

Section I: Introduction



Introduction

History

The Town of Mineral Springs, with a population of 2500, is located between Waxhaw and Monroe in Union County, North Carolina, only a few miles from the outer belt freeway around the neighboring large city of Charlotte.

While the community's history dates back to the 18th century, the town had lost its charter and was in danger of losing its identity. Residents reincorporated the town in 1999, in order to maintain itself as a predominantly rural community in the face of encroaching, homogenous suburban development. Wide-open spaces abound within the community and many residents maintain farms or keep horses. The Queen's Cup, a nationally recognized steeplechase event, takes place in the heart of Mineral Springs on the last Saturday of April each year.

The town does not provide any major services, and levies a property tax rate of only \$.027 per \$100. The municipal government is responsible for regulation of zoning and subdivision within the town limits, currently consisting of an area approximately eight square miles. The independently chartered Mineral Springs Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service provides fire protection, and police protection is provided by Union County Sheriff's Patrol.

Visioning Process

The visioning process is an attempt to fully articulate the goals of local residents. To accomplish this task, the Community Planning class at UNC Charlotte administered a written survey and a community visualization survey (CVS) as well as undertaking a series of geographic and visual analyses. The written-survey solicited feedback from residents on public services, community design, community satisfaction and future directions for the town. The CVS provided a visual tool to reflect more accurately the types of residential, commercial and retail facilities best suited to Mineral Springs' rural context. Together, both surveys reinforce one another and provide policy-makers with invaluable tools for gauging the public interest. When these surveys are combined with more objective analyses, such

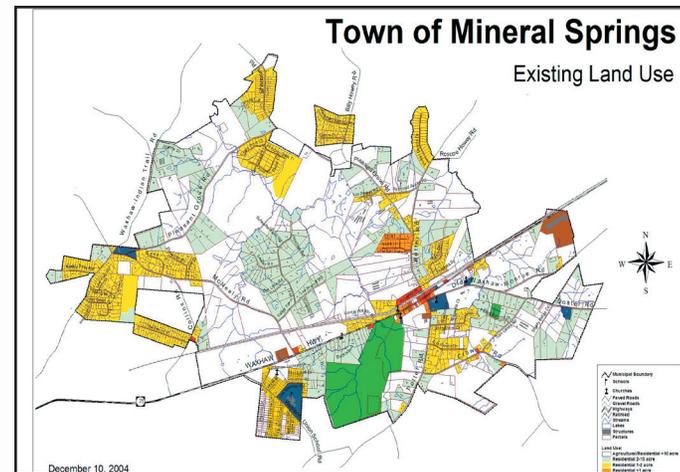
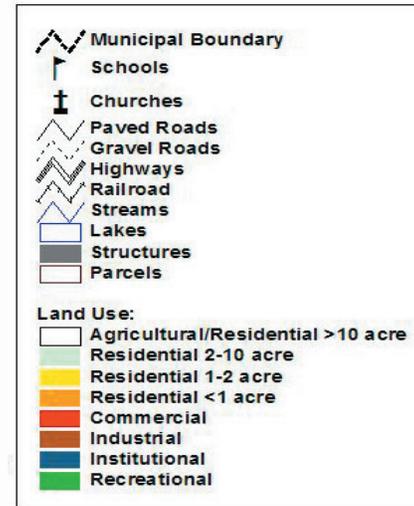


Fig. 1

as land capacity studies of topography, soil type, permeability, etc., and a variety of different development typologies that are potentially suitable to Mineral Springs, it is possible to articulate some clear recommendations for future development. These are outlined on subsequent pages.



Demographic Analysis

How many people will live in Union County and Mineral Springs in 2030? What kind of impact will this have on the number of homes on the landscape?

The task of projecting future population and housing numbers is a difficult job, especially for a town the size of Mineral Springs. Why? Population projections are usually based upon historical trends, and because Mineral Springs has only been incorporated since 1999, historical data is limited. Union County poses fewer problems in the historical sense, but the rate of development occurring within Union County is an historical aberration, and much of the speculative development is attracting population at a high rate. The proliferation of housing developments around Mineral Springs is a tangible example of how rapidly growth could engulf the town. Rather than trying to project population, perhaps a better solution is to determine the carrying capacity of Mineral Springs. That is, how much population can Mineral Springs absorb without sacrificing its unique quality of life?

