare planning.

### **ROADS & HIGHWAYS**

#### *Request from NCDOT District Office:*

- Establish community gateways at the following intersections:
  - Balls Creek Road and NC Highway 16
  - Buffalo Shoals Road and NC Highway 16
- Install traffic signals at:
  - Balls Creek Road and NC Highway 10
  - Install safety device and/or turn lane at Balls Creek Elementary School and East Bandys/West Bandys Cross Roads or High School
- Redesign intersections at:
  - Balls Creek Road and Little Mountain Road
  - Murray's Mill Road/Buffalo Shoals Road and Sherrills Ford Road
  - Buffalo Shoals Road and East Bandys/West Bandys Cross Roads
  - Mount Olive Church Road and Bethany Church Road
- Install warning lights or devices at:
  - Mount Olive Church Road and Claremont Road
  - Little Mountain Road and Buffalo Shoals Road
  - Mount Ruhama Church Road and North Olivers Cross Road
- Reduce the speed limit on:
  - East Maiden Road from Buffalo Shoals Road east to the Balls Creek SAP boundary should be 45 m.p.h.
  - Balls Creek Road from current 45 m.p.h. limit south of Winslow Road to the intersection of Hwy. 16 should be 45 m.p.h
- Improve the following roads to enhance safety:
  - Straighten curve on North Olivers Cross Road
  - Straighten curve on St. James Church Road at Jack Whitener Road
  - Replace bridge on Love Road
- Evaluate traffic engineering at all existing schools. Turn lanes should be mandatory when new schools are built. Existing schools should be retrofit for turn lanes as budgets allow.

- Evaluate the possibility of establishing a “future setback ordinance” to prevent building on land designed to become future right-of-way for highway widening.

Add to Catawba County Thoroughfare Plan:

- Increase pavement width to the maximum extent feasible on:
  - West Bandys Cross Roads
  - Smyre Farm Road
  - Water Plant Road from Maiden to North Olivers Cross Road
  - North Olivers Cross Road
  - East Maiden Road from the new four-lane NC Highway 16 west to the intersection of Lebanon Road
  - Bethany Church Road
  - Little Mtn. Road
- Explore possible local scenic highway designation for the following roads:
  - Murray’s Mill road
  - Buffalo Shoals Road
  - East Maiden Road

County Ordinance amendment:

Establish that all new driveways on the following roads be at least 12 feet wide for the first 20 feet of length with a minimum 3-foot turn radii:

- Hwy. 16
- Hwy. 10
- Buffalo Shoals Road
- Balls Creek Road
- Water Plant Road
- East Maiden Road
- Olivers Cross Road (North & South)
- Providence Mill Road
- Little Mtn. Road
- St. James Church Road
- W. Bandys Cross Road

**PEDESTRIAN SYSTEM**

- Apply for TEA – 21 enhancement funds to create a walking trail from Bandy’s High School to Mill Creek Middle School

**BICYCLE SYSTEM**

- Increase pavement width to the maximum extent feasible along the following roads for bicycle routes:

- Mount Olive Church Road
- Murrays Mill Road
- Balls Creek Road
- NC Highway 10 from the intersection of Murrays Mill Road east to Balls Creek Road
- West Bandys Cross Road
- Providence Mill Road
- Smyre Farm Road
- Bethany Church Road
- Little Mountain Road
- East Maiden Road
- Water Plant Road
- Buffalo Shoals Road

## **TRANSIT SYSTEM**

- Begin a marketing campaign to publicize existing services offered by the Piedmont Wagon Transit System
- Encourage and promote ridesharing/vanpooling to Charlotte through the Piedmont Wagon and the Charlotte Area Transit Systems

## **PASSENGER RAIL**

- Encourage Piedmont Wagon to schedule trips to coordinate with the Western North Carolina passenger rail service

See Map 6: *Future Transportation Recommendations*

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

#### **SCHOOLS**

Most children in the Balls Creek community attend the new Balls Creek Elementary School, a K-5<sup>th</sup> grade school with a current enrollment of 886 pupils. The capacity of the school is 926 students, which is expected to be reached by 2003, according to the *Catawba County School Growth Estimation Model*, developed by the WPCOG data staff. Based on growth patterns and population increases, the model predicts that Balls Creek Elementary will exceed the 110% capacity threshold by the 2005 school year. Maiden Elementary, which serves some of the residents of the Balls Creek area, is predicted to exceed 110% of capacity by the 2006 school year, if growth in the area continues.

