

chapter 1:
introduction

chapter 1: introduction

Charlotte's Center City has undergone dramatic growth and change over the past decade. From the development of new cultural venues and educational institutions to beautiful parks, walkable streets, and new housing, restaurants and shops, the evolution has been remarkable—and it has not been by chance. These changes have resulted from many successful planning efforts, collaborative partnerships, and strategic investments by the public and private sectors. Combined, they have led to **the rebirth of Center City as a vibrant focal point of a thriving region.**

The changing dynamics in Charlotte's urban core have stemmed from the area's already rich social and

cultural history, infused with new leadership, ideas and creativity. The result is an even stronger commitment to ensure that Center City is positioned for success for decades to come. The continued vitality of Charlotte's Center City is critical to the success of Charlotte and the surrounding region. Building on the many achievements of the 2010 Vision Plan and other recent initiatives, Center City is poised for a new era of collaboration, development and prosperity that will further enhance the lives of all Charlotteans.

Creating the Charlotte Center City 2020 Vision Plan is a critical strategy to ensure a promising future for Center City and the greater region. A cooperative effort

among the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and Charlotte Center City Partners, the 2020 Vision Plan is a comprehensive, strategic plan that provides a **“big picture” framework and unifying vision for Center City growth and development.**

The 2020 Vision Plan study area expands the scope of previous planning efforts and reflects the inclusive nature of the plan and process. While Uptown is the traditional center of the City, the study area also reaches beyond the I-77/I-277 freeway loop to embrace all of the surrounding Center City neighborhoods.

The Charlotte Center City 2020 Vision Plan sets forth a **bold vision** for the future that is unique to this modern, livable and gracious City. It provides a set of **innovative, transformative strategies** that chart the course for achieving the vision. And it outlines **clear implementation actions** to ensure that these ideas become reality in the coming years.

In setting the stage for the specific recommendations of the 2020 Vision Plan, this Introduction chapter includes the following sections:

- Setting.
- The Charlotte Center City Story.
- Assets, Opportunities and Challenges.
- Building the Future: The Economic Foundation.
- 2020 Planning Process.
- Summary.



Setting

The geographic location and physical setting of Center City have strongly influenced its past and will continue to be key elements in shaping its future.

As part of an important and growing metropolitan region of the United States, **Center City Charlotte plays an integral role in larger social, cultural and economic contexts.** At the greater regional scale, Center City is a major player in the Southeast and has interdependencies related to resources, commerce and transportation with several metropolitan areas in North Carolina and neighboring states. At the metropolitan scale, Center City is a strong attraction for tourists, industry and commerce within the Charlotte region. At the city scale, the Uptown core has the highest concentration of people and jobs in the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, making it a top economic performer in the state.

PIEDMONT ATLANTIC MEGA REGION

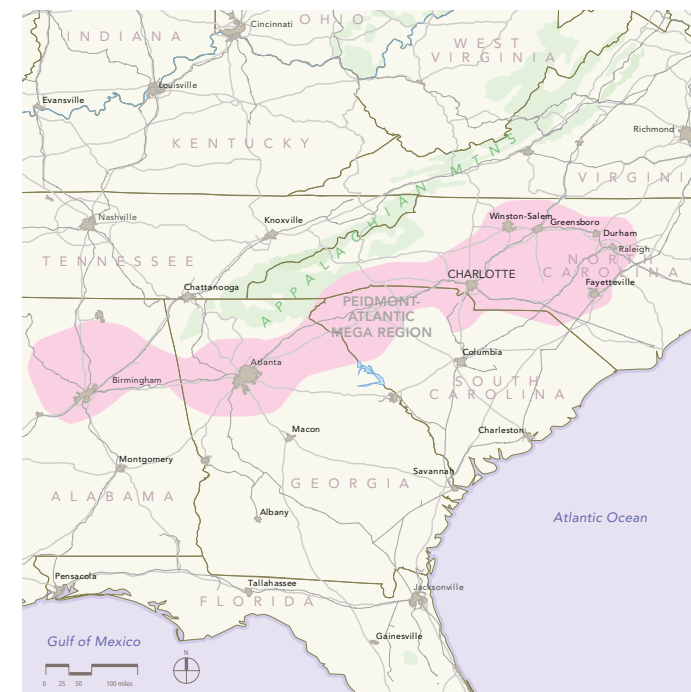
The Southeast United States contains several major cities and metropolitan areas collectively known as the Piedmont Atlantic Mega Region (see Regional Context). These cities include Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Birmingham, Alabama. The physical proximity and economic commonalities of these cities generate many positive benefits, such as attracting an educated work force and industry clusters that bolster the commerce of the entire region.

However, the area as a whole has several challenges, including traffic congestion, urban sprawl, increased energy demands, pollution and aging infrastructure. With a population projected to be more than 20 million by the year 2025, the Piedmont Atlantic Mega Region will continue to face the issue of balancing growth opportunities while managing resource demands.

