

Downtown Revitalization

- More restaurants, parks, and shopping opportunities.
- Improve business mix, aesthetics, parking, and walkability.
- Wayfinding signs that make it easier to explore.
- Attract area employees, Campbell personnel, and businesses to stay after 5 pm.
- Alternate route by-pass (10th Street) to alleviate truck and through traffic at main intersection.



Mural in downtown Lillington.

More or updated commercial and entertainment spaces

- Restaurants, grocery stores, shopping centers.
- Recreational businesses for entertainment (YMCA or mini golf).
- Expanded retail and dining options.
- Create a more vibrant downtown to attract Campbell students and staff.

Renovating empty storefronts

- More commercial businesses of all types are desired.
- Renovating empty storefronts and revitalizing existing buildings is a high priority.



Pedestrian crossing intersection (W. Front St. and S. Main St.) in downtown.

Enhanced pedestrian safety

- Dedicated pedestrian access should be a part of any future bridge, or enhanced on current one.
- Sidewalks are desired in all areas to assist a variety of users.
- Pedestrian-friendly access is desired between neighborhoods, parks and the river.

LILLINGTON TODAY



LILLINGTON TODAY

COMMUNITY PROFILE

This section provides an analysis of demographic and economic conditions in the Town of Lillington and the study area included in this plan. The information collected here serves as background context to support the recommendations presented later in this document.

Population & Housing

The most recent American Community Survey (ACS) estimates the town's population to be 4,735, with the study area at 9,405. The total daytime population of the town increases to 7,175, including 4,768 workers.

Lillington has experienced steady growth, with household incomes also rising steadily. Adding to household wealth, home values have also risen and outperformed the county. Single-family housing growth has shifted to rent vs. owner-occupied ratios.

Approximately 32.7% of homes in Lillington are valued at more than \$300,000. The homeownership rate is 63.1%, which is slightly below the statewide rate in North Carolina. The median gross rent in Lillington is \$997/month, and only 6.8% of all renters are paying more than \$2,000/month for rent.

The largest percentage of the population in the study area includes those ages 18-64, the town's workforce.

Housing in Lillington remains competitively priced relative to surrounding metro areas when adjusting for home size, age, and amenities, though prices have risen noticeably over the past decade.

LILLINGTON

1,632

TOTAL HOUSING UNITS

\$295,147

MEDIAN HOME VALUE

\$83,138

**AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD
INCOME**

STUDY AREA

3,608

TOTAL HOUSING UNITS

\$354,350

MEDIAN HOME VALUE

\$83,237

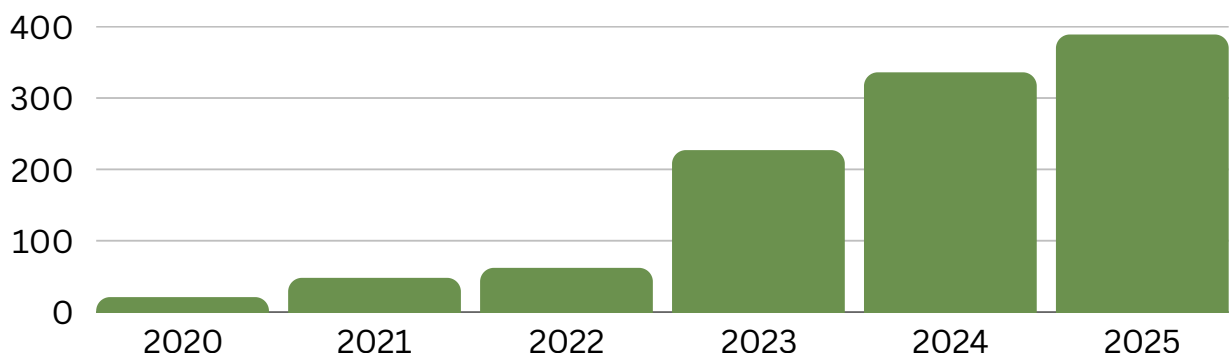
**AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD
INCOME**

Additional population increases are anticipated due to the significant number of residential lots currently under construction or in the development review process. The table below outlines proposed residential developments within Lillington’s jurisdiction as of Spring 2026, focusing on developments with the highest estimated number of residential units.

Development Name	Residential Units Proposed
Capeton Master Plan	2,900
Matthews Landing	990
Wade Park	618
Ollie Milton	490
Matthews Ridge	373
Blakes Landing	363
Miller Property	340
Providence Creek	334
Cape Overlook	319

Building Permits

Lillington has experienced significant growth in new single-family dwelling building permits since 2020, reflecting sustained residential demand and the town’s attractiveness as a place to live. This upward trend signals continued population growth, increased pressure on infrastructure and public services, and a need to align land use, transportation, and utility planning to support orderly development while maintaining community character.



Population by Generation

~5.1%

Greatest Gen: Born 1945/earlier

~20.6%

Baby Boomer: Born 1946-1964

~20.3%

Gen X: Born 1965-1980

~24.4%

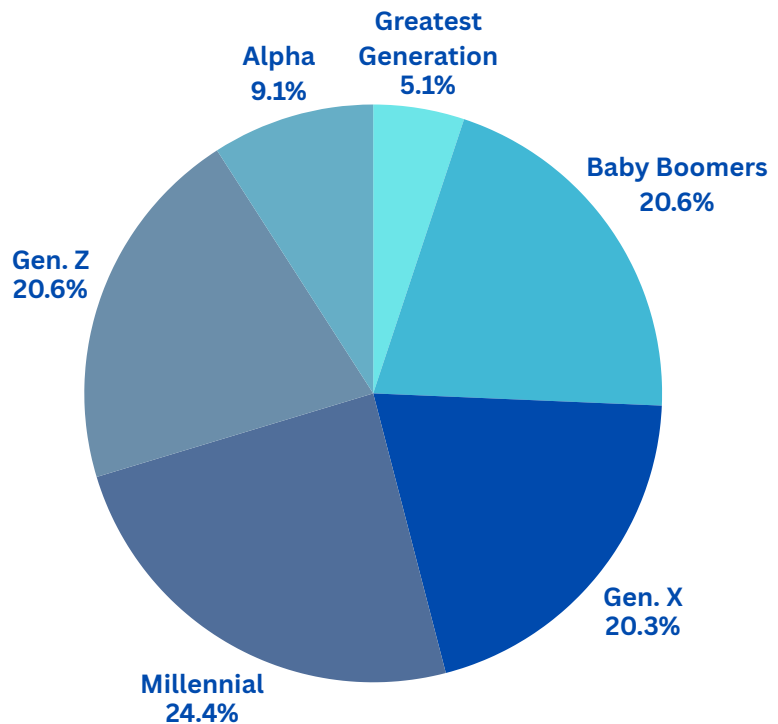
Millennial: Born 1981-1998

~20.6%

Gen Z: Born 1999-2016

~9.1%

Alpha Gen: Born 2017-Present



Income

The Median Household Income in Lillington is \$81,760. This figure has risen sharply over the past five years and is higher than the statewide median.

