

AVL.
Greater.



This document is dedicated to our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. We hope you are proud of the work we started in 2019 to secure a livable, prosperous and equitable community for your futures.

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To Your Future – An Open Letter

As I've been working with you on *Asheville Greater* ("AVL>>"), I've kept an open chair at each meeting. You may not have noticed; sometimes I drape my coat over it. But to me it's a reminder; I imagine a 6 year old in the chair, attending the meeting alongside us.

Why?

Because in 2040, that six year old will be 26 years old – old enough to decide where they want to live, old enough to contribute to the economy and society through their innovation, entrepreneurship or plain old hard work, old enough to be a parent of school-aged children, an ambassador, a volunteer, a community leader.

The next twenty years holds tremendous potential for today's six year old...and for Greater Asheville. What happens between today and 2040 will deeply impact the future that today's first graders inherit.

Some things we know for sure: the Asheville area is going to grow hard and fast. You will add another 125,000 people and 75,000 homes by 2040. This growth can be a gift and a curse; it depends how it's handled. This vision and blueprint is intended to help you leverage your growth in a way that's intentional, equitable, and retains your reputation for creativity, innovation and resilience.

As you read, you'll notice that this document covers the *hardware* (e.g. better transportation, more housing options) and the *software* (e.g. how we work together) required for a bright, 20-year future. We must do both if we want to reach our potential.

You have most of what you need to build this future. Some of the pieces are already being assembled. Now it's up to us to increase our momentum and work together in a wise, intentional, and future-focused way. We need each other. And we have each other.

To tomorrow's 26 year olds,



Rebecca Ryan, APF

WHY?

You can't talk about the future of Greater Asheville without talking about **GROWTH**.

By 2040, the region (Asheville MSA + Transylvania County) will be home to over 630,000 people – nearly 40% more than in 2010. This is an increase of about 178,000 people or the addition of two cities the size of Asheville. Most of this growth is expected to occur in Buncombe and Henderson Counties¹.

Growth can be a blessing, *and* it can be a challenge.

Growth is a blessing because it contributes to prosperity. When more people live in Greater Asheville, they buy goods and services here. They pay taxes here. They volunteer, contribute, and create a sense of vibrancy.

Growth also creates challenges. It lengthens your commute and creates more competition for housing. Longer term, growth is like a weight that grows heavier over time. When it's applied to fragile or flawed systems, growth deepens painful fissures and can break communities apart.

So this initiative asked, "What do we want to be when we grow up?" The timing is urgent. One community leader described it this way: "This community is like an indie rock band that had a huge hit single that's gone viral. Fans are going crazy. Everyone wants a piece of us. We're touring. We're famous. We're making money...but we have no idea how to manage our fame, manage our money, or think about our next album."

Growth is here, and it's gaining force. *Asheville Greater* created a platform to ask, "So what? What do we want to do with this growth? What do we want to be in 2040?"

AVL>> used a process called *Strategic Foresight*. Rather than look to the past for answers to the future, Strategic Foresight uses tools that enable and challenge us to see the future².

¹ Source: Trends Facing Buncombe County, https://www.ashevillechamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/avlgreater2018_trends.pdf

² See the Bonus Section for an explanation of strategic foresight.

WHO?

The future belongs to us all, and all members of the region were invited to participate in Asheville Greater.

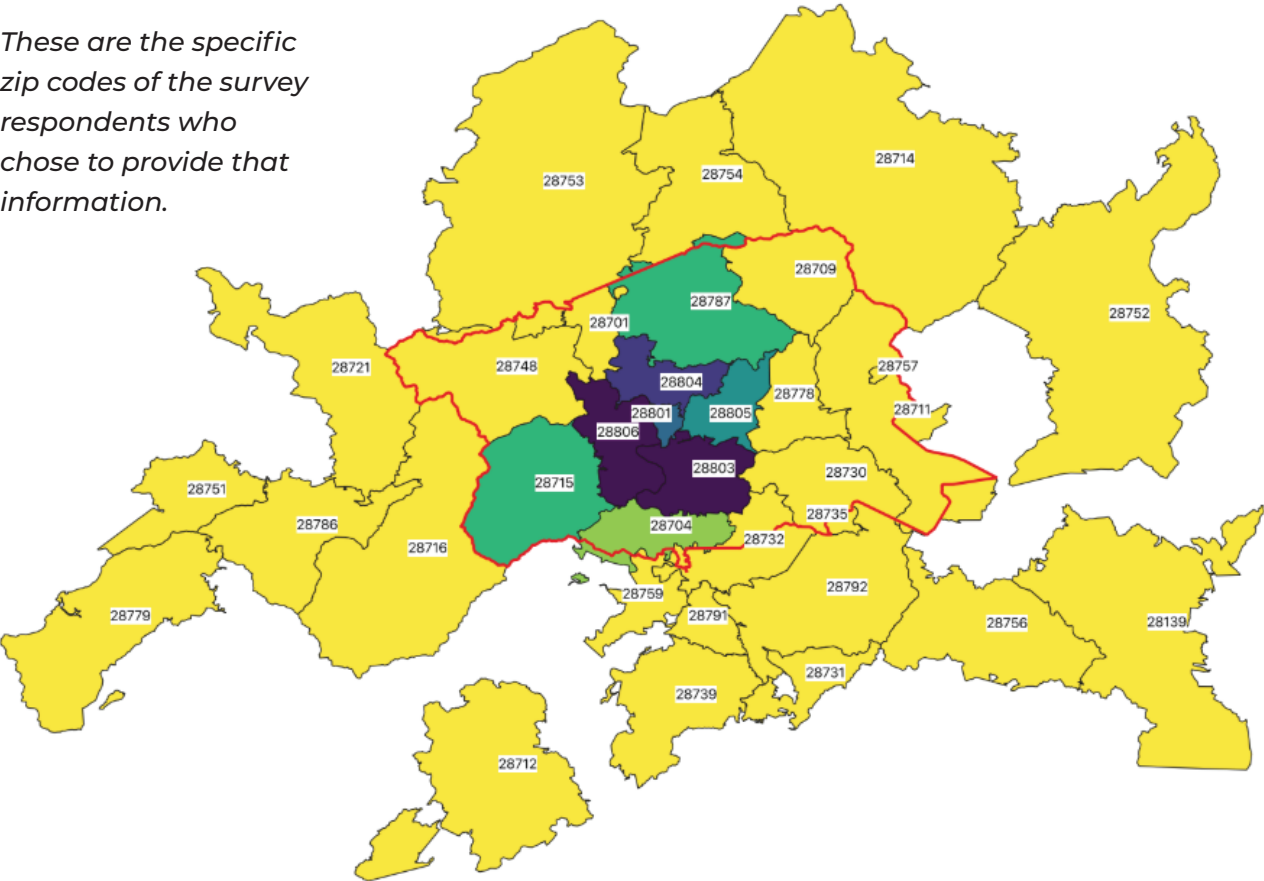
Over 1,100 community members contributed 3,262 hours to this plan.

