



Town of Lillington

Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Adopted: Month, Day, Year



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Richie Hines

TOWN STAFF

Joseph Jeffries
Alicia Adams
Shane Cummings
Landon Chandler
Jillian Brookshire

PROJECT CONSULTANTS

KCI Associates of North Carolina
Rose Associates

THANKS TO THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED

We extend our sincere appreciation to everyone who participated in the planning process for the Lillington Comprehensive Land Use Plan. This Plan was made possible through the valuable contributions and insights of residents, business owners, property owners, developers, and representatives from a wide range of groups and organizations. Your engagement has been instrumental in shaping a shared vision for Lillington's future.



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PLAN CONTENT

GUIDING FRAMEWORK

The Town of Lillington is a thriving community in the heart of Harnett County, North Carolina. Incorporated in 1903, it serves as the county seat and is strategically located between the Raleigh and Fayetteville metropolitan areas. Lillington is supported by a robust health care network that serves as a significant employment base and enhances the overall well-being of residents. Similarly, parks, greenways, and Raven Rock State Park promote active lifestyles and community connections. Nearby Campbell University is an important institution that serves as an anchor for education, employment and cultural enrichment. Lillington's small-town charm, high quality of life, and scenic natural areas along the Cape Fear River make it a desirable place to live.

In March 2025, the Town launched an update to the Lillington Comprehensive Land Use Plan to address this growth, be in conformance with NCGS 160D, and ensure that future development supports a thriving community with a high quality of life.

The planning process included a detailed analysis of existing conditions and robust community engagement to identify key opportunities and challenges. These efforts informed the plan's vision, goals, and actionable recommendations. The result is a blueprint for how Lillington should grow and develop over the next 10 to 20 years, ensuring the town remains a vibrant and connected community for current and future residents.

PLAN PROCESS

A well-designed, comprehensive land use plan strikes a balance between data, analysis, market demand, and community input. This plan builds upon the foundation of the 2015 Land Use Plan through a planning process that combined an understanding of existing conditions with meaningful community engagement. These elements helped establish guiding principles that shaped the plan's direction. This foundational work set the stage for an updated land use strategy, supported by clear objectives and actionable strategies to help the Town "Bridge the Cape."



HOW THE TOWN WILL USE THIS PLAN

This plan should be used as a guide for Town staff and elected officials to advise future land use decisions. The Plan should be used in the following ways:

- **Town Staff** - To align departmental policies, inform financial decisions, and incrementally implement the community's vision related to development, resiliency, and growth.
- **Elected Officials** - To guide decisions about growth and development, while enabling staff and elected officials to consider economic conditions and community preferences.
- **Boards & Committees** - To promote the community's vision and ensure consistency across the town as decisions are made.