There is little difference between average household income for the town's current jurisdiction and the study area. Further analyzing household earnings, 30.1% of households earn \$100,000 or more

Relatively few households are in poverty compared to the statewide average. Less than 5% of Lillington's population is living in poverty, which is less than half the percentage for North Carolina of 12.5%.



**\$81,760 vs
\$73,958**

**LILLINGTON'S MEDIAN
HOUSEHOLD INCOME VS.
NORTH CAROLINA'S**

4.9% vs. 12.5%

**LILLINGTON'S POVERTY
RATE VS. NORTH
CAROLINA'S**

Employment

Plentiful local and state government agencies, educational institutions, and health-care related fields have created a growing number of job opportunities.

The town's employment rate is 46.9% based on the 2024 American Community Survey. This is substantially less than the employment rate in North Carolina (59.8%), and lower than Harnett County (50.7%). However, the study area's unemployment rate is only 3.9%.

Most residents are employed in white collar jobs within the study area (58%), followed by blue collar (28%) and services (14%). The largest percentage of the population in the study area includes those ages 18-64, comprising an adequate workforce.

STUDY AREA



21.3% vs. 13.7%

**Local, State, & Federal Workers
in Lillington compared to NC**

3.9%

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

58%

**WHITE COLLAR
EMPLOYMENT**

Major Employment Sectors

Per the American Community Survey (ACS), the highest number of Lillington's workers are employed in the educational services, health care and social assistance sector. A large percentage of Lillington's workers are public sector employees, with 21.3% employed by either the local, state, and federal government. This number is substantially higher than the statewide average of 13.7%.



*Cape Fear Valley
Cancer Center*



*Campbell University's
School of Osteopathic Medicine*

Industry Sector by employment percentage:

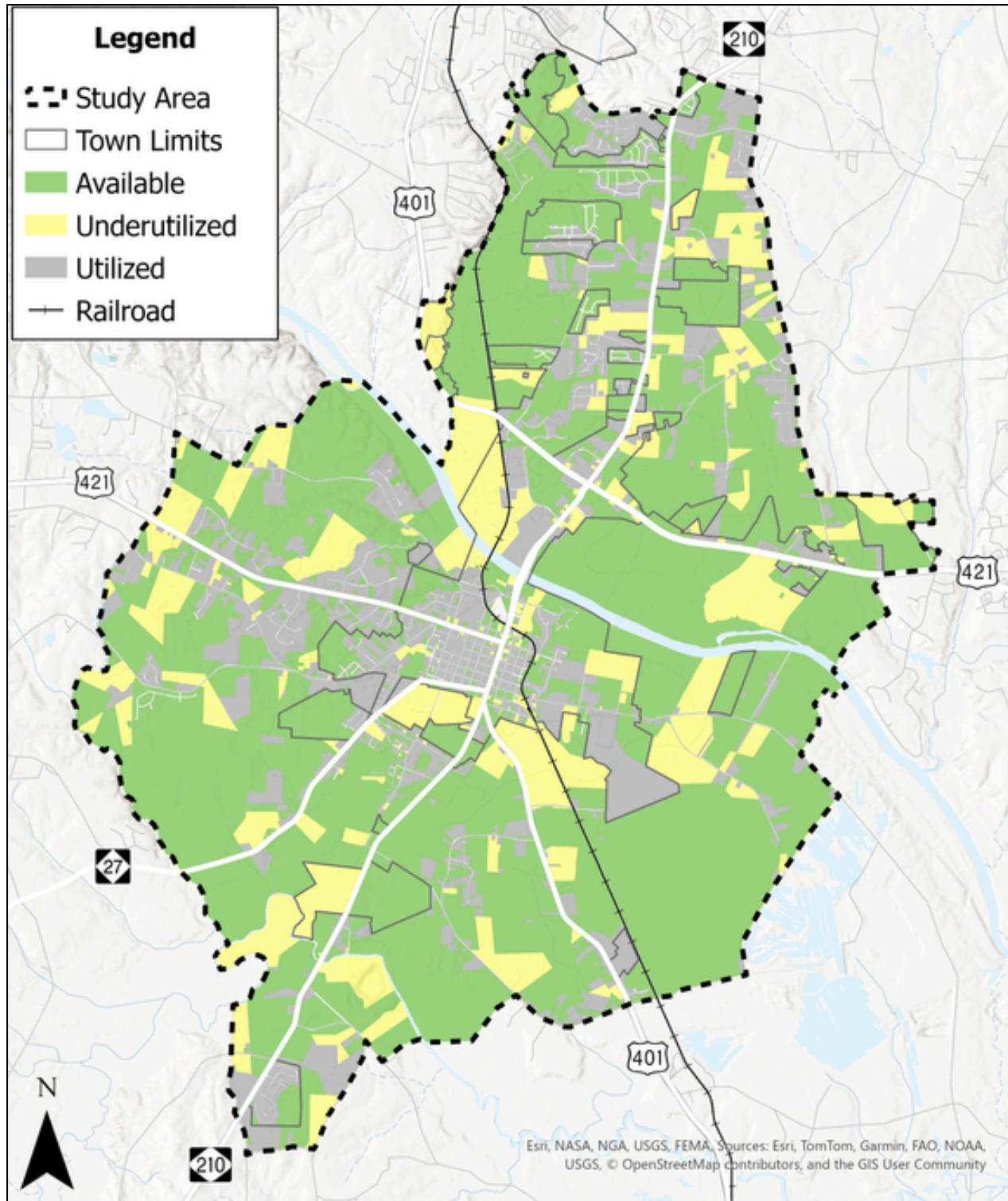
Industry Sector	Percentage
Educational services, and health care	26.9%
Retail trade	13.8%
Manufacturing	10.0%
Transportation, warehousing, utilities	10.0
Arts, entertainment & food services	9.7%
Professional, scientific, and management, and admin	9.6%

Established Major Industries and Workforce in Harnett County per Harnett County Economic Development:



LAND SUPPLY

A land supply analysis was conducted as part of this plan. It compares building value to property value. A parcel is considered “utilized” if the building value is greater than or equal to the land value. “Underutilized” parcels are those with a land value greater than the building value. “Available” parcels are those without a significant structure.