That's the equivalent of one full-time employee working for over one and a half years.

Asheville Greater started with a core of 80 volunteers who analyzed trends and created future scenarios. Their results were turned over to the community via an online survey. Here are some insights about the survey respondents.

Contributors represented the entire Asheville-Buncombe County region

These are the specific zip codes of the survey respondents who chose to provide that information.



Of the 842 survey respondents who offered their zip codes, most of them fell within Buncombe County (outlined in red.) The color spectrum of dark to lighter indicates the density of responses. For example, the 28803 zip code had the highest response rates, whereas 28704 (light green) had the fewest.

Contributors included people across the race and ethnicity spectrum:

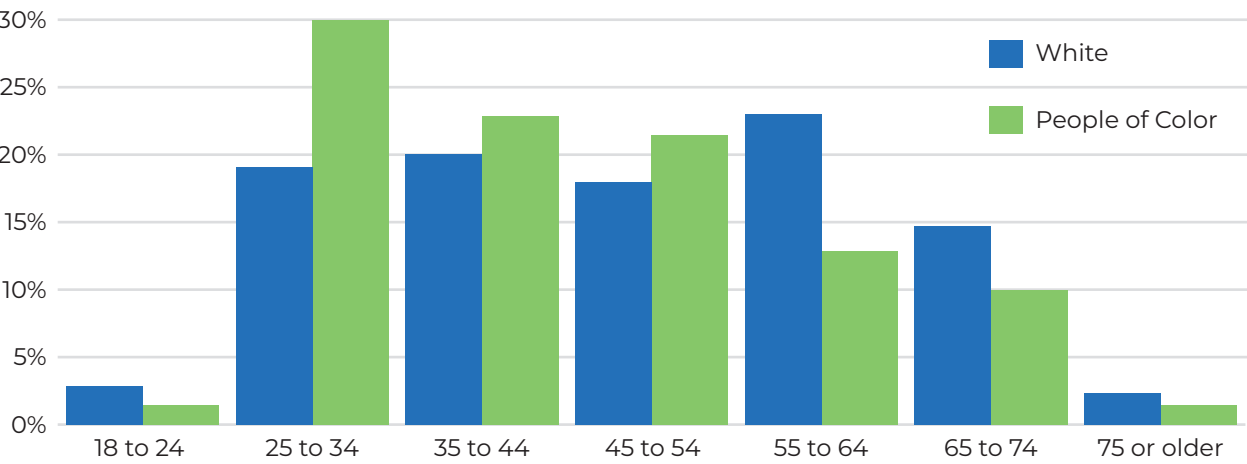
Respondents by Race or Ethnicity	Percent of Respondents	Buncombe Cty Pop.
White	94.63%	89.40%
Black or African American	1.87%	6.30%
Hispanic or Latino	2.92%	6.60%
Asian or Asian American	1.28%	1.40%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.93%	0.50%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.23%	0.20%
Two or more races	3.20%	2.20%
Another race	1.87%	N/A
Percent of respondents who indicated race or ethnicity	87.99%	

Blue indicates a group that was over-represented in the survey, compared to Buncombe County population³.
Green indicates a group that was under-represented in the survey.

Some community members have noted the racial and ethnic representativeness in the survey responses. For that reason, we report both People of Color and White as we look further at contributors.

Contributors ranged in age from our youngest to oldest

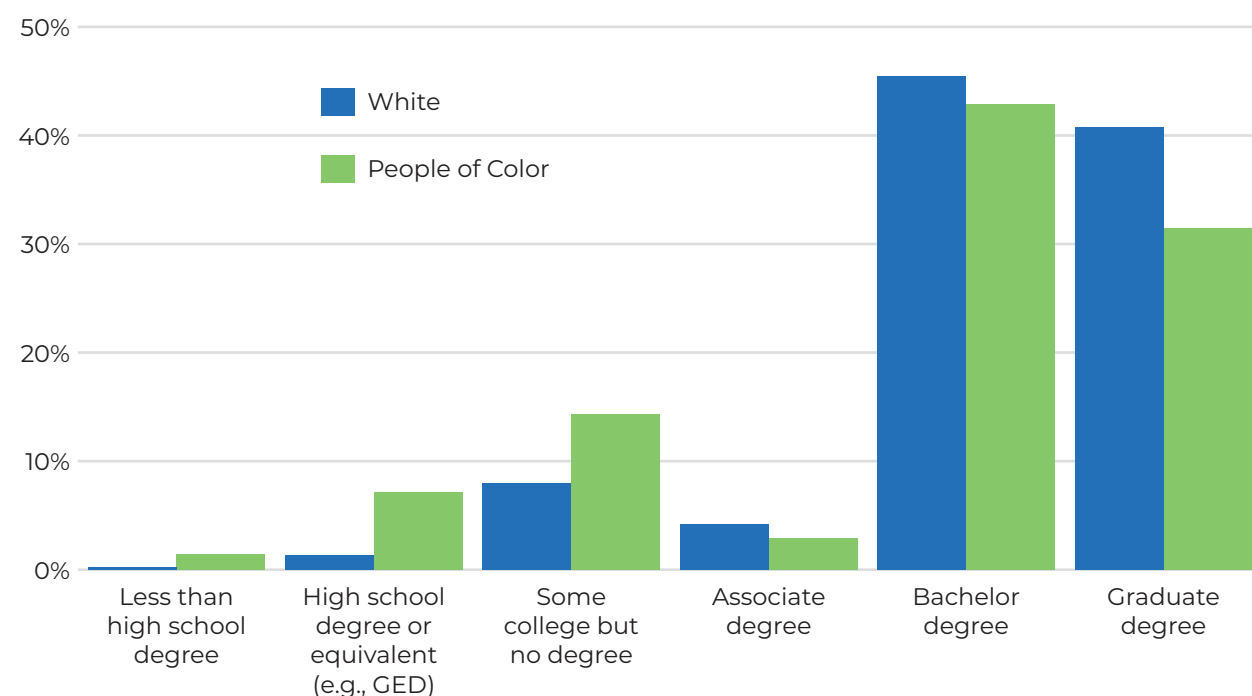
Which category below includes your age?