Since Balls Creek serves only students in grades K-5, sixth graders from Balls Creek Elementary currently attend Tuttle Middle School. In fall 2002, Tuttle enrolled 589 students, which exceeds its capacity of 576 students. Tuttle will most likely exceed the 110% of capacity (633 students) in the 2003-04 school year. Besides receiving 6<sup>th</sup> graders from Balls Creek, Tuttle also receives students from Maiden Elementary. (Building plans under development by the County School system may prevent overcrowding at Tuttle from happening, if the new Maiden High School and a new elementary school in Catawba can be constructed.)

After one year at Tuttle, most middle schoolers attend the new Mill Creek Middle School, located near Bandys High School, for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. (Unlike most other school systems in the region which group 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in their middle schools, nearly all middle schools in the Catawba County system serve 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders.) In 2002, Mill Creek began the school year with 527 students; its capacity is 770 and that level will not be reached in the near future.

Bandys High School, just east of the Balls Creek Small Area Planning boundary, is the community's high school. With a fall 2002 enrollment of 944, it exceeded its building capacity of 900. It is anticipated that it will exceed 110% of its capacity (990 students) during the 2003-2004 school year.

Balls Creek residents have expressed concerns about crowding in the schools their children attend, especially what appears to be over-crowding at the elementary school.

#### **PARKS AND GREENWAYS**

At the present time, no parks or greenways are located within the Balls Creek Small Area. The County's largest park is Riverbend, located at NC Highway 16

and the Catawba River, with over 450 acres of hiking, biking and equestrian trails. Bakers Mountain Park, recently opened, contains nearly 200 acres and is located in the western portion of the County, south of Hickory and I-40. The Elementary School, churches and civic organizations, however, operate some passive and active recreation programs and facilities.

## **LIBRARIES**

Catawba County operates a library system with a central library in Newton, a law library and six branches located in the St. Stephens area, Mountain View, Conover, Claremont, Maiden and Sherrills Ford. The Maiden branch, closest to the Balls Creek community, is open 42 hours, five days a week, closed on Sundays and Mondays. Other Balls Creek residents have access to the central County library in Newton, the Sherrills Ford branch or the new branch library at the Claremont City Hall. All branch libraries provide entertainment and general reference services, basic collections of fiction and non-fiction, and Internet access with several computer terminals for public use.

## **WATER SERVICE**

In the decade of the 1990s, public water service came to the Balls Creek community through efforts of Catawba County and the municipal water suppliers so schools could be provided with plentiful, clean water. Water service reached Tuttle Middle School from the Town of Maiden and was extended from the City of Newton to Balls Creek Elementary, both in the late 1990s. In both these projects, the County partnered with municipal providers by paying for construction of the lines while the municipal water providers agreed to maintain the lines. Revenues are shared between the County and the water providers.

Main water lines currently extend along NC Highway 10 from Newton to the Town of Catawba and south down Balls Creek Road to the Elementary School. A connector line ties this water supply with the NC 10 water line and loops around Yount Road and Mt. Olive Church Road. The Balls Creek water line also goes east on West Bandys Cross Road to the High School, then north on Buffalo Shoals and into the Sherrills Ford community.

In the southwest section of Balls Creek, Maiden has constructed a water line along Water Plant Road from the Town limits to Tuttle Middle School. Maiden is also partnering with the County to construct a water line out East Maiden Road to the Buffalo Shoals intersection. All these water projects have been possible because the cooperative relationship between the County and municipal water providers has extended service from the municipalities to County residents.

Although still in the formative stages, a newly-formed utility discussion group is expected to work together to coordinate County-wide policies on extending water service to additional areas of the County without sufficient water service.

Although no immediate plans are being considered for extending water service to other areas of Balls Creek, other than those listed here, public comments by residents have overwhelmingly supported the need for additional water lines.

## **SEWER SERVICE**

Essentially the Balls Creek community is not currently served with public sewer. Newton provides sewer to the Abernethy Center facilities on NC Highway 16 in the area's northwest corner. A significant project is currently under development that will expand sewer service to the northwest corner of the Balls Creek area. The City of Newton is developing a contract with Catawba County to build an additional sewer line down the unnamed creek drainage, north and west of Coley Fish Pond Road to Balls Creek Elementary. This line will provide sewer service to many residents in the area proposed for higher residential development in this *Plan*, the "Village" area and the area north of NC Highway 16 and west of Fox Dairy Road and south of NC Highway 10.