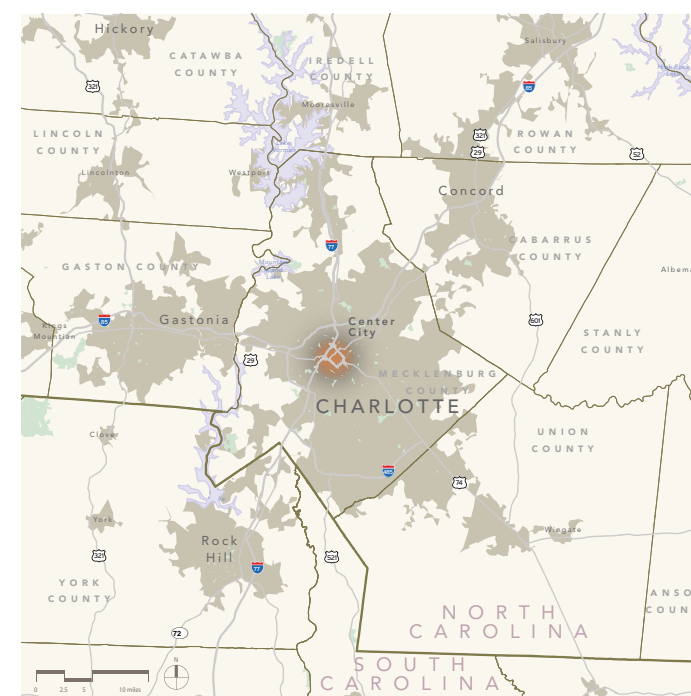
CHARLOTTE METROPOLITAN AREA

The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County are the major jurisdictions of the Charlotte Metropolitan Area (see Charlotte Region). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the metropolitan area population grew by approximately 26 percent between 2000 and 2009 to reach a total of 2.4 million, making greater Charlotte the country's 20th most populous metro area. The region's growth has largely been driven by a robust employment market, relative affordability and a high overall quality of life.

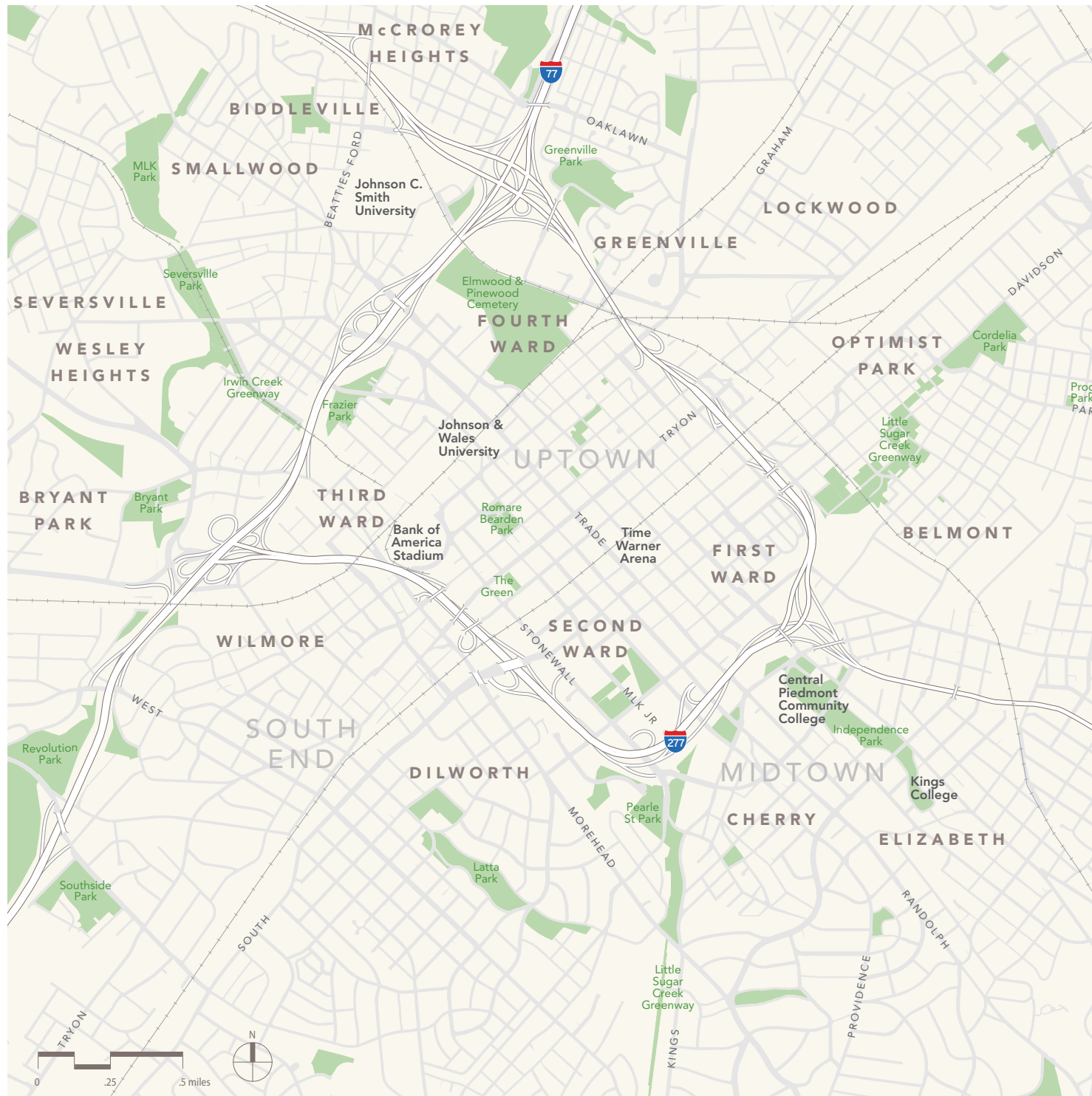
Within the metropolitan area, Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte have been the anchors for population growth, increasing by 34 and 32 percent, respectively, between 2000 and 2009. Mecklenburg County has a population of approximately 935,000 and is bordered by a chain of lakes and Gaston County to the west, and Cabarrus County to the northeast. At 286 square miles, Charlotte comprises most of Mecklenburg County's land area and is North Carolina's largest city with a population of approximately 700,000.



Regional Context



Charlotte Region



Charlotte Center City Study Area

The metro area is bisected by several major highways and interstates, as well as railway corridors that link cities within the region. Just 7.5 miles from Uptown, the Charlotte Douglas International Airport provides access to domestic and foreign destinations and contributes nearly \$10 billion annually to the regional economy. Overall, Charlotte is characterized by general growth in employment opportunities, an educated workforce, and a relatively low cost of living compared with similarly-sized cities across the country.