³ Source: U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts for Buncombe County, North Carolina, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/buncombecountynorthcarolina>

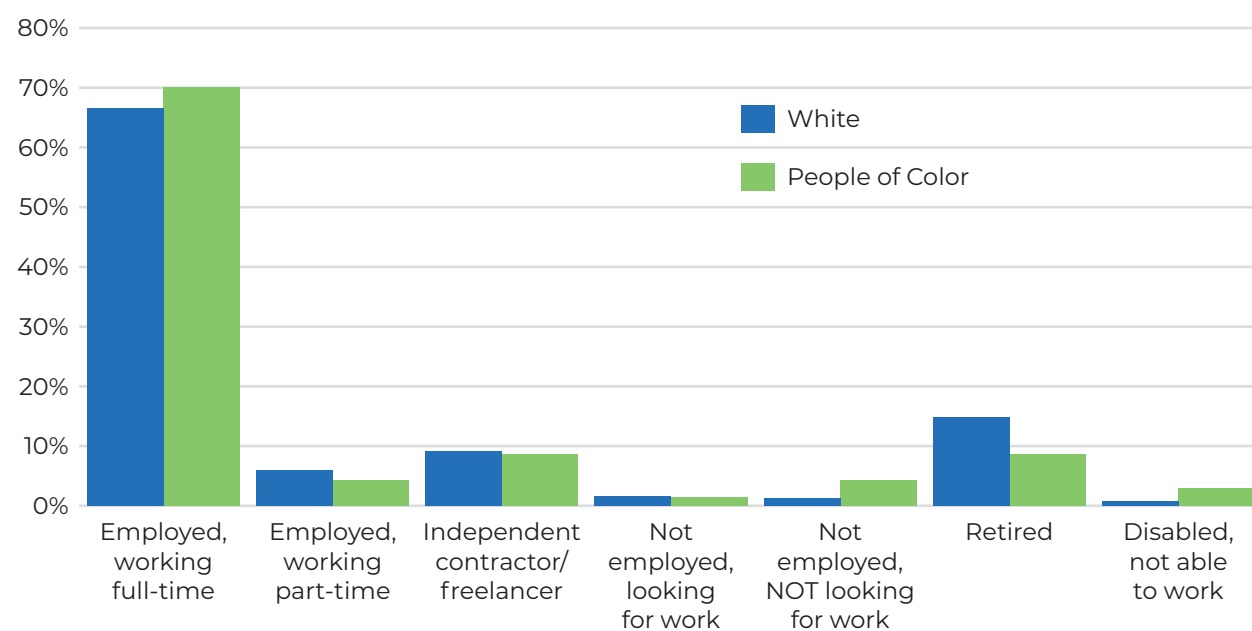
Most contributors had attended or completed college or graduate school

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?



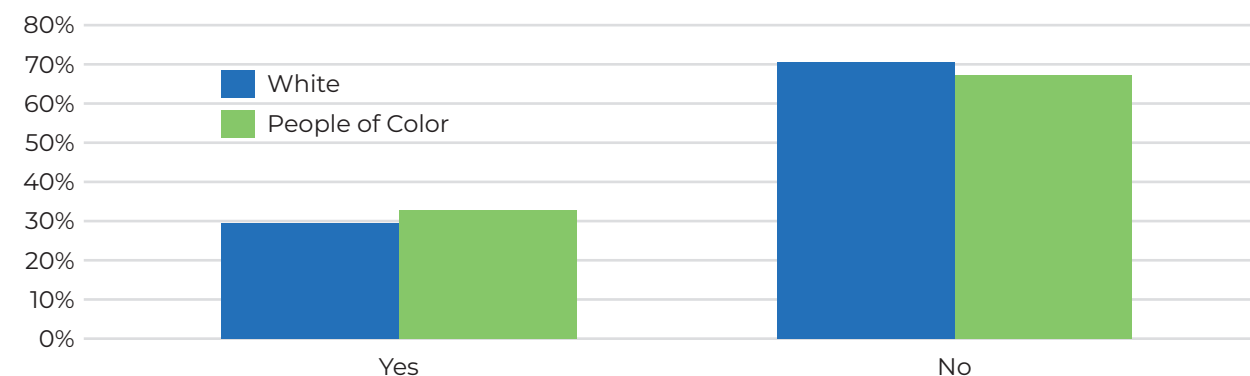
Contributors range from unemployed to retirees

Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?



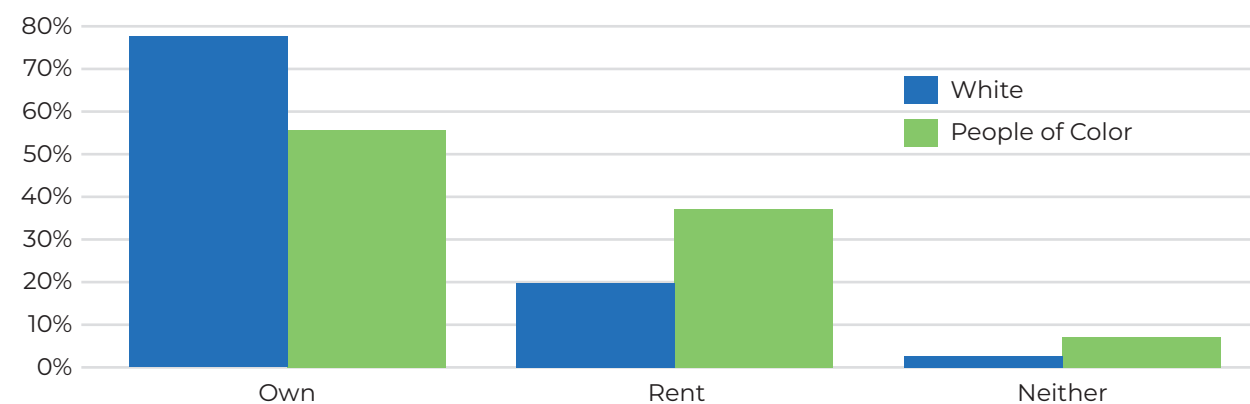
Many contributors were business owners

Do you own or manage a small to medium-sized business (1-500 employees)?



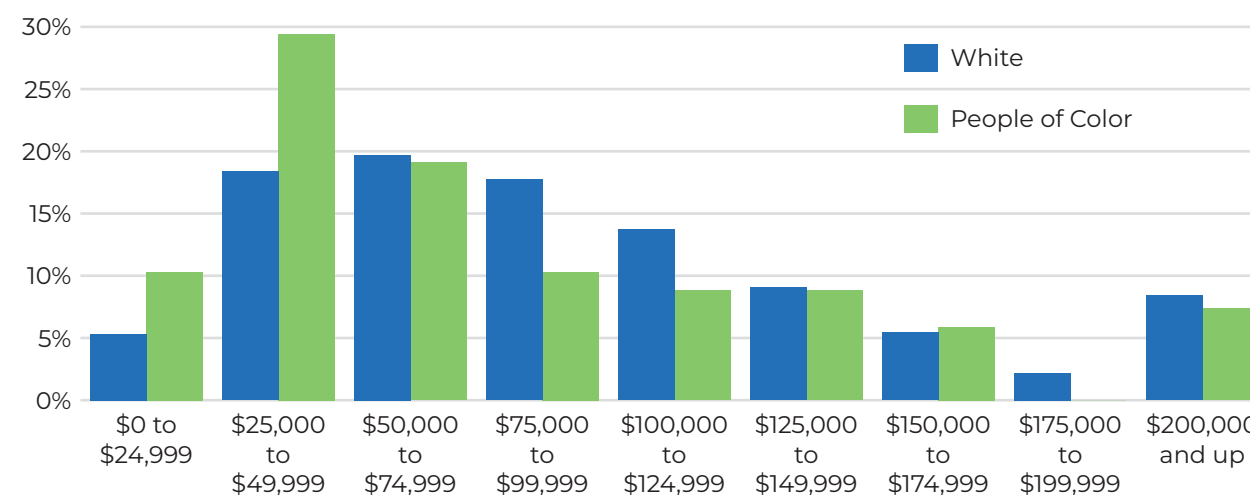
Both renters and homeowners contributed

Do you rent or own the place where you live?