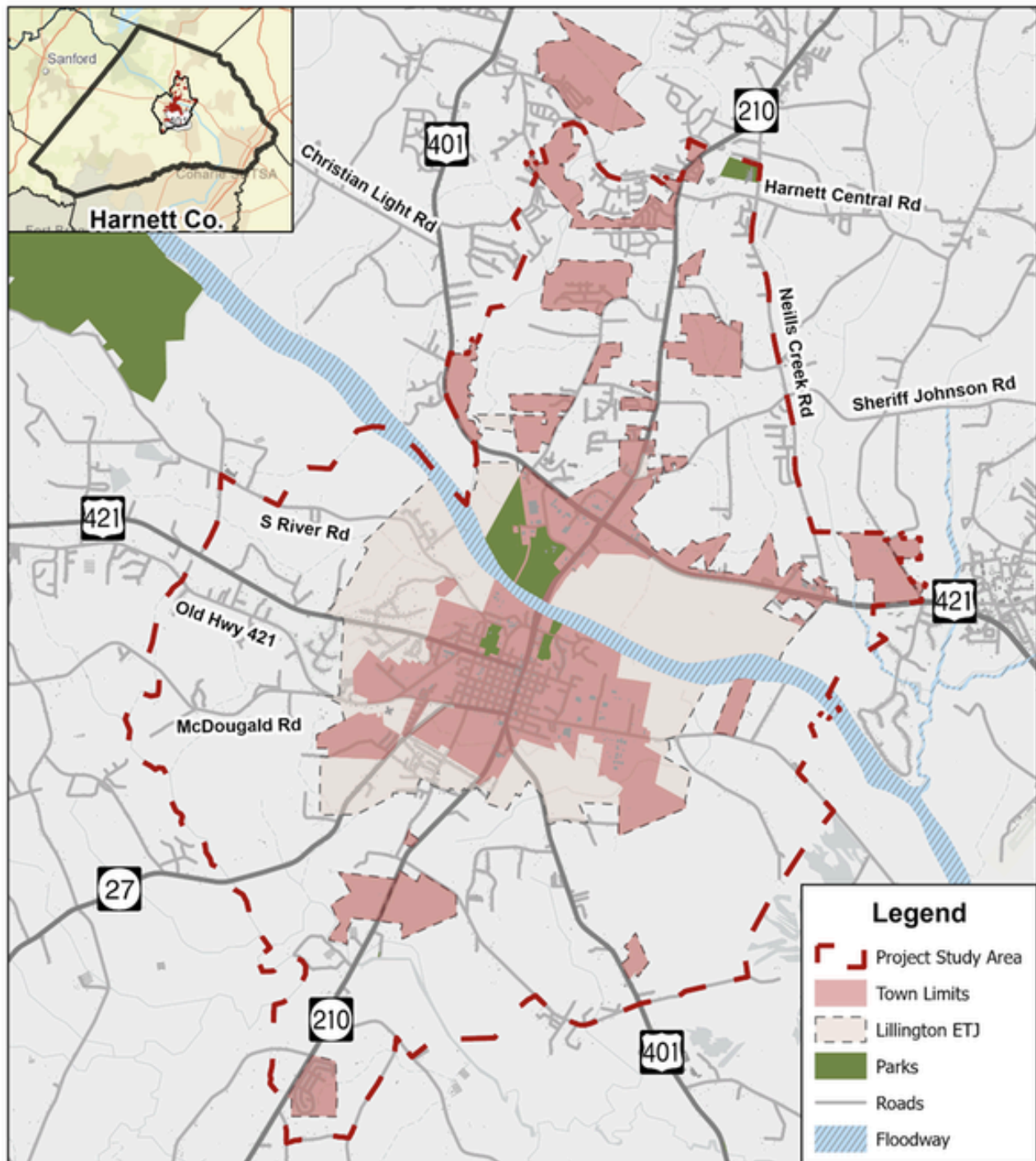
HOW OTHERS WILL USE THIS PLAN

This plan is intended to serve a wide range of groups with diverse interests in the community. It can be used in the following ways:

- **Residents** – To gain insight into the future vision for growth, development, and resiliency, and to see how supportive policies can enhance the overall quality of life.
- **Businesses** – To understand where the Town intends to focus growth and investment, and to identify areas where more concentrated development is anticipated.
- **Community Leaders** – To guide ongoing efforts that support shared community goals and priorities.
- **Regional Partners** – To coordinate cross-jurisdictional recommendations and policy strategies for more effective regional collaboration.
- **Quality of Life** – To provide a higher quality of life for residents in and around Lillington.

STUDY AREA

The study area encompasses Lillington's town limits, Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ), and designated growth areas to ensure a comprehensive approach to future planning. The town is collaborating with Harnett County Officials to establish an Urban Service Area (USA). This proposed area has been used as the northern boundary of the study area to maintain consistency.



HISTORY

Harnett County was formed from Cumberland County in 1855, and Lillington was named as the County seat shortly after. Construction on a courthouse began and was completed in 1897. In a region dominated by subsistence farms, Lillington became a hub for local government and business services for surrounding rural populations. This early history cemented Lillington's role as a regional service center.

