3 COMMUNITY PROFILE

This section of the Plan provides a general overview of Mecklenburg County and its incorporated municipal jurisdictions. This section consists of the following five subsections:

- GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT
- COMMUNITY QUICKFACTS
- POPULATION, HOUSING AND DEMOGRAPHICS
- GROWTH TRENDS AND LAND USE
- DATA SOURCES

Mecklenburg County was formed in 1762 from the western part of Anson County. The county was named for Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz (1744-1818), who had become queen consort of King George III the previous year. Princess Charlotte is also the source of the Mecklenburg County seat's name. In 1768 the part of Mecklenburg County west of the Catawba River became Tryon County. In 1792 the northeastern part of Mecklenburg County became Cabarrus County. Finally, in 1842 the southeastern part of Mecklenburg County was combined with the western part of Anson County to become Union County.

GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Mecklenburg County is located in the south central portion of North Carolina and is bordered on the west by the Catawba River, on the north by Iredell County, on the east by Cabarrus and Union counties, and on the south by the State of South Carolina.

North Carolina consists of 48,711 square miles of land and over 5,000 square miles of inland water including large areas of Lake Norman. The total area of nearly 54,000 square miles ranks North Carolina 29th in area among the states. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Mecklenburg County contains a total area of 546 square miles, of which 526 square miles is comprised of land and the remaining 20 square miles is water. **Table 3.1** provides a summary of land area within Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte and the towns of Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill and Pineville.

Table 3.1: Summary of Land Area			
JURISDICTION	**AREA IN SQUARE MILES**		
	TOTAL AREA	**WATER AREA**	**LAND AREA**
Mecklenburg County	547.91	22.07	525.84
City of Charlotte	299.67	1.99	297.68
Town of Cornelius	12.38	0.3	12.08
Town of Davidson	6	0.25	5.75
Town of Huntersville[1]	39.77	0.16	39.61
Town of Matthews	17.19	0.08	17.11
Town of Mint Hill	24.15	0.23	23.92
Town of Pineville	6.66	0.04	6.62
NORTH CAROLINA	**53,818.51**	**5,107.63**	**48,617.91**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the geographic location of each municipal jurisdiction with the county.

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[1] Huntersville's current town limits is technically 40.52 square miles, though the Town's sphere of influence is 63.46 (the Town has zoning throughout the entire sphere of influence, which could impact potential hazard situations).

