

Building Community Character **Mitchell County, NC**

Note – The below tables have 3 columns of numbers. The middle column is the number of *controlled* votes (i.e., single votes cast for each category); the right column is the number of *discretionary* votes (each participant had 12); and the left column is the number of *total* votes (controlled plus discretionary)

Landscaping – Signage – Roads – Parking – Lighting – Artistic Accents

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Above-ground utilities (phone, electric) in downtown areas are eyesores
- Insufficient codes and enforcement
- Is there a mural trail?
- Lack of planning and zoning
- Light pollution relating to street/parking areas
- Litter along roads
- Narrow and unsafe roads
- Unattractive commercial properties
- Unattractive signs and billboards

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Major road corridors
- ◇ Downtown areas



What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

19	6	13	Begin planning, zoning, and more stringent code development
17	8	9	Improve Hwy 226 from Marion to Mitchell County
9	3	6	Establish green space ordinance
5	3	2	Bury utilities in downtown areas
4	1	3	Add planner to county staff
4	2	2	Hire a grant writer for the county
3	1	2	Modify codes to reduce light pollution
2	1	1	Need better road signage
2	1	1	Work with NCDOT to get right of ways and widen roads
1	1		Encourage a consistent sign design that is in keeping with local style and character
1		1	Keep up the good work ... artwork, paintings, landscape, brick sidewalk
1		1	Provide additional parking
1		1	Widen the roads (Hwy 19E needs to be 4 lane)
1		1	Work with newspaper to better inform public of community events (e.g., clean-up)
			Bring back the clean sweep
			Dress up buildings in downtown ... encourage downtown businesses to work together for beautification
			Establish sign ordinance to control height, type, materials, etc.
			Organize community beautification programs

Historic Structures - Landmarks

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Failure to clearly identify our local heritage
- Fear/lack of trust in tourism
- Finding new uses for old/unused structures (e.g., housing)
- Finding owners who are willing to preserve structures/landmarks
- Limited financial resources for restoration

Community Character Workshop Results

- Many properties are vacant and not currently in use
- Obtaining community specific buy-in

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Major road corridors
- ◇ Downtown areas: Bakersville, Spruce Pine

What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

11	8	3	Develop unique uses for old buildings (e.g., Carolina Theater)
6	2	4	Seek grants to restore and preserve historic structures/landmarks
5	4	1	Make preservation of historic structures a priority
4	1	3	Better promote our assets (e.g., using the internet)
4	3	1	Develop way of honoring different community values
3	1	2	Publish guides to historic landmarks
2		2	Find new uses for properties not being used
2	2		Tell compelling stories about our landmarks
1		1	Add attractive housing to downtown
1	1		Encourage use of tax incentives for historic preservation
			Provide walking/driving tours of local landmarks
			Work with property owners (one-on-one)

Shopping Areas – Downtowns – Commercial Activities

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Being unique
- Community pride
- Demonstrating appreciation for local ownership
- Keeping commercial businesses profitable
- Promoting business-oriented lodging (e.g., with meeting facilities)
- Promoting tourism and other new businesses
- Providing activities/attractions for youth

Community Character Workshop Results

- Seeking revenue from tax on alcohol sales
- Staying loyal to old stores

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Major road corridors
- ◇ Downtown areas
- ◇ Other: Restaurants, meeting places

What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

26	6	20	Legalize the sale of alcohol ... allow restaurants to serve alcohol
13	3	10	Establish a long-term rehabilitation facility for both drugs and alcohol
13	9	4	Promote Mitchell County assets (e.g., unique, small, old, etc.)
8	7	1	Contact other small towns, and learn what they have done to attract small businesses and keep their downtowns thriving (e.g., Corning, NY)
6	1	5	Build a youth center, theater, and campgrounds
5		5	Encourage downtown businesses to work together (e.g., Main Street program and downtown beautification)
1	1		Focus on commercial and community activities other than shopping
1		1	Promote small businesses



Health/Medical – Education – Community Facilities

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Having adequate facilities for medical care, mental health, and community services
- Maintaining our educational facilities
- Promoting parental involvement/support for completing education within the local community
- Providing activities for youth (that will help to keep them away from drugs and alcohol)
- Providing early intervention in education for our children
- Providing essential medical care for elderly who lack funds
- Providing facilities, funding, and community support for local schools and community college
- Remembering that churches play an important role in the community
- Taking care of the increasing elderly population (without forgetting our youth/children)

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Major road corridors
- ◇ Downtown areas

What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

16	10	6	Place greater emphasis on facilities and programs to provide youth with something to do
13	7	6	Support and grow community services (for all ages)
10	3	7	Raise taxes to generate revenue for education
9	1	8	Establish more and better drug prevention programs
4	1	3	Require developers of subdivisions/new developments to contribute funds for infrastructure development (schools, parks, etc.)
3	2	1	Recruit more and better-qualified teachers (education can shape our future)

Community Character Workshop Results

2	1	1	Expand volunteerism to help meet our community needs
2	2		Promote Mitchell County as a regional destination for medical and educational services
2		2	Provide free parenting skills classes at Mayland Community College