In the early 20th Century, the railroad era brought multiple rail lines and depots to Lillington. The Atlantic and Western Railroad extended eastward from Sanford to Lillington, where a connection with the original Norfolk Southern Railway was made. Gridded streets were laid out south of the Cape Fear River.

Small businesses serving the surrounding population steadily grew and added to the downtown core. These included drug stores, barbershops, hardware, and grocery stores, traditional to early towns.

Today, Lillington is characterized by an up-and-coming downtown area surrounded by redevelopment opportunities and new residential subdivisions. Local and regional institutions like Campbell University, Raven Rock State Park, Harnett Regional Jetport, Central Carolina Community College, and the Cape Fear Valley Health - Central Harnett Hospital continue to expand and thrive, leading to enhanced quality of life benefits for current and future residents.

The town offers a unique mix of these quality-of-life factors and convenient access to regional metropolitan areas. The Town is investing in large-scale transportation improvements aimed at enhancing connections between residents and key local and regional employment and commercial centers, including the NC 55 bypass, NC 401 bypass and NC 210 widening and realignment.



REGIONAL SETTING

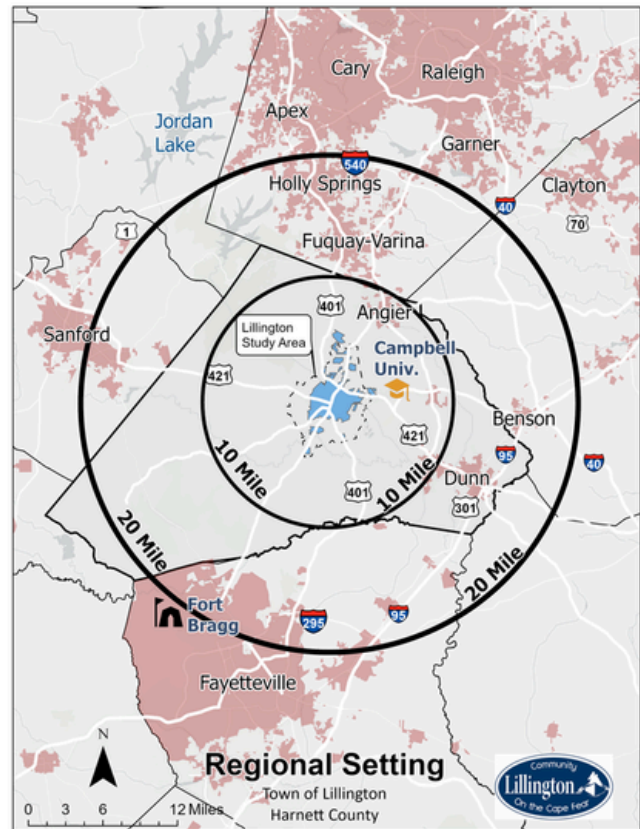
Lillington sits on the edge of the rapidly expanding Research Triangle region and is often described as being halfway between Raleigh and Fayetteville. Its central location provides convenient access to employment centers in southern Wake County, and recent completions of the southern loop of Interstate 540—along with the continued expansion of Phase 2—will further enhance regional connectivity.

According to the Greater Fayetteville Business Journal, Fort Bragg has a total direct and indirect economic impact to the Cape Fear Region of \$8.3 billion. Opportunities for employment, federal contracts, and innovation technology add to the Lillington's strategic importance.

As the county seat, Lillington is centrally located within Harnett County—one of the fastest-growing counties in North Carolina. The county's population has grown to 146,096, representing an increase of 27.4% since 2010.

Lillington benefits from strong regional connections via U.S. Highways 401, 421, and N.C. 210. Interstate 95 is just 16 miles away and can be accessed through Dunn via U.S. 421.

Additionally, the town lies within the Middle Basin of the Cape Fear River, which flows through Lillington on its way to Fayetteville and Wilmington.



