

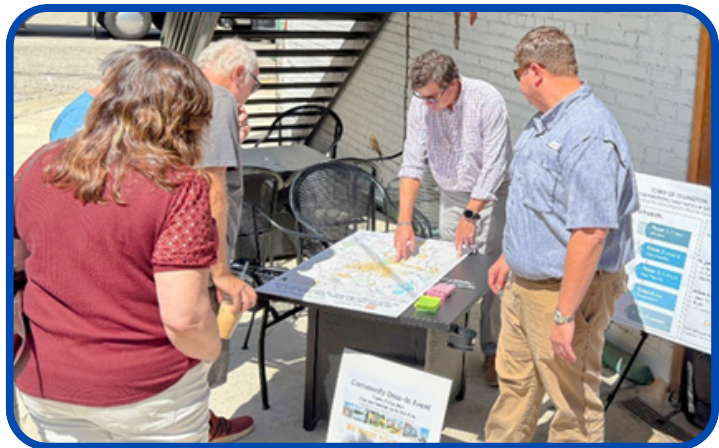
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Community input served as the cornerstone for developing the new Comprehensive Land Use Plan, with residents actively sharing their priorities, concerns, and aspirations. Outreach efforts included promotions through the Town's social media channels, official website, and flyers distributed at Town Hall. To broaden awareness of the planning process and encourage participation in the public survey and engagement events, the Town of Lillington partnered with KCI to host an informational booth at Cape Fear Fest and a pop-up event at a downtown coffee shop.

Community engagement activities included:

- Stakeholder Interviews
- Cape Fear Fest
- Coffee Shop Drop In
- Public Workshop No. 1
- Virtual Public Workshop
- Public Workshop No. 2



Public engagement event held in downtown Lillington.

Steering Committee

A panel of community leaders was established to guide the overall process, offering strategic advice, local insight, and expertise on key elements of the plan. The committee brings together representatives from Harnett County Planning Services, NCDOT, small business owners, and Lillington's staff and elected officials.

The committee helps to promote opportunities for engagement from Town residents and analyzes feedback to ensure accuracy. Over the course of the project, the committee met five times to provide insight into various phases of project plan development.

Stakeholder Interviews

On April 16, 2025 the KCI consultant team conducted interviews with key stakeholders that had been identified by town staff. This included discussions with individuals with expertise in the following six groups:

- Downtown Businesses & Major Employers
- Outdoor Tourism & Parks & Recreation
- Public Safety, Institutional & Education
- Civic Clubs, Churches & Community Groups
- Utilities, Infrastructure & Transportation
- Developers, Builders & Engineers

Stakeholders describe Lillington as a welcoming small town with a strong sense of community, deep agricultural roots, and a beautiful town centered around the Cape Fear River. They want to see improvements in community developments which are seen as essential to maintaining Lillington's charm. It was communicated that many residents see the potential that new growth brings but are concerned with increasing traffic, lack of infrastructure, and limited commercial spaces. There is also the desire to ensure that Lillington does not lose its small-town charm and lose its identity as it grows and develops further. Downtown revitalization and transportation are key priorities stakeholders listed within their responses. They spoke about the growing traffic congestion, the need for more sidewalks and greenways, and improving the connections to the Cape Fear River. More gathering spaces, retail, and commercial spaces were another priority mentioned along with updating the facade and overall downtown area of Lillington. The graphic below summarizes key themes from the stakeholder interviews.



In-person & Virtual Workshops

The initial public engagement meeting was held on June 4th, 2025, at the Harnett County Public Library. A total of 20 community members attended the workshop. Following a sign-in area, attendees were invited to visit six informational stations set up throughout the venue. At each station, a member of the KCI planning team or Lillington Town staff was present to answer questions, engage with attendees, and discuss any concerns.

A virtual engagement meeting was offered to provide a time-efficient solution for those unable to physically attend the in-person workshop. This meeting was designed to mimic the stations of the in-person meeting and allow participants to interact and respond to questions and voice their preferences.



Public engagement open house held at Harnett County Public Library in June 2025.



Public engagement open house held at Town Hall in January 2026.