The 2000 Census undercounted Mineral Springs as having a total of 1370 people, and annual estimates for 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 are not reported at the level of small towns. However, the best estimate of Mineral Springs' population in 2005 is 2,500 inhabitants. The Log Into North Carolina (LINC) website offers the best available data in terms of future projections at the County level, and it shows that Union County has been growing considerably over the last 15 years. Since 1990, Union County has added 73,795 residents, and since 2000, 13,200 single-family housing units have been built in Union County. All of this growth has had a tremendous impact on local infrastructure, landscapes, environmental quality, school capacity, habitat and residents' expectations for government services. Union County is continuing to transition from a rural to an urban community with no sign of this trend slowing or being halted.

Union County Historical Population Growth

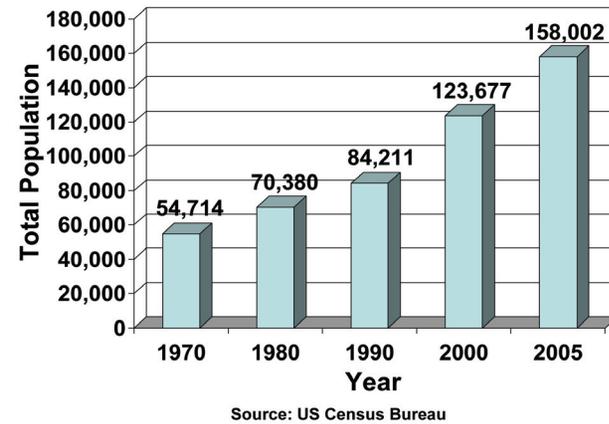


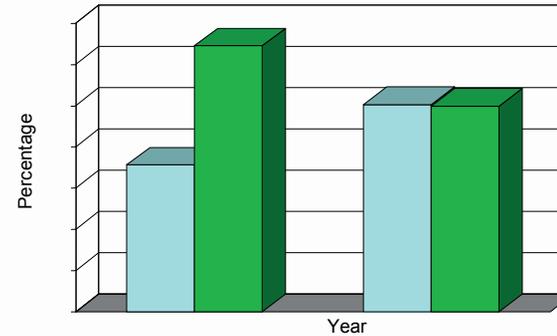
Fig. 2

Union County will also be affected by larger demographic trends like the so-called “graying of America.” As our population ages, several challenges to contemporary development patterns will become more pronounced. For instance, auto-dependency and a lack of health care services will mean a rise in the number of elderly drivers in the future making potentially long trips to health care providers. Mineral Springs has an opportunity to meet these challenges head-on by promoting appropriate residential densities in mixed-use areas where housing, commercial and retail are all within walking distance of one another.

For purposes of the visioning process, a high-growth, moderate-growth and low-growth scenario were presented. The high-growth scenario assumed an annual growth rate of 4.5 percent, and at this rate of growth, population would double roughly every twelve years. To put this in context, two large subdivisions of 500 homes each (typical in the surrounding county) would be enough to double Mineral Springs' population. The moderate growth rate assumed a 3 percent annual growth rate, which correlates with a doubling of the population every 24 years. Finally, the low-growth scenario assumed a 1 percent annual rate. At this rate, population would double about every 72 years. Figures 7,8, and 9 illustrate how much land would be consumed to meet the high-, moderate-, and low-growth scenarios at an average density of one unit per acre.

The scenarios assume a density of 2.6 people per household. Given the moderate-growth scenario, over 1,000 new homes would need to be built to absorb the incoming population by 2030. Within this context of growth, Mineral Springs has two options. It can react to haphazard rezoning requests like other municipalities in Union County, or it can proactively plan for its future. Some might point out that Mineral Springs has not experienced overwhelming growth over the last decade, thus stronger efforts to control growth are not needed. This view ignores the realities of growth trends in Union County. Mineral Springs is not anti-development, far from it. Rather, Mineral Springs wants to balance growth and development to insure that its rural heritage and scenic vistas are preserved for future generations. An unmanaged influx of new residents, housing and infrastructure would likely threaten the small town character of Mineral Springs, bringing with it new pressures for urban services, schools and infrastructure. The costs of these services are paid for in tangible (property taxes) and intangible ways (congestion, loss of identity and culture).