LILLINGTON'S REGIONAL ASSETS



Campbell University, ECU School of Dental Medicine & Central Carolina Community College



Cape Fear Valley Health - Central Harnett Hospital



Cape Fear River, Raven Rock State Park, Golf Courses, Greenway Trails & Town Parks



Harnett Regional Jetport



Fort Bragg

PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

At the beginning of the comprehensive land use plan update process, an assessment was conducted of existing plans and policies already in use. The key documents summarized below helped shape this plan and will continue to guide future planning decisions. These documents include:

Town of Lillington

- Land Use Plan
- Downtown Master Plan
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
- Unified Development Ordinance (UDO)
- Lillington Comprehensive Transportation Plan & Addendum

Harnett County

- Harnett County Comprehensive Land Use Plan
- NCDOT/Harnett County Transportation Plan
- Harnett County Bicycle, Pedestrian & Greenway Master Plan
- Harnett County Parks & Recreation Master Plan

Land Use Plan 2015

Adopted in 2015, Lillington's Land Use Plan guides growth and development through a vision statement, goals, and strategies shaped by public input. The Future Land Use Map (updated in 2019) outlines desired development patterns that support housing, commercial, industrial, and public uses, improve walkability, and balance growth across the Cape Fear River. The plan includes targeted recommendations for areas like Main Street, the Medical District, and the East Cornelius Harnett Blvd. area.



Highlights of this plan include creating complete, walkable streets, expanding greenways and public space, preserving historic buildings, and improving development standards and utility coordination. An action plan outlines the strategies, assigns responsible parties, identifies funding sources, and establishes timelines to implement the plan. Since 2015, growth has accelerated, and the plan needs to reflect:

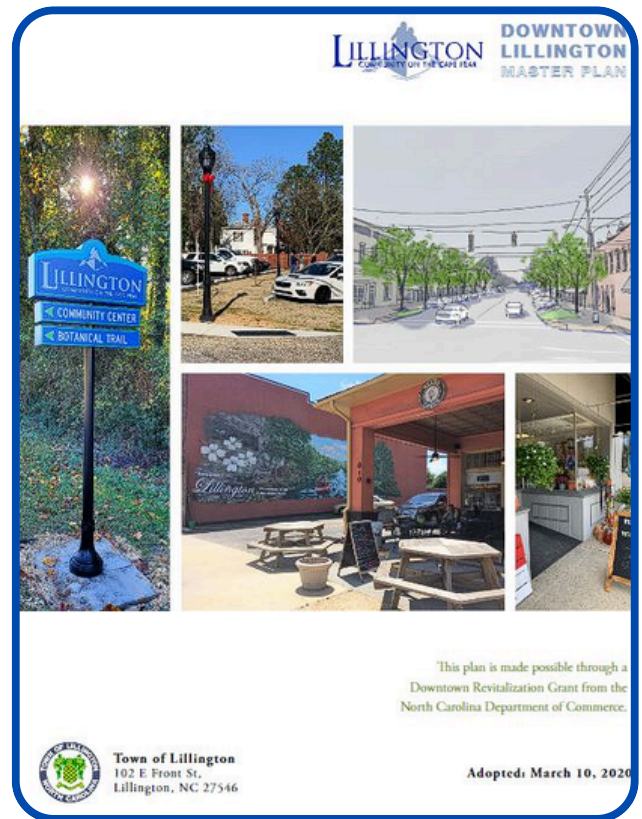
- A clearer future vision beyond existing land uses.
- Simpler, more flexible character areas.
- Expansion to include new growth areas and annexed developments, in areas beyond the town's ETJ.
- Expanded development options aimed at preserving the character of the town and human and natural resources.

Downtown Master Plan

The Town adopted the Downtown Lillington Master Plan in 2020 to establish a long-term vision for revitalizing the downtown core. The plan begins with an overview of existing conditions and outlines strategies to enhance connections, streetscapes, buildings, and key destinations.

A boundary map illustrates links to local and regional assets. Goals are supported by policy recommendations organized under five key themes: development form, economic development, alley revitalization, parking management, and outdoor gathering spaces.

Recommendations to make downtown more vibrant and inviting include improving pedestrian safety, enhancing sidewalks and crosswalks, adding wayfinding signage, and upgrading landscaping and lighting.