Contributors ranged in household income

What is your approximate average household income?



WHERE?

Where are we going? *Asheville Greater* launched because its leaders agreed to be intentional and future-focused in planning together for 2040.

There's a famous scene in *Alice in Wonderland*.

Confused by signs in a strange forest that say *Back, Up, Yonder, This Way, That Way, Down, and Go Back*, seven-year-old Alice asks, "I wonder which way I ought to go?"

The Cheshire Cat appears in a tree and startles Alice who stammers, "I just wanted to ask you, which way I ought to go."

"Well," the cat says, "that depends on where you want to get to."

"Oh it really doesn't matter." says Alice.

"Then," says the cat, "it really doesn't matter which way you go,"

The strategic foresight process started with a thorough scan of STEEP trends (Society, Technology, Economy, Environment, and Politics.) Then:

- ▶ 80 community volunteers discussed and debated the trends⁴. Which were certain to come true? How much impact would each trend have on the region? They narrowed the trends into a "Top Trends List" and then;
- ▶ 991 survey respondents force-ranked the trends by answering, "What trends are most critical to the region's near-term and longer-term future?" Their results are captured on the table that follows⁵:

⁴ To see the complete list of trends, visit avlgreater.org.

⁵ A dashboard of survey results is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-YBZKSK5V/>.

Top 6 Trends Impacting Greater Asheville

1. Residents are getting priced out of housing

2. Shrinking middle class

3. Growing population

4. Growing total employment

5. Budget gap in the public sector

6. Jobs are expected to grow especially in selected industries

So what?

Looking at the top trends list above, what do you see? Although residents agree that the shrinking middle class is a critical near- and long-term issue, they also agree that employment and jobs are growing. It's a mixed bag: some things are getting better and others are getting worse. How can we plan a vibrant future in the midst of competing trends?

We start by rehearsing the future.

Following the strategic foresight process, a team of volunteers developed 12 scenarios for Greater Asheville's future in 2040⁶. For brevity, here are two plausible futures for Greater Asheville.

⁶ Scenarios transcripts: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1iwj_jOMOIngrUtyvUITfHYSttCzsENU1

Scenario 1: Watch and Wait

The premise: Residents and leaders watch and wait as growth redefines the region

In this future, growth continues to happen as predicted and Asheville-Buncombe County's residents become older, whiter, and richer. Housing continues to feel out of reach for many people and resident demands for "affordable housing" are confusing because its meaning differs:

- ▶ To empty nesters, it means they want to sell their current home to take advantage of a seller's market, but they can't find a smaller home or condo that's "affordable" to them
- ▶ To the elderly who can no longer maintain a home of their own and are on a fixed income, they want to move into a senior community or assisted living but that is out of reach for many pensioners
- ▶ To young families who have small children, "affordable housing" is a modest starter home in a good school district. They can't find it in Buncombe County and many move to adjacent communities where they can afford a home. As working parents commute longer distances to get to daycare and then to work, traffic becomes an even greater issue.
- ▶ To those who receive housing assistance, there are too few livable units. Again, people start looking outside of Asheville and Buncombe County for places that accept government assistance.

As we grow in population, more cars on our roadways mean greater congestion and longer commute times. Even with autonomous vehicles (AVs), traffic will not ease for two reasons: AVs will enable shut-ins, children, and others without drivers licenses to use the roadways; and the region's population growth is so great that even with AV's, commute times increase.

Longer commute times cost residents more than time. Research shows that for every ten minutes residents spend in traffic, their civic participation decreases ten percent⁷. So by 2040, we can expect more traffic and less civically engaged residents. Voter turnout will subside, volunteerism will decrease, and fewer people will have time to "get to know their neighbors."

As we watched and waited, developments – industrial sites, housing, and commercial offices – sprouted up all over the region as expected, stretching municipal services over greater distances. "Doing more with less" reaches routine breaking points and the City and County must pass emergency budgets to cover the increasing costs.

If present trends continue, we can expect to lose our African American population and our schools' achievement gap will continue to widen. The population of students in our public schools will continue to shrink as families leave Asheville and Buncombe County in search of more affordable housing and better-ranked schools.

⁷ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*

Scenario 2: Blue Mountains, Bright Future

The premise: Inspired people with adequate resources and a shared commitment to the future work hard and creatively, together.

In this scenario, the *Asheville Greater* process is taken seriously. Institutional leaders across all sectors form a collaborative to carefully but ambitiously align their interests, expertise, and plans around the AVL>> goals. Leadership rotates among the group, e.g. when the community is focused on increasing third grade literacy rates⁸, the school superintendent chairs the collaborative.

A new conversation about land use and conservation is launched. Knowing it will face unprecedented growth, the three county area works together with farmers, homesteaders, economic developers, and real estate developers to identify the "highest and best use" sites for industrial, commercial, and residential development. As a result, more dense housing is built in Asheville and adjacent counties start to see the benefits of the region's growth. The result is smoother traffic flow, more affordable housing throughout the region, and award winning "triple bottom line"⁹ economic development.

In this scenario, we undergo a paradigm shift when talking about education and children. We realize that education isn't just what happens in the building, and many sectors of the community come together to help K-12 students succeed. Retirees are reading tutors for elementary schools. High school juniors and seniors are out and about in the community year-round, fulfilling requirements for job experiences in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. City and County boards remaster their "affordable housing" policies based on a wider swath of research based on economic mobility.

Due to a dedicated effort to ensure that every resident can get their foot on the economic ladder, crime decreases, jail populations shrink, and the region receives numerous awards for leadership and innovation.

Asheville and Buncombe County have grown to over 600,000 people and managed to do it while maintaining and extending quality of life.

We know the future we want. What do we need to do, and how can we get there?

⁸ Third grade literacy is a leading indicator of high school graduation.

⁹ Triple bottom line refers to balancing the needs of people, planet, and profit.

WHAT?