## **EMERGENCY SERVICES**

### **Law Enforcement**

The Catawba County Sheriff's Department serves the Balls Creek study area. The patrol division consists of 26 officers on four shifts. The County jail and court system security are also provided through the Sheriff's Department. The Department also supplies crime prevention, investigations and civil enforcement.

### **Fire Protection**

The Bandys Volunteer Fire Department serves the majority of the Balls Creek community. It provides fire protection to two-thirds of the study area. The Bandys Fire Department has two stations on Buffalo Shoals Road, north at Bandys Crossroads and south at Olivers Crossroad. With 54 volunteers, the department uses two pumpers, three tankers, two brush trucks and one equipment truck. The Bandys Department maintains an insurance rating of 5.

Fire service to the western areas of the Balls Creek area is provided by the Newton Volunteer Fire Department (in the northwest section) and the Maiden Volunteer Fire Department (in the southwest area of Balls Creek). Claremont and Denver Volunteer Fire also serve small portions of the study area.

### **Emergency Medical Services**

The Sherrills Ford and the Newton EMS bases provide Emergency Medical Services to the Balls Creek community. The Sherrills Ford base was recently upgraded to a full crew to decrease response time. Although the County has no immediate plans for future bases in the Balls Creek area, citizens at the Balls

Creek SAP Community meeting expressed an interest in locating an EMS base within the area. The County, however, is continuing to study the issue of the appropriate number and location of EMS bases across the entire County.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Balls Creek Elementary School and Tuttle Middle School should continue their standing as “centers of the community.”
- Public water service should be expanded into additional areas of the Balls Creek Community.
- The spirit of volunteerism in existing civic organizations should be encouraged as sources of community pride and as providers of recreation options for the community.
- The volunteer fire department’s role in protecting citizens and their property and its status as essential to the fabric of the community should be maintained.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Balls Creek Elementary School should continue to build on its role as an essential resource for the community.
- The Balls Creek Elementary School should be provided with adequate facilities and resources as population increases and more students attend the school.
- The future residential density recommendations made by the Balls Creek Small Area Planning Committee should be used by school planners for future school facility expansion needs.
- When the proposed land use and housing recommendations suggested by this Committee are approved, the Committee recommends releasing school capacity from limitations currently in effect.
- Explore funding options for construction of school facilities, which may include impact fees.
- Develop a formal, contractual relationship between Catawba County, civic groups and the Catawba County School Board to expand the schools' use as the area's "Community Centers," especially regarding additional recreation options for children and adults.
- Catawba County should revisit the EMS study to see if recent residential development in the Balls Creek area warrants additional consideration for an EMS base in the area, with a special focus on locating such a facility within proximity of the schools.
- Encourage the new cooperative water-providers consortium to provide water to areas set aside for high-density development and other areas based on water quality and quantity needs. A priority list of water extensions would include a line from the Balls Creek Campground south on Buffalo Shoals Road to NC Highway 16 and from Balls Creek Elementary School south on Balls Creek Road to NC Highway 16, then join these lines north along NC 16 to the Abernethy Center. These extensions would provide water to areas recommended for development as "commercial nodes."
- Catawba County should consider the Balls Creek area as an ideal location for a third County park, providing the southeast portion of the County with walking trails, picnic areas and open space for community recreation.

# **HOUSING**

## **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

Population growth in the Balls Creek area helps explain the increase in the number of housing units in the study area in the past few years. Building permits recorded by Catawba County provide the mechanism for recording the number and kind of housing unit contributing to that growth. The following table shows the total number of building permits issued from 1997 through 2002 by type of home (single-family site-built, multi-family or manufactured home).

<b>Balls Creek SAP Building Permits, 1997-2002</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Single-family Site-built Permits</b>	<b>Single-wide Manufactured Home Permits</b>	<b>Double-wide Manufactured Home Permits</b>
<b>1997</b>	27	42	16
<b>1998</b>	27	30	15
<b>1999</b>	67	33	29
<b>2000</b>	37	22	19
<b>2001</b>	43	13	15
<b>2002</b>	45	8	19
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>113</b>

Source: Catawba County Building Inspections, 2003.

Analysis of this building permit data shows a decreasing percentage of manufactured homes of the total number of homes permitted in the last six years. In 1997 mobile homes made up 68% of total new homes permitted, with site-built homes at 32%. By 2002, however, the percent of mobile homes of total new homes permitted decreased to 37% of the total new homes with stick-built homes reaching 63%. This pattern reflects a similar one which occurred across Catawba County when appearance criteria for manufactured homes went into effect in March 1996.