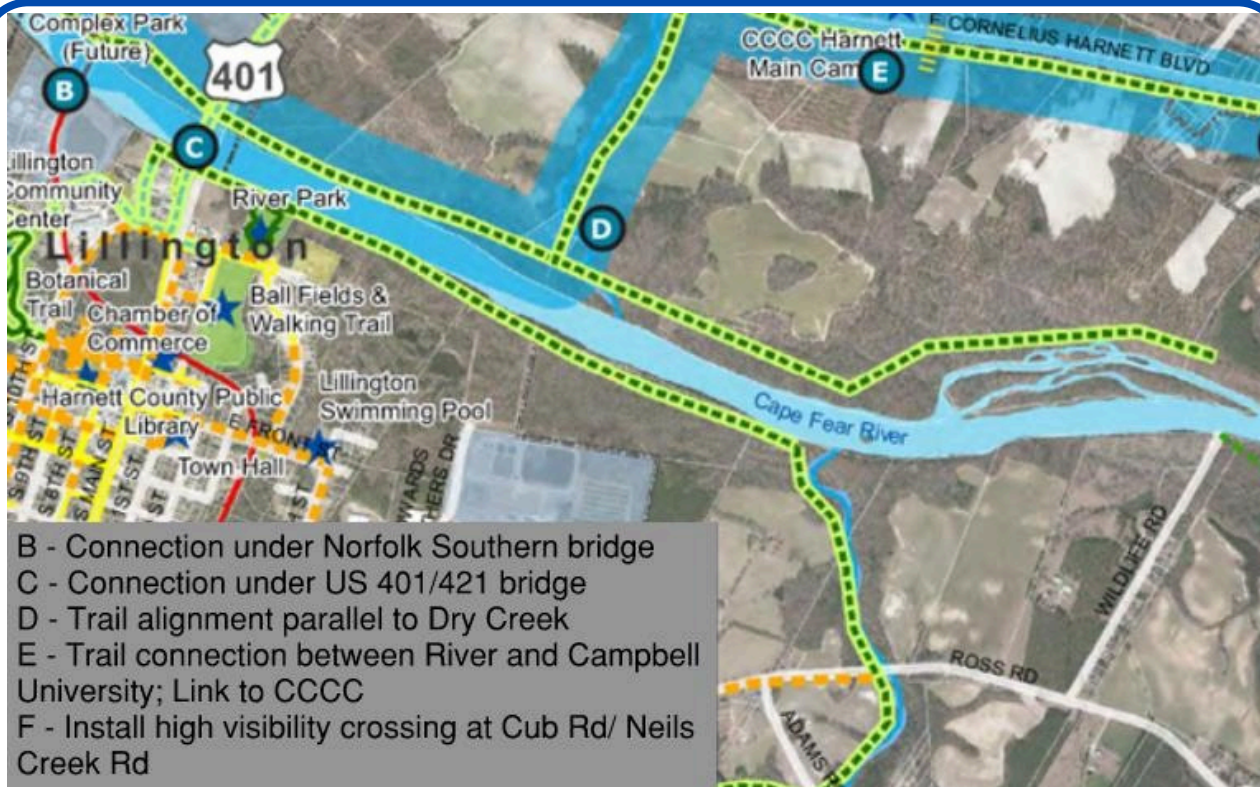
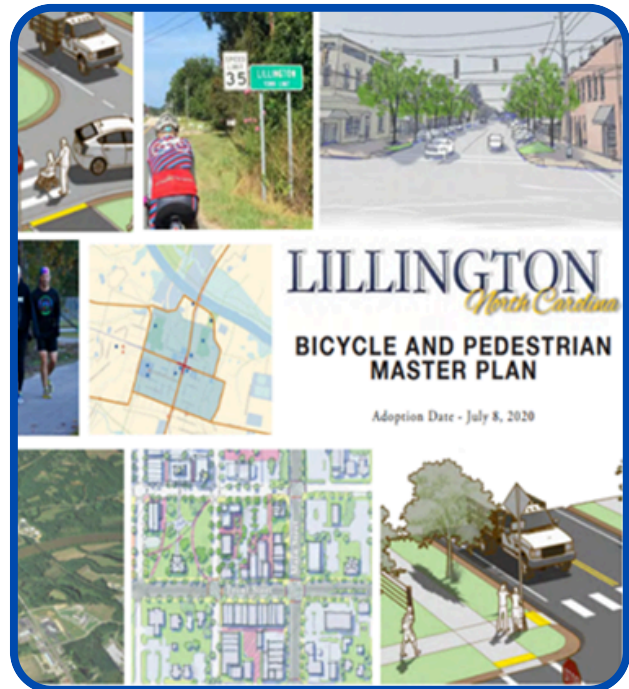