City of Charlotte

CHARLOTTE CENTER CITY

Located in the central part of Mecklenburg County, Center City is the historic hub of Charlotte's economy and culture. While there is no jurisdictional boundary for Center City, previous planning efforts for central Charlotte largely focused attention on Uptown—the traditional “downtown” bounded by the I-77/I-277 freeway loop. As defined by this plan, Center City includes not only Uptown but also the expanse of surrounding neighborhoods adjacent to the freeway loop (see Charlotte Center City Study Area).

Employment is a critical element of Center City's economic health. Finance and banking have played prominent roles in recent decades, with the major employers of Bank of America and Wells Fargo/Wachovia Bank anchoring a strong services sector. Energy, healthcare, education, and government employment are also important to the economic vibrancy of Center City and the greater region.

Center City's recent population growth has been facilitated by public and private sector efforts to bring substantial residential development and employment to the core. It has also been supported by a growing national trend toward living in downtowns and dense urban settings. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Charlotte added 60,795 households between 2000 and 2008. Uptown and the adjacent South End area alone added 7,100 new residential units, primarily in the form of new apartments, townhomes and condominiums.

The Charlotte Center City Story

Center City has evolved from its historic roots as a settlement at the crossroads of Trade and Tryon streets to become the downtown and heart of a burgeoning metropolitan area.

Today, Center City Charlotte is a modern, diversified and vibrant urban center comprised of many distinct neighborhoods. It is home to successful companies, a range of government offices, professional sports teams, universities, museums, and dozens of restaurants, hotels and new mixed-use developments. Center City is also the location of classic single-family home neighborhoods, each with their own distinct character. The neighborhoods include a diversity of parks, senior centers, schools, religious institutions, shops, local food markets, and other community amenities. However, unlike cities such as New York, Philadelphia or Washington, D.C., these historic areas surround a core of nearly all modern buildings and new cityscape. This **mix of bold new development with traditional neighborhoods** makes Center City truly unique.



Center City is the hub of the economic, social and cultural life of the Charlotte region.



The location of traditional neighborhoods close to the urban core is one of Center City's unique assets.



First Ward Place is a Hope VI mixed-income housing project with two- and three-story garden apartments.



Center City has many leafy, historic neighborhoods lying just outside of the freeway loop.

CENTER CITY'S NEIGHBORHOODS

Uptown

Uptown is the traditional core of Charlotte and the most “urban” part of Center City. It is defined as the area within the I-77/I-277 freeway loop. Trade and Tryon streets divide Uptown into four quadrants or “wards.” Named First, Second, Third and Fourth wards, each of them contributes to Center City’s urban identity:

- **First Ward** is one of Charlotte’s original neighborhoods and is defined as the northeast quadrant of Uptown. There is significant public land ownership in First Ward, and it is the location of the Charlotte Housing Authority’s successful Hope VI mixed-income development.
- **Second Ward** is the southeast quadrant of Uptown and was originally known as Brooklyn—the heart of Charlotte’s African-American community. It is now home to many government and civic uses.
- **Third Ward** is the southwest quadrant of Uptown and was developed as a streetcar suburb, with trolley tracks running down the center of West Trade Street. A strong financial services industry was built along South Tryon Street, helping the area to emerge as the “Wall Street of the Carolinas.” It continues today as a center of banking, commerce, arts and culture.
- **Fourth Ward** is the northwest quadrant of Uptown. Over the past 40 years it has been transformed into an area of historic homes that are convenient to Uptown businesses and shops. The Fourth Ward Historic District is Uptown’s only registered historic district.

Surrounding Neighborhoods

While Uptown is the primary hub of Center City jobs and new housing development, the surrounding neighborhoods are home to most of Center City’s residents and much of its social, cultural and economic vitality. On a neighborhood scale, Charlotte’s population is densest just outside of the freeway loop, with approximately 28% of the city’s population residing within one to four miles from Uptown. Center City’s neighborhoods beyond Uptown include Optimist Park, Belmont Park, Elizabeth, Cherry, Dilworth, Wilmore, Bryant Park, Wesley Heights, Seversville, Biddleville, McCrorey Heights, Greenville and Lockwood (see Charlotte Center City Study Area on page 4).

