

Chapter 1. Introduction and Summary of Planning Process

1.1 What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a plan that guides development and change for a community. It provides the basis and direction for a community's land development and land use policies and regulations. The plan examines the interrelationships between land use, transportation, utilities, the local economy, recreation, community character, etc. A comprehensive plan geographically covers the entire community and it has a long time horizon, typically 10 to 20 years. It represents the interests of the citizens as a whole.

A few good reasons to plan:*

- A good planning process involves a wide variety of citizens and interests. Once a community reaches consensus, the vision created in the plan can make future decision-making easier and less politically charged.
- A good, clearly articulated plan forms the basis of a community's vision of its future. Without it, regulatory controls may be legally challenged as arbitrary.
- A good plan ensures that a community can provide services like police, fire, and refuse collection efficiently while maintaining a relatively low tax rate for its citizens.
- Resources provided by state and federal governments are increasingly tied to good plans and planning processes. Highway funds, water and sewer grants, and other funding are easier to bring to your community if you have a well-crafted plan that shows extensive community involvement.

* From the NC Citizen Planner Training Program (NC Chapter of the American Planning Association, 2000), available at www.nc-apa.org, under "Resources," "Citizen Education."

What is covered in Madison County's Comprehensive Plan?

The plan includes a future vision for the County and goals which will help realize the vision and address concerns raised by citizens and county government. The vision was developed from input that was provided by citizens and officials at community meetings and through email, conversations and other meetings.

The plan contains data and analyses on Madison County's population, the local economy, land use, housing, environmental issues and infrastructure. The plan's chapters are arranged by topic area. Each chapter provides background, details and recommendations for a particular topic or set of topics. The plan contains recommendations for ways to manage growth, changes in policies and regulations, improvements to infrastructure and opportunities for intergovernmental coordination/collaboration. The plan will also include a suggested schedule for implementing the recommendations.

How does the Comprehensive Plan relate to zoning, subdivision and other ordinances?

A Comprehensive Plan defines goals for a community and outlines the investments, policies and regulations that are needed to achieve the goals. Land use ordinances such as zoning and subdivision regulations should be based on the content and recommendations in the comprehensive plan. A zoning ordinance is the most commonly used tool to implement the goals of a comprehensive plan.

1.2 How was this Comprehensive Plan developed?

Madison County contracted with Land-of-Sky Regional Council to develop the Comprehensive Plan. County Commissioners appointed a Steering Committee to guide and oversee the planning process. The Steering Committee consisted of the Planning Board and representatives from the Economic Development Board and Tourism Development Authority. Council staff worked closely with County staff and officials and have solicited input from individuals and organizations across the county. At least 175 people attended one of ten community input meetings which were held in June and July, 2008 in many communities throughout the county. Input was also gathered from county employees, county-appointed boards and citizens during this timeframe. Information about the plan, the process, input received and other related information has been available on the County's website, www.madisoncountync.org, throughout the planning process. The County and Land-of-Sky Regional Council have encouraged public input throughout the planning process.

The plan was drafted in topical sections, and as sections were reviewed by the Steering Committee, they were presented to the Commissioners and made available for public review and input. This drafting and reviewing/revising process occurred between September, 2008 and October, 2009. It is hoped that the plan will be approved by the County Commissioners in the fall of 2009.

Chapter 2. Background Information and Trends

2.1 Introduction

Madison County was formed in 1851 from Buncombe and Yancey counties and was named for President James Madison. Madison County is a rural, mountainous county in western North Carolina. It is located in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains and contains relatively steep mountains and beautiful rivers. Residents live in one of many small communities or in one of the three unique small towns – Marshall, Mars Hill and Hot Springs. The county’s culture is rooted in its heritage and residents have a strong desire to preserve the history and culture of the county as it grows and develops. See Maps 1 and 2 for orientation of the county in western North Carolina and the locations of the towns and townships.

A Brief History of Madison County

Note – Most of this section was derived from *This is Madison County*, by Jinsie Underwood (1974, Mars Hill).