Significant investments have been made in recent years to revitalize the Town's downtown area, including the construction of the S. 8th Street & W. Ivey Street parking lot and planned streetscape improvements along W. Harnett Street, S. 8th Street, and W. Front Street.

Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan

Lillington adopted a Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan in 2020 that was funded by a grant from the N.C. Department of Transportation's Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation (DBPT). The plan assesses existing sidewalk and trail infrastructure and identifies opportunities to enhance bicycle and pedestrian connectivity across town.

It outlines key needs for improving the current network and provides recommendations for repairing, expanding, & connecting assets. Proposed improvements are organized into categories such as sidewalks, intersections, greenways, trails, & bicycle routes.



The plan's action items have since led to planning and implementation of 2.5 miles of paved greenway trails along the Cape Fear River and acquisition of easements that will provide further connections to Raven Rock State Park.

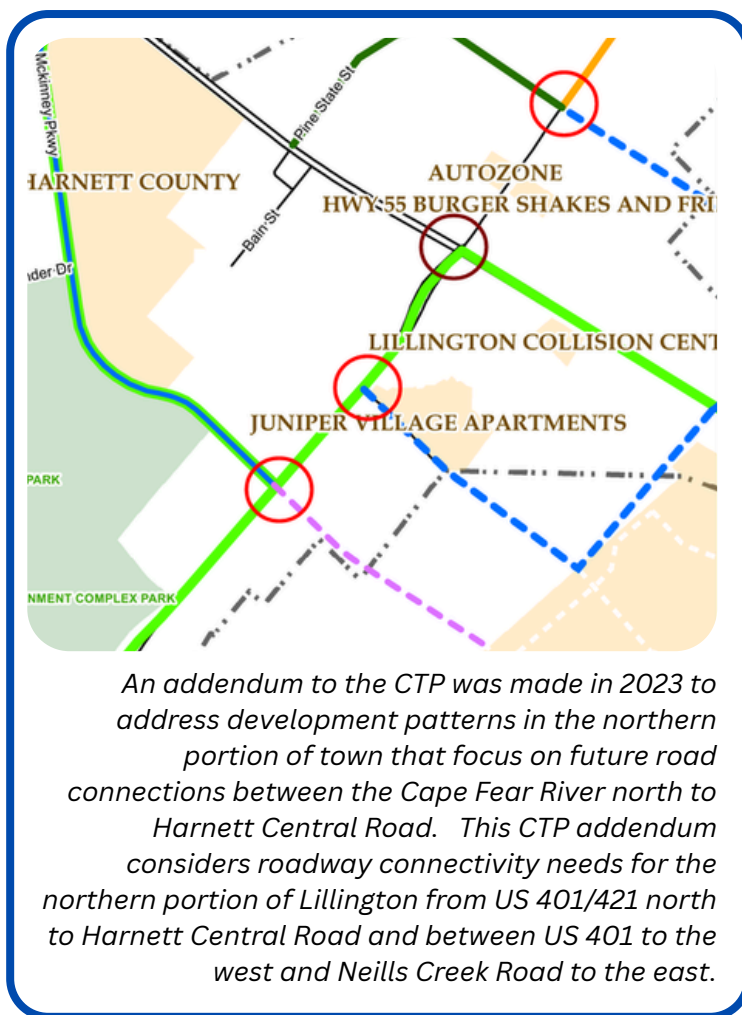
Unified Development Ordinance

The Town of Lillington's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) combines all zoning, subdivision, environmental, and land use rules into one document. It helps guide development in a way that supports the Town's long-term goals, as outlined in the Land Use Plan, Downtown Master Plan, and Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan. The UDO sets standards for aspects such as land use types, the density of development, building and site design, and the division of larger properties. It also includes rules for landscaping and signage to help maintain a clean and attractive appearance throughout the town. Overall, the UDO helps ensure that new development supports the community's vision for growth, sustainability, and character while adhering to state and federal laws.