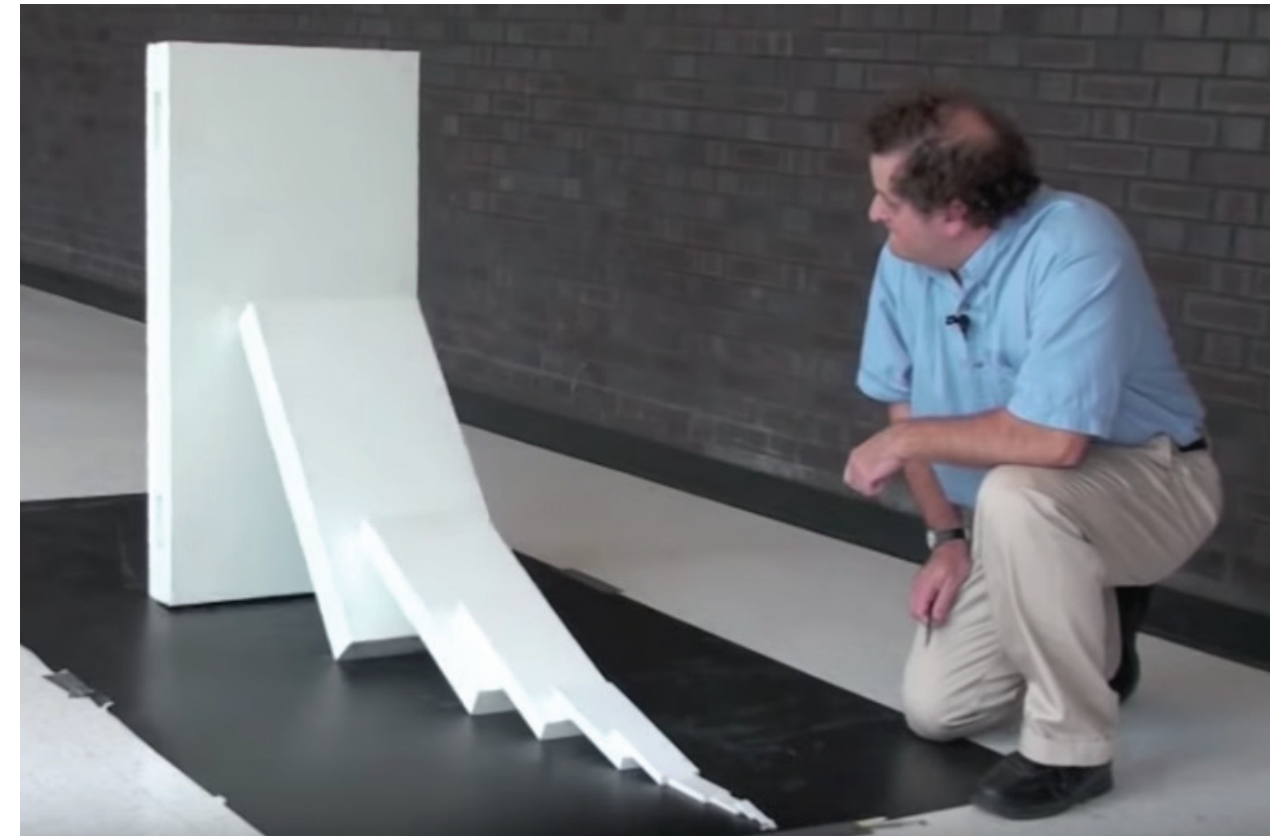
Asheville Greater focuses on four key areas we must get right, to ensure that our region can reach its full potential and mitigate foreseeable threats.

Why did we choose these four?

Because of the laws of physics.

In the famous YouTube video, “[Domino Chain Reaction](#),” Professor Stephen Morris uses tweezers to place a 5 mm domino in front of another domino 1.5 times its size. He explains:

Everybody knows about playing with dominos. What you may not know is that a domino can knock over another domino about 1.5x larger¹⁰. What I have here is a chain of thirteen dominos. The smallest is 5 mm high and 1 mm thick. The largest weighs more than a hundred pounds and is more than a meter high. Ready? (He knocks over the smallest domino which creates a chain reaction.) That was with thirteen dominos. If I had 29 dominos, the last one would be as tall as the Empire State Building.

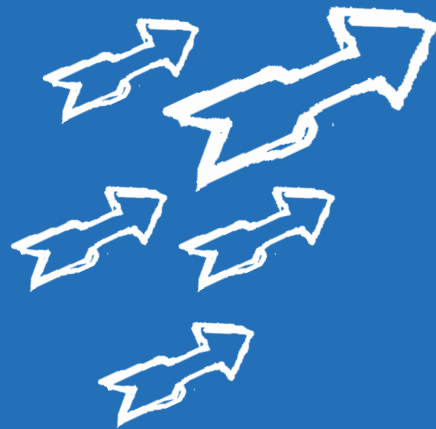


Stephen Morris, Domino Chain Reaction

The following four strategies are the first dominos that have to be activated, because they will enable the greatest possibility for success by 2040.

¹⁰ Stephen Morris, “Domino Chain Reaction”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y97rBdSYbkg&v=en>, accessed Aug. 18, 2019.

1



LEADERSHIP MATTERS

1.1 Committing to a Shared Vision Among Leaders

During the fourteen months that *Asheville Greater* was gathering input, eight key leadership positions changed personnel: UNC-Asheville, Western Carolina University, City of Asheville, Buncombe County, United Way, Dogwood Health Trust, HCA Healthcare and Mission Hospital. Now imagine these eight new leaders – coupled with the region’s incumbents – working hand-in-hand on a shared vision for *Asheville Greater*.

Our 2040 future is enabled by institutional leaders who commit to work together on a shared vision. If you lead an institution or a movement, what collaboration would benefit the region’s shared long-term success? *Section 1.3 offers additional ideas.*

1.2 Growing Next Generation Leaders

Trends show that Asheville and Buncombe County are getting older:

Between 2017 and 2037:

- ▶ The share of the Buncombe County population aged 55+ is projected to grow from 33% to 37%.
- ▶ The 60+ population is projected to grow from 26% to 30%.
- ▶ The Millennial share of the population is expected to decline from 19% to 17%.

By 2037, the median age in Buncombe is estimated to be 46.

For the region to flourish, it must make a concerted effort to attract, engage, and keep next-gen talent, and part of that is inviting them to the leadership table.

This is important for two reasons. First, young people are more likely to stay in a community where they feel they can make a difference. Second, *Asheville Greater* is building a 2040 future that the next generation will inherit; having them at the table to discuss, prioritize, and share the weight of implementation aligns the goal with the process.

1.3 Regional Leadership

“The best time to buy an umbrella is when it’s sunny outside.”

The growth in Asheville and Buncombe County will spread to Henderson County and throughout the region. Our growth is interdependent. As growth continues, tensions among municipalities and agencies may increase, and the reflex to “scapegoat” – to assign blame to another – will increase. In the short run, this is politically popular. But in the long run, it’s divisive and injures all parties.

A proactive strategy is to build a regional network of leaders who can work together on shared issues, now and in the future, to share growth’s burdens and prosperity. Examples:

- ▶ A regional network of economic development leaders who can work on site planning and development, recruiting, and retention.¹¹
- ▶ A regional group of electeds who work together on land use planning, conservation, and zoning
- ▶ A regional cohort of government relations professionals who can work together on legislation that will impact the region’s future.

1.4 The Balanced Scorecard

“Balanced scorecard” refers to a technique that balances financial and nonfinancial performance. It entered the management lexicon in 1990 and has grown in application and use around the world.