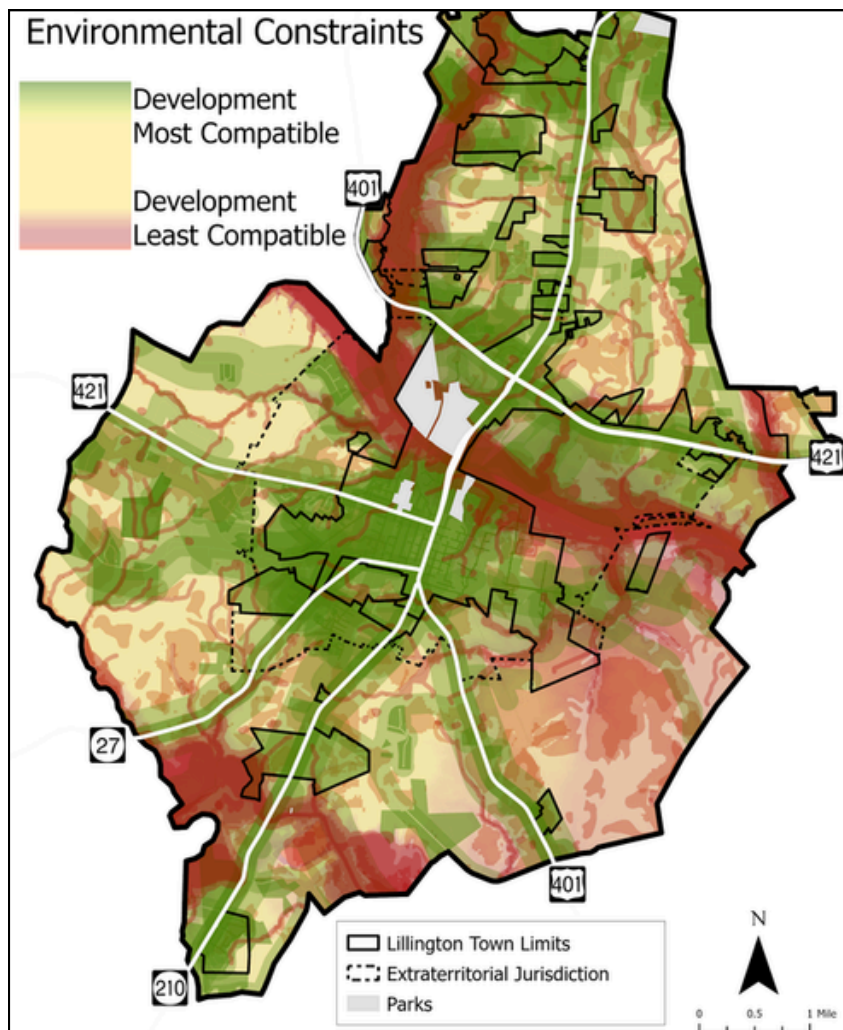


LAND SUITABILITY

This analysis evaluates land suitability across the study area and directly informs the future land use map.

Green areas identify where new development and reinvestment are most appropriate—locations with access to existing streets, utilities, schools, connected neighborhoods, and planned multimodal improvements. These areas help guide where higher-intensity residential and mixed-use growth can occur efficiently.

Red areas indicate where development is least suitable, primarily due to flood hazards, wetlands, and other sensitive natural features. On the future land use map, these areas are intended for preservation, restoration, or limited development to protect environmental systems and reduce risk.



Floodway and flood fringe areas along Neill's Creek, Upper Little River, and the Cape Fear River require low-impact development (LID) practices that work with natural systems and support conservation-oriented land uses.

The southeastern portion of the study area—between Poorhouse Creek and Coble Ski Estates Road—also presents environmental and infrastructure constraints.

While prime agricultural soils were reviewed, they were not included in this specific analysis but still informed overall plan recommendations.

Overall, this suitability analysis helps direct future growth to the most appropriate locations while safeguarding key natural resources.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment in Lillington includes all human-made features—such as roads, buildings, and utilities—that support daily life.

Planning for the Town’s expansion requires a clear understanding of the condition and capacity of essential systems, including transportation, water and sewer, parks and recreation, public safety, and community facilities.

Because the built environment is closely interconnected with the natural environment, thoughtful planning is needed to balance growth with resource protection.

Conserving wetlands, avoiding development in flood-prone areas, and managing stormwater effectively are critical strategies to reduce future risks. These natural systems filter water, reduce flooding, and provide vital wildlife habitats. As Lillington grows, protecting these resources will help the community minimize negative impacts and build long-term resilience.

This section provides an overview of Lillington’s environmental constraints, parks, community resources, transportation, utilities and infrastructure.



Environmental Constraints

Lillington's environmental constraints are closely tied to its location within the Cape Fear River Basin, one of North Carolina's largest watersheds. Being part of this watershed means that land use decisions directly influence water quality, flooding, and ecological health both locally and downstream.

Flood Hazard Areas

Lillington lies along the Cape Fear River and the confluence of several tributaries, including Neill's Creek, Upper Little River, and Poorhouse Creek. These waterways create extensive floodplains and flood fringe areas that pose development limitations and require careful stormwater and land management.

These risks have grown more severe with increasingly frequent and intense weather events. Recent storms such as Hurricane Helene (2024) and Tropical Storm Chantal (2025) highlight the damage that flooding can cause, even in inland areas.

Wetlands

Wetlands are common throughout the river corridor and its tributaries. These areas provide essential floodwater storage, groundwater recharge, and habitat, but also create constraints for development due to saturated soils and regulatory protections.

Watershed

As part of the Cape Fear River watershed, Lillington contributes to a larger regional hydrologic system. Runoff from developed areas can impact downstream water quality, making erosion control, low-impact development (LID), and riparian buffer protection critical. Portions of the basin face nutrient loading, turbidity, and fecal coliform challenges, which further increase the need for responsible land use practices.

