

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Building an economically resilient community through job creation, business attraction, and diversification of the local economy is essential to sustaining a stable and growing tax base for the Town of Lillington. This remains a key priority for the town as it continues to grow.

Economic opportunities, including employment and access to services and retail, are vital to residents and the long-term sustainability of the Town's tax base. In order to maintain a high quality of life in Lillington, residential growth needs to be off set with non-residential development at key locations.

Many professionals living in Lillington travel elsewhere to work. Partnering with organizations dedicated to bringing economic opportunities and workforce development to the region, will become crucial as available real estate for large scale developments become scarce and employment trends towards high-tech and medical services continue to increase.

Planning for the land use and programmatic needs of growing a more diverse and robust economic environment will help ensure a resilient Lillington in the future.

Regional Economic Context & Partnerships

Lillington's economy functions within a broader regional system. Strategic coordination with county, regional, and institutional partners is essential to successful economic development.

Regional Role

As the county seat of Lillington, the Town serves as a center for government services, civic activity, and professional employment. Its location provides access to regional employment centers while offering a more affordable and small-town alternative for residents and businesses.

Key Economic Development Partners

- **Harnett County:** Provides countywide economic development, infrastructure planning, workforce initiatives, and industrial site development.
- **Harnett County Economic Development:** Leads business recruitment, retention, and expansion (BRE) efforts and markets the county to targeted industries.

- **Central Carolina Community College:** Serves as a critical workforce development partner, offering customized training, certifications, and continuing education aligned with employer needs.
- **Regional Economic Markets:** Proximity to the Triangle and Fayetteville regions allows Lillington to capture population growth, supplier industries, remote workers, and service-sector businesses.

Comprehensive Land Use Plan Implications



- Economic development success depends on alignment between Town land use policy and county recruitment strategies.
- Regional partnerships increase competitiveness for grants, infrastructure funding, and workforce programs.
- Lillington is well-positioned to attract small- and mid-scale employers seeking lower costs and strong quality-of-life amenities.

Economic Base & Business Environment

Existing Economic Conditions

Lillington's economy is primarily service-oriented, supported by:

- Government and public services.
- Healthcare and education.
- Retail and personal services.
- Small professional offices and local businesses.

Residential growth has been a significant economic driver, increasing demand for services, retail, and community amenities.

However, employment growth has not kept pace with population growth, resulting in a job-housing imbalance.

Business Environment Characteristics

- Strong small business presence.
- Limited supply of modern commercial and flex space.
- Opportunity for downtown and neighborhood commercial revitalization.
- Growing demand for healthcare and professional services.

Residential Market Conditions

Lillington continues to experience steady residential growth driven by affordability, quality of life, and access to regional employment centers.

- Strong demand for single-family homes and townhomes
- Growing interest in master-planned communities
- Increasing need for workforce and moderate-income housing
- Emerging opportunity for senior and age-friendly housing

Residential growth is a primary driver of local spending and service demand, but must be balanced with employment and commercial development to reduce commuter outflow.

Commercial & Employment Land

Retail & Service Commercial: Demand is rising for neighborhood-scale retail, restaurants, healthcare services, and personal services tied to population growth.

Office & Professional Space: Opportunities exist for medical offices, government-related services, and small professional firms, particularly near downtown and healthcare facilities.

Industrial & Flex Space: Limited supply of shovel-ready sites within town limits suggests a need for:

- Light industrial
- Small logistics
- Contractor and service-oriented flex buildings

The chart below indicates that there is limited available product inventory and low vacancies for retail, office & industrial uses which indicates demand and opportunity to expand in these areas where feasible.

Inventory 5-mile radius	Retail	Office	Industrial
Buildings	96	35	13
Existing S.F.	755,899	118,499	810,313
Available S.F.	1,342	3,344	0
Vacancy Rate	0.20%	2.80%	0%

Source: CoStar May 2025



Comprehensive Land Use Plan Implications

- Preserve and plan sites for future employment uses, not just housing.
- Encourage mixed-use and higher-intensity development in appropriate areas.
- Ensure zoning flexibility to accommodate evolving business models.
- Coordinate utility and transportation investments with priority growth areas.