Figure 3.1: Overview Map of Mecklenburg County
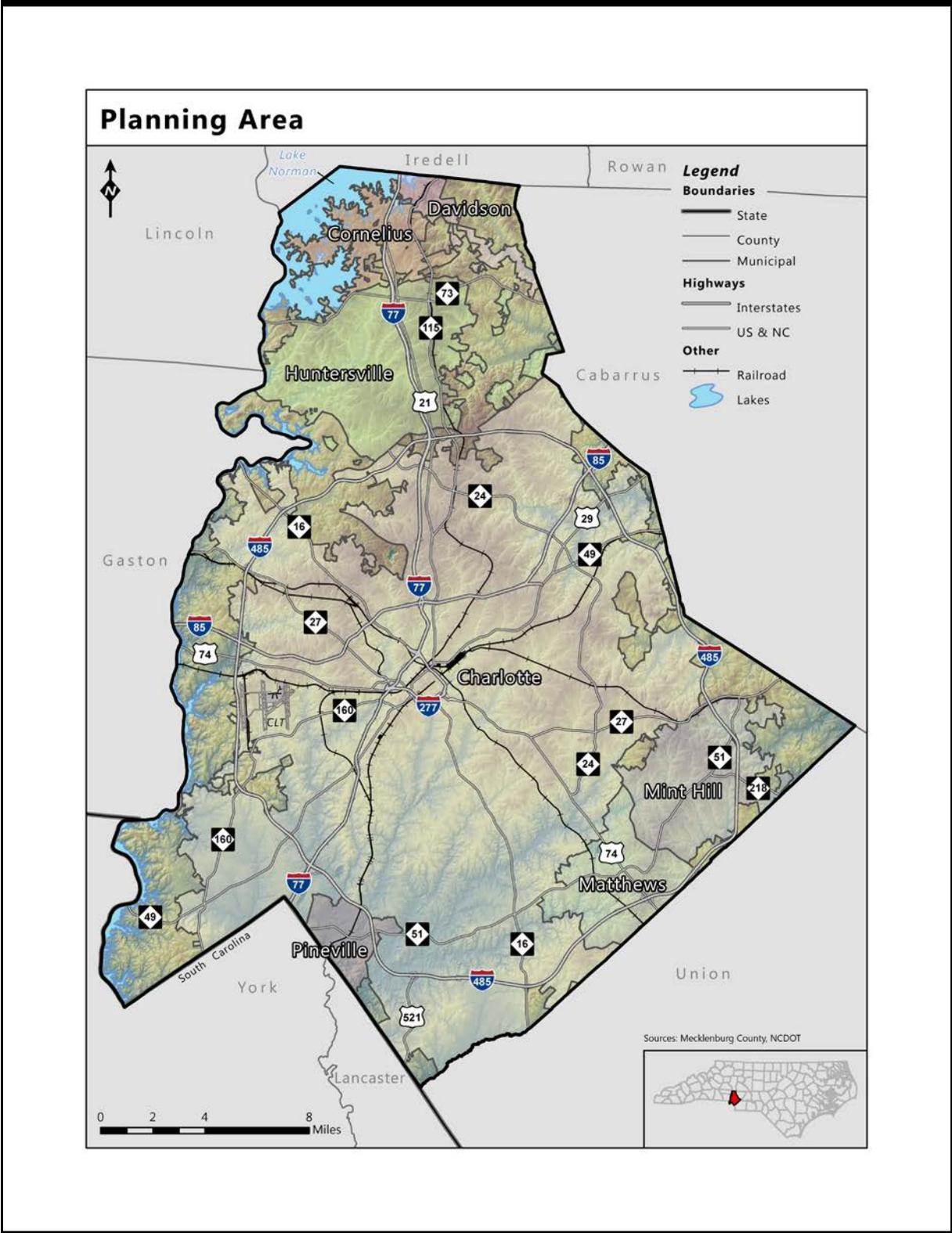
COMMUNITY QUICKFACTS

There a seven incorporated municipalities within Mecklenburg County, each of which are very briefly introduced below (with 2013 population estimate counts) and then further described in sections that follow.

City of Charlotte (Pop. 792,862)
Charlotte was incorporated in 1768 (as a town, later as a city) and today is the largest city in North Carolina. Nicknamed the *Queen City* in honor of Princess Charlotte, the city has become one of the nation's largest financial centers serving as the home city for Bank of America and numerous other regional banking and financial services companies. The city remains a major employment hub for North Carolina including more Fortune 500 companies than anywhere else in the state, several institutions of higher learning including the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, one of the busiest airports in the world and largest hub for US Airways and a major center for the U.S. motorsports industry, all of which has led to tremendous population growth and urban development in the past several decades. While much of this development has occurred outward from the central business district, the center city/uptown area of Charlotte has experienced remarkable growth and revitalization over the last decade. Numerous residential units continue to be built uptown, including over 20 skyscrapers either under construction, recently completed, or in the planning stage. Many new restaurants, bars and clubs now operate in the uptown area and several projects are continuing to transform the Midtown Charlotte/Elizabeth area of this modern city.

Town of Cornelius (Pop. 26,898)
Established in 1905, the Town of Cornelius originated as a mill and farm community. With the closing of the mills, the damming of the Catawba River, the development of I-77 and the growth of the Town as a result of its close proximity to Charlotte and Lake Norman, the Town has experienced dramatic population growth and significant development in recent years. Since only 2000, the reported population for Cornelius has doubled in size with one of the fastest growth rates in the state during that period.