Although there is no evidence of Indian towns or settlements in Madison County, Cherokee Indians lived in communities throughout the southern Appalachians and moved around in Madison to hunt and fish. The County’s first settlers came in the mid- to late-1700s, as the Indians in the region were defeated and pushed westward. There was a great wave of land speculation following the end of the Revolutionary War that continued into the early 19th century. Fertile land along the river valleys, good quality timber and cheap land prices also contributed to the rapid population growth in Madison County throughout the 1800s. However, the biggest factor that brought people into and through Madison County was the French Broad River and the trail along its banks that was used first by the Indians, then later by traders and settlers.

In 1824, the NC General Assembly created the Buncombe Turnpike Corporation and the trail along the French Broad River became a more formal transportation route and toll road, from the Tennessee line to the South Carolina state line. This turned into a major trade route, especially for drovers of hogs and other stock, and settlements (including the early towns which would become Marshall and Hot Springs) grew up along it where people could stop for the night, eat and rest.

The railroad brought an abrupt end to the turnpike traffic in the late 1800s, but was a major factor in the prosperity of Marshall in the first quarter of the 20th century. Marshall became a large trading center and businesses and industries flourished. This, along with the big wave of lumbering that swept through the region in the early 20th century, provided many jobs to local residents and brought more people to live in the county.

The Town of Warm Springs (what is now known as Hot Springs) was discovered early and was nationally known as a health and tourist center since the early 1800s. The Warm Springs Hotel brought many visitors to the Town – up to 1,000 at a time for special events – and also brought prosperity to the town. Businesses and other guesthouses served the many and regular visitors. The hotel burned and was rebuilt a few times over the years, but the site is still a place where visitors come to enjoy the natural hot springs and natural beauty.

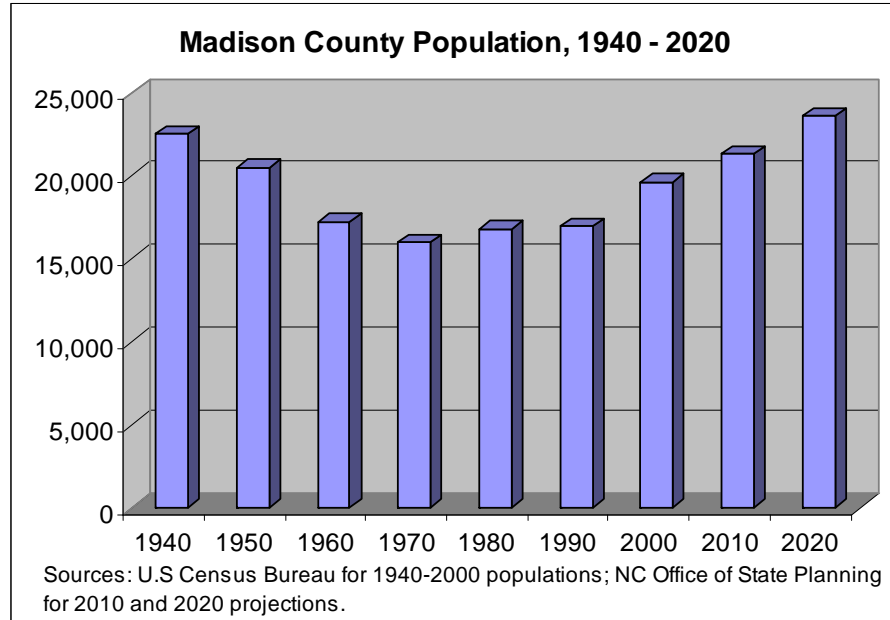
Mars Hill began as a farming community and grew up around the school that eventually became Mars Hill College. The school was established in the mid-1800s and the town was incorporated in 1893. Both the town and school have grown over the years and Mars Hill College remains a prominent part of the Town.

The automobile and its popularity, in parallel with the decline of the railroad, brought a great amount of change to Madison County and caused a downturn in the economic prosperity it had enjoyed. No national or regional thoroughfare connected the county to areas with which it was formerly connected until the mid-1950s. Due to its challenging terrain and lack of adequate access to transportation, retail and manufacturing businesses tended not to locate in the county and residents either commuted to other counties or left the county to find work elsewhere.

In recent years, there has been renewed interest in development and rehabilitation projects in the three towns and Mars Hill College has continued to expand. Interstate 26 was completed through the county in 2003, and a beautiful Welcome Center was built north of Mars Hill that offers visitors a wealth of information about things to do in and around Madison County. However the county has remained predominantly rural, with a strong agricultural base and strong communities.

