

## INTRODUCTION

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## PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

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The intent of the Clay County Comprehensive Plan (CCCP, the Comprehensive Plan, or the Plan) is to help Clay County government leaders and citizens guide short-range and long-range change, growth, and development. The purposes of the Comprehensive Plan are to:

- Provide vision for future growth and development in Clay County;
- Identify areas appropriate for development and preservation over the next ten years;
- Recommend appropriate types of land use for specific areas in and around the county;
- Preserve the natural resources and promote the conservation of agricultural resources around the county;
- Identify needed transportation and community facilities to serve future land uses;
- Foster the economic development base by capitalizing on the county's unique opportunities and resources;
- Serve as a vehicle for community awareness and education; and
- Provide detailed strategies to implement plan recommendations.

## PLAN ORGANIZATION

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## COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING COMMITTEE

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The Clay County Comprehensive Planning Committee (the Committee or CCCP Committee), comprised of ten Clay County residents and one ex-officio member, provided the guidance and direction for plan development. Committee members met monthly from March 2009 to July 2010 to analyze data, explore appropriate directions, incorporate community input, and develop the recommendations found in this plan.

The committee, chaired by Dr. Gail Criss, included Hayesville Mayor Harrell Moore, Keith Nuckolls, Frank Leatherwood, Ron Guggisberg, Elizabeth Rybicki, Ed Roach, Tanya Long, Dennis Myers, and Joe Allen Davenport. Clay County Commissioner Harry Jarrett served as an ex officio member of the committee.

## PLANNING PROCESS

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The development of the Clay County Comprehensive Plan involved several steps, with the goal being the adoption and implementation of a set of goals and policy actions to guide future community growth and development. The process used to develop this plan involved the following steps:

**Step One--Data Collection and Analysis:** This step involved collecting data, developing support documents, updating maps and databases, and assembling the information necessary to define and document existing conditions and trends as they relate to the physical, social, and environmental conditions within the county. Individual chapters of the Comprehensive Plan present much of this documentation, including information on general demographics; agricultural, natural, and cultural resources; land stewardship and housing; transportation; utilities and community facilities; and economic development.

**Step Two--Identification of Issues and Opportunities:** Based on the information collected and on the results of the first round of the community input meetings, the committee listed specific concerns and issues. Along with the identification of issues, or perceived problems needing action, the committee also made an effort to identify opportunities, or areas where existing conditions or trends present a situation favorable for future action.

**Step Three--Development of a Future Land Stewardship Plan:** Perhaps the most important elements of this plan are the Future Land Use Map and the Regional Context Map, which are intended to serve as a basis for the future growth and development of the county. The Committee considered various alternatives to guide future land use. The recommended alternative is a means to meet and implement the plan's goals and objectives.

**Step Four--Formulation of Goals and Policy Actions:** Goals are statements defining a desired future in a general or philosophical manner, while policy actions are more concrete and measurable outcomes. The identification of issues and opportunities led into the formulation and refinement of the plan's goals and policy actions that, in turn, will be used to guide implementation of the overall comprehensive plan.

**Step Five--Plan Adoption and Implementation:** The development of this plan would be meaningless without it being adopted and implemented. More important than its official adoption, however, is the buy-in from the public and from public officials. The Plan is intended to reflect a shared vision of the future, and although it is difficult to create a shared vision which satisfies all parties, it is hoped that this Plan and the planning process used, has created a roadmap which can be used as a basis for future growth and development decisions.

**Step Six--Plan Review and Update:** The final step in the planning process begins upon adoption – the monitoring and review of the plan and its recommendations. As conditions change and unforeseen events occur, it will become necessary to update, amend, or re-initiate the planning process. The Plan should be thoroughly reviewed at least once every three to five years to determine whether or not changing circumstances demand amendments to the plan or if it is necessary to begin the entire planning process anew.

## SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY INPUT

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The Clay County Comprehensive Planning Committee gathered community input in three rounds—the first of which was to obtain general thoughts, ideas, and concerns from which the Comprehensive Planning Committee used to make plan recommendations. *<Final Draft> The second \_\_\_\_\_. The third, and final \_\_\_\_\_.*

## PHASE ONE—GENERAL COMMUNITY INPUT

Community input for the first phase of the Clay County Comprehensive Plan began in August 2009 with small group gatherings and focus groups, and ended in December 2009 with the close of the Community Opinion Survey.

