



MEMO

Date: June 14, 2022 (5.12.22 edit)

RE: Amendments to Town of Spencer Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Narrative:

In August of 2008, the Board of Aldermen adopted the *Town of Spencer, North Carolina Land Use Plan 2025*. Per suggestions in that plan and requirements of NCGS 160D, the Town has undertaken to review and update that plan. This update process was done by Town staff and the Town's Planning Board.

An initial review by staff showed that there had been little change in the demographic and statistical description of the Town and thus, the update process concentrated on the impact of new development trends affecting the overall region and the Town. These trends included the following:

1. An increased demand in the region for large tracts of land for manufacturing and distribution related businesses. After decades of seeing development activity from the Charlotte core fall just short of the Spencer area, this trend includes new growth in areas close to the Town to the north and northeast.
2. A related demand for housing, increasing the demand for higher density residential lots with relatively smaller homes. This demand is also magnified by a looming shortage of residential properties and limited sewer capacities in large areas to our south.
3. A recognition that to attract younger, more affluent families to our area, the Town must provide amenities that will be found attractive by this demographic. Recreational choices of this demographic include soccer fields, bike lanes, passive parks, and greenways.

Recognizing these new trends, the planning effort then identified specific areas, corridors and even individual properties that deserve additional planning scrutiny. As a part of the update, these areas should be defined as amendments to Section 5 of the original plan. They are as follows:

SECTION 5 AMENDMENTS

Strategic Properties

- Old NC Finishing Property (PIN 048 006) - Located at the northeast extreme the Town's municipal limits along US Hwy 29 on both the east and west sides of I-85, this property gives the Town frontage on the Yadkin River which offers special development opportunities.
- Fisher Lamb Property (PIN 049 003)- A large tract located east of the railroad, north of Hackett St. and extending to the east side of I-85, has been identified by EDC as a prime industrial site.

- Sowers Farm Property- (PIN 045 0320001) 144-acre site NE of Steeplechase Development, accessed from N Salisbury Ave., prime location for industrial or mixed-use development.
- Center for Urban Forests Site- (PIN 030 077, 076, 074, & 075) The Salisbury Ave. connection to the Stanback Forest trail system, originally envisioned as a multiuse site with community educational and meeting spaces, and a trailhead with parking. Most of site is owned by Spencer but privately owned parcels will need to be acquired to complete the project.

Strategic Corridors and Areas

- Downtown Area- an area along Salisbury Ave from 1st to 8th Streets, and extending one block NW where high quality commercial, retail, arts and service businesses should be encouraged. This area is the face of Spencer.
- Salisbury Ave. from 17th St to Long Ferry Rd- major commercial corridor through core downtown area extending from connection with Salisbury to current limit of commercial development. Current primary automobile entry point to Town, defining our image.
- Salisbury Ave/US HWY 29 Long Ferry Road to River- Major opportunities for commercial development along road frontage with industrial development on internal parcels accessed from this highway. Will become one of the Towns primary automobile entry points, defining our image.
- Long Ferry Rd- Town's primary connection to I-85, experiencing heavy commercial and industrial growth pressures both east and west of I-85. Primary interstate entrance to our Town, defines our Town's image.
- Hackett St- current industrial expansion and future growth interest supports improvements to roads and infrastructure in this corridor.
- Area north of Long Ferry Rd- Both east and west sides of I-85, north from Long Ferry Rd. to Yadkin River, identified as prime commercial and industrial growth areas. This will become the face of Spencer to transient traffic along I-85 in the future, defining our Town's image to many.
- Hawkinstown Rd Area- Area north of Hawkinstown Rd, east and south of 7th Street and west to Salisbury ETJ boarder, includes a mixture of small and medium sized parcels with limited residential development. If combined and redivided, and provided with municipal water and sewer, this could be prime area for higher density residential development and annexation.
- Hollywood Dr Area- area west of Hollywood to east of 7th, NW to ETJ extreme, comprised of large, mostly undeveloped parcels that could be developed into higher density residential property if provided with municipal water and sewer.
- Sowers Ferry Rd Area- Area SW of Sowers Ferry Rd, NW of Elizabeth Ave, consists of several large tracts currently zoned AG (which requires 2.5 acre minimum lot size) that if rezoned and provided with municipal water and sewer would be prime location for higher density residential development

A Future Land Development Concept Map is found in Section 5 on page 42 of the original plan. Taking into consideration the changing development trends and the identified areas, corridors and properties of strategic interest to the town's development future, we have identified several land use concepts that should be added as amendments to the original as follows:

NC Finishing Property

This property has a long and interesting history but its interest to Spencer is two-fold: 1) This is the northern entrance to the Town of Spencer, and it will become the “face” of our community to people traveling past or coming to our community and, 2) This is “waterfront property” with various views and access to the Yadkin River and headwaters of High Rock Lake. No other municipality in Rowan County has this type of asset and potential amenity.