Town of Davidson (Pop. 11,750)
Founded by a Presbyterian Church in 1835, the Town of Davidson was incorporated as Davidson College in 1879 but the name was changed to Davidson in 1907. Traditionally a small, Southern college town (home to Davidson College) with engaged and active citizens, Davidson's development patterns follow principles of new urbanism and include significant attention to open space (acquiring nearly 500 acres in the past ten years), greenways and transportation systems built for pedestrians and cyclists. In recent years the town has experienced a change in demographics with more retirees and fewer people directly connected to the college.

Town of Huntersville (Pop. 50,458)
The Town of Huntersville was incorporated in 1873, with fertile land and a rail line promoting quick growth. Cotton mill Virgin Manufacturing Company and a brickyard that supplied bricks for many homes in older sections of town were thriving businesses, and in later years textile mills brought jobs and residents to the area. Proximity to Charlotte and Lake Norman have made Huntersville an attractive residential and commercial destination for residents and new and/or relocating companies alike. Available land and a focus on providing high quality of life amenities like parks and recreation have fueled the town's increase in population from 3,024 people in 1990 to over 52,000 residents per the most recent state estimates. Today, Huntersville is the second largest municipality in Mecklenburg County and the 17th largest in North Carolina. Huntersville is fully committed to careful growth and development based upon the principles of traditional town planning, transit-oriented development, and quality urban design, and the Town has received regional and national attention due to its progressive and innovative growth management policies.

Town of Matthews (Pop. 29,384)
The Town of Matthews began as a small farming community in the early 1800s but was not incorporated until 1879, shortly after the town's first railroad stop. Matthews continued to grow and the railroad remained an important and integral part of the community into the early 20th century in which cotton ginning was big business. Keeping pace with population growth and continued development, Matthews is now largely 100% built-out and encompasses approximately 14 square miles between Charlotte and Mint Hill. Recent planning efforts have been focused on downtown development and redevelopment opportunities.

Town of Mint Hill (Pop. 24,543)
Although the Mint Hill community was first settled as early as 1750, the Town was not incorporated until 1971. Primarily a suburban community adjacent to Charlotte, Mint Hill has seen an influx of luxury residential communities and the business district has shown intensified development in recent years with approximately 285 businesses and professional services available. In 2003 the Town established its own Police Department to keep pace with the needs of a growing population and increased development (the Town had formerly been contracting with the City of Charlotte for police services). The Town's Planning and Zoning Department continues to provide long range planning, downtown revitalization and development review services to maintain Mint Hill's quality of life.

Town of Pineville (Pop. 8,061)
Located just south of the City of Charlotte, the Town of Pineville was incorporated in 1973 and today is well known for its antique shops lining Main Street in its historic downtown. Primarily a suburban residential community, it continues to grow rapidly with the recent addition of many shopping centers, malls, businesses and churches. Pineville now also has its own medical park with one of the finest hospitals in the area, and is located in close proximity to Paramount Carowinds amusement park which brings many visitors through the area on a regular basis.

POPULATION, HOUSING AND DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the latest Census estimates (2014), North Carolina is the 10th most populous state in the United States with a resident population of 9,943,964. Over three decades (2000-2029) North Carolina's total population is projected to grow by approximately 4.5 million people (North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management). Although not the fastest growing, Mecklenburg County remains the state's most populated county. According to census records, Mecklenburg County has a 2013 estimated population of 990,977 people – an increase of 7.8 percent from the 2010 census count of 919,568, compared with the statewide growth rate of 3.3 percent. Today, Mecklenburg County remains North Carolina's most densely populated county with 1,755.5 people per square mile, and there are an estimated 410,575 housing units. **Table 3.2** shows population and densities per square mile for population and housing units in Mecklenburg County as well as for each municipal jurisdiction and the entire state of North Carolina.