A windshield survey conducted by planning staff from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments in December 2001 revealed slightly more than 1,000 mobile homes in the Balls Creek community. Of the total of 1,014 manufactured homes in the community, 529 were single-wides while 485 were identified as double-wides. At this time an estimated 4,269 site-built homes were located within the Balls Creek study area.

One major theme to emerge from meetings with the Balls Creek community was the desire to preserve the rural nature of the community. The rural setting of the area, its location and its cultural and historic heritage, were listed as the chief reasons people liked living in Balls Creek. At the same time, concerns about the community included ways to balance growth with the community's rural nature, its farming tradition and the presence of open-space. With these concerns in

mind, the SAP Committee sought to devise ways to manage residential development by controlling its density. Accordingly, the Committee developed density requirements (ranging from  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre per housing unit to 1 acre and 2 acres), as described in the Land Use section of this *Plan*.

The Committee also proposes rezonings to keep residential developments in the Balls Creek community more in tune with the patterns of residential housing reflected in recent years. The percentage of stick-built homes increased from 32% in 1997 to 63% in 2002. Since a majority of the 28,979 acres (excluding right-of-way) in Balls Creek SAP is currently zoned R-2, allowing single-family housing, modular housing and single-wide and double-wide mobile homes, the Committee proposes to rezone slightly less than 17,000 acres (58% of the area) to R-1, allowing site-built or modular homes. Another 3,651 acres (13% of the area) are suggested for rezoning to R-3, which allows site-built homes, modular homes and doublewide manufactured homes. This proposed rezoning would apply to 71% of the land within the Balls Creek study area.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **SINGLE-FAMILY**

- Encourage aesthetically-pleasing subdivision design
- Encourage the preservation of open spaces as development increases

### **MULTI-FAMILY**

- Direct multi-family housing to appropriate locations

### **MANUFACTURED HOMES**

- Provide for the location of manufactured housing

### **RETIREMENT**

- Promote low maintenance, alternative housing opportunities for seniors

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **ALL RESIDENTIAL USES**

- The Balls Creek Small Area Plan Committee recommends the Planning Board and staff investigate the possibility of developing a County-wide minimum housing standard. It should apply to single-family, multi-family housing and rental housing, with standards limiting the number of individuals inhabiting a single dwelling unit.

### **SINGLE-FAMILY**

- Cluster development is encouraged as an option for single-family subdivisions.
- Open space of 15% of total acreage is required in single-family subdivisions, which may be located within the development as community-use, open-space along the perimeters of the development as well as a required 30-foot buffer along road frontage. (Existing vegetation is allowed to provide this open-space buffer if deemed adequate.)
- Three separate densities for single-family housing are proposed: high-density areas (3/4-acres per housing unit), medium-density areas (one-acre tracts per dwelling), and a low-density area which allows densities of 2 acres or greater per dwelling unit. (See *Map 5*).

### **MULTI-FAMILY**

- Multi-family housing of various sorts (apartments, condominiums, town houses, zero-lot line development and cluster development) is proposed for the Village area.

### **MANUFACTURED HOMES**

- Rezone the areas shown on *Map 7, "Balls Creek SAP Proposed Zoning Map Amendments."* About 58% of the land in the Balls Creek SAP is proposed for rezoning to R-1 (which allows stick-built or modular homes). Proposed for rezoning to R-3 (which allows double-wide manufactured homes, modular homes and site-built homes) is another 13% of the land in the Balls Creek SAP area. The basis for this proposed rezoning is to preserve the community's historic character, especially in the Murray's Mill and Balls Creek Campground areas, the rural character of the community with its large farming tracts, scenic views such as along East Maiden Road and more intense mixed and residential uses in the "Village" area of the community.

This proposal will also reflect the changing pattern of residential housing in the community as manufactured housing decreased from 68% of new homes in 1997 to 37% in 2002.

- The Committee recommends that single-wide and double-wide mobile homes continue to be allowed in the R-2 residential zoning district. The R-3 zoning district is also recommended to continue, which currently allows stick-built, modular or double-wide manufactured homes.