In *Asheville Greater*, the balanced scorecard is used as a decision making and measurement tool along three dimensions: *people, planet and profit*. Each major investment made in the region is encouraged to ask:

- ▶ How does this impact our people, both current and future generations?
- ▶ How does this impact our part of the planet, e.g. is this congruent with stewardship for our mountains, land, air, and water?
- ▶ How does this impact our region’s prosperity? Does this create a sense of shared prosperity?

The balanced scorecard makes sense for Asheville and Buncombe County because the community already demands these kinds of investments and conversation. Using *people, planet, profit* as a framework enables organizations and the public to evaluate decisions and report results.¹²

¹¹ Best practice: Denver’s regional collaboration among public and private sector stakeholders: <https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/DENcasestudy-071409.pdf>

¹² AVL 5X5, the region’s economic development plan, recently adopted “economic sustainability” as one of its core values, and committed to balancing people, place, and prosperity. https://www.ashevillechamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/AVL5x5_2025_Plan.pdf

Focus: Grasstops and Grassroots Leadership

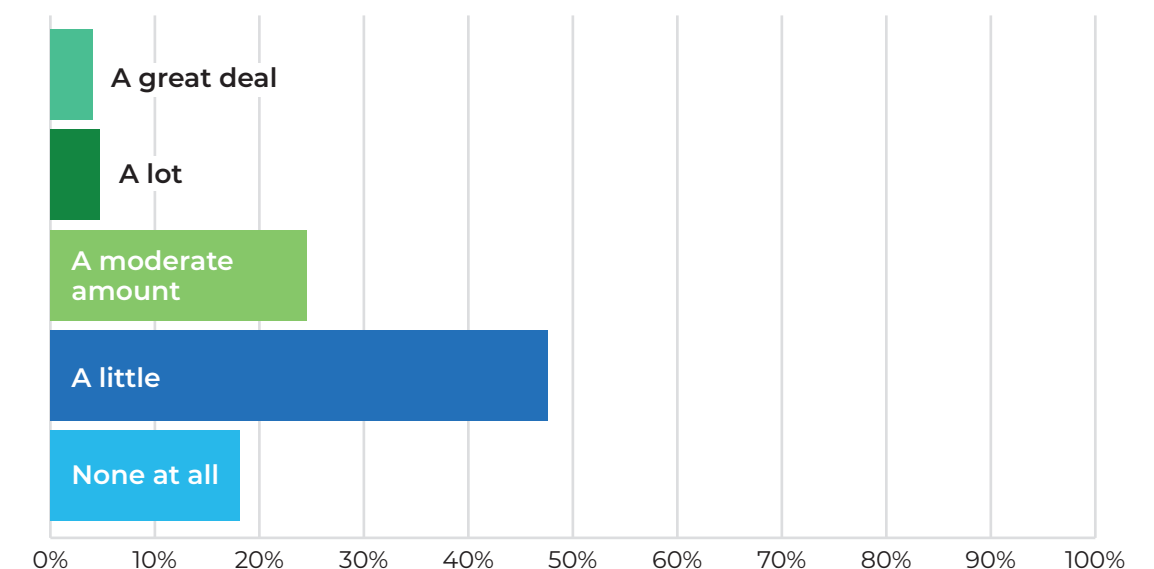
“Grasstops” leaders those we traditionally think of as leaders: people with positional authority. They could be elected officials or have titles like “CEO” or “Executive Director.” They can drive top-down change, influence others, and allocate resources (money, staff). In many communities, the de facto leaders are the “Grasstops” leaders.

“Grassroots” leaders are those who have relational influence. They might not have money, authority, or a C-suite title. Their strength is in their network, their agility, and their ability to activate a community.

We need both grasstops and grassroots leadership. In Asheville and Buncombe County, survey respondents indicated that there is a lot of room to grow, especially at the grassroots level. Asked “How much impact do you feel you have on the Asheville area’s future?”, over half of respondents said “None at all” or “A little.” This represents a reservoir of untapped skills, passion, and contribution.

How much impact do you feel you have on the Asheville area’s future?

Answered: 979
Skipped: 12



2



GROWING UP

THE GREATER ASHEVILLE AREA WILL GROW.
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF *IF*, IT'S A MATTER OF *WHERE* AND *HOW*.

WISE STEWARDSHIP OF THE REGION'S GROWTH
REQUIRES ATTENTION IN FOUR CRITICAL AREAS: LAND USE,
TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND RESOURCES.

2.1 Land Use & Transportation Planning

When community survey respondents were asked, "Which issues are most urgent, for the region to address?" Two of the top six answers were:

- ▶ Expand public and mass transit (Ranked #3)
- ▶ Improve funding for transportation projects, including the airport (Ranked #6)

For *Asheville Greater* to reach its potential, transportation and land use decisions and investments must be made alongside each other because they influence each other. For example:

- ▶ Mass transit improvements like bus rapid transit (BRT) or rail lines spur residential and commercial development around transit stations.
- ▶ Autonomous vehicles (AVs) and shared ride services like Lyft and Uber impact the number of cars per family, and therefore how much infrastructure (roads, parking) is required.
- ▶ The City of Asheville's current zoning codes call for greater density. This will impact the kind and amount of transit planning and services serving the City and urban core.
- ▶ Increasing the number of affordable housing units (see 2.3 below) increases the load on transportation systems.

These considerations should also be made as the region "grows up" to a population over 600,000:

1. Industrial development in the Asheville area has geographic limits. Industrial sites require large, flat parcels of land with specific water, sewer, and utility service. At present, there are a limited number of industrial sites that are "move in ready" which hinders economic development. Careful and intentional land use and transportation planning can help attract future employers. A regional land use plan that considers industrial needs will be a competitive advantage
2. The City of Asheville's zoning codes call for greater density. This policy recognizes that the city must grow up, vertically, to accommodate intense growth. This is a good, future-facing policy that must be upheld. Upholding policies may be unpopular with some residents now, but it's critical for all residents of tomorrow.
3. Patterns of land use have historically had a large impact on the economic opportunity available to families, and on the ability of families to build wealth. Whenever possible, land use and transportation planning should be based on the Balanced Scorecard principles mentioned in 1.4. They should consider impacts on people, planet, and prosperity.

2.2 Affordable Housing

Community survey respondents agreed that the top issue that must be fixed for the long-term: Expand the share of housing that's affordable for average workers.

What's "affordable?" And what's an "average worker"?

- ▶ The average income of a Buncombe County resident is \$26,930 a year. The US average is \$28,555 a year. The Median household income of a Buncombe County resident is \$45,642 a year. The US median is \$53,482 a year.¹³
- ▶ The median home price in Buncombe County is \$319,500.¹⁴

"Affordable housing" means different things to different people.