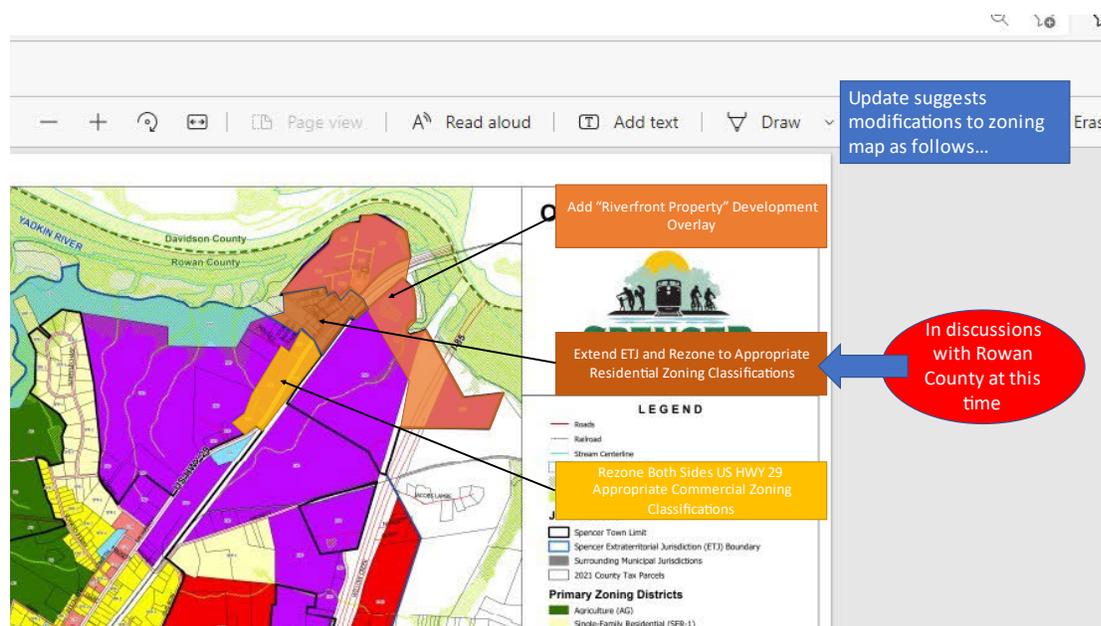
This property is currently zoned Industrial (IND) for a wide variety of industrial uses but it would appear that at least the waterfront portion of this property would be better suited for some type of mixed use (commercial/residential/recreational) development. At least, this property needs to be rezoned to one of the town’s Mixed Use zoning classifications and a development overlay probably should be applied to this property so that the town will have some more influence on this property’s development.

ETJ Extension

On the west side of N US HWY 29, South of the NC Finishing property and north of Yadkin Baptist Church Rd is a small residential community that is currently outside of the town’s ETJ with zoning controlled by Rowan County. I would suggest that the town work with Rowan County to allow an extension of our ETJ into this area and then apply appropriate residential zoning classifications (SFR-3 or RMST) to these existing lots.

N US HWY 29 Rezoning

This is a strip of mixed development on both sides along N Salisbury Ave (US HWY 29) from about 1625 (the old weigh station site) to about 2175 (Yadkin Baptist Church Rd) that is currently zoned Industrial (IND) for industrial development. These are relatively small lots that over time will likely transition to retail uses, especially if the surrounding properties are developed into industrial uses and the NC Finishing property is developed into some sort of mixed-use development. We would suggest rezoning this to an appropriate commercial zoning classification (C-29) to promote commercial development over time.