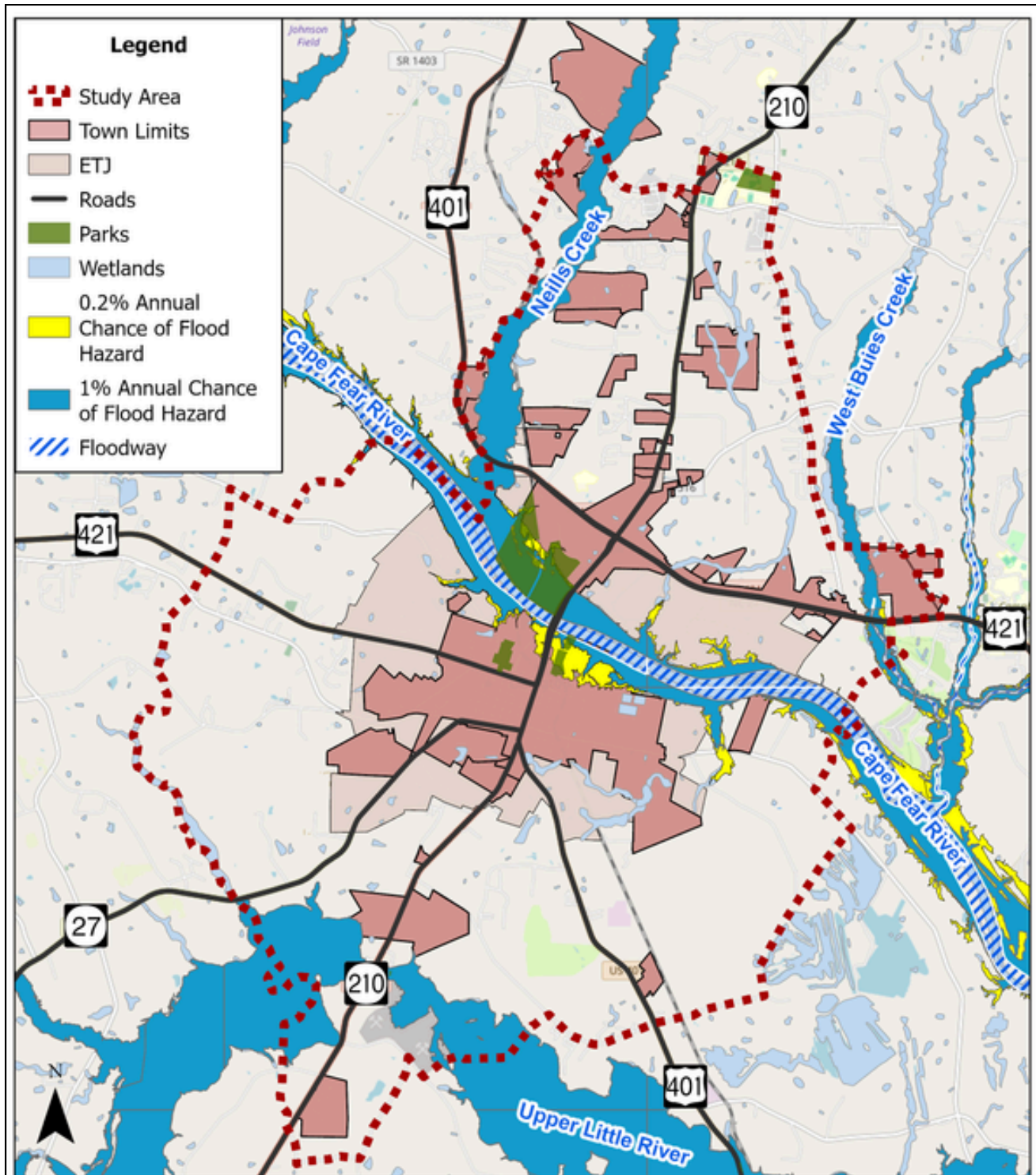
Ecological and Habitat Constraints

The river corridor and associated streams support diverse plant and animal communities. Maintaining healthy floodplains, forest cover, and riparian buffers is important for sustaining these habitats and reducing erosion.

Overall, Lillington's position within a major watershed—combined with floodplains, wetlands, and sensitive habitats—requires thoughtful development patterns that protect natural systems and reduce long-term environmental impacts.

Environmental Features Map

There are environmental constraints that may restrict development within the study area, although most of the study area is located outside of any special flood hazard area. Areas prone to flooding include those on the banks of the Cape Fear River and along major tributaries such as Neills Creek and West Buies Creek.



Transportation

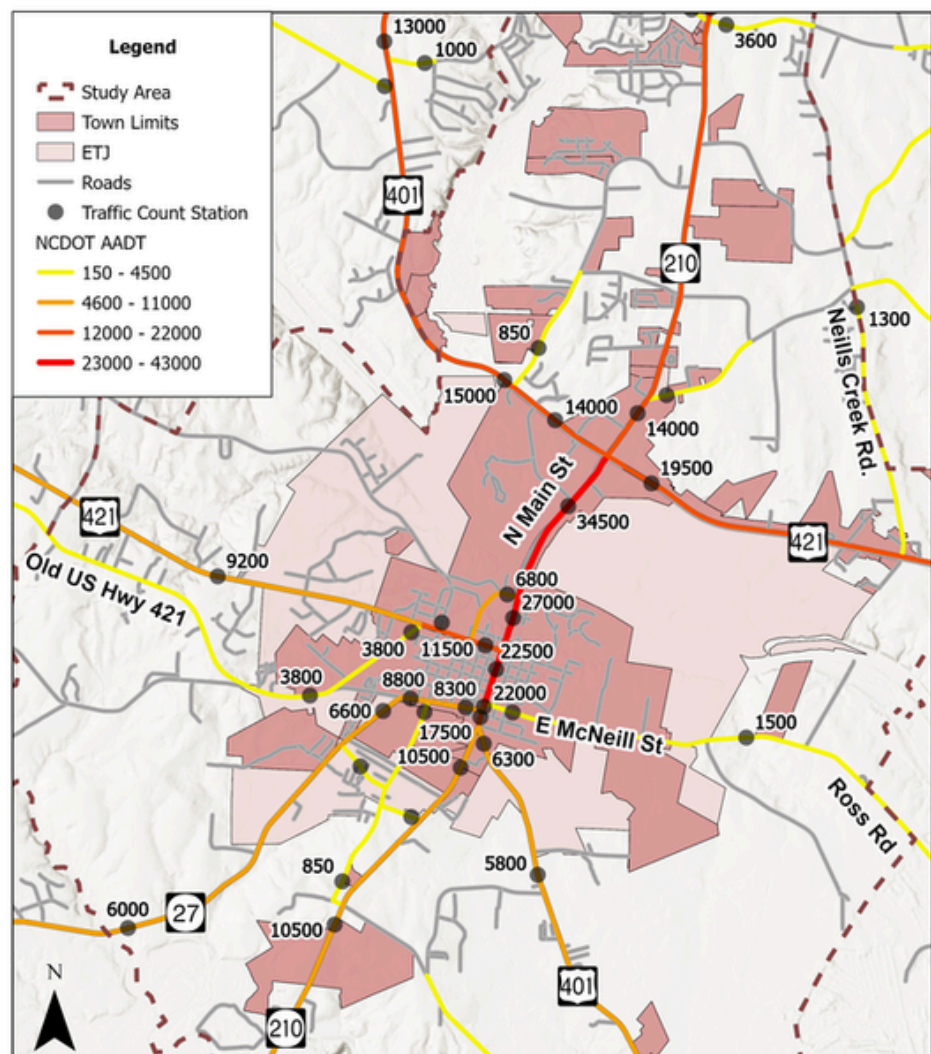
Lillington's transportation network is shaped by a combination of neighborhood streets and major state and U.S. highways—US 401, US 421, and NC 210—that connect the town to regional hubs such as Raleigh, Sanford, and Fayetteville. These corridors serve as vital routes for commerce, jobs, and regional mobility. While personal vehicles remain the primary mode of travel, Lillington continues to expand its sidewalk network and has emerged as a central hub within a recently adopted countywide pedestrian plan.