2.2 Population and Demographics Data and Trends

As shown in the accompanying graph, population in Madison County has both decreased and increased over the past sixty or more years. In 2007, its population was 20,502. Madison County's population reached its peak of 22,522 in 1940. For the next thirty years it lost population and then began gaining it back slowly through 1990. Between 1990 and 2000 there was a large increase (16%), when it went from 16,953 to 19,645 people. Almost all of this growth (98%) was from people moving into the county from other places. The

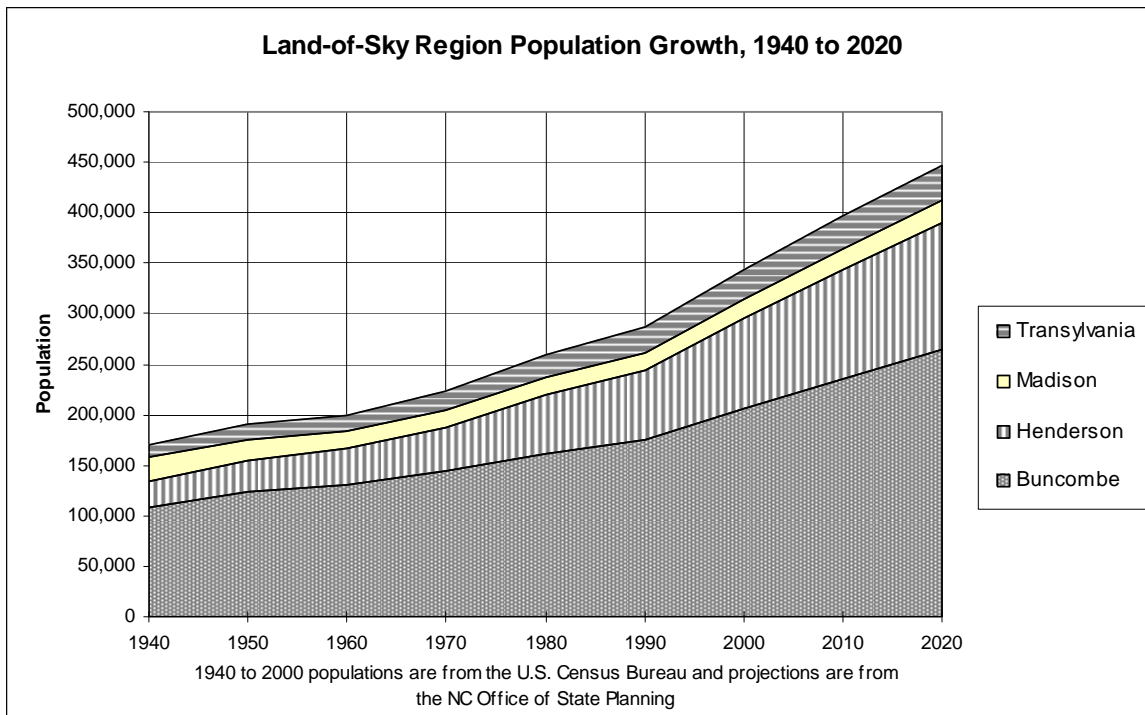


County's population is expected to continue to grow at a steady rate; the population is projected to reach about 23,500 in the year 2020 and 25,000 by 2030.

The towns in Madison County are small and each has its own unique character. The towns of Hot Springs and Mars Hill both lost a large percentage of their populations between 1980 and 1990, but then grew and gained a lot of it back between 1990 and 2000. The towns' populations in 2000 made up 16.5% of the county's total population. The rest of the people are spread out throughout the more rural areas of the county, and there are some strong communities found throughout the county.

