

Wake Forest Community Plan

Draft Vision Statements (as of May 30, 2007).

These vision statements depict a clear picture of where the Town of Wake Forest would like to be in the year 2025 (plan horizon year). The vision statements are written as if now is 2025 and we are looking back at what has transpired as a result of actions identified in the Community Plan. The vision statements were drafted by the consultant and the steering committee based on citizen input gathered at the special town meeting held on April 19, 2007.

1. Small Town Character, Attractive Appearance

Wake Forest has kept its small town feeling and identity, while continuing to grow. Attractive, walkable neighborhoods, a thriving historic downtown, excellent community services, and an outstanding quality of life have made Wake Forest among the most desirable locations in the Triangle region. Streets in Wake Forest exude a welcoming, small town charm—overarching street trees, lush landscaping, understated signage, and wide, shaded sidewalks combine to create a truly inviting community character. Even road signs and traffic signals exhibit a quality design. Greenery is everywhere. Small parks and natural areas are within walking distance of most parts of town. Office and retail parking lots, once viewed as “seas of asphalt”, are now tree-shaded and landscaped. Wake Forest has minimized “anywhere USA” development. Instead, buildings, old and new, honor the 100-year-plus heritage of the community. New two and three story buildings are finished in wood, brick and other traditional materials, and relate well to the street and their surroundings.

2. Vibrant, Revitalized Downtown

Wake Forest has a healthy, vibrant downtown with a unique mix of restaurants, shops, offices, entertainment and housing. Downtown streets are filled with people of all ages day and night, drawn by the historic character and beauty of the area, the human scale of its buildings and public spaces and a diverse offering of special concerts, festivals and cultural events. Storefronts and sidewalks exhibit a colorful, inviting mixture of merchandise, flower-filled planters, benches and other amenities. Additional parking is provided on the interior of blocks or at perimeter parking lots, so as not to detract from the tightly woven, pedestrian character of the area. Downtown buildings, new and old, have retained and respected the modest architectural scale and design detail that is so much a part of the heritage of Wake Forest. An upgraded Farmer’s Market has found a permanent home and a full service grocery store provides convenient shopping for the increasing numbers of downtown area residents. The Renaissance Plan for the heart of Wake Forest has become a reality.

3. Well Planned and Timed Infrastructure

The Town has planned ahead for necessary infrastructure, including adequate roads, water, sewer, schools, open space and greenways, sidewalks, and drainage. These services must be in place prior to the occupancy of the new development they serve. Infrastructure has, in many cases, been strategically employed to encourage development where it can best be accommodated. Advanced planning has allowed future school and park sites to be located and acquired ahead of their need. Planned highway and transit corridors have been identified to ensure their protection during the development process. Similarly, future greenway corridors have been mapped so that they may be incorporated into the design of new developments. An area-wide stormwater management plan has anticipated necessary drainage and retention facilities as development has occurred.

4. Growth That Pays its Own Way

Growth and development pays its own way in Wake Forest. Impact fees and infrastructure improvements, paid for as part of the development process, have been successful in offsetting the costs of additional schools, fire stations, parks and roads brought about by growth. This has lessened reliance upon existing property tax payers to finance the growth-induced expansions of these facilities. By encouraging efficient development patterns, Wake Forest has continued to deliver quality municipal services for a tax rate below regional averages. In addition, compatible commercial and light industrial development have continued to expand the town's non-residential tax base, helping to offset the costs of town services associated with new residential growth.

5. Efficient, Multi-Modal Transportation System

The Town of Wake Forest has worked proactively with the State DOT toward a balanced, efficient, multi-modal transportation system. Enhanced planning and technological advances in traffic management have resulted in a more efficient system of major and minor thoroughfares. US-1 and 1A have especially benefited and are better able to serve patrons of businesses along these routes as well as commuters. A new area-wide mass transit system serves Wake Forest, providing a stress free commute to and from Raleigh and the Research Triangle Park. The new transit service has been effective in helping to keep traffic counts and congestion below previously projected levels. The Town's policies on compact growth have reduced automobile dependency; compared to other communities, many residents of Wake Forest are able to walk, bike, or take the bus to most daily activities.

6. Walkable and Bikeable Community

Wake Forest continues to work toward becoming a very walkable and bikeable community. Mixed use developments encourage walking from home to work, shopping and transit services. New streets, as well as improvements to existing streets, are designed for multiple users (motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians) –according to the level of traffic intended. Most streets have sidewalks on both sides; many larger streets have bike lanes. Designated crosswalks are evident throughout Wake Forest, but especially in the downtown area. In general, there is a high level of connectivity between neighborhoods and developments by a well-integrated network of streets, sidewalks, bikeways, walking trails, and greenway trails. This continuous system provides for a multitude of driving, walking, bicycling and transit alternatives. Cul de sacs are employed sparingly, in favor of fully connected neighborhood streets.

7. Open Space and Environmental Quality

In managing its growth, Wake Forest has worked to preserve open space and minimize adverse impacts to the region's air and water quality. The Town's walkable neighborhoods and nearby services are designed to create less traffic congestion and require shorter commutes. Streams and drainage ways passing through Wake Forest receive less storm water runoff and pollution due, in part, to policies on dedicated open space, tree preservation, landscaped parking areas, compact two and three story buildings, and vegetated buffer strips along streams and roadsides. Infill development and the adaptive reuse of vacant buildings has reduced the need for land clearing and sprawl. Solid waste levels have been substantially reduced through good participation in community-wide recycling efforts.