Economy, Business & Workforce Issues & Opportunities

Key Economic Challenges



Job–Housing Imbalance: Residential growth has outpaced job creation.



Income Constraints: Lower per-capita incomes limit retail depth and spending capture.



Limited Commercial Inventory: Shortage of modern commercial and flex space.



Infrastructure Readiness: Broadband, transportation, and utilities must keep pace with growth.

Key Economic & Business Opportunities

Target Industry Opportunities

- Healthcare and medical services
- Light manufacturing and assembly
- Construction and building trades support
- Logistics and service-based distribution
- Professional and small office-based firms

Small Business & Entrepreneurship

- Downtown and neighborhood commercial districts are well-suited for:
 - Local retail and restaurants
 - Service businesses
 - Professional offices
- Opportunities for:
 - Business façade improvements
 - Startup assistance
 - Business retention programs focused on existing employers.

Retail & Services

- Leakage of retail spending suggests opportunities to:
 - Recruit mid-scale grocery, dining, and service businesses
 - Strengthen Lillington as a convenience and services hub for surrounding rural areas.

Labor Market & Workforce

Workforce Profile

Lillington's workforce is characterized by:

- Skills in healthcare, education, manufacturing, skilled trades, and service industries
- A growing labor force supported by regional population growth
- High levels of workforce participation, but significant commuting out of town

Employment & Commuting Patterns

A substantial share of residents commute outside the Town and county for employment. This workforce outflow indicates:

- Mismatch between local job availability and resident skills
- Wage differentials favoring regional employment centers
- Opportunity to attract employers aligned with the existing workforce

Workforce Development Assets

- Strong regional training infrastructure
- Availability of continuing education and certification programs
- Willingness among employers to partner on training when programs are aligned with business needs

Key Indicator:



Lillington has a low unemployment rate, and the majority of residents are employed in white collar jobs within the study area. The largest percentage of the population in the study area includes those age 18-64, the town's workforce. Campbell University brings university students, and the educational attainment of its residents for bachelor's degrees is above the Harnett County average, though lower than the broader Triangle region, suggesting that most graduates leave the community.

Conclusion

While many factors will influence Lillington's future economy, the analysis conducted as part of this plan identified three key elements that will be especially important in shaping long-term growth and opportunity.

Attraction & Business Expansion



- The primary land uses in support of workforce development & job growth include industrial and office developments.
- For office, this includes healthcare and the areas around the Central Harnett Hospital.
- For industrial, the development at 1425 US 401 South, which includes a Duke Energy certified site (Byrd Tract), making it competitive for attracting a variety of users.
- Harnett Regional Jetport is making significant contributions to the local and state economy, highlighting the critical role of aviation in driving growth

Small Business & Entrepreneurship (SBE)



- Small Business is supported by membership in the Lillington Area Chamber of Commerce
- Small Business support is also provided by the Central Carolina Community College
- North Carolina Small Business Centers (SBC) help small and mid-sized businesses increase sales, create jobs, and access capital. Regional offices are located throughout the state and affiliated with Central Carolina Community College.
- The downtown would be the greatest beneficiary of an SBE strategy.