### COMMUNITY AND SMALL GROUP MEETINGS

To begin the Community Input Process, the CCCP Committee hosted a series of community meetings and small group gatherings to solicit information from a wide variety of citizens. The Committee held meetings at the Brasstown Community Center, Hayesville First United Methodist Church, and the Tusquittee Community Center. The first two meetings at Brasstown and Hayesville Methodist had sparse attendance. The third meeting at Tusquittee had better attendance, but the meeting was held in conjunction with the Community Center's regular monthly meeting and the community input session was cut short. Additionally, Committee members hosted small group gatherings with people in their social circles, and five focus groups were coordinated with representatives from the real estate/ development community, ministers, the Hispanic community, school parents, and high school students. Combined, 118 people participated in at least one type of community meeting.

### COMMUNITY OPINION SURVEY

The Clay County Community Opinion Survey was available to residents of Clay County in electronic and printed formats. The CCCP Committee posted electronic survey links on a variety of Clay County Comprehensive Plan promotional materials and it was advertised on posters distributed throughout the county. The Committee also posted a link to the survey in the Clay County Progress, and links were available on the Clay County Government and the Comprehensive Plan websites. All 8,816 Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation (BRMEMC) customers who receive a paper power bill received a copy of the survey in their October 2009 bill. Five hundred and sixty individuals completed the Community Opinion Survey. Sixty-six percent of the survey respondents completed the printed version while 34% responded to the online survey. Survey respondents were not required to answer each question. Of the sixty-six answerable items, there is a median of 538 answers per item—96% of people answered each question.

### COMMUNITY INPUT REPORT

All of the information generated through the first phase of the community input process is summarized in the *Clay County Comprehensive Plan Community Input Summary*.<sup>1</sup> The summary report is available on the Clay County Comprehensive Plan.

### CLAY COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WEBSITE

A record of meetings and documents pertaining to the Clay County Comprehensive Plan is available on the Clay County Comprehensive Plan website. The site was another avenue for citizens to submit feedback for the CCCP Committee. At the time of this writing, the site is hosted at the following address: [www.claycountycomp.wordpress.com](http://www.claycountycomp.wordpress.com). The meeting records, supporting documents, comments submitted via the website, and other electronic materials on the site are an important appendix to the Clay County Comprehensive Plan.

## PHASE TWO—RESPONDING AND REACTING TO THE DRAFT PLAN

<sup>1</sup> <http://claycountycomp.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/final-ci-summary-03-04-10-reduced-size.pdf>

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## PHASE THREE—FORMAL PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

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### COMMON THEMES OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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Throughout the planning process, the Comprehensive Planning Committee identified six reoccurring themes that intimately shaped the Plan's goals and policy actions. The common these are:

1. *Coordination and communication:* Better coordination and communication from County department to County department, from County leadership to citizens, from citizen leadership to County leadership, and community group to community group will enhance Clay County's overall use of resources and better unite those who have Clay County's best interest in mind.
2. *Connection:* Fragmentation, or disconnection, is common in Clay County--whether the topic is recreation, tourism, transportation planning, or land stewardship. The goals and policy actions in the CP attempt to connect fragmented elements.
3. *Intention:* In the past, opportunities have come to Clay County, and the county has not had to go outside to market itself or look for opportunity. As times have changed, Clay County now competes with the region, the nation, and the world. In order meet its goals, particularly those tied to economic development, Clay County must intentionally seek out opportunities that will help the county meet the needs of its citizens now and in the future.
4. *Education:* During a Committee meeting, Mayor Harrell Moore said, "I've lived here all my life, and I learn something new every time I come to one of these meetings." Clay County has many resources for its citizens. Unfortunately, most are not well known. If the Mayor of the Hayesville who has lived here for well over 60 years isn't aware of what's available, it is safe to assume that many others are as well. The CP looks for ways to increase awareness and to make connections between County services in order to maximize County resources.
5. *Quality of Life:* Overall, people are happy with the quality of life in Clay County. The CP's strategies work to maintain what is good--such as the rural character; and improve what is challenging--such as the lack of good jobs.