- ▶ To young workers, it means a place they can afford to rent while starting their careers.
- ▶ To families with young children, it means a starter home in a good school district.
- ▶ To empty nesters, it means a smaller home with lots of amenities.
- ▶ To seniors on fixed incomes, it means age-appropriate housing that they can afford.
- ▶ To low income residents, it requires landlords who rent apartments and homes at fair market rates and will accept a housing voucher.

The first challenge in developing an affordable housing strategy is to determine the projected demand for each type of affordable housing, and then to work collaboratively with regional partners on a shared approach. A one-size-fits-all approach to affordable housing won't work. Asheville and Buncombe County will need partners to solve the region's needs.

¹³ https://www.bestplaces.net/economy/county/north_carolina/buncombe

¹⁴ Asheville Citizen Times, July 2019: <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2019/07/19/buncombe-county-median-home-price-sets-record-sales-up-2018/1768655001/>

Affordable housing is an issue that nearly all U.S. communities are facing. Asheville¹⁵ and Buncombe County should learn from and align with other communities committed to evidence-based best practices:

- ▶ The Urban Institute's Affordable Housing Catalyst Brief¹⁶
- ▶ The Mayors Innovation Project has a special emphasis on housing¹⁷
- ▶ Affordable housing in rural areas requires a unique approach. Purdue University identified 8 strategies for tackling housing problems in rural areas.

2.3 Paying For It

As the region grows, public sector budget gaps will widen if we don't figure out alternative ways of funding the infrastructure and special projects that will help the region reach its potential. Options for new revenue include taxes, public-private partnerships, re-distributing current funds, growing parts of the economy that strengthen or expand the tax base.

Innovative examples:

- ▶ In Jacksonville, Florida, a cohort of stakeholders including municipalities, the tourism bureau, and the schools worked together to pass the "Jax Tax," a half cent sales tax that would benefit each of the stakeholders: the public sector would fix and build roads, the tourism bureau would invest in a new stadium, and schools would get overdue renovations.
- ▶ Public Private Partnerships have been used in Europe, Australia, and Canada for decades to fund large long-term investments. "P3" programs are still fairly new to the U.S. but there is a growing pool of best practices and case studies.¹⁸ Although P3s are generally more expensive than traditional public sector investments, their benefits (e.g. private sector innovation, risk transfer, and efficiency) are cited as valuable.

¹⁵ The City of Asheville published a review of 11 best practices in affordable housing in 2015, https://www.mayorsinnovation.org/images/uploads/pdf/Best_Practices_Final_Ashville.pdf

¹⁶ https://next50.urban.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/2019.02.20_Next50%20Housing%20brief_finalized.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.mayorsinnovation.org/policy/housing/>

¹⁸ <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/capital-projects-and-infrastructure/our-insights/the-rising-advantage-of-public-private-partnerships>

3



ECONOMIC MOBILITY AND SHARED PROSPERITY

“We must display a heart for every American, and a special passion for those still on the first rung of life’s ladder. Upward mobility from the bottom is the crux of the American promise, and the stagnation of the middle class is in fact becoming a problem, on any fair reading of the facts. Our main task is not to see that people of great wealth add to it, but that those without much money have a greater chance to earn some.”

– (Ret.) Governor Mitch Daniels (R), Indiana¹⁹

3.1 Block by Block

“Economic mobility” is the ability of an individual, family or some other group to improve (or lower) their economic status.

Research is making it clear: where you grow up has a deep impact on your economic mobility.

How can Asheville and Buncombe County use its growth to enhance economic mobility? How can *Asheville Greater* enable every resident to get a foot on a rung of the economic ladder and climb as their skills and ambition allow?

¹⁹ Mitch Daniels Keynote Speech to the Conservative Political Action Committee delivered 11 February 2011, Ronald Reagan Centennial Dinner, Washington, D.C., accessed at American Rhetoric Online Speech Bank Aug. 19, 2019.

Focus: Economic Mobility

“What is the connection between economic development and economic mobility?”

Harvard economist Raj Chetty has completed groundbreaking longitudinal research showing that:

“[...] the neighborhood in which a child grows up has substantial causal effects on his or her prospects of upward income mobility.”

In other words, it’s not enough to bring jobs to our community or recruit new talent to move here. We must also strive to ensure that block-by-block, residents have jobs.

Chetty and his co-authors write:

“We find no association between children’s outcomes and rates of job or wage growth. For example, Atlanta and Charlotte have had exceptionally high rates of job and wage growth over the past two decades, yet have among the lowest rates of upward mobility for children who grow up there. These cities achieve high rates of economic growth despite offering local residents limited prospects for upward income mobility by importing talent – i.e., attracting talented individuals to move in and fill high-paying jobs.

In contrast [...] we find a strong positive correlation between the employment rates of adults who live in a tract and rates of upward mobility for children who grow up there (race-adjusted correlation = 0.3). Evidently, what predicts upward mobility is not proximity to jobs, but growing up around people who have jobs. This result echoes [others’] findings that children’s outcomes are correlated with the characteristics of the ‘company they keep.’”

Research is making it clear: if we want better economic outcomes for our next-generation residents, we must work to provide jobs to their parents and neighbors. This insight is novel and will require new partnerships and innovative, shared models of success. We can do more to diversify and expand the work-ready talent pool for Buncombe County employers.

Where can we start?

- ▶ The Economic Development Coalition’s new AVL 5X5 2025 strategic plan recognizes the importance of building meaningful connections and networks with historically marginalized populations in our community through partnerships with the Asheville Housing Authority, UpSkill WNC, the State of Black Asheville, and others.
- ▶ Charlotte-Mecklenburg and the Foundation for the Carolinas are partnering with Dr. Raj Chetty’s Opportunity Insights to increase pathways for children, youth and families. Learn more: <https://www.leadingonopportunity.org/about>.

3.2 The First Years

Thinking ahead to 2040, when today’s first graders will be in the first decade of their careers, *Asheville Greater* recognizes that there are things we can today, to ensure that tomorrow’s young adults are prepared for success.

Reading fluency by third grade

“A student who can’t read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate by age 19 than a child who does read proficiently by that time.”²⁰

²⁰ Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Education, available at: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy/>

Fifth-grade math skills

“Analyzing data from six long-term studies, (researchers) found the strongest predictor of later achievement to be children’s school-entry math skills, followed by reading and ability to pay attention. The big surprise was that math skills ranked as the most important predictor of school success.”²¹

Asheville Greater doesn’t silo these two issues inside of schools. The community must stand together and make an impact on student outcomes. Examples:

- ▶ Volunteers visit elementary schools for one hour a week to help develop children’s literacy skills.²²
- ▶ Volunteer tutors have deep impact on children’s outcomes.²³ In Greater Asheville,²⁴ college students, retirees, high school students, entrepreneurs, employees, and others could be tapped and paired with elementary school students.
- ▶ Employers – including the public sector – host age-appropriate field trips and provide apprenticeships, internships and job experiences.
- ▶ Companies or departments can “adopt a class” for a semester or year.
- ▶ Young professionals or another interested group can start a Book Trust for public schools in Asheville and Buncombe County.²⁵
- ▶ Funders can invest in promising pilot projects or initiatives related to student outcomes in literacy and math.