Population in Madison County, Region B and North Carolina, 1980-2000					
				Percent Change	
	1980	1990	2000	1980-1990	1990-2000
Hot Springs	690	478	645	-30.7%	34.9%
Marshall	793	809	840	2.0%	3.8%
Mars Hill	2,126	1,611	1,764	-24.2%	9.5%
Madison County	16,827	16,953	19,635	0.7%	15.8%
Region B	259,758	286,577	344,472	10.3%	20.2%
North Carolina	5,880,000	6,632,448	8,049,313	12.8%	21.4%
United States	226,546,000	248,709,873	281,424,603	9.8%	13.2%

Source: U.S. Census 1980, 1990 and 2000



The County is part of the four-county region known as Region B or the Land-of-Sky Region. The other three counties in this region are Buncombe, Henderson and Transylvania. This region has experienced moderate to high levels of growth each decade since the mid-1900s. It also has experienced a growth rate similar to the state of North Carolina over the past few decades. It is projected to continue to grow as shown in the graph below.

Population Density

In this rural county, population density has been consistently low compared to other counties in North Carolina and in the Land-of-Sky Region (Region B). Madison County’s density is similar to counties in the mountainous western part of North Carolina. In 1990 there were 37.7 people per square mile in Madison County. This rose slightly to 43.7 in 2000 and to 45 people per square mile in 2007. Even with the projected growth for Madison County, the density is only expected to rise to 54.3 by the year 2030. This low density is partly due to the steep terrain in much of the county and the significant amount of protected land (16% of County’s land area) in federal/state ownership.

Population Density History and Projections for Region B						
Area	Estimated			Projected		
	1990	2000	2007	2010	2020	2030
Buncombe County	266.3	314.5	338.08	349.6	389.6	427.9
Henderson County	185.7	238.5	270.91	284.6	331.8	379.6
Madison County	37.7	43.7	45.99	47.2	50.9	54.3
Transylvania County	67.5	77.5	80.26	81.7	85.5	87.8
Region B	139.2	168.6	183.8	190.8	214.5	237.4
North Carolina	136.1	135.2	184.12	191.9	219.9	248.2

The numbers indicate the number of people per square mile in the given geographic area.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and NC Office of State Planning

Race and Ethnicity

1990 Population	White		Black		Hispanic Origin (of any race)		Native American, Asian, Some Other Race	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Hot Springs	474	99.2	0	0	1	0.2	4	0.6
Mars Hill	1,515	94	82	5	11	0.6	14	0.8
Marshall	802	99.1	4	0.4	2	0.2	3	0.3
Madison County	16,744	98.8	136	0.8	86	0.5	73	0.4
North Carolina	5,008,491	75.6	1,456,323	21.9	76,726	1.2	163,823	2.5
United States	199,686,070	80.3	29,986,060	12.1	22,354,059	9	19,037,743	7.6

The above table shows the racial breakdown in 1990 for the towns in Madison County, the County as a whole and for the state and country for comparison purposes. It shows that the County is predominantly White (98.8%), with a very small number of Black, Hispanic or other races. There were small increases in the non-White population between 1990 and 2000. The group that grew the most was the Hispanic population; it made up 0.5% of the population in 1990 and 1.4% (or 266 people) in 2000. The Hispanic population has been growing fairly rapidly in western North Carolina. The Census Bureau acknowledges that it was likely undercounted in both 1990 and 2000, so there are probably more than this number of Hispanics in the county.

The table below shows the racial breakdown for the County in the year 2000 in a slightly different, more detailed way. It also shows the numbers of American Indians, Asians and Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, which are small but may become more significant in the future.

Race Breakdown by County and Region									
2000 Census		RACE							Hispanic or Latino (of any race)
		ONE RACE						2 or more races	
		White	Black or Afr Amer	Am Indian	Asian	Hawaiian & Pacific Islands	Some other race		
Area	Total Pop								
Buncombe	206,330	183,761	15,425	803	1,368	79	2,365	2,529	5,730
<i>percent</i>		<i>89.1%</i>	<i>7.5%</i>	<i>0.4%</i>	<i>0.7%</i>		<i>1.1%</i>	<i>1.2%</i>	<i>2.8%</i>
Henderson	89,173	82,505	2,725	245	546	16	2,237	899	4,880
<i>percent</i>		<i>92.5%</i>	<i>3.1%</i>	<i>0.3%</i>	<i>0.6%</i>		<i>2.5%</i>	<i>1.0%</i>	<i>5.5%</i>
Madison	19,635	19,169	162	53	45	2	88	116	266
<i>percent</i>		<i>97.6%</i>	<i>0.8%</i>	<i>0.3%</i>	<i>0.2%</i>		<i>0.4%</i>	<i>0.6%</i>	<i>1.4%</i>
Transylvania	29,334	27,476	1,235	83	111	7	92	330	298
<i>percent</i>		<i>93.7%</i>	<i>4.2%</i>	<i>0.3%</i>	<i>0.4%</i>		<i>0.3%</i>	<i>1.1%</i>	<i>1.0%</i>
REGION B	344,472	312,911	19,547	1,184	2,070	104	4,782	3,874	11,174
<i>percent</i>		<i>90.8%</i>	<i>5.7%</i>	<i>0.3%</i>	<i>0.6%</i>	<i>0.0%</i>	<i>1.4%</i>	<i>1.1%</i>	<i>3.2%</i>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (www.census.gov); Table DP-1. Profile of Demographic Characteristics
NOTE: These data are from SF-1, which is the 100% count data file.