## **RETIREMENT**

- Options for retirement living are suggested in the Village area where a variety of multi-family housing is proposed. Retirement housing would expand existing retirement housing presently located in this area.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

In Catawba County as a whole, the economy in the last decade has evolved from one dominated by traditional manufacturing, especially the textile, hosiery and furniture industries. The new job scene in Catawba County is one in which manufacturing no longer dominates but shares the number of available jobs with an increasingly lively service sector. During the decade of the 1990s, jobs in manufacturing grew by 6.2% while service sectors jobs grew by 39.7%. While these numbers do not take into account the current recession, they indicate a significant change in the patterns of where workers are employed. Service sector jobs, it should be noted, often pay less than manufacturing jobs and may provide fewer benefits. But they include workers in the health professions, legal services, auto repair, hotels and motels, and engineering, not just the fast food workers we may think of when we hear the term “service sector” jobs.

Most residents of the Balls Creek community, other than those engaged in agriculture, work outside the immediate community. In fact, few commercial or industrial facilities are located within the boundaries of the Balls Creek area. Several industrial sites are located on the western edge of the area, near similar sites along the US 321 Business corridor between Newton and Maiden. In the community input meeting, residents conveyed their concerns that the rural character of the community be maintained and that additional industrial sites not be expanded. The Small Area Committee endorsed these opinions.

Existing commercial uses are located along NC Highway 16 north of the intersection of Bethany Church Road and at the Balls Creek Road-Providence Mill Road intersection with NC 16. The widening of NC 16, currently projected for completion beyond 2010, is expected to provide additional opportunities for expanded shopping and eating for Balls Creek residents.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Facilitate and encourage new, community-focused economic development in the Balls Creek area.
- In the new NC Highway 16 Corridor, encourage limited commercial and office-institutional development which observes development standards in order to provide additional retail opportunities for Balls Creek residents close to home.
- Maintain existing industrial sites as adequate for the needs of this rural community.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Business development, including new development along the widened NC Highway 16 Corridor, should observe the following appearance and design criteria:
  - landscaped areas along road frontage,
  - limitation on size of signs,
  - driveway cuts – interconnectivity.
- The Village area, as proposed above (see “Residential Recommendations,” p. 15, and *Map 5*), will allow a mixture of residential, commercial, office and institutional uses. It is especially designed to encourage multi-family residential uses with open space and landscaped internal access
- “Neighborhood” commercial nodes are proposed for these intersections:
  - Bethany Church Road and NC Highway 16
  - Balls Creek Road and NC Highway 16
  - Buffalo Shoals Road and NC Highway 16
  - Bethany Church Road and NC Highway 10
  - Balls Creek Road and Highway 10

These neighborhood commercial nodes should include highway-business type uses with a site area of 10 to 25 acres and maximum gross leasable area of 50,000 square feet per lot.

- “Rural” commercial nodes are suggested at these intersections:
  - East Maiden Road and Buffalo Shoals Road
  - East Bandys Cross Road and Buffalo Shoals Road

These rural commercial nodes should serve residents of the immediate neighborhood with a maximum site area of 10 acres and a maximum gross leasable area of 15,000 square feet per lot.

- Pursue a high-quality, attractive office-institutional business park along the NC 16 Corridor near NC Highway 150.
- Additional industrial sites are not proposed for the Balls Creek Small Area. Existing industrial sites in the US 321-Business Corridor between Newton and Maiden provide adequate industrial sites for the coming decade.

## **NATURAL/ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES**

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS AND TRENDS**

Anderson Mountain is the primary natural resource in the Balls Creek community, located at the southeast corner of the study area (see *Map 8, Balls Creek SAP Natural and Cultural Resources*). The Mountain reaches an elevation of 1,545 feet and is partially developed for residential use. A double-wide manufactured home subdivision occupies the northwest side of the mountain. Over 130 lots have been platted, with approximately 55 currently developed as residences. The remaining percentage of the Mountain consists of vacant land, including one undeveloped, 430-acre tract on the southeast side.

The view of Anderson Mountain dominates the southeast portion of the Balls Creek community and maintaining its appearance in an aesthetically appealing manner is an important value for the Small Area Planning Committee. At the Community meeting, residents also expressed concerns that additional development on Anderson Mountain might detract from the area's rural character. The Committee, in particular, was concerned about the effect of additional residential development on the Mountain including its steepness of slope, runoff and drainage, especially its effect on the Lake Norman watershed, and the impact of additional septic tanks on water quality.

Two major creeks run through much of the Balls Creek community and affect not only the quality of the surface water but have important cultural and historic ties to the community. Balls Creek flows northeast into Murrays Mill Lake, site of the historic Mill, then directly east into the Catawba River. Maiden Creek has been dammed east of the Town and has provided the Town water supply for many years. The Maiden Creek Reservoir will be abandoned in coming years because of excessive cost of repairing the dam. Below the Reservoir, Maiden Creek flows west across Town, then south into Clarks Creek and the South Fork of the Catawba.