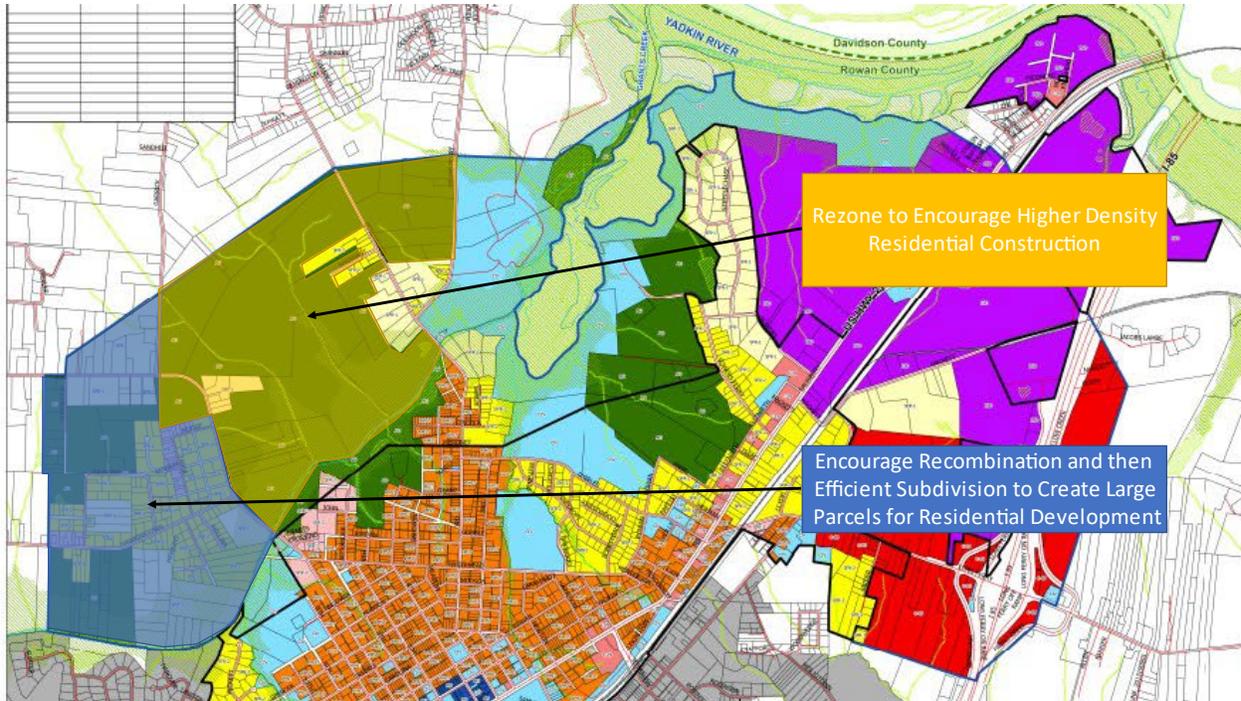


NW ETJ, Hollywood to 7th Street

This area is currently zoned Agriculture (AG) which allows low density residential and more rural land uses. As the town needs to grow its population base and as there are few large parcels of land suitable for large residential subdivisions within our municipal limits, I would suggest rezoning many of these properties to residential zoning classifications more suitable for higher density residential development. The town should work with SRU to preplan water and sewer main extensions into this area that would support higher density development and then exchange authority to utilize municipal water and sewer for voluntary annexation of the new developments.

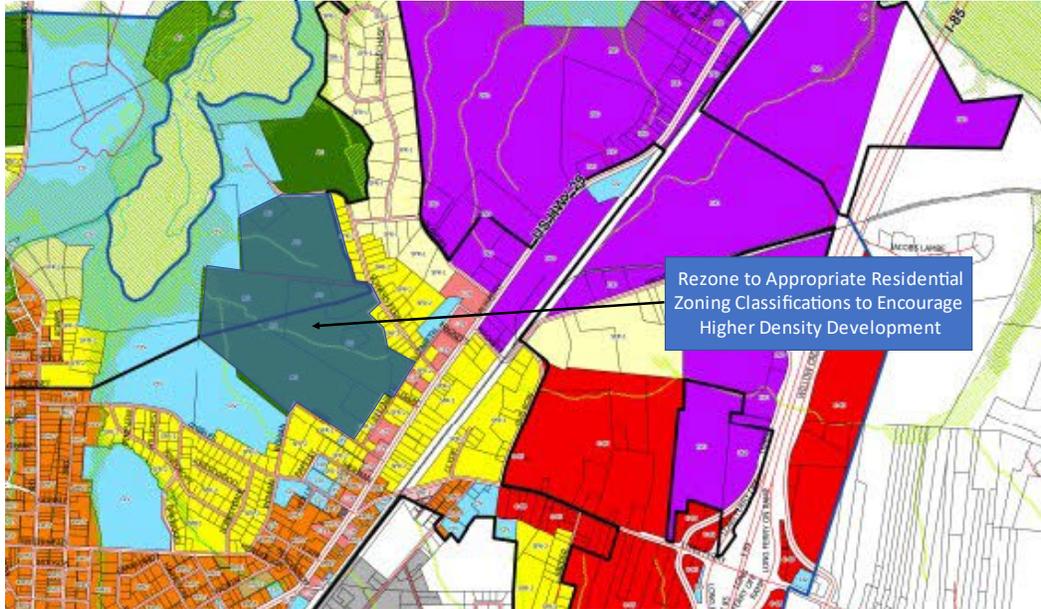
North of Hawkinstown Rd, West of 7th Street