Community Pride - Annoyances

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Being functional as a community
- Caring about how we look
- Finding out who owns dilapidated buildings, and talking to them about the problems
- Finding ways to refurbish old buildings
- Improving architectural designs
- Keep from being stuck in the past
- Making good first impressions
- Overcoming apathy
- Removing eyesores

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Downtown areas

What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

17	13	4	Develop and enforce more stringent codes
10	2	8	Find innovative ways to comply with codes (e.g., need a place to take junk vehicles)
7	4	3	Engage in both planning and zoning
5	2	3	Provide incentives to improve aesthetics and design
5		5	Tax owners of junk cars
4		4	Make removal of junk a priority
3	1	2	Utilize inmate resources to help with cleanup

Community Character Workshop Results

2		2	Address erosion problems before they occur
2	2		Upgrade when possible, and demolish when necessary
1		1	Create codes that emphasize safety and aesthetics
1		1	Get grants to renovate facades
1	1		Refurbish (rather than destroy) old buildings
1	1		Restore old and historic buildings
			Take pride in our community

Agriculture – Tourism – Arts and Crafts

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Ability to develop cultural tourism that support arts and crafts
- Ability to develop viable farming that will increase local consumption
- Advertising the arts/artists in our county
- Appreciating and valuing art/artists in the county
- Insufficient lodging facilities
- Insufficient promotion of tourism (on the regional, state, and national levels)
- Lack of alcohol sales inhibit restaurant business
- Lack of high speed internet
- Lack of support for local agriculture
- Locals cannot afford to keep/maintain large farms/farmland
- Making it affordable for locals to buy local arts and crafts
- There is little to draw people to Mitchell County

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Major road corridors



What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

11	4	7	Identify new markets for local products
11	5	6	Start thinking <i>outside the box</i> in terms of new crops for agriculture
10	4	6	Promote agri-tourism (people love to tour farms)
6	3	3	Encourage green industries in Mitchell County
5		5	Educate others that artist do not take away from local jobs ... they add to them
3	2	1	Unify our efforts (chamber, towns, EDC, local government, community college, etc.) to promote economic development
2	1	1	Increase availability of jobs for locals
1	1		Buy locally grown produce
1		1	Continue blacksmith festival as a positive model
1	1		Encourage organic farming at Mitchell High School
1		1	Expand farmers markets
1	1		Identify opportunities to keep farming viable
			Borrow ideas from other communities that might work in Mitchell County
			Establish better communication between the county and towns
			Offer cooking classes using local produce
			Provide assistance to Christmas tree farms that will help them become more environmentally conscious
			Recognize and celebrate local artistic talent
			Widely publicize the unique offerings of Mitchell County

Parks – Recreation – The Physical Environment

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Balancing ownership issues, private property rights, and public needs/wants
- Budgeting money for parks and recreation facilities
- Insufficient advertising for recreational activities
- Lack of indoor recreational facilities
- Low commitment to protect our watershed

Community Character Workshop Results

- Most outdoor recreational activities are seasonal
- Promoting positive things in Mitchell County
- Providing outdoor recreation opportunities that minimize environmental impacts (e.g., hiking/biking trails)
- Stopping the dumping of trash in rivers, at road sides, etc.

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Downtown areas (e.g., Bakersville park)

What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

14	6	8	Develop a comprehensive plan and zoning
13	7	6	Publish a county-wide guide to parks, recreation, and outdoor activities
6		6	Educate our youth (and others) to break the dumping habit
5	3	2	Look for alternative funding sources (e.g., grants, donors, etc.)
4	3	1	Establish stream buffers and more stringent erosion control standards
3	1	2	Build public/private partnerships
3	1	2	Include community centers in park areas
2		2	Establish greater control over real estate development
2		2	Require developers to set aside property for parks and recreation (e.g., exactions and impact fees)
1	1		Practice land management
			Dedicate more classroom hours to teaching about civic responsibilities
			Develop environmental controls
			Make recreational areas easy to access and use
			Publicize our parks and recreation opportunities
			Use prison inmates to pick up trash

Housing – Land Use Controls – Mining Activities – Architecture and Design - Energy

Root problems ... keys to community character

- Balancing the protection of jobs and industry while also preserving our environment
- Barns and other old structures rotting and falling apart
- Lack of diversity in housing
- Lack of planning and zoning
- Many of our schools resemble prisons
- Mining reclamation
- Providing affordable low-income housing
- Tilting towards *green* practices
- Unregulated development

Geographical extent

- ◇ County-wide
- ◇ Downtown areas

What can/should be done to create positive sense of place feelings?

17	9	8	Need planning and zoning (to include bonding requirements that will ensure that development projects get completed)
15	8	7	Practice land use management
10	4	6	Provide housing for mid-level income families
4		4	Enforce adopted regulations
4	1	3	Focus on renewable energy (i.e., wind, solar, etc.)
4	1	3	Provide incentives for solar/green power
3	1	2	Maintain open dialogue between public and elected officials/local government
2	1	1	Seek grants/state money to restore barns and old structures (owners don't have the money)
1		1	Find more products and new uses for our raw mining materials

Community Character Workshop Results

1		1	Integrate gated communities/developments so that they become active community participants
1		1	Schools should have geo-thermal heating/cooling system
			Institute a Main Street program
			Stop hiring the same architect for schools/county buildings