To protect water quality, the State of North Carolina enacted the Water Supply Watershed Protection Program in 1989. The program requires all local governments with land use planning jurisdiction in designated watersheds to administer a Water Supply Watershed Protection Ordinance to protect surface drinking water. Lake Norman has been designated a source for water supply and as a result a portion of the Balls Creek area falls within the WS-IV Watershed (see *Map 8*). The WS-IV protected area requires 15,000 square foot lots when curb and gutter is not used, and public water or sewer service are provided. When no public utilities (water and sewer) are provided, lots cannot be smaller than 20,000 square feet. Multi-family and non-residential uses are limited to 24 percent impervious coverage of the lot with curb and gutter and 36 percent without curb and gutter.

The Balls Creek area also falls within the WS-II watershed. The Maiden Reservoir is the primary water intake for the Town of Maiden and as a result a large part of the Balls Creek area also falls within this watershed (see *Map 8*). Within the critical area, the WS-II classification requires 2 acre lots or larger, while the balance of the watershed requires 1 acre lots or larger. Multi-family and non-residential developments may not exceed 6% and 12% impervious coverage of the lots for the critical and balance areas respectively.

Besides protected watersheds and Anderson Mountain, another significant natural feature is the rural, undeveloped land that dominates the community. While much of this open land is farmed, considerable acreage simply remains as undeveloped woodland and open fields. These elements constitute much of what for residents symbolizes the quiet, rural character of the Balls Creek area.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

### **WATER**

- The quality of water is a vital concern for the public and should be protected.

### **ANDERSON MOUNTAIN**

- Minimize the impacts of residential development on Anderson Mountain, especially those caused by development on slopes, drainage and excessive use of septic tanks.
- Protect scenic views and corridors as well as wildlife corridors.

### **OPEN SPACE**

- Provide adequate recreational opportunities, both active and passive, for all segments of the population.
- Maintain the rural character for which the Balls Creek community is known.
- Preserve ample open space for future generations.
- Assist farmers and property owners desiring to maintain the agricultural or open space use of their property.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Establish standards for new development on Anderson Mountain above the 1,100 foot elevation in the area designated as “Mountain Protection District” on *Map 8, Balls Creek SAP Natural and Cultural Resources*. All new major subdivisions will be subject to a planned development process which will address the following:
  - Lot clearing limits based on percent slope
  - Height restrictions
  - Building material and finishes of homes and signage to be compatible with the natural environment
  - Environmentally sensitive road and lot configurations

The average density allowable is one unit per two acres. To minimize the impacts to environmentally sensitive areas, the transferring of densities within the development will be strongly encouraged.

- Coordinate active recreation in the Balls Creek community with local civic groups and Catawba County Schools.
- Preserve the community’s open spaces through density controls and zoning and subdivision regulations which establish three density areas: high density (3/4 acres per dwelling unit), medium density (one acre per housing unit), and low density (2 acres per dwelling) (see *Map 5*);
- Open space of 15% of total acreage is required in single-family subdivisions (excluding those in the Village area), which may be located within the development as community-use open space along the perimeters of the development as well as a required 30-foot buffer along road frontage. (Existing vegetation is allowed to provide this open-space buffer if deemed adequate.)
- Internal open space is required in the “Village” residential developments, either passive or active, at a rate of 5% of the property or 10,000 square feet, whichever is greater. A community building, bicycle path, tennis courts, etc. could be included; the 30-foot landscaped road frontage buffer, however, may not be included in this calculation.
- Encourage residential subdivisions to follow design criteria for preserving trees within subdivisions.
- Work through county, state and federal agencies to expand educational efforts to farms about voluntary agricultural districts to preserve their farmland and their livelihood.

- Encourage the new cooperative water-providers consortium to provide water to areas set aside for high-density development and other areas based on water quality and quantity needs. A priority list of water extensions would include a line from the Balls Creek Campground south on Buffalo Shoals Road to NC Highway 16 and from Balls Creek Elementary School south on Balls Creek Road to NC Highway 16, then join these lines north along NC 16 to the Abernethy Center. These extensions would provide water to areas recommended for development as “commercial nodes.”
  
- Consider requesting NC legislative authority to allow Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), which would encourage development in areas with adequate infrastructure and preserve open space in more rural parts of the County like the Balls Creek community.