### QUALITY OF LIFE VALUES

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People involved in the community input process shared what makes Clay County such a great place to live and work. From that input, the following Clay County Quality of Life Values list was developed. These values are the qualities that form Clay County's foundation.

- **Family and Faith Oriented:** Clay County is a good place to raise a family, with supportive activities through recreation programs, the schools, and churches.
- **The People:** The people of Clay County are vital to the quality of life in Clay County. People of Clay County:
  - **Care for the community and have a sense of pride:** People in Clay County care for where they live and want to take care of what they have.

- **Volunteer and get involved in the community:** People in Clay County offer their time and resources to maintain a high quality of life.
- **Sense of Safety:** Clay County is a safe place to be and live.
- **Education:** Kids in the Clay County School System receive a high quality education.
- **Small Town Feel, Quaintness:** Clay County is a place where you know your neighbors and someone is always willing to help you out.
- **Rural Feeling, Rural Character:** When we honor the slow pace of life, the farms and open land, and the history and culture of the people, the quality life in Clay County is enhanced.
- **Natural, Scenic, and Environmental Beauty:** The beauty in Clay County is abundant and is a irreplaceable resource for which the people of Clay County are stewards.

## CLAY COUNTY SNAPSHOT

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Situated in the westernmost end of North Carolina, Clay County was formed in 1881 from Cherokee and Macon Counties. Named after Kentucky statesman Henry Clay, the county is bordered by two North Carolina counties, Cherokee County to the west and Macon County to the east, and by three Georgia counties--Union, Towns, and Rabun to the south. The region in which Clay County sits is broadly characterized as having a mild climate, a biologically diverse ecosystem, a wide variety of natural heritage destinations and publically owned land, the TVA system of lakes, the southern Appalachian Mountains, tourism and second home opportunities, agricultural production, Cherokee heritage, and Appalachian values, among many other influences. The County's physical setting has and will continue to influence growth and development.

Clay County is approximately 221 square miles in area, ranking as the second smallest of North Carolina's 100 counties. Only New Hanover County in southeastern North Carolina is smaller. According to North Carolina's Office of Management and Budget's 2009 County Population Estimates, Clay County is the state's sixth smallest county in population.<sup>2</sup> The County has about forty-seven people per square mile.

A large portion of Clay County's land is open space that is publically owned and preserved. About 73,000 acres, or 52% of the county, is owned by the United States Forest Service, the State of North Carolina, or the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). One of the most distinguishing elements is Lake Chatuge, which lies in the middle of the county's southern border. Map 1 illustrates the location of Clay County within the state of North Carolina.

Ask a Clay County resident, "Where is Clay County?," and one is likely to get the answer, "Two hours from everywhere." Several metropolitan areas are within a 2-3 hour driving distance from Hayesville, the county seat. Additionally, Clay County is closer in driving distance and miles to five state capitals than Raleigh, the capital of North Carolina. Map 2 highlights Clay County's regional position.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts\\_and\\_figures/socioeconomic\\_data/population\\_estimates/demog/countygrowth\\_bysize\\_2009.html](http://www.osbm.state.nc.us/ncosbm/facts_and_figures/socioeconomic_data/population_estimates/demog/countygrowth_bysize_2009.html)

Map 1: Clay County – Position in North Carolina and Region



Source: NC DCA

Map 2: Clay County , Relation to Other Metro Areas and State Capitals



Source: NC DCA

<b>Metropolitan Area</b>	<b>Distance In Miles</b>	<b>Distance in Time</b>
Asheville, NC	103	2 hr 11 min
Greenville, SC	118	2 hr 42 min
Athens, GA	94	2 hr 20 min
Atlanta, GA	124	2 hr 30 min
Chattanooga, TN	106	2 hr 22 min
Knoxville, TN	128	2 hr 49 min
<b>Source: Google Maps</b>		

<b>State Capital</b>	<b>Distance In Miles</b>	<b>Distance in Time</b>
Raleigh, NC	347	6 hr 2 min
Frankfort, KY	325	5 hr 44 min
Nashville, TN	238	4 hr 21 min
Montgomery, AL	289	4 hr 51 min
Atlanta, GA	124	2 hr 30 min
Columbia, SC	215	4 hr 11 min
<b>Source: Google Maps</b>		

## POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

At the federal level, Clay County is in the Eleventh US Congressional District. Clay County is in North Carolina House District 120 and Senate District 50. Locally, Clay County, along with Cherokee County, is one of the two remaining counties in North Carolina to have a three-member board of county commissioners.