Tourism

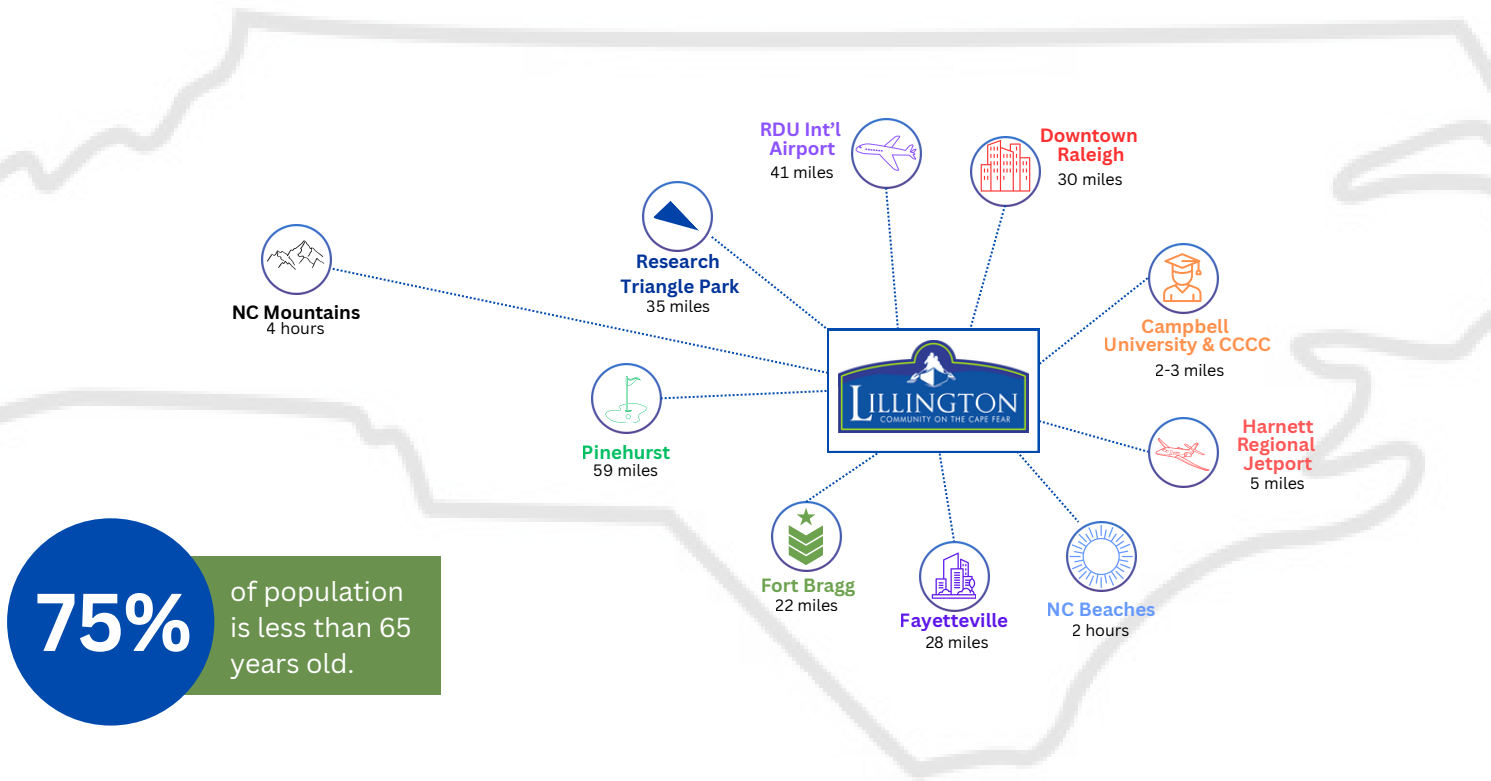


- Capitalize on the abundant recreational opportunities in the region that support tourism. This includes places to experience, things to do such as events, and opportunities for unique shopping & dining.
- Campbell University, expanding regional recreation opportunities and businesses utilizing the Harnett Regional Jetport create demand opportunities to expand hospitality such as hotels, inns and restaurants.