Age Groups

The following table contains information on population by age groups. The largest age group in Madison County contains people between the ages of 18 and 44, accounting for 36.8% of the County's population. The next largest age group contains people between the ages of 45 and 64, with this group making up 26% of the population. After this, people under 18 years old account for 21.3% of the population. The older adult population, between ages 65 and 84, makes up a smaller but significant percentage (13.7%) of the population. The median age for people in Madison County is 39.3, slightly higher than the median age for North Carolina and the U.S. (35.3).

It is interesting to note that Mars Hill has a large proportion of younger people (age 18-44) but this is due to the number of college age students attending Mars Hill College. On the other hand Marshall has the largest proportion (21.2%) of people over 65 years of age. Also, Madison County as well as other western North Carolina counties, have a larger percentage of older adults than seen in other areas and than the average in the U.S. because the area has been popular as a retirement destination.

Population by Age Groups - 2000										
	Age Groups									
	< 18 Years		18 to 44		45 to 64		65 to 84		85 +	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Hot Springs	138	21.4	220	34.1	171	26.5	103	16	13	2
Mars Hill	207	11.7	1,045	59.2	277	15.7	198	11.3	37	2.1
Marshall	182	21.7	295	35.1	185	22	153	18.2	25	3
Madison County	4,172	21.3	7,232	36.8	5,102	26	2,697	13.7	432	2.2
State of NC	1,964,047	24.4	3,307,356	41.1	1,808,862	22.5	735,221	9.1	233,827	2.9
United States	72,142,757	25.6	112,550,338	40	61,749,839	22	25,886,932	9.2	9,092,040	3.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Summary File 1

Education – School Enrollment

The Madison County School System is “student-focused, providing comprehensive educational experiences in a safe environment that equips and empowers students to be responsible citizens” (www.madison.k12.nc.us). The school system is fully accredited by the State of North Carolina and follows the NC State curriculum. Madison County School System has approximately 2,600 students enrolled in four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. Student enrollment numbers by school and by grade are shown in the following tables.

Number of Students by School - Sept. 2009	
School	Number of Students
Brushy Creek Elementary	480
Hot Springs Elementary	136
Laurel Elementary	95
Mars Hill Elementary	553
Madison County Middle School	601
Madison County High School	710
Early College	46
<i>Total number of students</i>	<i>2621</i>

Source: Madison County School System

Number of Students by Grade			
Grade	No. of Students	Early College Students	Grand Total
K	203		
1	213		
2	209		
3	218		
4	187		
5	234		
6	199		
7	201		
8	201		
9	229	17	
10	157	29	
11	172		
12	152		
Total	2575	46	2621

Source: Madison County School System

September 2009

Prior to 1975 there were five high schools – in Hot Springs, Laurel, Mars Hill, Marshall and Spring Creek. These high schools were consolidated into one high school, located just off the 25-70 by-pass in Marshall. The middle schools were consolidated into one middle school in 1992. While consolidation has led to efficiencies in administration and the provision education and related services, it has also resulted in long bus rides for a number of students.

The average bus ride for middle and high school students is currently 1.5 hours, and the average distance traveled one way on the bus is 23 miles. A number of county residents expressed concerns about the long rides students must take to and from school.

Education – Graduation and Post-Graduation

Graduation rates and educational attainment data are indicators of workforce preparedness and skill levels/types of an area’s population. Prospective employers, when considering an area to locate, look at these data to see if the skills and education levels meet employment needs.