Traffic Volumes

Traffic volumes, measured through Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT), provide important insight for roadway planning and land use decisions. The busiest segment is North Main Street between E. McNeill Street and Cornelius Harnett Boulevard, where overlapping state highways (US 401, US 421, NC 210 and NC 27) carry more than 30,000 vehicles per day.

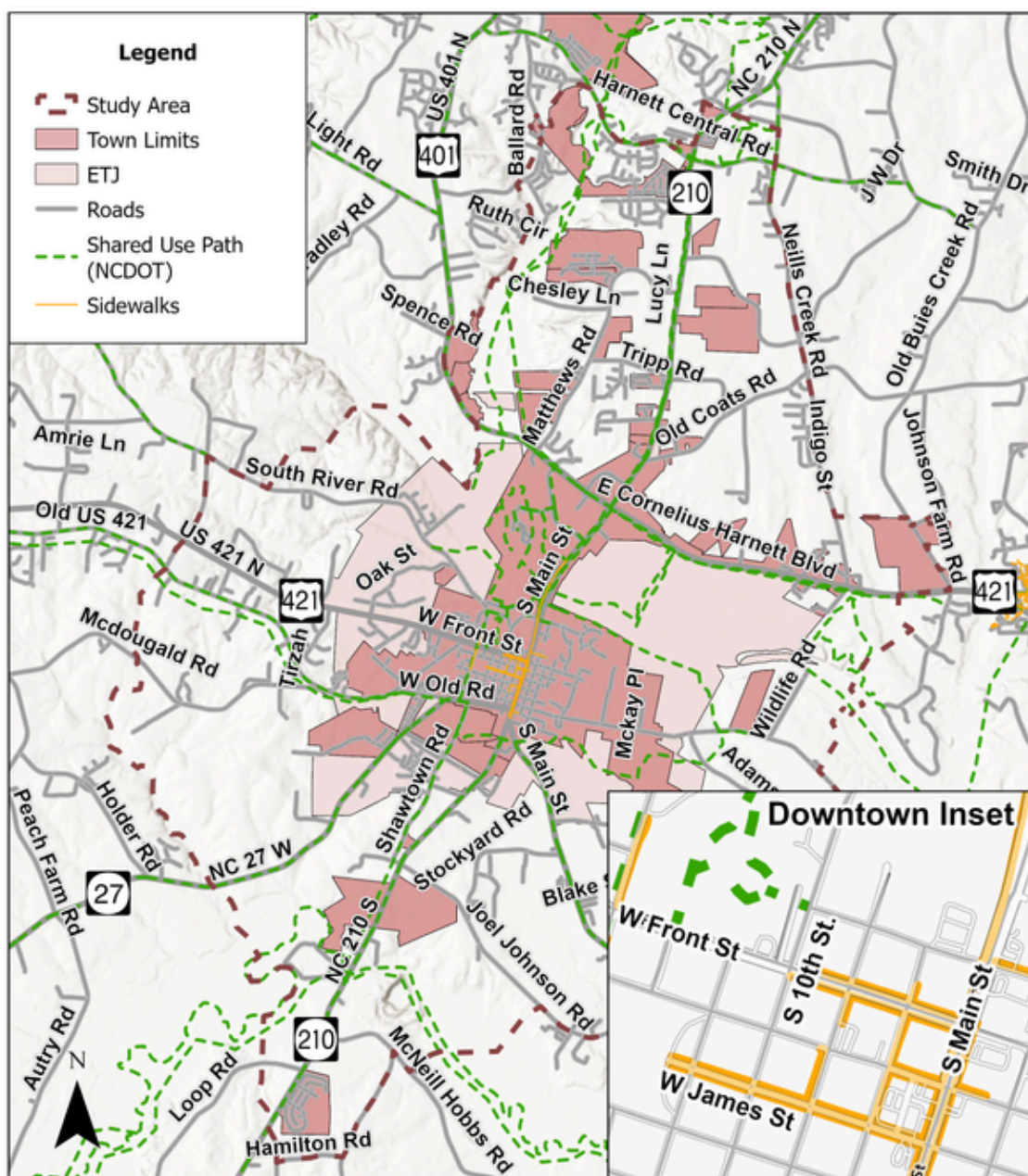
Other important secondary routes include Old US Highway 421, Shawtown Road, E. McNeill Street, Neills Creek Road, Old Coats Road, and Matthews Road.

This traffic data helps identify priority areas for road improvements, congestion management, and long-term growth planning. The map to the right presents existing traffic volumes on roadways within the study area of this plan.