Community Snapshot

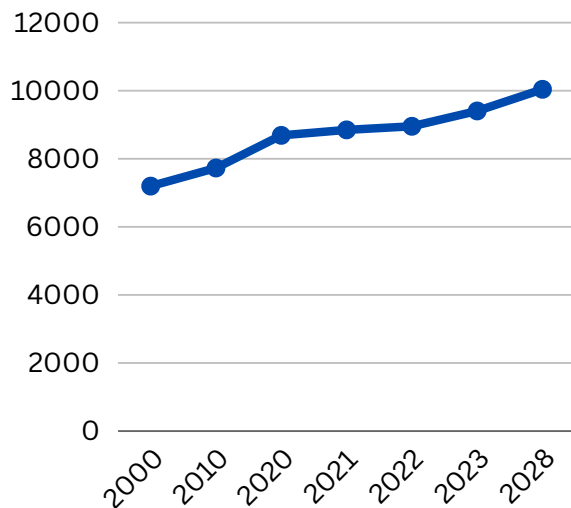
Location

Lillington is located in the heart of Harnett County and serves as the county seat. Its proximity to the Research Triangle Park, Raleigh, Fayetteville, Fort Bragg, access to recreational destinations, and major transportation corridors such as I-95 and I-40 makes it an ideal location for companies to invest and thrive.

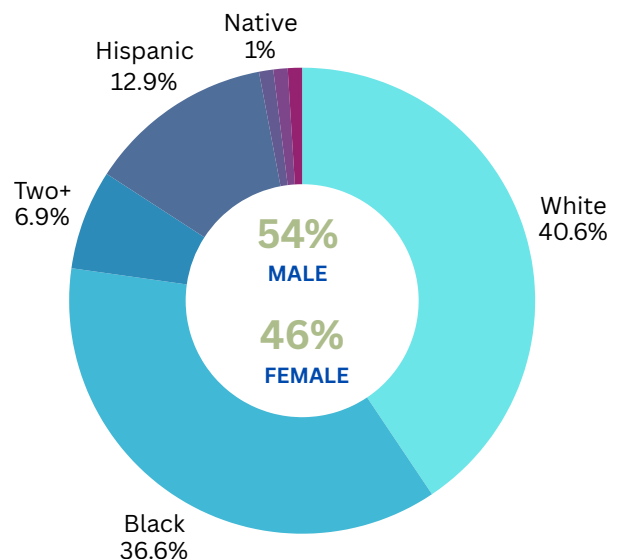


Population Characteristics (SA = Study Area Estimates)