Madison County has a higher high school graduation rate than the other mountain counties (looked at as a group) and the state of North Carolina. The County should be proud of this achievement. It also has a slightly higher percentage of students who pass the end of grade tests than does the state. The County’s average SAT score – 1,496 – is almost equal to the average score across the state.

Locality	High School Graduation Rate	Percent Pass End of Grade Exams	Avg SAT Score
Madison	73.7%	64.3%	1,496
Mountain*	69.8%	67.7%	
North Carolina	68.1%	61.2%	1,493



Madison County High School

* Mountain region contains the 24 western mountain counties
 Source: NC Department of Public Instruction (2006)

Despite the currently high graduation rate, many adults in Madison lack a high school diploma (30.7%). This is relatively high compared to the state (22%) and the average across the mountain counties (25.6%). Related to this, Madison has a lower percentage of adults with Baccalaureate degrees and graduate or professional degrees. (see following table)

Educational Attainment in 2000					
Locality	Percent with less than HS Diploma	Percent with HS Diploma	Percent with some college	Percent with Assoc Degree	Percent with Bachelor's Degree or higher
Madison	30.7%	31.8%	16.3%	5.0%	16.1%
Mountain*	25.6%	30.6%	19.6%	6.6%	17.6%
North Carolina	21.9%	29.6%	19.0%	6.8%	22.5%

* Mountain region contains the 24 western mountain counties
 Source: US Census Bureau
 Note: Educational attainment is for persons >=25 years old at the time of the 2000 Census

2.3 Incomes and Economic Status

The tables below include data for two adjacent counties – Yancey and Haywood – and the counties in the Land-of-Sky Region, as well as North Carolina as a whole. In general terms, incomes in Madison County tend to be less than incomes in the surrounding counties and in North Carolina. Madison County is similar to Yancey County in terms of Median Household Income and Per Capita Income and both of these are much lower than the other counties and than the NC figures.

Income Levels in 2000 and 2008				
Place	Median HH Income		Per Capita Income	
	2000	2008	2000	2008
Buncombe	\$36,682	\$47,170	\$20,384	\$26,101
Haywood	\$33,959	\$42,359	\$18,554	\$23,159
Henderson	\$38,263	\$49,090	\$21,110	\$27,041
Madison	\$30,951	\$37,889	\$16,076	\$20,127
Transylvania	\$38,733	\$50,000	\$20,767	\$26,199
Yancey	\$29,587	\$36,284	\$16,335	\$19,731
North Carolina	\$39,184		\$20,307	

Source: NC Department of Commerce, County Profile December 2008
U.S. Census Bureau for 2000 data

The poverty rates shown in the second table correlate with the lower income levels. Madison County has a relatively high overall poverty rate (15.4% of the population) and a very high elderly poverty rate (19.2%) as compared to the state and the other counties. Yancey County has a higher child poverty rate and a higher percentage of people receiving food stamps than the other counties and the state.

Poverty Levels and Information - 2000					
Place	Population in Poverty	Poverty Rate	Child Poverty Rate	Elderly Poverty Rate	Percent Receiving Food Stamps
Madison	2,880	15.4%	17.6%	19.2%	9.8%
Haywood	6,112	11.5%	17.4%	10.3%	10.3%
Yancey	2,780	15.8%	22.1%	16.3%	13.7%
Buncombe	22,920	11.4%	15.3%	9.8%	8.6%
Henderson	8,526	9.7%	14.5%	8.3%	5.5%
Transylvania	2,708	9.5%	11.8%	7.0%	8.8%
North Carolina	958,667	12.3%	15.7%	13.2%	9.9%

Source: NC Rural Center Data Bank / U.S. Census

Chapter 3. Long-term Vision for the County

3.1 Developing the Vision

Ten community input meetings were held in June and July, 2008 in locations throughout the County. They were located in places central to most of the communities in the County (community centers, schools, fire departments) in an attempt to get participation from residents in all the communities. Some meetings were large and others small, with a mix of long-time residents and newer residents at almost all of the meetings. A total of at least 175 people attended these meetings. Input was also gathered from county employees, county-appointed boards and citizens during this timeframe.