Comprehensive Transportation Plan + Addendum

The Lillington Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) serves as a long-range guide for improving mobility, safety, and connectivity throughout the community. The plan evaluates existing transportation conditions, identifies future needs, and outlines a coordinated vision for roadway, bicycle, pedestrian, and multimodal enhancements that support the Town's expected growth.

In addition to establishing a functional hierarchy of streets, the CTP provides detailed project recommendations, planning-level cost estimates, and implementation strategies to help the Town prioritize investments over time.



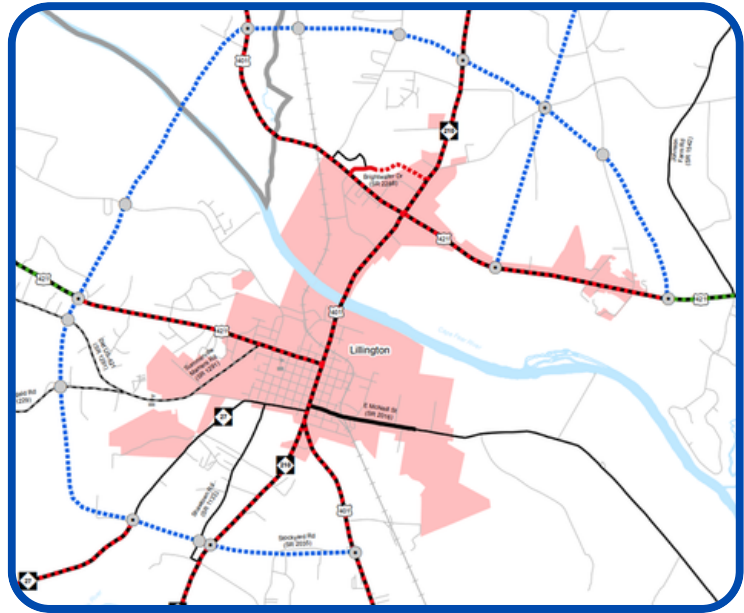
A key focus of the plan is the strategic use of private development to construct future collector roads, reducing the financial burden on the Town while ensuring that new growth contributes to a more connected and efficient street network.

NCDOT/Harnett County Transportation Plan

The 2011 Harnett County Comprehensive Transportation Plan, developed by NCDOT and local partners, outlines long-range multimodal improvements through 2035. It includes recommendations for highways, transit, rail, biking, and walking based on system analysis and public input.

Key Highlights:

- Northern Lillington Connector freeway with multiple interchanges.
- Four-lane boulevard with bike lanes and sidewalks to improve safety at major intersections.
- Multi-use path from Cape Fear River Trail to U.S. 401.
- New sidewalk on Front Street from Lakeside Drive to 9th Street.



*Harnett County Comprehensive
Transportation Plan*

Harnett County Bicycle, Pedestrian & Greenway Master Plan

The 2021 Harnett County Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenway Master Plan outlines a countywide trail network connecting parks, schools, shopping areas, and natural assets. It envisions a variety of trail types that link to the East Coast Greenway and the Triangle's regional trail system.