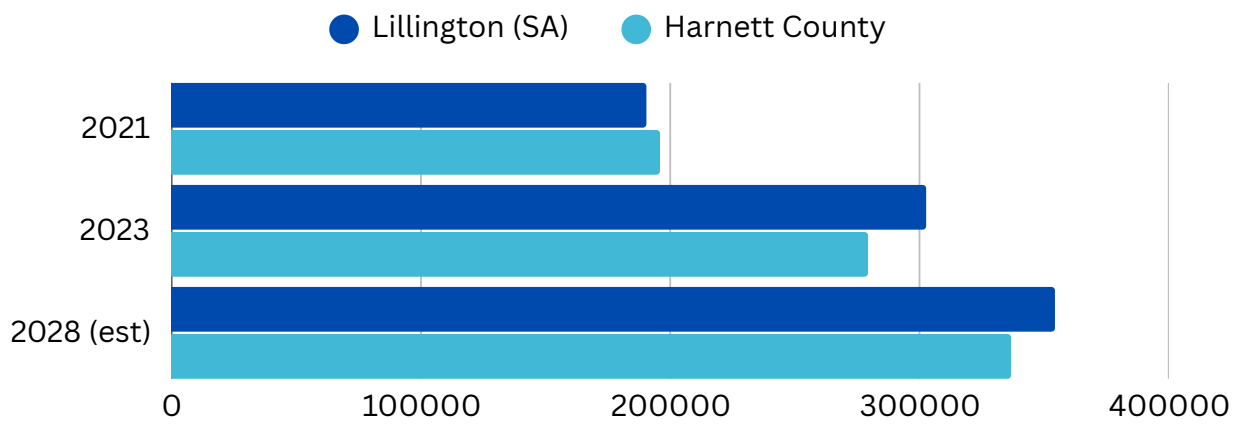
Population Growth



Gender & Ethnicity

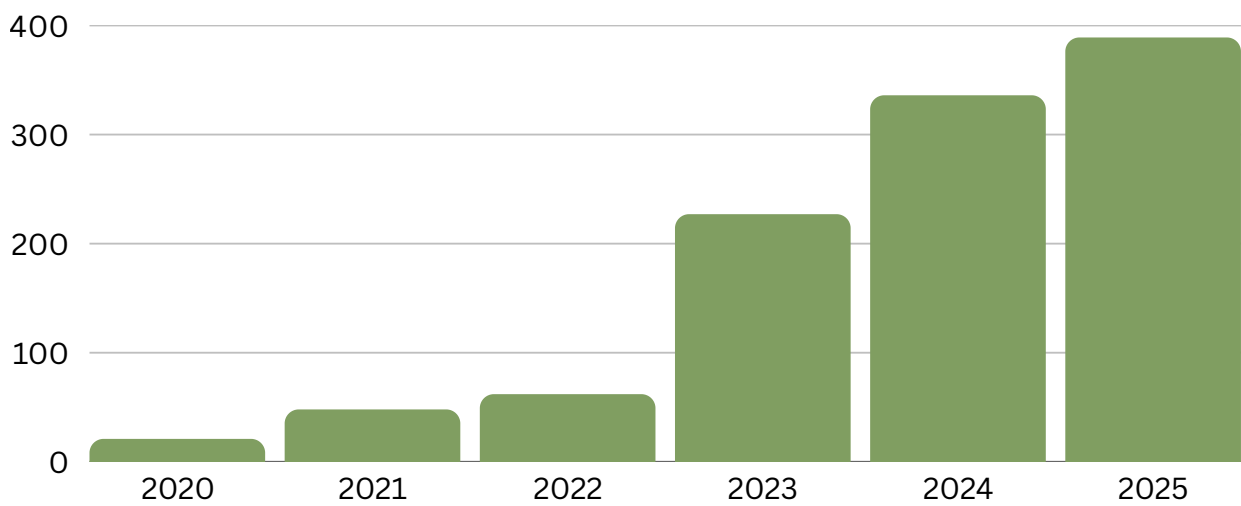


Median Home Value



Development Activity

Single-Family Dwelling Building Permits Issued by the Town of Lillington (since 2020):



Education

Lillington is part of the Harnett County School System which includes:



28 schools



+21,000 student

State & Local Taxes

4.25%
Personal
Income Tax

2.25%
Corporate
Income Tax

7%
Sales
Tax

In addition to K-12 education, Lillington is within close proximity to major higher education institutions in the Triangle, including [NC State University](#), [Duke University](#), and the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#). The town is also very near [Campbell University](#) and [Central Carolina Community College](#), as well as [East Carolina University's](#) School of Dental Medicine, providing residents and employers access to a broad range of educational, research, and workforce development opportunities.

Transportation



Lillington is located approximately 5 miles from the Harnett Regional Jetport and 41 miles from RDU International Airport. RDU International Airport provides +400 flights on 17 major airlines to 57 non-stop destinations and 14 international destinations in 11 countries daily.



The primary active freight railroad serving Lillington today is Norfolk Southern (NS). It operates freight service on the line that passes through Lillington and connects to larger regional routes, including service toward Raleigh.



Lillington is part of the Harnett Area Rural Transit System (HARTS) which provides transportation for the Harnett community serving the public for education, employment, medical and personal trips.

Top 4 Industry Sectors By Employment



29.5%

Educational services,
and health care



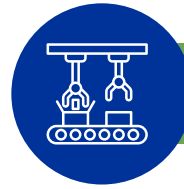
22.2%

Government (Local,
state or federal),



11.4%

Professional, scientific,
administrative and
waste management.



10.2%

Manufacturing

Commuter Flow

The graphic below displays the commuter flows in, within, and out of Harnett County every day:



VISION & GOALS