Multi-Modal Transportation Facilities

The Transportation Facilities Map highlights an extensive system of shared-use paths (green dashed lines) from Harnett County's Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenway Plan. These paths extend beyond town limits to connect to smaller communities, recreation areas, and Campbell University. Within Lillington, sidewalks (orange lines) are concentrated in the gridded downtown core, where they support walkability and access to local businesses. However, gaps in the network remain, and additional amenities such as crosswalks and ADA-compliant curb ramps are needed to improve pedestrian safety and accessibility. New development standards require sidewalks on both sides of new and existing streets for all new residential and commercial developments.



Transportation Improvements

The Town has made a concerted effort to invest in substantial infrastructure improvements. Projects such as the NC 55 Bypass, the NC 210 widening and realignment, 10th St. Bypass, and the US 401 Bypass illustrate a coordinated approach at the regional level. Continued collaboration among local, county, and state officials will be essential to effectively address regional transportation challenges, particularly those related to highway capacity and mobility.

New subdivisions are required to include sidewalks, giving residents safe, modern pedestrian routes within their neighborhoods. The town has also benefited from developer-built shared-use paths along major road frontages. Although this system is still in its early stages and currently functions mostly for recreation, it is expected to expand over time, creating a continuous, paved, off-road network for cyclists, pedestrians, and other users—safely separated from vehicle traffic.

Railway

A north–south rail line runs along the east side of the downtown core and crosses the Cape Fear River just west of the highway crossing. It plays a key role in regional freight movement, though no passenger service is currently offered.

The rail network remains an important asset, and offers similar opportunities for the town’s northern and southern areas. Older industrial sites along the corridor present opportunities for redevelopment into new job centers, while some new industries rely on rail access for shipping and receiving of durable goods.



*Newly constructed paved sidepath
along Matthews Road*

Parks & Community Facilities

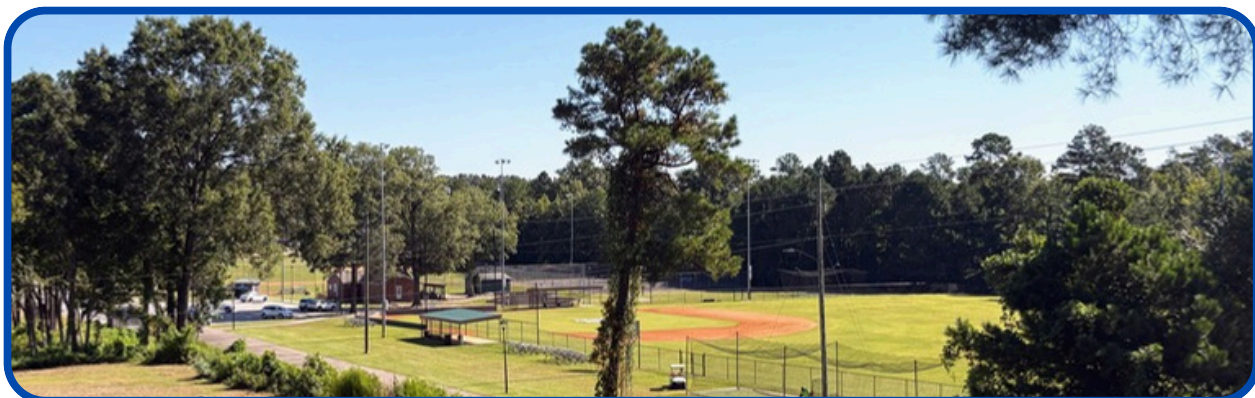
Parks & Recreation

Lillington has a variety of parks, open areas, and recreational spaces that enhance the town. These public spaces include neighborhood parks, riverfront parks, and community facilities that serve both residents and visitors. According to the map, Lillington's stand-out parks and recreational spaces include:

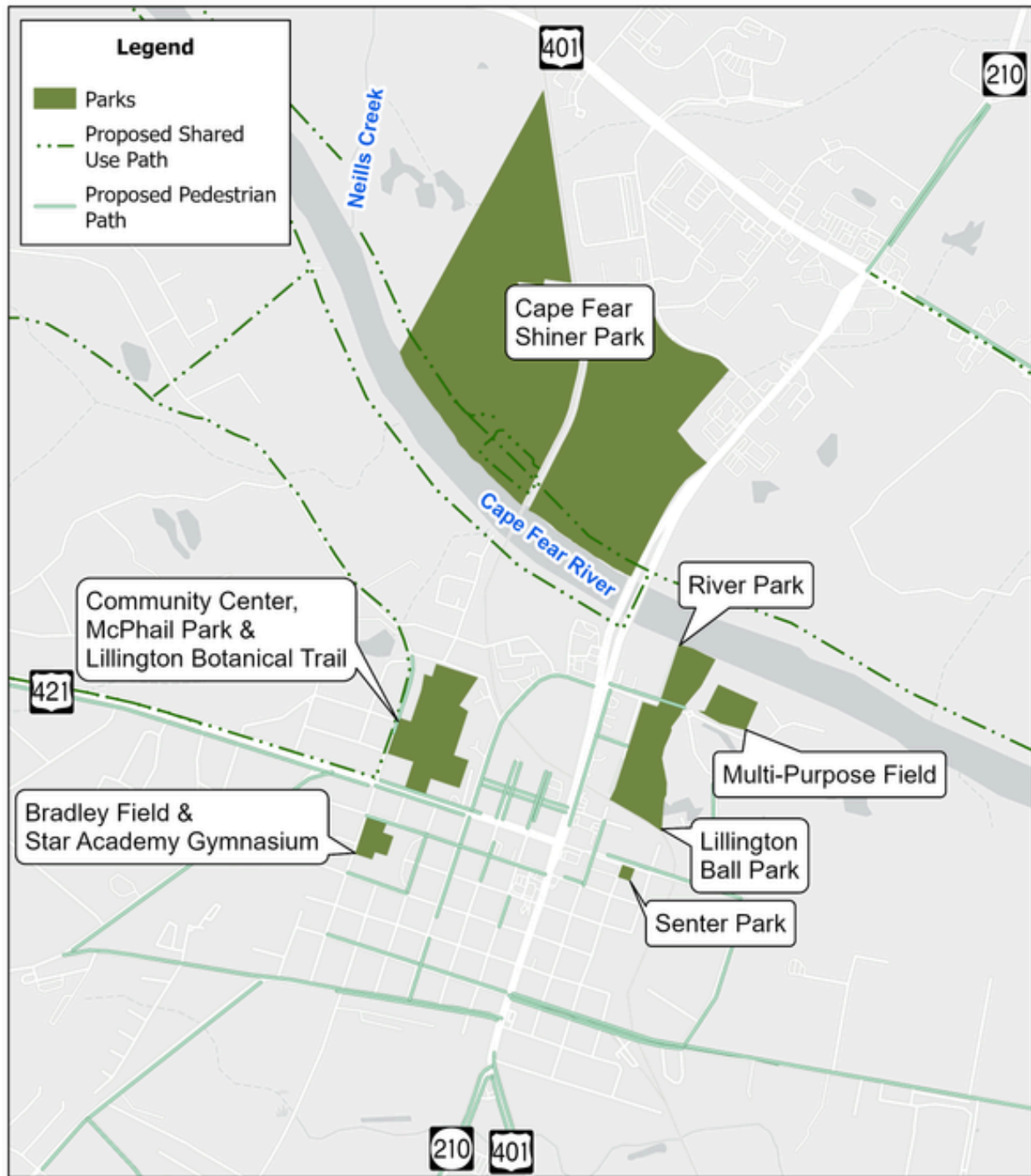
- **McPhail Park**, which features a zipline and innovative slide along with plenty of open space. **Lillington Botanical Trail**, is a mile long walking trail, that provides connections to the Lillington Community Center and McPhail Park.
- **Lillington River Park** includes an ADA accessible playground along with grassy open areas. There are also canoe launches to the Cape Fear River along with both an amphitheater and shelters both available for rental.
- **Cape Fear Shiner Park**, A Harnett County–owned park on the north side of the Cape Fear River—adjacent to Sandhills Farm Park—offers 3.25 miles of nature trails, a wildlife observation deck, athletic fields, and a canoe portage. Planned future phases will expand recreation uses and facilities.
- **Raven Rock State Park**, a North Carolina State Park located in Harnett County and less than 10 miles from the center of Lillington. This park offers bridle trails, hiking trails, and bike trails the park has amenities like picnic shelters, amphitheaters, auditoriums, classrooms, visitor center, exhibits, and even includes horse trailer parking.
- **Historic STAR Academy** is a community asset that hosts basketball and pickleball in the gym and football, junior league baseball and softball at Bradley Field.
- **Senter Park** is a small pocket park, on the edge of downtown, featuring a playground shaded by mature oak trees.