²¹ “School Readiness and Later Achievement”, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/dev-4361428.pdf>

²² Example cosponsored by United Way, Chamber of Commerce, and three public education institutions: <https://www.uwlaflafayette.org/readtosucceed>

²³ https://www.jstor.org/stable/40071159?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

²⁴ The Literacy Council and Hands On Asheville are actively working to recruit volunteers. What difference could be made in the lives of our next generation if all residents and businesses made a concerted effort through these two programs? <https://www.handsonasheville.org/middleschool/>

²⁵ <https://www.booktrust.org/>. See a successful model at United Way of the Midlands: <https://www.unitedwaymidlands.org/initiative-book-trust/>

3.3 Grow the Pie, Don’t Cut the Pie

A third strategy to grow the region’s prosperity is to enlarge the pool of resources and opportunities rather than squabbling over existing resources. Two examples:

- ▶ **Broadening the region’s portfolio of economic development.** Traditional economic development is a zero-sum game of attracting businesses to relocate from one community to another. This zero-sum game takes from some communities and benefits others and assumes a fixed (or shrinking number of employers and jobs. “Grow the pie, don’t cut the pie” takes a different approach. Rather than assuming a fixed number of jobs and employers, it assumes that new growth can be spurred among existing companies and industries. For example, if a current employer has 200 full-time employees, how can the region help it secure new customers and thereby increase its need for additional employees? Another example, how can we help a fast-growing startup with five employees and \$500,000 in revenue grow to 25 employees and \$2M in revenue?²⁶
- ▶ **Broadening the region’s tourism market.** Currently, Greater Asheville’s hotels and hospitality businesses are busiest Thursdays-Sundays and cater to leisure travelers. How can the tourism industry attract weekday business travelers who share leisure travelers’ interests? The Outdoor Economy Conference is one example.²⁷ Other targeted segments could include Benefit Corporations, sustainability conferences, aerospace or advanced manufacturing conferences, climate science conferences, and entrepreneurs’ conferences.

²⁶ See AVL 5X5 for strategies to grow existing companies and develop a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem: <https://www.ashevillechamber.org/economic-development-strategy/avl-5x5-strategy/>

²⁷ <https://mountainx.com/news/outdoor-economy-conference-comes-to-asheville/>

4



A PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE

“We believe our society is in need of articulating a New Social Compact, one that is based on a set of core inclusive values, one that builds on our past and embraces our future. This compact recognizes our fundamental belief that we are linked by our common humanity, that we are bound together in our work to secure a fair and inclusive democracy, and that we are united in our commitment to care for each other and the Earth. There are certain times in which we are called upon to rethink, reclaim, and boldly articulate what we stand for, and to act, and we believe we are in one of those times today.”²⁸

What are communities for? Why do we choose the places we do?

Ancient cities formed along rivers because people needed access to water. Rivers also brought trade, and cities became bustling, efficient gathering places for buyers and sellers to meet and exchange goods. Eventually, cities developed town squares where people could gather to meet and debate the issues of the day. Cities have evolved from fulfilling our physical needs to our economic and commercial needs, and onto our civic needs.

Modern functional communities deliver water and sewer service to residents. They offer online, offline, real-time and remote civic opportunities for people to negotiate how they live together. But today’s cities must also figure out how to make people feel that they belong.

Without a sense of belonging, we “otherize.” Today’s racism, classism and identity politics are pulling people apart. In Asheville and Buncombe County, a once vibrant African American neighborhood has dissolved. Students’ achievement and high school graduation rates seem tied to race. Rural and urban voters seem farther apart on issues than ever before.

²⁸ <https://newsocialcompact.org/>

There are three key groups that need to feel that they belong, to make *Asheville Greater*.

People of Color

Between 2000 and 2010, 98% of all population growth in the United States was attributable to growth among people of color. Yet in Asheville and Buncombe County, our percentage of African Americans is shrinking, and new research shows that our public school's educational outcomes for children of color are worse than the majority population.

Many organizations in the region are beginning to use racial equity as a lens for Greater Asheville's future. These are critical efforts, but can't be relegated to institutions alone. All residents have a role to play in ensuring that the region can be a place where all people belong. White people must be leaders and allies in this process.²⁹

Retirees

Retirees in Asheville and Buncombe County are a growing population and an untapped resource. Many retirees would like to feel connected and engaged and need a centralized resource to match their interests with opportunities, e.g. as mentors, employees, coaches, tutors, volunteers, donors, or leaders. The core opportunity is how Asheville and Buncombe County can become "home," not a "second home" for its new residents.

Young Families

Over the next decade, young families are at risk of becoming a shrinking population in Greater Asheville due to housing costs and quality of schools. The quality of schools is a critical deciding factor in a family's choice about where to put down roots. See 2.1 and 3.2 for further ideas on how to attract and keep young families.

FIRST PRINCIPLES

As *Asheville Greater* grows into itself and momentum builds, additional opportunities beyond these four strategies will emerge. As they do, residents and stakeholders are encouraged to keep these First Principles in mind.

Inclusion & Belonging

The next 20 years belong to us all. How can we make decisions, investments, and choices in a way that everyone feels they have a stake and say in the region's future?

Excellence

Asheville and Buncombe County don't have to do the same things that other cities and regions do, to be competitive in the future. But for the select number of items it chooses, the region should make a commitment to being world-class.

Authentic

The Blue Ridge Mountains, mountain country, and Asheville itself have distinctive and unique character. Rather than fight this and try to become "one region," we must celebrate our differences and work with them, not against them.

Pragmatic

While committing to excellence, we must scale our efforts for our needs and size. How can we balance our ambition with what's doable?

Next gen/succession planning

As we plan the future, we must engage next-gen residents and leaders. How can we use *Asheville Greater* to develop our next generation and pass the torch?

²⁹ Resources include: The Othering and Belonging Journal, <http://www.otheringandbelonging.org/>; Government Alliance on Race and Equity: <https://www.racialequityalliance.org/jurisdictions/state-of-minnesota/>; Resources for Educational Professionals: <https://www.educause.edu/about/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/resources>; Resources for nonprofits: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/why-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-matter-nonprofits>; Resources for Businesses and Business Organizations: <https://secure.acce.org/wiki/diversity-and-inclusion/>



Thank you to the 1,100 people of Asheville and
Buncombe County who participated in *Asheville Greater*.

For more information visit AVLGreater.org



[Land] [Transportation]

GROWING UP

[Housing] [Resources]



[Shared Vision] [Intergenerational Leadership]

LEADERSHIP

[Regional] [Balanced Scorecard]



[Grow The Pie, Don't Cut The Pie]

ECONOMIC MOBILITY & SHARED PROSPERITY

[Block-by-block] [A Child's First Years]



[People Of Color] [Retirees]

A PLACE FOR ALL PEOPLE

[Young Families]