This area has developed over time, partially through land division as inheritance into a mix of small lots, some served by a system of roads with several interior lots having no road frontage. Property owners in this area should be encouraged to recombine and then subdivide property, creating larger lots more suitable for higher density subdivision. The town could provide logistical support and then rezone the property as needed to the benefit of current property owners and the town's future. In return for attaching to town water and sewer (needed for high density development), this property would be annexed into the town's municipal limits.



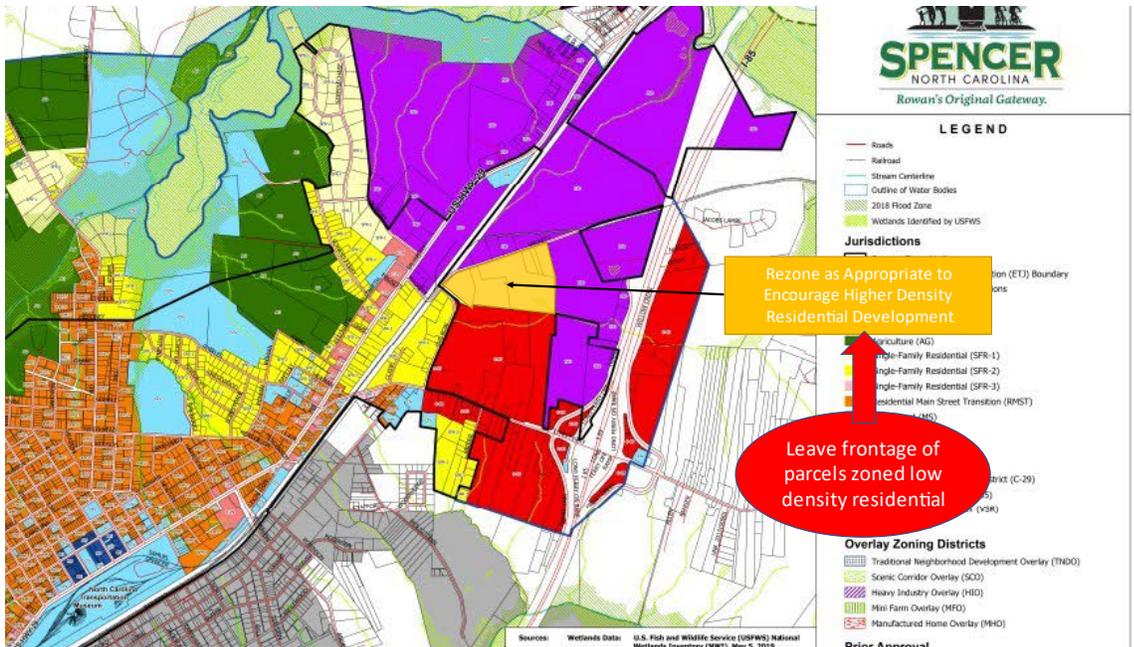
SW Sowers Ferry Road

There are several large parcels in this area currently zoned Agricultural (AG) which allows low density residential and more rural developments. This area should be rezoned to the appropriate zoning classifications to allow higher density residential development. In return for attaching to town water and sewer (needed for high density development), this property would be annexed into the town's municipal limits.