Youth playground at River Park



View of Lillington Ball Park at 405 South 1st Street



Map of Town and County parks focused on downtown Lillington

These parks and open spaces create a network of recreational activities and opportunities for town residents and visitors. Connections to the Cape Fear River enhances these spaces and offers access to water-based activities such as canoeing and rafting. It is important that future land is preserved to provide active parks and passive open space that are accessible for all to enjoy.

Community Facilities

Community facilities in Lillington include educational, healthcare, and public safety centers. Along with recreational and cultural amenities, these facilities are essential to supporting the health, safety, and overall welfare of the community. Lillington is home to several key community facilities that not only serve its residents but also provide resources to the broader region.

County Education

Lillington-Shawtown Elementary is the local elementary school serving Lillington. The district extends south beyond the study area, even as far as the Cumberland County line along US 401 South.

STAR Academy High, located within the 1915 Lillington High School building, functions as a non-traditional school focused on providing students with tailored support services aimed at preparing students for re-entry into the traditional school setting.



STAR Academy High (former Lillington High School)

Harnett Central Middle and High Schools are outside of town limit, yet just inside the northern boundary of the study area. These schools pull students from the northern end to the southern boundary of Harnett County and include the town of Angier and the rapidly expanding northwest area of Harnett County.

The Harnett County Resource Center & Library opened in 2021, serving as the main branch for Harnett County Library system. This central facility is located in the County Government complex near the main US 401 and US 421 intersection and serves a local and regional audience.

Higher Education

Central Carolina Community College's Harnett Campus has three locations within the study area. The Harnett Main Campus provides opportunities for university transfer, workforce development, and continuing education programs, supporting recent graduates while also enhancing and retooling the local workforce. The Harnett Health Sciences Center, located at the Brightwater Campus, offers continuing education and specialized training in health sciences to prepare students for employment in the medical field. The Harnett Adult Education Center, located alongside the Harnett County Government campus, supports the Bridge to Earning, Learning & Living Academy, providing adult learners with resources to expand skills and career opportunities.

East Carolina University's School of Dental Medicine operates a Community Service Learning Center in Lillington. This facility allows graduate-level dental students to complete clinical rotations while gaining experience with the specific healthcare needs of the region's population.

Campbell University has a significant impact on both Lillington and the surrounding region. In Fall 2024, the University enrolled approximately 5,000 students, with nearly half pursuing graduate or professional degrees. The University offers several unique academic programs, including Osteopathic Medicine, Physician Assistant/Public Health, Trust and Wealth Management, and Golf Management. Beyond academics, Campbell supports 21 men's and women's NCAA Division I athletic programs as a member of the Coastal Athletic Association. Its students, athletics, and facilities collectively represent an important economic and cultural asset for the region, as university events attract students, visitors, and investment from across the Southeast.

Downtown Lillington is approximately 5 miles from campus and the eastern edge of the project study area is walkable to the University's off-campus medical school complex and Keith Hills Golf Club. Students, faculty, and staff from Campbell University are a driving force of housing demand in Lillington. There is a stable and consistent need for rentals to serve a growing student population, while faculty and staff increasingly look to Lillington to satisfy both rent and buy housing closer to employment and amenities. Major university events like homecoming weekends, sporting events, and summer programs create opportunities throughout the year for Lillington to grow services, entertainment, and lodging to serve overnight visitors.



Campbell University



ECU School of Denistry

Healthcare

Cape Fear Valley Central Harnett Hospital provides health care for the town and region, attracting patients from Fuquay-Varina and western Harnett County. Requiring a large capital investment, community vision, and multiple partners the hospital opened in 2013.



Cape Fear Valley Health Pavilion

The 17,000-square- Cape Fear Valley Cancer Center opened in 2025 expanded the array of services provided. This brings cancer treatment to Lillington, previously not available anywhere in Harnett County. This presents opportunities to build partnerships with higher education institutions for education, research, and workforce development

Fire and Rescue Stations and Response Area

The study area includes coverage areas for three fire districts - Lillington Flatwoods Fire Department, Summerville Bunn Level Fire Department, and Buies Creek Fire & Rescue. Communication and coordination between these fire departments is important to create a positive relationship of mutual aid, which is beneficial for all departments. Lillington has two stations, the first is downtown on Main Street and the second on US 401 on the southern edge of the study area.