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## **CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES**

### **MURRAY'S MILL HISTORIC DISTRICT**

The Murray's Mill Historic District contains over 150 acres and two-dozen structures. It is the "last surviving complex of its type in Catawba County," according to local historians. Murray's Mill, located on Balls Creek, was one of many water-powered mills in Catawba County during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The great flood of 1916, however, destroyed most of the mills of Catawba County. This mill survived the flood and continued to operate until 1967 as the last water-powered mill in Catawba County. Although mill operations began at this site between 1873 and 1883, the current mill structure was built in 1913 to expand and upgrade the original building. Today, the complex is owned and maintained by the Catawba County Historical Association. The Historical Association now operates the site as a museum, educating school-age children and the general public about the history of the site. (See *Map 8, Balls Creek SAP Natural and Cultural Resources*.)

### **RELIGIOUS "CAMPGROUNDS"**

Another 19<sup>th</sup> century facility, unique to this region of North Carolina, is the summer religious gathering place, typically called a "campground." Catawba County is the site of two of these facilities, still used every summer for religious and social gatherings. Methodists established the 33-acre Balls Creek Campground site, located on Buffalo Shoals Road, in 1853 to serve as a gathering place to worship and hold annual revivals. It is still used today and is one of the largest religious campgrounds in the southern United States. The site contains an arbor, the principal site of religious services, and many "tents," wooden, two-story structures that provide living and sleeping space for families during the August, two-week long religious services.

The second "camp meeting" facility in Catawba County was established by members of the A.M.E Zion Church sometime in the 1870's. The five-acre site, located on Shiloh Road, served as a gathering place for the African-American residents of the area. McKenzies Grove Campground functioned much the same way as its white counterpart. Revivals and annual gatherings are still held at the site every September.

### **HISTORIC RESIDENCE**

One significant historic residence in the area is the David Franklin Propst house, located at the intersection of Providence Mill and Campbell Roads. The house, built about 1887, is noteworthy for its distinctive brickwork.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Identify, recognize and protect significant cultural and historical sites.
- Encourage further education of the public concerning the history and cultural attributes of the Balls Creek community.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Cooperate with the Catawba County Historical Association to add cultural sites to County mapping projects, so that proposed developments near those sites will preserve the community's historical and cultural heritage.
- Encourage the Historical Association to increase public educational efforts for those sites of County- and state-wide significance in Balls Creek, especially the religious campground sites.
- Identify additional historical sites in the Balls Creek community which may qualify for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

## **APPENDIX A**

Specific issues that residents voted on are listed below. The number beside each issue indicates the number of votes it received. If an issue does not have a number beside it, the issue was listed for voting but no one voted for it.

### **What do you like about Balls Creek?**

#### **Rural Setting – 7**

Rural atmosphere – 3

Open spaces and farms - 2

Rural farm – open land, nice drives, honest & hardworking people – 2

Rural farmland

Rural but close to commercial areas

Semi-rural

Good mix urban – rural living

Good place to live

Quiet area

Clean and quiet

Clean air

#### **Heritage - 1**

Cultural heritage - 1

Rich history & culture – Dr. Hart Historical Place, Murray's Mill, Bunker Hill

Bridge, Campground

History and heritage

#### **Community**

##### **Churches**

Good church, school, hospitals

Churches (variety)

Churches

Churches serve as center of community

Opportunity for religious expression

##### **People**

Community unity

Community committed to schools, churches, children, families

Friendly – caring people (family atmosphere) tight knit

Small family-type community

Family roots

Family oriented

Good area to live in – good folks to work with

Friendly folks

Wonderful neighbors

Good volunteers

**Public Services**

Low crime  
Low crime  
Excellent educational facilities  
Good schools  
Schools  
Schools serve as center of community  
Low tax rate  
Fire department

**Location**

Not Charlotte/Hickory but within commuting distance  
Centrally located Hickory/Charlotte  
Close to activity – mountains, beach  
Close proximity to shopping  
Close to larger cities

**Residential**

Single-family homes  
Houses aren't crowded – open space  
Good area for retirees (Abernathy Center)

**Transportation**

Good roads  
Low traffic

**Organizations**

Civic organizations  
Balls Creek Optimist (youth activities)

**What concerns do you have for Balls Creek?**

**Public Services - 35**

**Government - 19**

- Quality County leadership, public policy – land use, quality education – all minority groups – 14
- Less control (i.e. government) - 3
- County emphasis is on Mountain View – Startown area – new schools - 1
- Lack of developmental planning - 1
- Where will money come from (State cutting funding)? Will all people (taxpayers) bear burden of providing funding?
- Being able to use your land the way you want to – family land concerns
- Restrictive covenants
- Buffers
- Configuration of Balls Creek SAP lines – move eastern line east (Little Mountain)