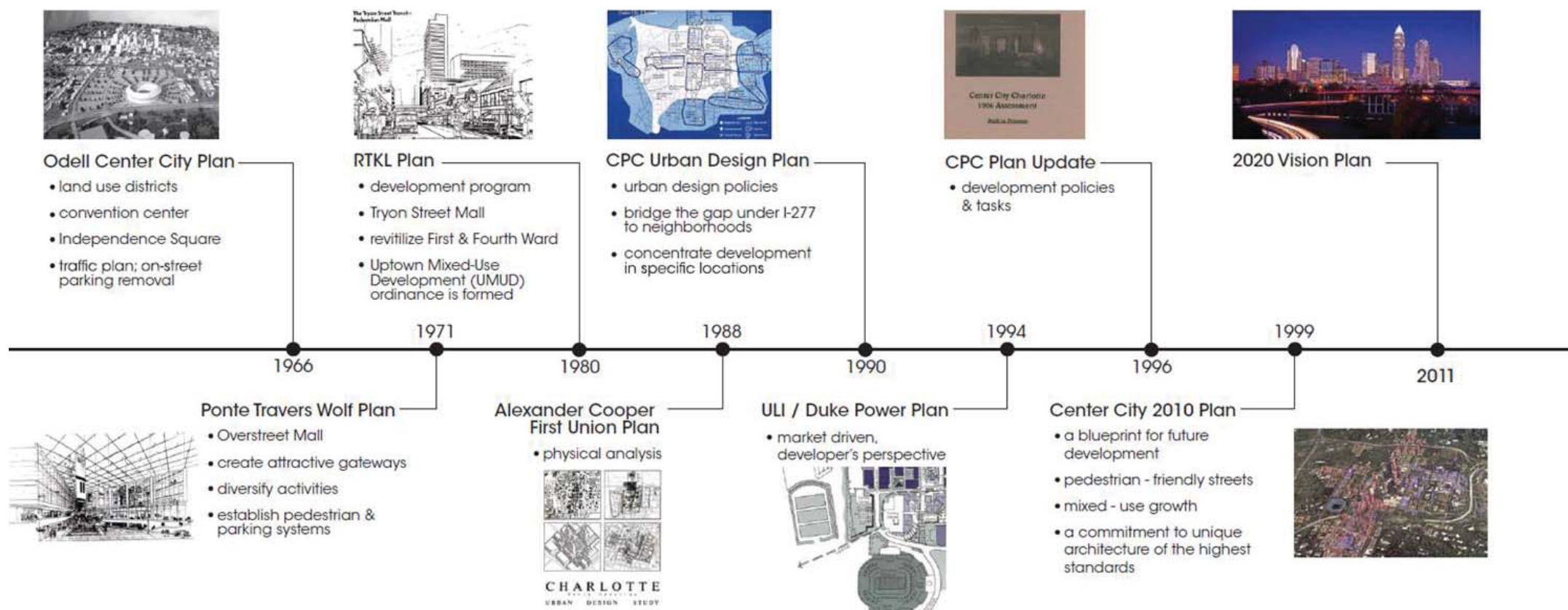
FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Center City's successes in recent years can be largely attributed to three primary influences: a history of planning and successful implementation; the direction of the 2010 Vision Plan; and a tradition of collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Decades of Planning and Successful Implementation

Past planning efforts and the cultivation of unified visions for Center City have had great impact. Multiple plans have directed investment into Center City, particularly Uptown, through ambitious goals and improvements over several decades.

While the City's roots date to the pre-Revolutionary War era, it wasn't until the 1960s that Charlotte developed its first master plan. The Odell Center City Plan (1966) responded to the impacts of suburbanization, outlying shopping centers, and the interstate highway system with a vision of residential districts connected to the urban core by a series of wide streets. The Ponte Travers Wolf Plan (1971), RTKL Plan (1980) and CPC Urban Design Plan (1990) all built upon this foundation, outlining design guidelines, pedestrian enhancements, regional transit initiatives, and new development opportunities to shape the urban vision for Center City.





The 2010 Vision Plan identified the former Convention Center site as one of the most significant redevelopment parcels in Uptown, and was subsequently demolished.



The EpiCentre mixed-use entertainment and retail complex was constructed on the former Convention Center site.

2010 Vision Plan Recommendations and Accomplishments

The 2010 Vision Plan has been the largest building block for Center City development and growth over the past decade. The plan’s overarching vision is to create a “viable, livable and memorable” Center City with distinct neighborhoods connected by unique infrastructure. Since its adoption in May of 2000, investment catalyzed by the plan has resulted in a remarkable amount of new development, additional residents and strong business activity.

The 2010 Vision Plan calls for a balanced mix of uses with distinctive design, as well as a walkable city that connects to neighborhoods outside the I-77/I-277 freeway loop. The vision is based on strategies to encourage office and retail uses, improve housing and livability, and develop a robust transportation network. The plan also highlights several priority projects, including the acquisition of land for new parks and a greenway trail; the redevelopment of the former convention center as a mixed-use site; and the creation of a new residential village adjacent to the government district in Second Ward. Numerous other Center City plans and policies are based upon the strong vision, policies, projects and programs set forth by the 2010 Vision Plan. These include transportation-related documents, design guidelines, and area plans for specific neighborhoods and wards.

Many of the 2010 Vision Plan’s recommendations have been implemented, including:

- Redevelopment of Midtown Square into the Metropolitan mixed-use complex and focused development of the Little Sugar Creek Greenway corridor.

- Redesign of the intersection at Stonewall Street, Kenilworth Avenue and Charlottetowne Avenue, which helped to improve connectivity from Uptown to Midtown.
- Completion of ImaginOn, the children’s library and theatre; development of the UNC Charlotte (UNCC) Building; and redevelopment of the convention center site with the EpiCentre entertainment and retail complex.
- Allocation of land for a new minor league baseball stadium and two new parks in Second Ward and Third Ward, which hold the potential to attract future development to the area.
- Development of approximately 7,750 housing units and more than six million square feet of office space, surpassing plan projections.
- Great expansion of arts, cultural and entertainment venues, such as the Levine Center for the Arts, Mint Museum of Art, Bechtler Museum of Modern Art, Knight Theater and Harvey B. Gantt Center of African-American Art and Culture.

Collaboration between the Public and Private Sectors

Strong collaboration between public and private sectors has also been critical in the current success of Center City. Private sector entities such as developers, businesses, foundations and non-profits have all been key partners in project implementation with the City, County, North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), and other government agencies. Recent successful collaborations include initiatives on retail strategy, transportation infrastructure, affordable housing, crime prevention and employment.

Assets, Opportunities and Challenges

Center City Charlotte has **many of the ingredients needed to evolve as an even more successful and exciting urban core** in the coming years. The overall strength of the regional economy and investment over the past decade has resulted in a resilient and prosperous place. Yet the pathway to achieving the community's vision is marked with many challenges.

ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES: BUILDING ON CENTER CITY'S STRENGTHS

From growth in housing development to an abundance of first-rate amenities and institutions, Center City has a strong foundation upon which to build a vibrant future under the 2020 Vision Plan. Specific assets and opportunities include:

- **A strong economy.** Despite the economic downturn, with approximately 82,900 workers Center City remains the region's primary economic engine and employment center. Uptown is a major banking and financial hub. Retail businesses and shopping opportunities have also increased in recent years. Charlotte's top-level professional sports teams, including the Carolina Panthers and Charlotte Bobcats, are substantial revenue generators that attract millions of fans and visitors. The area's many schools and universities also support the economic strength of Center City and promote an educated workforce.
- **Investment and development.** Since adoption of the 2010 Vision Plan, renewed interest in Center City has resulted in many completed and planned developments, including the ImaginOn children's library and theatre, Time Warner Cable Arena and UNCC's new Uptown building. The planned Brooklyn Village is a project that will reinvigorate the Second Ward neighborhood with a new park and a combination of residential and commercial space. Public investment in Uptown, such as construction of the Mecklenburg County Courthouse, also shows that civic life continues to flourish in Center City's urban core.
- **Culture and entertainment.** The social, entertainment and dining opportunities of Center City are major assets to Charlotte's culture and economy. Sporting venues, bars and restaurants, special events (such as First Night), museums, and art are all important aspects of Center City's allure. Recent projects changing the face of Center City include EpiCentre, NASCAR Hall of Fame and Levine Center for the Arts. Center City's libraries and theater venues provide residents and visitors with additional cultural and entertainment opportunities. Live concerts at the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, North Carolina Music Factory, Spirit Square and other venues are also popular.
- **Commitment to transit.** Charlotte has made major investments in the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) over the last decade. The 9.6-mile LYNX Blue Line light rail opened in 2007. Streetcar tracks have been installed in Elizabeth and additional funding has been identified for construction of the remainder of the first phase. Public and private investments over the next decade should capitalize on existing and planned transit investments.



Center City's live music, performances and events enrich Charlotteans' lives as well as boost the local economy.



Recent transit-oriented development and remaining potential at existing and future rail stations are major assets for Center City.



Elizabeth is a neighborhood just outside of Uptown that has seen significant growth in recent years.



Center City has several nicely-scaled urban parks, plazas and gathering spaces.

- **Higher education and emerging technology.** Higher education is a key ingredient of the area’s strength as a regional center of academic opportunities and corporate partnerships. Center City has several colleges and universities, including Central Piedmont Community College, Johnson & Wales University, Johnson C. Smith University and the new UNCC Center City building. The Wake Forest School of Business and Northeastern University have also established Uptown campuses. These higher education facilities and resources can contribute to the growth of high tech jobs and emerging technologies in Charlotte. However, the potential for a robust “urban campus culture” is currently hampered by a lack of physical connectivity and collaboration between educational entities. A key opportunity is to foster the growth and integration of the area’s colleges, community colleges and universities—including their physical development, partnerships, programs and outreach—into the fabric of the downtown economy.
- **A variety of parks and open spaces.** Center City’s parks and open spaces include a diversity of urban plazas, neighborhood parks, greenway trails and historic cemeteries. Several private landscaped areas and civic plazas between streets and building entrances also create spaces for greenery, recreation and public gathering. In Uptown, spaces such as Fourth Ward Park, the Green and Frazier Park allow people to relax, gather and recreate. The planned Romare Bearden Park in Third Ward and future parks in First Ward and Second Ward will add additional open space. Larger parks located outside the I-77/I-277 freeway loop include Freedom Regional Park, which is being connected to the rest of Center City and the larger region via the Little Sugar Creek Greenway.
- **Safe, family-friendly and relatively affordable.** Charlotte’s growth is largely attributable to its overall high quality of life. The City’s feeling of safety and its good schools have attracted new residents from around the country. Center City, in particular, has capitalized on Charlotte’s reputation for livability to attract major employers and employees to Uptown, and has become one of the most walkable and safe places in the City. A key opportunity will be to develop more affordable and workforce housing, as families and other underrepresented groups currently have difficulty buying or renting in the core of Center City.
- **A tapestry of neighborhoods.** Charlotte is a city of neighborhoods. Center City’s neighborhoods are unique, ranging from historic homes in places like Fourth Ward, Lockwood and Dilworth to the recent development boom of new housing and shops in South End and Elizabeth. A main element of the 2010 Vision Plan is improving connectivity between Uptown and the surrounding neighborhoods. However, such connections, development and growth can adversely impact the livability of adjacent neighborhoods if not planned properly. Care must be taken to ensure context-sensitive neighborhood development and appropriate transition of densities from the Uptown core.

- **Strong civic leadership.** The strength of Charlotte’s neighborhoods and recent investment in Center City can be credited in part to strong civic leadership. The City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County provide a range of community services and work in partnership with neighborhood groups, non-profit organizations, religious institutions and academic leaders to advance initiatives for community health and well being. Through the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee, the City and County advocate for inclusiveness and participatory processes.
- **Historic roots.** The City of Charlotte has a rich history highlighted by its early days as a crossroads of trading routes; its role in the Revolutionary War and Civil War; its era of mining, milling and manufacturing; and its eventual emergence as a modern financial center. However, many of the physical remnants reflecting this history were lost over recent decades as numerous Uptown historic buildings and landmarks were sacrificed to make way for new development. In Fourth Ward, a historic zoning overlay now protects this unique neighborhood just a short distance from office towers, sports arenas and cultural destinations. Such historic preservation measures are important to help save the last remaining physical elements of Charlotte’s history and to anchor Center City’s social fabric and sense of place.
- **Strong urban form.** Appropriate density in the right locations, contiguous development patterns, and active streetscapes are all things that create a memorable and vibrant city. Tryon Street in Uptown is already a model for pedestrian-friendly design and a cohesive urban fabric. Its success can and should be replicated elsewhere in Center City, to bolster planning for stronger centers and corridors and cluster more dense development around transit lines and stations.
- **Development opportunities.** The large amount of vacant and underutilized land throughout Center City provides many opportunities for new development. Vacant parcels, surface parking lots and underutilized structures should be redeveloped in a manner that helps to “stitch” the urban fabric back together. Publicly-owned land—such as the Hal Marshall site in First Ward and properties along North Graham and East Stonewall streets—presents excellent opportunities for catalytic development and strategic partnerships that will spur further revitalization.