Hackett Street

Starting at the railroad tracks and running east on the south side of Hackett Street for about a half mile are several parcels zoned SFR-1, our lowest density residential zoning classification. These should be rezoned to the appropriate residential zoning classification to encourage higher density development

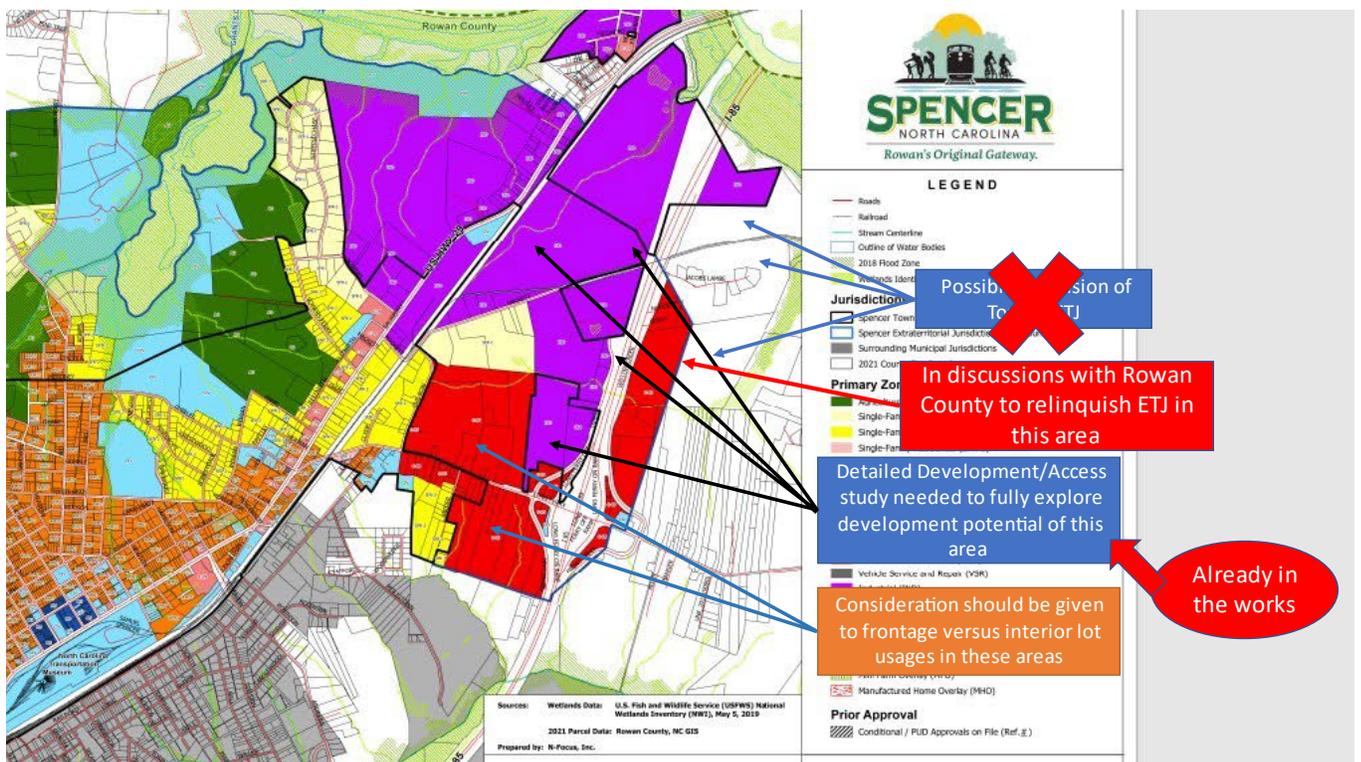


Long Ferry Road

The Town's zoning control extends on both sides of Long Ferry Road from Salisbury Ave east to beyond I-85. Most of this property is zoned C-85 which is meant to promote automobile traffic related commercial development. Some thought should be given to the different development potential of the road frontage property versus the internal portions of these properties.