## HISTORY OF PLANNING, REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS

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Creation of the CCCP did not start from scratch. Over the years, the county has engaged in a number of short-term, long-range and topic-specific planning activities. The CCCP cross-references many of these plans, documents, and ordinances. Where relevant, CCCP recommendations are reconciled with, support, or rely on recommendations made through previous planning efforts. A summary of most recent and relevant plans is included in Appendix \_\_\_.

## HISTORY OF PLANNING

Historically, Clay County leaders have regulated land use and growth and development through state or federal mandates, such as minimum surface water buffers, septic and well regulations, and regulations pertaining to development in the floodplain. In most cases, Clay County has opted to adopt the minimum requirements necessary to meet appropriate laws and rules. Clay County has also adopted a small number of local ordinances to address growth and development, such as the *Clay County Land Subdivision Ordinance*, the *Clay County Building Height Ordinance*, and the *Clay County Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance*. Comprehensive or coordinated land use planning efforts in Clay County have been minimal. There is, however, evidence to suggest that previous County Commissioners were motivated to address land use and planning concerns in the recent past. In 1990, the Clay County Board of Commissioners adopted *An Ordinance to Establish a Planning Board for Clay County, North Carolina*. While the then sitting Commissioners adopted the ordinance, the planning board was never appointed. Additionally, there is at least one known written land use plan, the *1993 Clay County Land Use Plan*, developed under North Carolina’s Year of the Mountains initiative. According to the document, “The *1993 Clay County Land Use Plan* is a guidance document based on analysis of the county’s existing physical resources, economic resources, natural resources, and community input during the public participation process.” It is not clear that this document was adopted by the then sitting commissioners. Documentation of adoption is not available and it is unknown to what extent, if any, county leaders used this plan.

## REVIEW OF EXISTING PLANS

While Clay County comprehensive or land use planning efforts have been minimal, the county has developed a number of standalone plans and ordinances to address a variety of county functions, not all of which relate to growth and development. A sampling of these plans include the *Clay County Water and Sewer Plan* (2001), the *2008 Community Health Assessment*, the *Hazard Mitigation Plan for Clay County and the Municipality of Hayesville* (2009), and the *Community Transportation Improvement Plan* (2008). Additionally, Clay County has also dealt with a number of subjects over the years through regional planning projects. Many of these regional plans were coordinated through the Southwestern Commission, the council of government serving the seven westernmost counties in Western North Carolina (Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain). Some examples of regional plans affecting Clay County include the *Southwestern North Carolina Economic Development District Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*<sup>3</sup> (2008), the *Southwestern Rural Planning Organization's Transportation Planning Plans*,<sup>4</sup> and, most recently, the *Mountain Landscapes Initiative*<sup>5</sup> (2009).

## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STUDY AND COMPARISON AREAS

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Almost two decades of changes—social, economic, demographic, infrastructure, land use, and cultural—have transpired since the last time Clay County took an in-depth look at its plan for the future. The *2010 Clay County Comprehensive Plan* is the culmination of much work and processing of information from historic and current plans as well as many federal, state, regional, and local sources. This document brings these and hundreds of other factors into focus to provide an analysis of existing conditions that support recommendations for Clay County's future growth and development. The first step in this process is to define the CCCP's study area and comparison area.

### STUDY AREA

Map \_\_\_ illustrates the Clay County Comprehensive Plan study area. The study area includes the unincorporated area of Clay County as well as the incorporated Town of Hayesville, and its extra territorial jurisdiction (about 0.21% of Clay County's total land mass). The study area also includes publicly owned lands and the North Carolina portion of Lake Chatuge. However, sections of the Comprehensive Plan distinguish between land that is in and land that is out of the county's jurisdiction. The term *county jurisdiction* applies to land over which the Clay County government has regulation power and it includes The Town of Hayesville, unless otherwise noted.