Key Highlights:

- Multiple trail connections from Lillington to Raven Rock State Park on both sides of the river.
- Sidepath along U.S. 421 to CCCC Harnett Main Campus and Campbell University.
- Riverfront trails along both banks of the Cape Fear River.
- Natural surface trails along river tributaries.
- Sidepath links from Lillington to rural destinations like Boone Trail Community Center and Barbecue Creek Park.

Harnett County Comprehensive Land Use Plan

The Harnett Horizons 2040 Comprehensive Plan, an update to the 2015 Grow Harnett County Plan, outlines a vision and strategic recommendations focused on housing, economic development, and natural resource protection. The plan includes goals and actions across land use, agriculture, greenways, economic growth, transportation, and infrastructure.

Key Highlights:

- Medium-density residential and mixed-use areas proposed near Lillington along NC 210 and US 421.
- Employment Growth Area identified west of Lillington toward Buies Creek.
- Coordination encourages widening NC 210 and updating utility service areas near Lillington.
- Partnerships with CCCC and Campbell University to support workforce development.
- New "village districts" proposed to preserve small-town character, including near Buies Creek with greenway links to Lillington.

Future Land Use

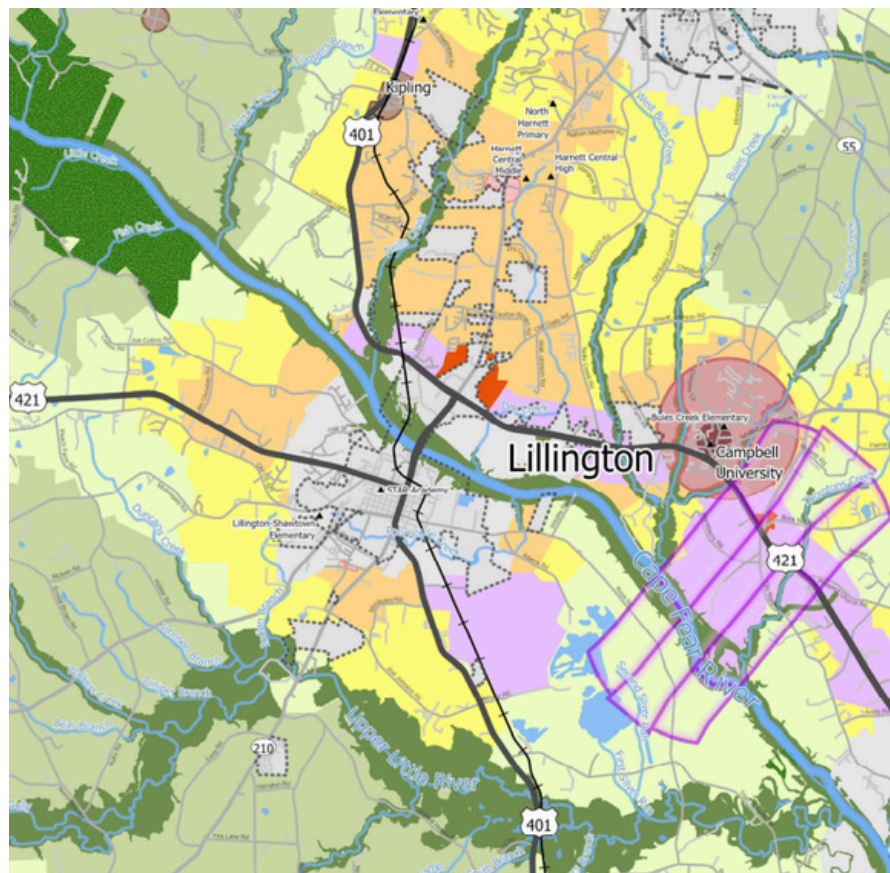
- Parks and Open Space
- Conservation
- Agricultural Protection Area
- Rural / Agriculture
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- Historic Community
- Rural Center
- Village
- Village Center
- Commercial Mixed-use
- Employment

Overlays

- Jetport Overlay
- Military Overlay Buffer

Context

- Municipal Limits
- Municipal / ETJ
- County Boundary



SOURCE: Harnett Horizons 2040 Future Land Use Map

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