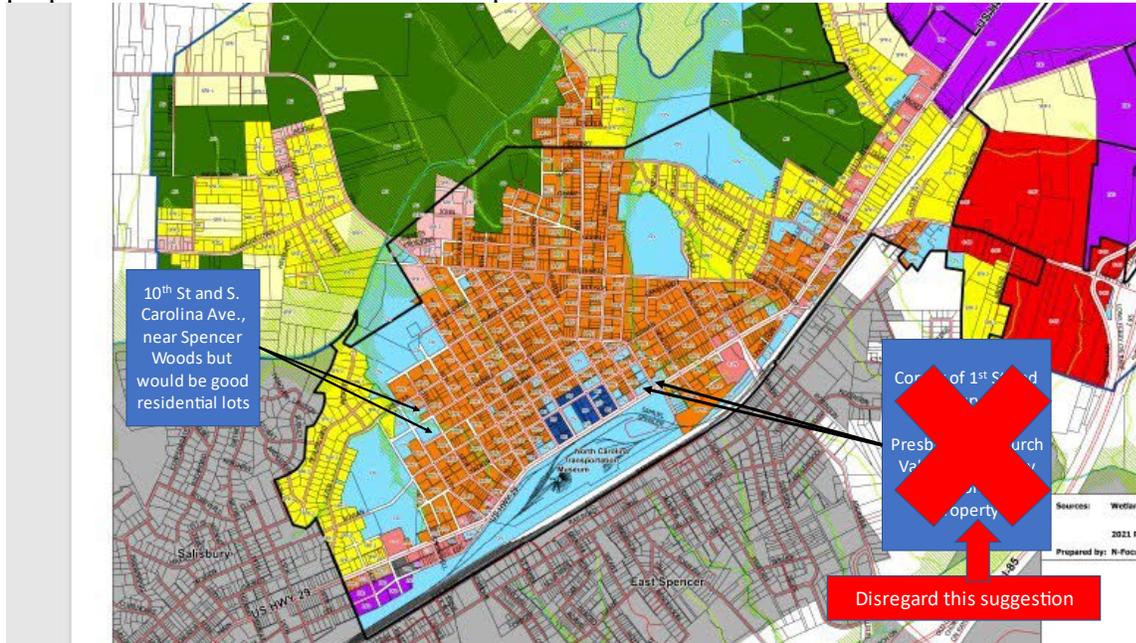
Recognizing the impacts of increased traffic on Long Ferry Road created initially by new industrial developments east of I-85, Rowan County has initiated a corridor study for this road and Spencer is participating in that study. As an adjunct to that effort, now would be the time to initiate a small area study looking at development patterns and access issues for the properties north of Long Ferry Road between US HWY 29 and I-85.

By annexation of the old NC Finishing property and other factors, the Town controls zoning on most of the properties north of Long Ferry Road, along both sides of I-85. There are several properties on the east side of the interstate that are still under the zoning control of Rowan County, including one property that has split zoning. Initial zoning statutes established in the 1970s allowed municipalities to have an extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) area that extended one mile out from its municipal boundary. Extensions of that initially granted boundary require approval of our county. Since future development in these areas will impact Spencer and the services it provides, it makes sense that development be controlled by the Town. The process for requesting an expansion of our ETJ in this area should be initiated with Rowan County.



Potentially Incorrectly Zoned Properties

Two properties owned by the Town, located near Spencer Woods could possibly be used as residential lots if not planned to be used as part of the park. There may be other town-owned properties that could be sold to developers for residential and commercial lots.



SECTION 6 AMMENDMENTS

Section 6 of the original plan defined **Goals and Implementation Strategies**. After review and in light of the new development trends identified above, we feel that some of the strategies deserved rethinking. A “reality check” process was applied to the current strategies, and we suggest revising that section as follows:

(deletions shown with ~~strikethroughs~~, additions shown highlighted in **yellow**.)

1. Improve / Revitalize Downtown Retail / Commercial District

- a. Designate a downtown culture and arts district
 - i. Officially designate the downtown area and encourage a mix of uses to create an active community center for culture and arts to include restaurant, entertainment and housing opportunities
 - ii. **Confirm zoning classifications match the encouraged mix of retail used desired.**
 - iii. **Create an overlay zone for this area to better define its location and limits.**
- ~~b. Work with development association to develop a four point approach to downtown revitalization~~
 - ~~i. The National Main Street Center has developed a comprehensive and proven approach to downtown success. The four points are:
 - ~~1. Organization~~
 - ~~2. Promotions~~
 - ~~3. Design~~~~