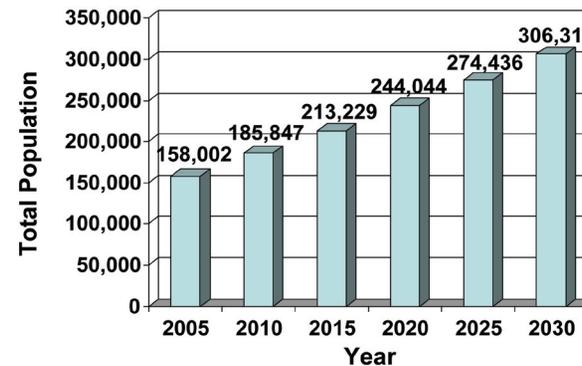
Union County: Urban v. Rural



Source: US Census Bureau SF3 1990, 2000

Fig. 3

Union County Projected Population Growth



Source: LINC – North Carolina Demographics Website

Fig. 4

To avoid the fate of similar communities around it, Mineral Springs has worked with local residents, land-owners and businesses to engage the public in a dialogue about growth, and one dominant message has emerged, a desire by residents and elected officials to limit population growth in the town to an overall figure of about 4,000 residents, including existing citizens. This means a population increase of about 1,500 people, or between 600 and 700 new homes built within the town limits. This equates to a very low rate of growth and cannot be accomplished without major changes to the town's zoning maps and zoning classifications to restrict development and to preserve large areas of open space to maintain the desired rural character.

“Proper growth and planning along with focused leadership will make the next few years of growth possible and efficient.”

Mineral Springs Projected Population Growth Scenarios

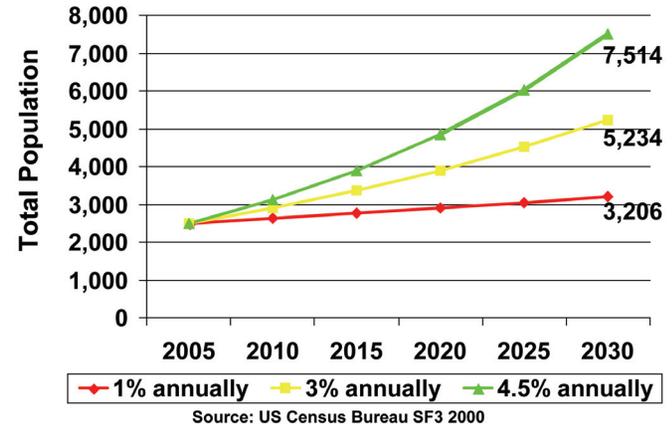


Fig. 5

Mineral Springs Projected Housing Growth Scenarios

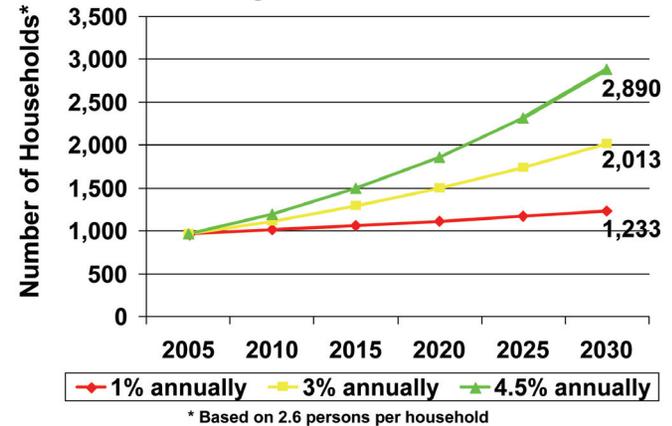


Fig. 6

Low Growth Scenario



Fig. 7

Mineral Springs Vision Plan

UNC Charlotte Community Planning Analysis
April 2006

Medium Growth Scenario

Mineral Springs, North Carolina (2030)

Graphical Representation of 3% Household Growth

1,050 Households
Representing 2,200 sf homes on 1-acre lots

University of North Carolina at Charlotte
College of Architecture
Study 2005

*Note: Diagrammatic Representation Only
Census data projections - NOT design proposal



Fig. 8

High Growth Scenario



Fig. 9