A second in-person public engagement meeting was held on January 14, 2026 at Town Hall. Community members were invited to provide feedback on the draft plan components. The event featured display boards showcasing the plan's progress and a presentation that outlined the draft goals, character areas, and the proposed future land use map.

Following the presentation, the project team facilitated an interactive discussion and responded to questions and comments from attendees. There were specific questions about how the plan would impact local schools, small town character, and town services.

Public Survey Summary

On the project website visitors were encouraged to fill out a 16-question public survey. The survey sought feedback on residential, commercial, transportation facilities, connecting the town, and taking advantage of nearby institutions.

There was also an interactive map where respondents could identify the locations where they saw issues, concerns, or opportunities. Out of the 330 unique user visits to the website, 64 responded to the survey, 31 gave map comments and 102 project documents were downloaded. The public input from these methods helped to shape the vision and goals of the plan.

The survey responses revealed that most participants live within town limits or the ETJ, yet many shop outside of Harnett County. While residents frequently visit downtown restaurants and festivals, they would like more dining options, parks, and shopping. Key themes from the survey results are listed below and detailed results are available in the appendix of this document.



Downtown revitalization is highly desired.



Improved traffic and safety at intersections.



New & improved commercial development is important.



Provide more sidewalks & greenway trails.



Renovation and revitalization of existing neighborhoods is a priority.

Planning Board & Town Commissioners

Updates on the community engagement process and plan vision and goals were provided to the Planning Board and Town Commissioners throughout the planning process. In January of 2026 elected and appointed boards were provided more focused information on real estate demand and market analysis. The boards were asked to provide input on specific action items in the implementation recommendations and comment on the draft Future Land Use Map. Public hearings were attended during meetings with the aim of plan adoption.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

The planning process gathered public input from across the community to help draft a shared vision statement - a description of the desired future that Lillington aims to achieve. Through the visioning process, residents identified core community values, emerging trends, and challenges that must be addressed. Discussions about opportunities further helped define the community's preferred future and the direction citizens would like Lillington to take.

This section outlines the challenges, opportunities, and vision statement shaped by public engagement. The plan goals that follow provide broad strategies to achieve the vision and address identified challenges.

Challenges:

Traffic Congestion

- Multiple choke points were identified, particularly: Front St. & Main St., McKinney Parkway near shopping areas, the McDonald's intersection and near S 8th St.
- Access management concerns include: too many driveways along key roads, lack of turn lanes, and inefficient signal timing.
- Traffic concentrated at river crossing, (one of two crossings in Harnett County).



Traffic in downtown Lillington (facing W. Front St.)

Parking

- Parking is limited downtown, and wayfinding signage is unclear or missing.
- On-street parking in newer neighborhoods is beginning to cause safety concerns.

Functioning as a bedroom community

- Residents leave Harnett County for shopping and entertainment.
- More local job opportunities are needed, especially industrial.
- New residents are not connected to Lillington socially.

Downtown

- Divided by U.S. 421, it is difficult to walk around.
- The appearance of many buildings is unattractive and dated; storefronts not properly maintained.
- Food and beverage options are lacking in number and availability.

Existing business inventory is limited

- Retail and office are limited with industrial having no available inventory.
- Historical buildings have been lost, underutilized, or not properly maintained.

Cape Fear divides the community

- The proposal for a bypass road and a second river crossing are viewed as long-term solutions to keep traffic moving and improve safety.
- There is continued perception of competition between north and south sides of the river, and a zero sum mentality exists.



NC 401/421 Bridge over Cape Fear River.

Opportunities:

Branding & Identity

- Town gateways could feature custom signage and landscape treatments.
- Street signs and banners could incorporate a local logo or theme.
- Distinct visual identity for downtown and corporate limits.
- The Town should market the river, greenways, and healthy lifestyle – ties to sense of community and branding.

Outdoor Promotion

- Trails and greenways are wanted to connect Cape Fear River, parks, and downtown.
- Natural beauty and outdoor recreation.
- New residents more likely to adventure on the river.
- Riverfront could accommodate more dining options.



Greenway trail in Lillington.