4. Economic Restructuring

- c. Identify ways to connect the business district with the transportation museum
 - i. Inviting signage could be erected on the museum property to lead visitors to a pedestrian walkway designed to mimic rail crossings – encouraging visitors to walk across the street safely to conduct business in downtown
 - ii. Consider a joint marketing with the Museum where the museum encourages tourists to visit downtown and vice versa
 - iii. Signage and brochures could be developed and on display at the museum
 - iv. Ensure new Town Park on Salisbury Ave. includes attractive transition points from museum to downtown area.
 - v. Include appropriate signage and facilities to encourage bicyclist moving along the Town's new bike lanes on Salisbury Ave and pedestrians utilizing the Town's other parks and greenways are aware of the museum and how to get to its site.
 - d. Build off of existing events
 - i. Take advantage of large events already being held – for example,
 - 1. Cruise-in
 - 2. Thomas the Tank
 - 3. Winterfest
 - 4. Events in neighboring Salisbury
 - 5. Other events
 - e. ~~Promote a private, nonprofit organization to hire a downtown development manager as funds can be raised~~
 - i. ~~A “shepherd” is needed to oversee overall strategy and implementation of initiatives for the downtown. Consider the following–~~
 - 1. ~~Volunteer or paid position (full or part-time)~~
 - a. ~~Identify funding source~~
 - i. ~~Membership~~
 - ii. ~~Fundraising~~
 - 2. ~~Consulting services~~
 - a. ~~Hiring expertise on a part-time basis to assist with the management~~
 - f. Downtown Redevelopment/Revitalization Plan
 - i. A detailed overall strategy will be needed to move the downtown efforts forward. The Plan can be derived with various forms of assistance -
 - 1. NCDDA (NC Downtown Development Association) – revise previous plan
 - 2. Small Town Main Street and/or Main Street Program
 - 3. Rural Center Programs
 - 4. Consultant prepared
- 2. Improve the public perception of the Town of Spencer (with special emphasis on quality of life and shopping opportunities)**
- a. Partnerships with Rowan Tourism Development
 - i. How can strategies be developed to help Spencer market itself?
 - b. Build off of existing events and attractions

- c. Explore branding and marketing initiatives
- d. ~~Build off of themes unique to Spencer, such as—~~
 - i. ~~“Steam and Economic Engines”~~
 - ii. ~~“Two Tracks—One Great Town”~~
 - iii. ~~Spencer “Shops” (the museum—old Spencer Shops and people come there to shop—play on words)~~
 - iv. ~~Town of Spencer, NC—Home of Spencer Shops~~
 - v. ~~“Hear the whistle blow as we grow”~~
 - vi. ~~Spencer, North Carolina—Area Center of Culture and Commerce~~
- e. ~~“In the center” theme (see example ad on the following page)~~
 - i. ~~Geographic Center of NC~~
 - ii. ~~Transportation Center with the Museum~~
 - iii. ~~Unique Raceway Center~~
 - iv. ~~Culture and Commerce Center~~
- f. Improve the reality that will support the perception by enforcing code compliance for commercial building maintenance
- g. Improve the reality that will support the perception by creating and financially supporting downtown improvement grant programs

3. Protecting existing neighborhoods

- a. ~~Advertise and promote historic district incentives~~
- b. Consider current time allocated to Code Enforcement efforts
 - i. Create and use standard procedure process for all code enforcement efforts
 - ii. Establish budget line item for enforcement efforts (legal expense, notification expense, etc.)
- c. Consider establishing proactive Neighborhood Organizations
- d. Conduct a detailed study of vacant lots with infill potential
 - i. Develop example building types and styles that would fit the character of the neighborhood and possibly accelerate approval process (more specific Historic District Standards)
- e. Update inventory of housing stock and its condition in all neighborhoods
 - i. This may be conducted as part of an overall neighborhood or housing development/redevelopment planning effort

4. Improve the performance and perception of the schools in Spencer.

- a. ~~Partner with schools to~~
 - i. ~~Identify the key issues~~
 - ii. ~~Identify areas where the Town and its citizens can help improve the community and schools~~
 - iii. ~~Consider assistance from the Rowan Partners in Schools~~
 - iv. ~~Identify other areas across the state that have turned around school perception (For example, Enloe in Raleigh, which became a Magnet School and became a desired school for parents to send their children)~~
- b. Improve connections with the school
 - i. Facilities at the school are renovated with some new construction
 - ii. Consider and explore the “Safe Routes to School” program

1. Research opportunities to plan for bicycle and pedestrian access to schools
2. Speed limit management on Charles St

5. Facilitate commerce and industry opportunities within Spencer

- a. Work closely with Rowan EDC to identify, secure, and promote key development sites / properties
- b. Provide marketing data to potential businesses
 - i. Data and studies can be made available on the Town’s website as a free service for potential businesses
 - ii. Data can be updated on a quarterly or annual basis
- ~~c. Implement a marketing strategy to attract potential businesses for downtown and for the Town as a whole~~
 - ~~i. Utilize Marketing data to target specific businesses within the area and outside of the area to locate in Spencer (detailed strategy and recommendations will be in final plan)~~
- d. Identify necessary utility and transportation improvements that may be needed
- ~~e. Provide greater flexibility for businesses within ½ mile of the interstate, to include setback, signage, and parking accommodations~~
- f. Confirm zoning classification for potential business sites are correct. Rezone as needed
- g. Ensure dimensional limitations for commercial and industrial zoning classifications are well balanced between protection of neighboring properties and being “business friendly”
- h. Streamline site plan, rezoning and subdivision approval process to shorten approval timeline