Historic South Tryon Street (illustrated above) has largely been redeveloped with contemporary skyscrapers, but remains the most prominent street and home to signature addresses in Center City.



Uptown's many surface parking lots act as impediments to pedestrian activity but offer opportunities for additional development.



While restaurants and nightlife are thriving, retail opportunities in Center City are severely limited.

CHALLENGES

Already one of the fastest growing cities in the nation, Charlotte will need to focus on generating new jobs and housing to meet the demand of forecasted population growth. Challenges range from repositioning Center City within a changing economic environment to ensuring that infrastructure meets future needs. Specific challenges include:

- **Economics and employment.** Competing with other regional, national and global cities to create a healthy and sustainable economy is a growing challenge. Although Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte have lower overall unemployment rates than most major U.S. metro areas, economic turmoil in the commercial banking and financial services industries has had dramatic impact on the regional economy and contributed to rising job losses.
- **Limited housing choice.** Urban, family-friendly neighborhoods are important to Center City's future as a livable place. Maintaining affordability will be a challenge as new development projects and other Center City investments increase property values. As the City continues to grow, it will be important to preserve the livability of the core neighborhoods while creating a range of new housing options, including a supply of new or refurbished workforce housing targeted to low- and middle-income households. Residential development in Center City will need to provide convenient access to public transit and shopping, while fitting in with adjoining uses and existing neighborhoods.
- **Incomplete neighborhoods.** Several of Center City's neighborhoods lack services and amenities such as parks, grocery stores, schools and places to eat, drink and socialize. Furthermore, there are a limited number of connections providing residents with access to amenities in adjacent neighborhoods.
- **The barrier of the loop.** The I-77/I-277 freeway loop is a significant physical barrier between Uptown and the surrounding neighborhoods, greatly influencing the development patterns of Center City. While the loop serves to contain larger building footprints and office towers within Uptown—thereby protecting surrounding neighborhoods from the encroachment of out-of-scale development—it also contributes to poor connectivity and cuts off several close-in employment and residential areas. Overcoming the real and perceived barrier created by the loop is a significant challenge.
- **Parking in Uptown.** Parking structures and surface parking lots are dominant features in Center City, particularly in Uptown. Many of the area's parking facilities are single use with big, blank walls at the street level that discourage pedestrian and bicycle activity. Surface lots are typically unattractive, without landscaping or shade features. Meanwhile, new developments require adequate amounts of parking to serve businesses and residents. The redevelopment of Center City demands creative thinking to resolve design issues related to off-street parking structures and lots; reduce parking needs for existing and new development; encourage use of mass transit to reduce overall parking demand; and leverage new parking technologies to manage supply and access.

- **Roadway network and alternative transportation modes.** As Center City’s commercial and mixed-use areas add density, it will be important to provide alternatives to driving. Sections of I-277 currently experience frequent congestion. Some local roadways that provide access from adjacent residential neighborhoods can also become congested during peak hours. Policies, projects and programs must be implemented to help manage the number of people driving to, through and around Center City. Over the long term, transportation should prioritize non-single occupancy vehicle modes including walking, biking, buses and rail transit as well as carpooling.
- **Public transit operations.** Charlotte’s light rail and bus service are amenities that help make the City a great place to live. However, Center City’s transportation center is insufficient in size to handle current demand. The lack of adequate stacking and bus transfer space often leads to queuing and congestion on Trade and 4th streets. Connections to surrounding neighborhoods and fast, efficient transit routes are critical. As the public transit system expands, identifying and securing additional funding should be a top priority.
- **Limited retail opportunities.** The vibrancy of Center City is rooted in a mix of land uses—including housing, office and entertainment—but it lacks a critical mass of retail. The area’s many attractions bring out residents, visitors and workers during evening hours, but Uptown has not been as successful in establishing itself as a daytime shopping destination. A recent inventory identified almost

two million square feet of available retail space in Center City with approximately 378,000 square feet of additional space proposed or under construction. However, only 39,000 square feet of retail space is allocated to providing shoppers with goods that residents, workers and visitors desire. Uptown shops compete with well-established suburban shopping malls, and the majority of existing retailers focus on providing convenience goods. In addition, much of the Center City’s existing retail space is inwardly focused and does not contribute to a bustling downtown shopping experience.

- **Accommodating future growth.** Adequate amounts of utilities, including water, power and sewer, must be available to serve Center City’s future growth. For a City established more than 200 years ago, Charlotte’s infrastructure system is in relatively good condition. Still, there are areas with aging infrastructure that will need to be addressed to accommodate new development. Challenges include uncertainty about pipeline conditions and materials, as well as the operability of valves and hydrants for the water system.



The I-77/I-277 freeway loop creates a physical and perceptual disconnect between Uptown and the surrounding neighborhoods.



Building the Future: The Economic Foundation

The long-term vitality and sustainability of Center City hinge on its ability to **maintain and build upon the existing foundation of jobs, commerce and business activity while diversifying into strategic growth sectors**. The ability to successfully grow existing and new companies, expand markets, and cultivate a diverse, talented workforce will in part determine if Center City will achieve its vision and goals in the coming years.

EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR

While finance has been a primary economic driver for Charlotte, the overall economy is somewhat diversified with significant employment concentrations in professional services, retail trade, wholesale trade and manufacturing. By comparison, Center City's employment base is much more heavily concentrated in Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE), Public Administration, and Transportation and Utilities. Center City is headquarters to three Fortune 500 companies, including Bank of America (13,900 employees), Wells Fargo/Wachovia Bank (20,000 employees) and Duke Energy (7,800 employees). In addition, four of the region's seven other top employers have a large presence in Center City. These include the Carolinas Health Care System (26,300 employees), Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (19,800 employees), Presbyterian Regional Healthcare (9,000 employees) and Charlotte and Mecklenburg County Government (7,500 employees). Sectors with the weakest representation in Center City are construction (approximately 4% of

total County employment), wholesale/retail trade (6%) and manufacturing (9%). Further strengthening and diversification of employment sectors will be critical for a balanced economy (*Sources: Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, BAE*).

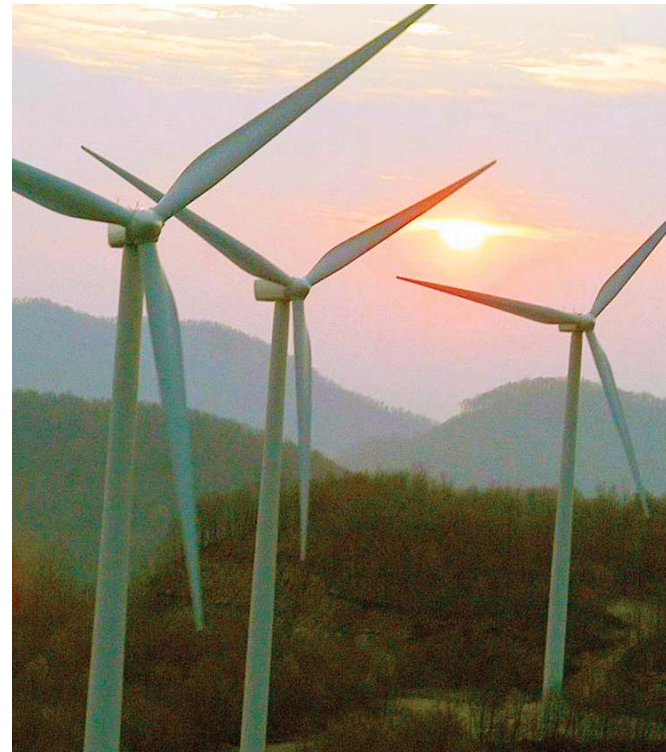
REGIONAL TRENDS

The Charlotte Regional Partnership identifies six major target sectors that have the strongest long-term prospects for regional economic growth. The sectors include:

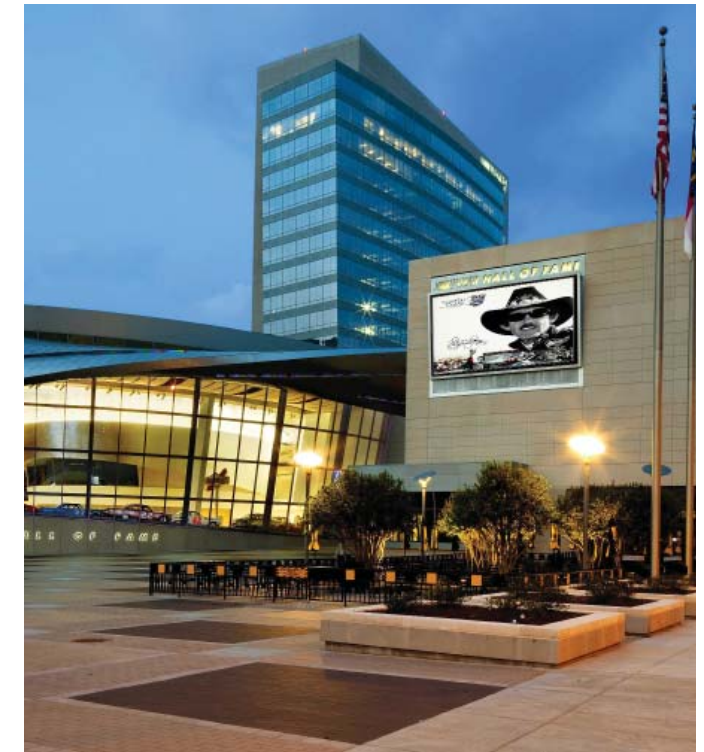
- **Finance.** Charlotte is often referred to as the second most important financial services center in the United States, after New York City. Financial services and insurance activities account for one-third of the Gross Domestic Product for the Charlotte metro area. This is by far the most significant sector in the region, and in Uptown specifically, in terms of long-term employment growth and related impacts on the commercial real estate market.
- **Health.** This sector comprises medical device manufacturing, biotech, and pharmaceutical research and health administration (including insurance and back office support). Though not as strong as the North Carolina Research Triangle in terms of biotech uses, Charlotte has a strong health care sector and is an increasingly important center for biotech and bioinformatics research and development through UNCC. The UNCC Uptown Center offers masters degree programs in Health Accountancy and Public Health.

- **Energy.** Home to Duke Energy, the region has a diversified energy generation industry and research and development cluster anchored by the UNCC Energy Production Research Center, as well as the Lee College of Engineering and Electric Power Research Institute’s research and development headquarters.
- **Defense.** The Charlotte region has approximately 1,000 companies with defense contracts with a focus on performance materials, fuel and power systems, military vehicles, and aerospace components. Firms and employment in Center City currently comprise a small share of this sector.
- **Motorsports.** Although it is unclear how many jobs motorsports generate in the regional economy, the Charlotte region is home to approximately 90 percent of all NASCAR teams. Most importantly for Uptown, the NASCAR Hall of Fame provides a new draw for visitors from around the United States.
- **Film.** The Charlotte Regional Partnership estimates the annual economic impact of this sector to the region at \$500 million. It is unclear what impact, if any, this sector will have on specific economic opportunities in Center City.

Finally, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce identifies higher education as an important element in developing jobs in the following target industries: aviation, bioscience, computer software engineering, logistics/distribution, optics and plastics manufacturing. These areas should also be considered as Center City strives to bolster its position in the greater regional, national and global economies.