Table 3.2: Summary of Population, Population Density and Housing Unit Density			
JURISDICTION	**POPULATION (2013)**	**DENSITY PER SQUARE MILE OF LAND AREA**	
		POPULATION (2010)	**HOUSING UNITS (2008)**
Mecklenburg County (total)	990,977	1,755.5	766
City of Charlotte	792,862	2,457.1	1,221
Town of Cornelius	26,898	2,058.4	1,900
Town of Davidson	11,750	1,903.0	699*
Town of Huntersville	50,458	1,180.8	533
Town of Matthews	29,384	1,589.6	774
Town of Mint Hill	24,543	949.8	370*
Town of Pineville	8,061	1,129.4	971*
NORTH CAROLINA	**9,848,917**	**196.1**	**78**

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010,2013 Estimates
* No Census data on housing units available for 2008, so these estimates we're generated using 2008 population data in combination with average household size according the most recent Census data (2000).

According to the official 2013 estimates, the racial makeup of Mecklenburg County is 59.7 percent White, 32.1 percent Black or African American, 5.2 percent Asian, 0.8 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, 0.1 percent Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and 2.1 percent from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race makes up 12.6 percent of the county population. Of the total population in Mecklenburg County, 7.1 percent are under 5 years old and 24.8 percent are under 18 years old. A total of 9.7 percent are 65 years old and over.

Note: The remainder of this section on *Population, Housing and Demographics* summarizes the most up-to-date information for Mecklenburg County according to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey (ACS) performed by the U.S. Census Bureau. The ACS is an on-going, nationwide survey that is sent to a sample of the population to help communities determine where to locate services and allocate resources. It is a critical element in the Census Bureau's reengineered decennial census program. The ACS collects and produces population and housing information every year instead of every ten years.

Households and Families
There are approximately 366,689 households in Mecklenburg County with an average household size of 2.4 persons. Families make up 62.2 percent of the households. This figure includes both married-couple families (43.2 percent) and other families (19.1 percent). Nonfamily households make up 37.8 percent of all households in Mecklenburg County. Most of the nonfamily households were people living alone, but some were composed of people living in households in which no one was related to the householder.

Housing Characteristics
Of the approximately 402,401 housing units in Mecklenburg County, it is estimated that 8.9 percent are vacant. Of the total housing units, 67.1 percent are in single-unit structures, 31.3 percent are in multi-unit structures, and 1.6 percent are mobile homes. 49.8 percent of the housing units were built since 1990. In 2009-2013, Mecklenburg County had 366,689 occupied housing units - 218240 (59.5 percent) owner occupied and 148,449 (40.5 percent) renter occupied. 2.1 percent of the households did not have telephone service and 7 percent of the households did not have access to a car, truck, or van for private use. 39.7 percent had two vehicles and another 15.4 percent had three or more.

Housing Costs
The median monthly housing costs were $1,084.

Income
The median income of households in Mecklenburg County is $55,444. 85.1 percent of the households received earnings and 12.6 percent received retirement income other than Social Security. 19.7 percent of the households received Social Security, with the average income amount being $17,767. These income sources are not mutually exclusive; that is, some households received income from more than one source.

Nativity and Language
14.8 percent of the people living in Mecklenburg County are foreign born. 85.2 percent are native, including 42 percent who were born in North Carolina. Among people at least five years old living in Mecklenburg County, 18.2 percent speak a language other than English at home. Of those speaking a language other than English at home, 48 percent speak Spanish and 52 percent speak some other language; 52 percent reported that they did not speak English "very well."

Geographic Mobility
Seventy-seven percent of the people at least one year old living in Mecklenburg County were living in the same residence one year earlier; 13 percent had moved during the past year from another residence in the same county, 3 percent from another county in the same state, 6 percent from another state, and 1 percent from abroad.

Education
88.8 percent of people 25 years and over in Mecklenburg County have at least graduated from high school and 40.7 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Eleven percent are dropouts; they were not enrolled in school and had not graduated from high school. The total school enrollment in Mecklenburg County was 260,915 in 2009-2013. Nursery school and kindergarten enrollment was 33,122 and elementary or high school enrollment was 154,598 children. College or graduate school enrollment was 73,195.