### COMPARISON AREA

Clay County data, on its own, tells only part of the county's story. To make the story complete, a comparison area has been selected to weigh Clay County trends against those in the region and state. The comparison area includes the remaining counties in the Southwestern Commission's planning and development area which, in addition to Clay County, includes Cherokee, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain Counties. Additionally, Towns County, GA, is included in the comparison area when reliable comparison data is available (North Carolina's data offerings are greater than Georgia's). Comparisons with the state of North Carolina are made when the state trends are comparable to Clay County or the comparison area. When averages for the comparison area are reported, Clay County figures are included in the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.regiona.org/PDF%20Files/2008%20CEDDS%20post.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.regiona.org/rpo.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.regiona.org/MLI%20Toolbox.pdf>

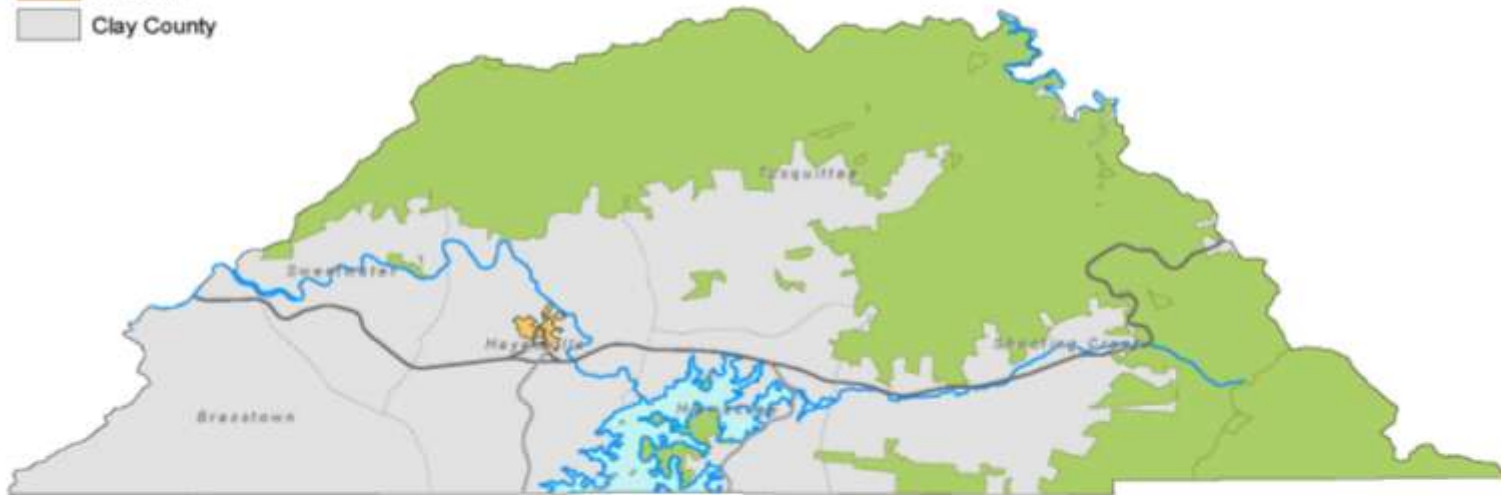
averaged number but North Carolina figures are not. Map \_\_\_ illustrates Clay County and the selected comparison area while Table \_\_\_ details the size of the comparison locations.

<b>Table 3: Land Area of Comparison Counties</b>			
Geographic Area	Area In Square Miles		
	Total Area	Water Area	Land Area
Cherokee County	466.68	11.49	455.19
Clay County	220.6	5.89	214.7
Graham County	301.6	9.53	292.07
Haywood County	554.62	0.96	553.66
Jackson County	494.5	3.79	490.71
Macon County	519.47	3	516.47
Swain County	540.64	12.54	528.1
Towns County, GA	172.01	5.35	166.66
North Carolina	53,818.51	5,107.63	48,710.88
<b>Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000</b>			

# Clay County Comprehensive Plan Primary Study Area

## Legend

- NC Highway
- US Highway
- Major Rivers & Creeks
- Publicly Owned Land
- Lake Chatuge
- Townships
- Hayesville
- Clay County



0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Miles



# Clay County Comprehensive Plan Comparison Area

## Legend

### Major Roads

- Interstate
- NC Highway
- US Highway
-  Lake Chatuge
-  Towns County, GA
-  Region A Counties