8. Expanded Park and Recreation System

As the community has grown, Wake Forest has steadily added to its system of parks and open space. Many smaller parks have been created through the Town's routine development approval process. Some larger park areas have come about through advanced planning and property acquisition by the Town. An extensive system of greenway trails, primarily adjoining area streams, is enjoyed by hikers, bicyclists, and others. These greenways also serve as natural corridors for the movement of wildlife in Wake Forest. The Reservoir has been protected and enhanced as an outstanding outdoor recreation area with walking paths, picnic areas and other low impact recreation facilities. A major new community recreation center has been completed, featuring an excellent indoor swimming pool.

9. Neighborhood Schools and Lifelong Learning

The Town and Wake County Schools have worked cooperatively to plan for schools well in advance of growth to avoid overcrowding and the need for mobile classrooms or constant redistricting. Traditional school buildings, whether new or rehabilitated, are located and designed to serve and be accessible to the neighborhoods around them. Rather than functioning as single purpose "factories to educate children", schools in Wake Forest serve as true neighborhood centers, providing space for community gatherings, recreational events and other functions. Increased diversity within the Town's neighborhoods has reduced the need for bussing to assure social and economic diversity in the schools. In addition, a new, large, state of the art library located at the center of the community serves as a flagship for education in Wake Forest, where an attitude of life long learning has become second nature to most residents of the town.

10. Balanced, Compatible Commercial Development

Town officials have navigated a careful course, balancing the need for sustained economic development against the threats to the community from over-commercialization. Small, locally owned shops and restaurants have been favored over big box retailers, chain stores, and "asphalt intensive" shopping centers. Various incentives have been employed, including a zoning and regulatory environment conducive to small business. Both small and large businesses alike have been required to take on development forms that blend easily into Wake Forest's historic, small town image and character. Vacant commercial and industrial buildings have been renovated and adapted for use as cultural facilities, retail stores, offices, innovative housing, or for small business incubators. Policies have been implemented to prevent indiscriminate abandonment and prolonged vacancies of "big boxes" left behind for "bigger boxes".

11. Affordable Housing and Quality Neighborhoods

Wake Forest neighborhoods display a wide variety of housing types and values, including attractive, affordable housing in many forms and locations. New and old neighborhoods alike are attractive and well maintained, having benefited from the town's shared economic prosperity, and overall quality of life. Walkable, mixed use neighborhoods are favored over automobile-dependent, cookie-cutter subdivisions and gated communities. An open system of pedestrian and bicycle friendly streets work together with a network of greenways to connect neighborhoods with the rest of the town. Most residential areas are convenient to neighborhood services, as well as public transit. Wake Forest is known for safe, secure, quiet neighborhoods in every part of the community, with well-tended yards and gardens, and small parks close at hand.

12. Support for Arts and Culture

Wake Forest has emerged as a destination for arts and culture in the Triangle area. Appreciation for the arts and culture begins with value placed on the unique heritage of the town, exemplified by the preservation of historic buildings and landmarks throughout the community. Public art graces many public spaces. Cultural activities include a broad selection of traditional and contemporary art forms, festivals, fairs, concerts, plays, seminars, and cross-cultural events. Young and old, as well as people from many ethnic backgrounds, are drawn to a constantly changing array of indoor and outdoor events. All of these activities are facilitated by the addition of a new performing and cultural arts center of outstanding design and utility.

13. Better Jobs, Larger Tax Base, Local Businesses

Wake Forest is a community dedicated to the creation and prosperity of small businesses. As a result, Wake Forest's business sector has seen steady growth and diversification. New and expanding businesses, as well as some post-industrial industry, have provided for a favorable tax base, holding property taxes down. Those who wish to make Wake Forest their permanent home can find well-paid, lifelong career opportunities without having to leave the community. While workers in services, retail trade and some types of manufacturing continue to be an important part of the local economy, other kinds of work have expanded, including health care, information services, and professional and technical services. A significant tourism base has taken root, as visitors are drawn by the preservation and enhancement of Wake Forest's historic, pedestrian-oriented, small town charm.

14. Community Dedicated to Public Safety

Wake Forest is a community of neighbors, business owners, police, firemen and other public safety personnel committed to working together for a safe and secure town. Highly visible police officers may be seen on a regular beat, oftentimes on foot or bicycle, getting to know the neighborhood kids, and their parents. Fire fighters are out in the community more than ever, teaching fire safety in schools and conducting courtesy fire inspections of homes and businesses. Our citizens and our public safety officers continue to support a safe and secure community free of drugs, gangs, vandalism, violence and crime.

15. Good Leadership, Communication and Involvement

Residents of Wake Forest show a keen interest in the affairs of their town government. There is a can-do spirit driven by civic pride and revealed through broad community involvement. The Town Board and various Town committees have no shortage of interested, qualified people willing to serve. Area citizens are heavily involved in civic clubs and organizations; volunteerism is a constant source of energy as it is poured into the institutions and organizations that work to improve the community. Town Commissioners routinely seek the views of their constituents on important decisions through personal contacts as well as enhanced information sharing and technology. A renewed focus on timely, effective communication between town government and town residents has greatly enhanced decision making in Wake Forest. Intergovernmental cooperation among local governments and state government agencies has done much to improve regional planning throughout Wake County.