Local corporate and institutional resources can help make renewable energy production a burgeoning economic sector for Charlotte.



The NASCAR Hall of Fame represents a sector that can be leveraged for further growth.



The healthcare and health-related industries have a strong and growing presence in greater Charlotte.



The Charlotte Regional Partnership is working to create a sustainable template to measure the economic impact of the film industry in the 16-county region.



Ideas on Center City's assets, challenges, opportunities and overall vision were recorded in real time during Community Workshop #1.



Workshop participants provided input and feedback at microphones, on comment cards and at interactive idea stations.



More than 200 people participated in the community visioning workshop from remote locations via the internet and CLT Blog.

2020 Planning Process

Similar to the 2010 Vision Plan effort, the 2020 Vision Plan reflects the needs, ideas and creativity of Charlotteans. Input and feedback were gathered through an interactive planning process with a multi-faceted media, communications and community engagement strategy. A series of community workshops, neighborhood meetings, committee sessions, and working groups was bolstered with a project website, social media, speaker series, newspaper articles, radio interviews and cable television programs.

The 2020 Vision Plan process was organized in three major phases, including:

- Phase I: Existing Conditions Assessment/ Articulation of Vision.** The first phase of the planning process focused on review of previous and concurrent planning efforts and studies; data collection and analysis; identification of assets, issues and challenges; and community visioning.
- Phase II: Plan Strategies, Projects and Programs.** The second phase of the process was devoted to developing the overarching plan framework and specific strategies and concepts.
- Phase III: Draft and Final Center City 2020 Vision Plan.** The final phase of the planning process included refinement, documentation and prioritization of the results from the first two phases. The 2020 Vision Plan combines the overall vision with specific recommended policies, programs and projects to create a comprehensive development concept for Center City Charlotte.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

More than 800 participants attended public meetings between October 2009 and November 2010 to develop ideas and provide input on the 2020 Vision, goals, recommendations and implementation strategies. Three workshops were hosted at the Charlotte Convention Center and provided opportunities for virtual participation via social media and blogging sites.

- **Community Workshop #1: Visioning.** The first session engaged the community and businesses in the development of a vision for the next decade of growth and development in Center City. The workshop was highly interactive and provided a collection of activities, a presentation, and facilitated community discussion.
- **Community Workshop #2: Review Plan Direction and Framework.** At the second community workshop, the project team presented and garnered feedback on the preferred plan direction and framework. The workshop included a large group presentation and discussion, as well as small group breakout sessions to provide input on emerging recommendations.
- **Community Workshop #3: Review Draft Plan.** A final community workshop was held to present the draft 2020 Vision Plan recommendations. Workshop participants provided comments on the overall plan organization, specific strategies and refined projects.

STEERING COMMITTEE AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Steering Committee for the 2020 Vision Plan included key stakeholders representing major employers, landowners, neighborhoods, schools and citizen organizations. A series of Steering Committee meetings was held throughout the planning process to help articulate the vision; create the strategy framework; review and provide input on plan alternatives and strategies; and review, refine and confirm the draft and final plan products. Additional stakeholder engagement included more than a dozen individual and group stakeholder interviews, several neighborhood meetings, and a charrette with local professionals in the fields of planning and design.



A group of local professionals participated in a session with the project team to explore planning and design options related to several development focus areas.



Community workshops included formal and informal activities to gather participant input related to values, vision, goals and specific plan recommendations.



Video Voices—a video and sound booth—provided a unique opportunity for participants to share their personal vision for Center City with the larger community.



Working group members and workshop participants discussed ideas related to several topic areas, including Transportation and Mobility.



The Technical and Steering committees provided valuable input and feedback throughout the 2020 Vision Plan process.

WORKING GROUPS

During the generation of the plan alternatives and strategies, five working groups were formed to discuss, analyze and more completely develop specific plan recommendations related to the following five topic areas:

- Transportation and Mobility.
- Urban Living.
- Economic Vitality.
- Arts, Culture and Entertainment.
- Parks, Recreation and Environment.

Each working group met twice during Phase II of the planning process. The first meeting was a facilitated brainstorming session, after which working group members independently researched one or more ideas. At the second working group meeting, ideas were presented and prioritized for consideration in the final plan recommendations.

Many of the working group ideas are incorporated into the 2020 Vision Plan including, but not limited to, recommendations for increasing urban agriculture; promoting community diversity; better linking parks and recreational amenities; capping the freeway; celebrating connections between the four wards; exploring a funding district for arts and cultural facilities; bolstering the role of Uptown religious institutions; encouraging more food festivals; carsharing; linking higher education via transit; and creating additional housing options.

TECHNICAL REVIEW AND INPUT

A Technical Committee, comprising staff from multiple agencies, departments and organizations, met periodically throughout the 2020 Vision Plan process to provide detailed expert knowledge of Charlotte's Center City, review technical elements of the 2020 Vision Plan, and evaluate alternatives. Technical Committee input was supplemented with ongoing individual and group meetings with key staff members, as well as an Urban Land Institute Technical Advisory Panel focused on the potential of the West Trade corridor.

ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

Several additional outreach tools were employed throughout the planning process to increase participation and facilitate input and feedback. An online presence was established for the project with an interactive website (www.centercity2020.com), social media accounts, and blog postings. Charlotte Center City Partners also teamed with UNCC School of Architecture to sponsor a speakers series focused on topics related to urban design and development.

Summary

The vision expressed by the community is one of a vibrant, prosperous future. With many building blocks in place—and a focus on ensuring future economic health—Center City is poised to evolve as the dynamic center of a thriving metropolis, one that is on par with the best downtowns in the country. The elements of the 2020 Vision Plan set the stage for the next decade of growth and change in Center City.