A third fire station, located north of the Cape Fear River, began construction in July 2025 and is projected to open in the summer of 2026. This will allow fire departments to maintain their response times throughout town limits, and into annexed properties that were previously covered by other fire districts. Summerville – Bunnlevel Fire & Rescue has a station on E. Harnett Street, just outside of downtown Lillington, in addition to a second station outside of the study area in the community of Bunnlevel. This will allow to maintain response times throughout town limits, even satellite annexations there were previously in other fire districts.

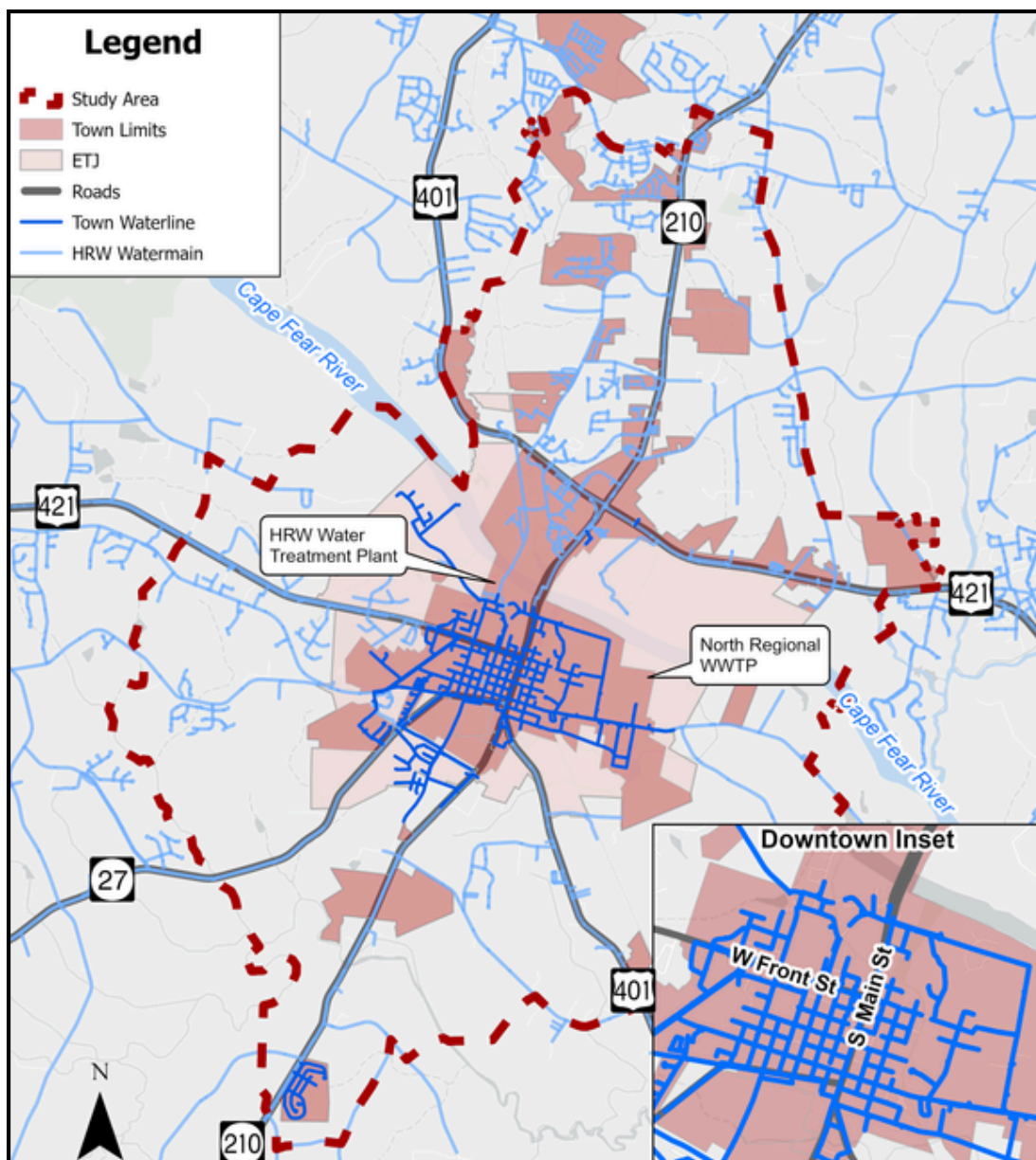


*Fire Station 3 under construction
(near NC 210 and Tripp Rd.)*

Utilities & Infrastructure

Lillington's utility infrastructure—comprising water, sewer, and stormwater systems—provides essential services to the town's residents, businesses, and institutions. These systems are most concentrated within the downtown core and along major corridors, including US 401, US 421, and NC 210.

The Town continues to make significant capital investments to expand water and sewer services throughout its jurisdiction. In addition, multiple stormwater improvement projects have been completed, are currently underway, or are advancing through the design phase. These efforts have been supported by a combination of grant funding and the Town's substantial financial commitment to enhancing its infrastructure systems.



Map of water utility infrastructure

Utility services in Lillington are provided jointly by the Town of Lillington and Harnett Regional Water (HRW). Coordination between the Town and HRW can support the efficient operation, maintenance, and expansion of utility services in each jurisdiction's service area.

Water and sewer infrastructure maintained by the Town is concentrated within the municipal limits south of the Cape Fear River. Beyond these areas, HRW provides service through an extensive network of water transmission mains and distribution lines serving outlying portions of the community and satellite residential developments. HRW's Water Treatment Plant, located between downtown and the south bank of the Cape Fear River, plays a central role in delivering water throughout the community. Similarly, the North Harnett Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant—also located within Lillington's town limits—provides regional wastewater treatment capacity. The Town is a capacity stakeholder in this facility and serves as a key partner in advancing the plant's capacity expansion from 7.5 MGD to 16.5 MGD.

The Town should continue to apply best engineering practices by upgrading aging infrastructure and replacing utility lines where maintenance needs are identified. Expansion of water and sewer service into new growth areas must be approached strategically. Decisions should be guided by cost-benefit analysis and coordinated with the Town's comprehensive land use and transportation plans to ensure orderly, fiscally responsible development.



Town of Lillington ground-level water tank

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