Industries
For the employed population 16 years and older, the leading types of industries in Mecklenburg County are educational services, health care and social assistance (19 percent), and finance and insurance, real estate and rental and leasing (13 percent).

Occupations and Type of Employer
The most common occupations in Mecklenburg County are: management, business, science and arts occupations (41 percent); sales and office occupations (26 percent); service occupations (16 percent); production, transportation, and material moving occupations (10 percent); and natural resources, construction and maintenance occupations (10 percent).[2] Eighty-five percent of the people employed are private wage and salary workers; 9 percent are federal, state, or local government workers; and 5 percent are self-employed in their own unincorporated businesses.

Travel to Work
77.3 percent of Mecklenburg County workers drive to work alone, 10.2 percent carpool, 3.4 percent take public transportation, and 3.2 percent use other means. The remaining 6 percent work at home. Among those who commuted to work, it took them on average 24.7 minutes to get to work.

Poverty and Participation in Government Programs
15.4 percent of people in Mecklenburg County are below poverty level. Fourteen percent of related children under 20.8 are below the poverty level, compared with 8.2 percent of people 65 years old and over. 11.9 percent of all families and 29.5 percent of families with a female householder and no husband present have incomes below the poverty level.

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[2] This totals 103% due to rounding.

GROWTH TRENDS AND LAND USE

U.S. Census 2010 figures show that Mecklenburg County experienced a 24 percent population growth rate from 2000 to 2010, making it one of the fastest-growing areas in the country. Since 2010 that growth rate remains high with an increase of another 7.8 percent, as estimated in 2013, adding an additional 71,349 people to the county in a three-year period. This rate of growth nearly doubles the statewide percent change of 3.3 percent from 2010 to 2013. **Table 3.3** provides a summary of the growth rates for each jurisdiction in Mecklenburg County between 2010 and 2013 according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

| Table 3.3: Population Growth in Mecklenburg County, 2000-2013			
JURISDICTION	**2013 POPULATION**	**POPULATION GROWTH**	
		CHANGE SINCE 2010	**GROWTH RATE**
Mecklenburg County (total)	990,977	71,349	7.8%
City of Charlotte	792,862	61,438	7.8%
Town of Cornelius	26,898	2,032	8.1%
Town of Davidson	11,750	806	7.5%
Town of Huntersville	50,458	3,685	7.9%
Town of Matthews	29,384	2,186	8.0%
Town of Mint Hill	24,543	1,821	7.8%
Town of Pineville	8,061	582	7.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The rapid growth in population is reflected in the county's pace of development. Nearly every part of Mecklenburg County boasts some level of new development that has continued at a steady pace, seemingly immune to recent economic downturns. Mecklenburg County is becoming more urban in character, and is projected to be fully developed or built out by 2020. The U.S. Forest Service reports an approximate 14 percent loss of forestland in Mecklenburg County between 1990 and 2002, and according to the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources the county lost an additional 47,000 acres in forestland between 2004 and 2009 (35 percent change). A study commissioned by the Charlotte Tree Advisory Commission indicated a 22 percent loss of tree cover and a 22 percent loss of open space between 1984 and 2001.

According to the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM), the county is projected to have a total population of more than 1.2 million by 2029. **Figure 3.2** illustrates this projected growth in comparison to historical population growth for Mecklenburg County according to OSBM data.