The meeting agenda and format was the same for all of the meetings. After welcoming people and introducing staff and steering committee members, attendees introduced themselves and sometimes shared where they lived and how long they lived in Madison County. Then Linda Giltz explained the scope of the Comprehensive Plan, the planning process and schedule for completing the plan. After questions and answers, the rest of the meeting was devoted to gathering input and listening to attendees' ideas and suggestions.

The questions that people were asked to think about and respond to were:

- *What do you love about your community and about Madison County?*
- *What is your vision for Madison County 20-30 years in the future?*
- *What are your concerns about the future of this community and/or Madison County?*
- *Other ideas or suggestions you have for this county plan?*

3.2 Future Vision for Madison County

Many common themes were expressed for all these questions, in all the meetings. The things people love about their communities in Madison County include:

- The people – friendly; good neighbors; trustworthy; hard-working; strong families
- The natural resources and beauty – mountains, rivers, trees, nature, clean water and good drinking water, scenic views
- The distinct and unique small towns and rural setting; small, safe and close-knit communities
- Quiet, remoteness, dark skies
- Farms and farming communities
- Rich heritage and music and arts/crafts traditions

When asked to think about what they would like to see in place and in the landscape 20 to 30 years in the future, people in all the meetings said that we need to preserve all those things we

love about the County today (i.e., the things they listed in response to the first question). In addition to those, other **things people want to see** include:

- More job opportunities (that pay a “living wage”) and businesses in the County, and “closer to home.” Children choosing to stay and live and work in Madison County.
- Improved communications infrastructure throughout the County.
- Both commercial and subsistence farming is thriving and supported at the county level. Agriculture is seen as a viable and respected way to make a living.
- The Towns are vibrant, community centers containing businesses and services needed and used by surrounding residents. New businesses have located in/near the towns and aren’t spread across the landscape.
- Smaller, local businesses predominate, with little or no very large retail stores or centers.
- More youth graduate from high school and students have shorter rides to and from school.
- Youth have more places to recreate and learn new skills that are closer to home.
- Views and rural character have been preserved by implementing design guidelines/standards for new development and other policy and/or regulatory changes.
- Traditions, history, and culture are being passed on to young people and are a strong part of community life.
- Public transportation service exists that provides transportation between the three towns and to/from Asheville.

A number of **concerns** were also expressed and appear to be shared by people throughout the County. These concerns are being considered along with the future vision in shaping the data gathering, analysis and recommendations in this plan. Concerns include:

- The ability for local people to continue to be able to afford to live here (and pay taxes), with the increased value of land and sales prices for land and homes. People are also concerned about the increased amount of real estate speculation occurring in the county, which drives up the price of land.
- Losing agriculture as a way of life; losing the agricultural communities and farmland.
- Large subdivisions and gated communities and other large developments that do not fit the character of Madison County.
- Ridge top development and visible development on mountainsides.
- The need to better understand water capacity/availability and consider new developments’ impacts on water supply as part of the development review and approval process.
- Loss of heritage and traditions that make up the culture of Madison County.
- Need for a balance amongst property rights, preservation and development.
- Need more, accessible health care services in the County.

3.3 Realizing the Vision

County Commissioners recognized that a plan was needed to address the multiple issues related to growth and change that the County has been experiencing in recent years. This plan is a guide and a resource for the Commissioners as they consider investments, changes in policies and ordinances and other actions affecting the future of Madison County.

The recommendations in this Plan consider the County's history, existing conditions and changes that have been occurring and are likely to occur in the future. The recommendations are also related to realizing the future vision and addressing concerns of county residents. The plan will provide recommendations and guidance to help the County:

- ❖ Preserve the rural character, natural resources and scenic beauty of Madison County;
- ❖ Preserve agriculture and the agricultural communities in the County;
- ❖ Assist and support commercial and subsistence farmers, so agriculture thrives and continues to be a vital part of the County's economy;
- ❖ Identify where and what types of development occur in the county and plan for growth;
- ❖ Recognize emerging economic opportunities and identify the best locations for businesses/employers;
- ❖ Enable the development of more affordable housing options in the County;
- ❖ Plan for and provide services and infrastructure in more coordinated efforts with the towns; and
- ❖ Identify changes to current policies, procedures and ordinances to accomplish the above goals and protect public health and safety.