6. Facilitate and encourage transportation improvements

- ~~a. I-85 bridge construction is a priority~~
- b. Key intersections in town that may need improving
- c. Work with NCDOT and other entities to improve access to industrial and other business sites from existing road system

To be useful as a decision-making tool, we feel the plan should have specific development **Policies** that can be used by staff, the Planning Board and the Board of Aldermen when making land use decisions and then cited when approving **Statements of Consistency**. We suggest the following be added as amendments to Section 6 of the original plan:

Development Policies

1. The Town should encourage new and expanding industries and businesses which diversify the local economy, increase resident’s job opportunities, and expand the town’s tax base.
 - a. The Town should actively seek out and preserve through zoning, properties uniquely suited to industrial and business growth.
2. The Town should protect, enhance, and encourage a high quality of life, image, and cultural amenities as an effective approach to economic development.

- a. Recognizing the importance of the Town’s image to economic and community development efforts, the Town will make land use decisions for defined Strategic Properties, Areas and Corridors with that image in mind.
 - b. A building’s location on its site and buffer and berms should be used as required for new development to protect existing vistas important to the Town’s “small town” and rural image.
3. Economic development benefits should be balanced against the possible detrimental effects high density residential, commercial, and industrial development might have on the quality of life enjoyed by area residents.
4. Economic development efforts should encourage the revitalization and reuse of unused or underutilized structures and sites in appropriately located commercial and industrial areas.
5. Protection and rehabilitation of viable neighborhoods should be encouraged to ensure their continued existence as a major housing resource for the Town.
6. Low density residential neighborhoods or properties which become infused with or surrounded by higher density residential or commercial development should be protected from new development when possible and should be allowed to undergo an orderly transition to new types of development over time.
7. Single-family homes should be recognized as the primary housing type for the Town, but housing of different types, sizes, and price points should be encouraged to meet the diverse needs of our evolving community.
 - a. Multi-family housing should be considered in all areas of the Town when developed to the level of surrounding neighborhoods and where buffering is provided as needed to protect existing neighborhoods
8. Innovative and flexible land development planning techniques should be supported as a means of encouraging development configurations which are more desirable, and which may better safeguard existing natural land and water resources.
 - a. Large land tracts should be preserved through use of innovative and flexible land use planning practices.
9. The housing needs of the elderly, handicapped, and low/moderate income households should be recognized in the Town’s policies and actions regarding residential development.
10. Commercial and industrial development should be encouraged to occur in clusters or defined areas to maximize efficiency of municipal utility and service expansions.
 - a. Commercial development should especially be encouraged in the Town’s defined Downtown Area
11. Location of major commercial development should be encouraged adjacent to arterial highways and at intersections of major roads.
12. Industrial development should be located in defined areas and buffered from major highway vistas and adjacent or nearby residential areas to limit any undesirable impacts. Non-industrial development adjacent to planned (zoned) industrial areas should be sited in such a way as to protect the viability of the industrial property.
 - a. Building location, berms, and buffers should be used to insulate properties designated for one type of use from surrounding properties of a different use.
 - b. Heavy industrial sites should be separated from non-industrial areas by natural geographic features, greenbelts, major roads, and or other suitable means.

- c. Light industrial uses may be located in more urbanized areas to take advantage of available municipal services. Careful site design and/or buffering may be required to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas.
- 13. Historic District development standards should be judiciously enforced on all new development and reconstruction/maintenance of existing structures to ensure the District's continued viability and the Town's recognition as a historic community.
- 14. The Town should remain involved in NCDOT's transportation planning to ensure appropriate transportations options in and around the Town.
 - a. The Town's Land Use Plan should recognize possible road extensions and improvements identified by the NCDOT Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and make land use decisions with those future transportation improvements in mind.
- 15. Land use decisions should recognize the park, open space, and recreation needs of the community and reserve property to meet those defined needs when possible.

When adopted, these items will become an official part of the Town's Comprehensive Land Use Plan originally adopted in 2008 and will be used by all parties when making land use decisions. This update is meant to bring this plan into compliance with the requirement of NCGS 160D. This plan should be reviewed annually by staff with a full review and revision by the Planning Board and Board of Aldermen every five years, or sooner if development trends or pressures change.