Figure 3.2: Historical and Projected Population Growth in Mecklenburg County, 1970–2029
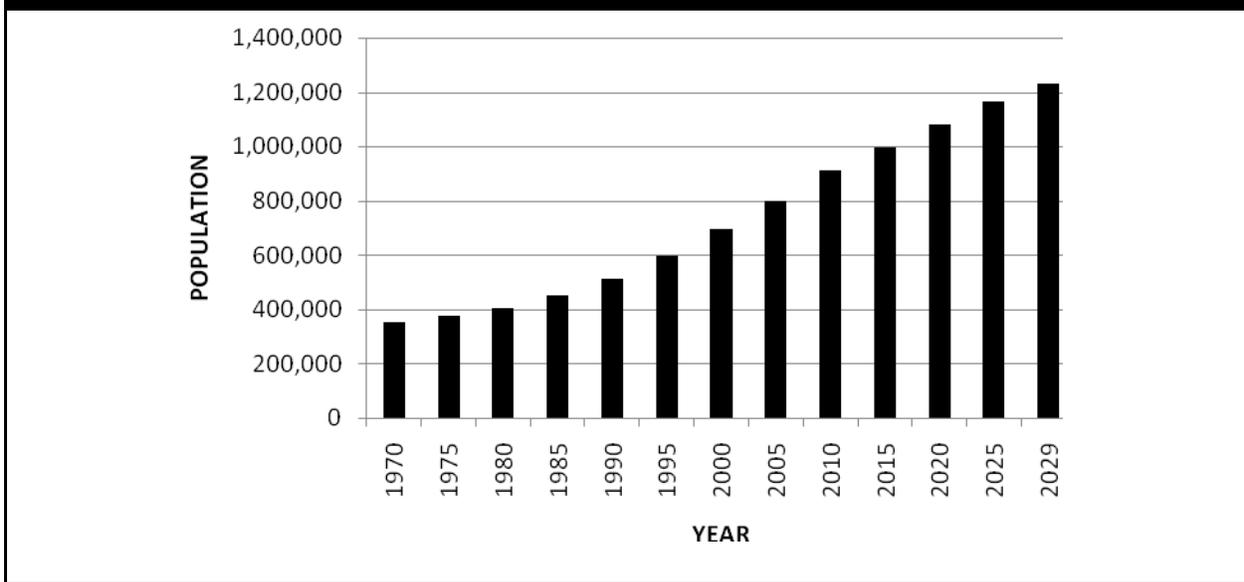
Source: North Carolina Office of State Management and Budget, 2009.

Figure 3.3 shows the change in land use from 1980 to 2020 as predicted by a model developed by the Open Space Institute of the Carolinas, a non-profit land conservation research and education organization. Nicknamed the "Piedmont Green Plan," it identifies open space as it existed in 1980 and 1990 based on satellite imagery, and uses population projections and adopted land use plans to project conversion of open space to developed uses by 2020. For Mecklenburg County, the model reports a decline in open space, for the years 1980 to 1990, from 41 percent of total land area to 36 percent, with a projected further drop to 17 percent by 2020. This is the equivalent of five acres a day throughout the 40-year period of 1980 to 2020.