**Schools - 9**

- Maintain high quality schools with good teachers - 6
- Teachers having to spend time teaching English to immigrants – 3
- School enrollment (overcrowding)
- School crowding – everyone wants to live in Balls Creek – shortage of available homes
- Over crowded schools
- School overcrowding
- Parental school involvement

**Emergency Services**

- Maintain safety – low crime
- Crime
- Not enough emergency services
- Response times
- Not enough police protection
- Sheriff Department response time

**Recreation - 4**

- Need better access to community buildings for community use – 4
- Insufficient recreation facilities

**Infrastructure - 2**

- Insufficient infrastructure (water/sewer lines, improved roads) - 2
- Want water & sewer for everyone

**Solid Waste - 1**

Junkyards – 1

Junk vehicles

Inconvenient bottle recycling facility (container too small & difficult to fit bottles into) at landfill

Charlotte moving in this direction – will Balls Creek be ready with schools, housing, public infrastructure, can crime remain low?

**Residential - 14**

Control of growth - 6

Too many people in 1 home – not paying taxes and overcrowding schools - 5

1 acre should be the lot size – recent 2 acre requirements is too harsh – 2

Loss of farm land to developments – 1

Growth

Balancing growth with rural character – property owners rights

Over population (1/4 – 1/2 acre lots too small), tax payers not able to keep up with rapid influx of new people

Remain residential area for families, no annexing, loss of identity, remain agricultural

Want to control growth with emphasis on housing for younger people starting out

Organized residential development

Residential growth

Manufactured housing

Affordable housing

Lack of rental property

Not over-develop land

**Transportation - 2**

Traffic congestion in school area - 2

Traffic

Eastern thoroughfare (Newton – Conover loop)

Need wider roads and need to be maintained – if had wider roads wouldn't need sidewalks for pedestrians and bicyclists

**Commercial**

Industrial/commercial growth

Need quality childcare

**Miscellaneous**

Language barriers

**What is your future vision of Balls Creek?**

**Public Services – 36**

**Infrastructure - 26**

- Water & Sewer – 12
- County water system – 12
- Water and sewer for everyone at a reasonable price - 2
- Water & Sewer
- Countywide water system

**Emergency Services - 5**

- Crime Prevention – 4
- Low crime - 1
- Emergency/Fire protection

**Schools - 2**

- Quality Education – 2
- More Schools
- Provide children (school) with the best technology
- Stricter School Discipline
- Continuing Education locally

**Recreation – 2**

- Public recreation (near water – picnic, playground, boats/fishing) –1
- Park/recreation center (all ages) – 1
- Community Building
- Recreational opportunities
- Community events
- Public park – walking trails etc.
- Parks
- More cultural involvements for diversified population

**Government - 1**

- Less Government Intervention - 1
- Lower taxes
- Better communications between the County & Tax Payers
- Receive as much attention and funding as Mountain View
- More county involvement for Balls Creek Community

**Residential – 21**

- 1 acre lots - 10
- No mobile homes - 4
- Enforcement of minimum housing standards and restrictions on “temporary” homes (i.e. campers) being used permanently – 3

High quality development – 3  
No more developments like the doublewide community off of St. James Church  
Road near Prison Camp Road (mobile homes okay but the development is  
not maintained) – 1  
Planned community housing

**Transportation – 10**

Hwy. 16 widened (4-lane) – 5  
Better traffic pattern at Bandys H.S. – traffic light – 4  
Highway 16 by-pass - 1  
Park & Ride Program  
Widen roads for bikeway  
Widen heavy use roads  
Wider roads  
Light rail from Olivers Cross Roads to Balls Creek  
Smooth traffic flow around schools

**Commercial - 2**

Commercial/industrial growth (limited) - 2  
No more commercial activity – can drive to those areas if needed  
Appearance criteria (businesses)  
Planned commercial space  
Development that offers jobs and/or services (Hwy. 16)  
Increased Economic Development in Urban Areas  
Post Office

**Rural Setting - 1**

Preservation of Farmland – 1  
Keep rural/agrarian  
Agricultural/Rural Area (Support Business)  
Preservation of Natural Resources

**Status Quo**

Community Stay the Same as much as Possible  
Continue quiet, family community  
No more growth or very little  
Controlled Growth