Figure 3.3: Land Use Change (1980-2020) for Charlotte Metropolitan Area
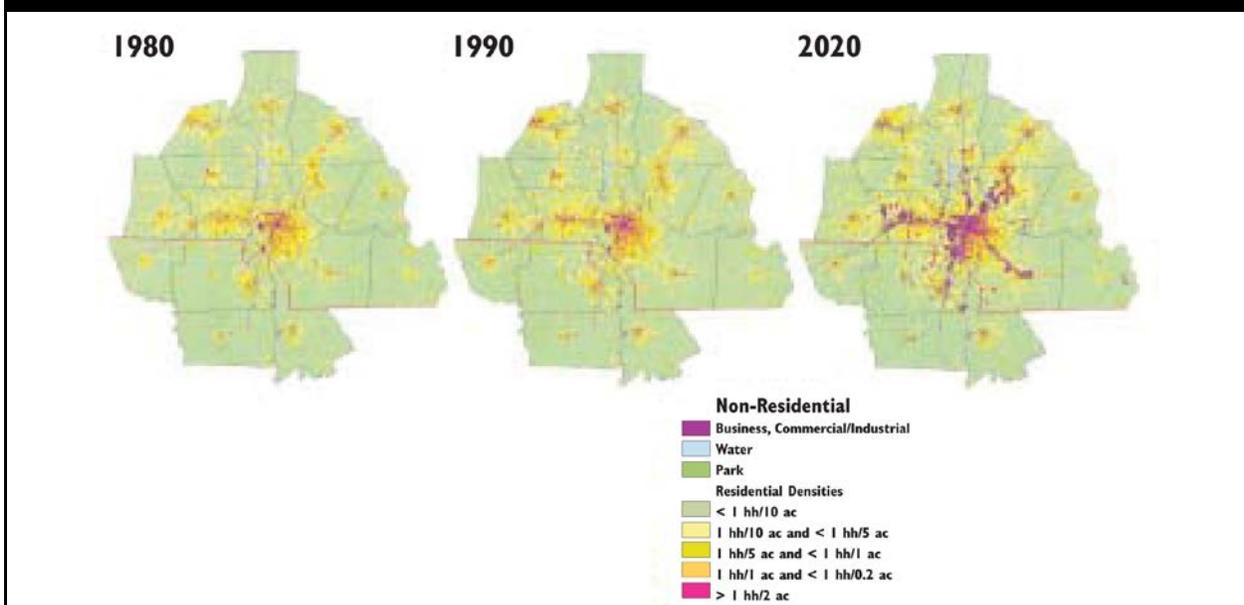
Source: 2004 State of the Environment Report for Mecklenburg County, North Carolina by the Mecklenburg County Land Use & Environmental Services Agency.

The County, in coordination with its municipal jurisdictions, has undertaken various efforts to preserve open space and maintain livability. The public land acquisition effort has attempted to put three types of preserved land in place: large park sites geographically dispersed around the county, floodplains along major creeks, and watershed protection land around Mountain Island Lake. By the end of 2003, Mecklenburg County had acquired 833 acres of open space with the 1999 land purchase and parks bond funds to protect the Mountain Island Lake watershed, the main source of the county's drinking water. A number of additional County land acquisitions for open space have since been completed, including several large-scale acquisition and demolitions through Mecklenburg County's *Floodplain Buyout Program* further described in Section 7: *Capability Assessment*.

The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County have adopted and continue to implement a "corridors and wedges" land use plan that envisions denser development along five key transportation corridors and less dense development in the wedges between corridors. Integrating urban green space into plans for transit station areas in the corridors has emerged as a key ingredient in making density livable. Each of the small towns within Mecklenburg County is attempting to manage their growth and maintain their individual character. In so doing they have engaged in a number of cooperative long-range projects with the County and each other designed to combat suburban sprawl, encourage commuter rail connections to surrounding communities, and preserve rural lands.

More information on current land use and future development trends in Mecklenburg County and how they relate to natural hazard vulnerability is provided in Section 6: *Vulnerability Assessment*, and Section 7: *Capability Assessment*.

DATA SOURCES

The following primary data sources were among those used to collect the information presented in this section.

- *Welcome to NC*
  (www.welcometonc.com/countydirectories/Mecklenburg/index.cfm)

- *North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management*
  http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/index.shtm

- *Town of Cornelius*
  (www.cornelius.org/)

- *Town of Davidson*
  (www.ci.davidson.nc.us/)

- *Town of Huntersville*
  (www.huntersville.org/)

- *Town of Matthews*
  (www.matthewsnc.com)

- *Town of Mint Hill*
  (www.minthill.com/)

- *Town of Pineville*
  (www.pinevillenc.net/)

- *NCGen Web Project*
  (www.rootsweb.com/~ncmeckle/)

- *Charlotte-Mecklenburg*
  (www.charmeck.org)

- *Mecklenburg County Land Use and Environmental Services Agency*
  (www.groundwater.org/pe/actt/MH_NC1202.pdf)

- *Federal Emergency Management Agency*
  (www.fema.gov/)

- *U.S. Census Bureau*
  (http://www.census.gov/)