

# Greauxing Resilience at Home

City of Asheville, North Carolina: Affordable Housing, Environmental, and Climate Resiliency Initiatives



GEORGETOWN CLIMATE CENTER



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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

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Louisiana is one of the hardest-hit areas in the United States as extreme weather events and regular flooding become more frequent and intense.<sup>1</sup> These challenges often fall “first and worst” on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color or “BIPOC” and low-income communities.<sup>2</sup> This is especially true in the U.S. Gulf Coast region and the state of Louisiana.

Over time, these challenges are being exacerbated by population increases and transitions as climate and non-climate drivers (e.g., people moving out of urban centers into more rural areas) influence where people choose — or are able — to live.

In southeast Louisiana, resilient, affordable housing initiatives are critical to ensuring equitable adaptation that takes into consideration the myriad overlapping challenges facing all Louisianans, but especially those living in communities that have long borne a disproportionate burden of risk.

Over a two-year period between fall 2020 and spring 2022, **Capital Region Planning Commission** and **Georgetown Climate Center** partnered with dozens of people from government, private, and nonprofit sectors and community stakeholders in Region Seven of the **Louisiana Watershed Initiative**.<sup>3</sup> The result of that partnership effort is **Greauxing Resilience at Home: A Regional Vision**<sup>4</sup> (Regional Vision), a resource to inform Region Seven’s ongoing work to increase community resilience by promoting affordable housing and nature-based solutions.

Regional and local governments in Region Seven can use the Regional Vision to identify potential legal, planning, and policy tools and projects to increase the affordability and availability of housing and the use of nature-based solutions. In addition, the Regional Vision offers insights for policymakers across Louisiana, throughout the Gulf Coast region, and nationally.

This report is composed of 24 individual case studies developed by Georgetown Climate Center to support the Regional Vision. These case studies describe best and emerging practices, tools, and examples from Louisiana and other U.S. jurisdictions to make progress on these complex and challenging issues. These case studies are intended to provide transferable lessons and ideas for regional and local governments addressing housing and mitigating flood risk as integrated parts of comprehensive community resilience strategies. Collectively, these case studies present a suite, although not an exhaustive list of tools and approaches that can be used to facilitate any of these efforts.

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1 STATE OF LA., LOUISIANA CLIMATE ACTION PLAN: CLIMATE INITIATIVES TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNOR 15–16 (Feb. 2022), available at <https://gov.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/CCI-Task-force/CAP/ClimateActionPlanFinal.pdf>.

2 See *id.* at 15–17.

3 The Louisiana Watershed Initiative is an effort to create a paradigm shift in floodplain management towards a strategy that approaches flood risk reduction from a nature-based solutions and land-use-based approach. A part of this approach includes identifying eight separate regional watershed management areas to assist in achieving cross-jurisdictional activities.

Region Seven is one of these eight watershed regions. Region Seven encompasses the upper part of the toe of Louisiana’s boot. It spans eastward from the Mississippi River near Baton Rouge across the Northshore (i.e., north of Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas) to Mississippi and along the Mississippi River to the Bonnet Carré Spillway. The region includes 13 parishes and 45 incorporated municipalities.

4 To reflect their connection to Louisiana’s cultural heritage, the project team and members of Region Seven that participated in this process chose to use the word “Greaux,” a French-inspired phonetic spelling of the word “Grow,” to brand this product.

Where possible, all the case studies share a consistent organizational format to allow easier cross-comparison of tools, processes, and takeaways:

- The **Background** section introduces the regional and local context (e.g., location, demographics) for each case study, including the following facing each jurisdiction: extreme weather risks, housing and environmental challenges, and development pressures.
- The **Housing** section focuses on the legal, planning, and policy tools and projects that have been designed and implemented to support the growth and preservation of housing affordability and availability.
- The **Environment** section highlights how vulnerable habitats like floodplains and other open spaces are being restored, conserved, and protected as a part of comprehensive resilience strategies to provide important ecosystem and community benefits like reducing flood risk and creating community assets, such as parks and trails.
- The **Community Engagement** section summarizes how governments have provided different types of public engagement opportunities and how affected residents have contributed to these planning and decisionmaking processes.
- The **Funding** section identifies how the programs, plans, and projects discussed have been funded by federal, state, and local government and private and nongovernmental sources.
- The **Next Steps** section captures the anticipated future actions that featured case study jurisdictions may take in implementing these tools and strategies.
- The **Considerations and Lessons Learned** section concludes with the primary takeaways from each example that other regional and local policymakers and communities may consider when developing or implementing their own housing and resilience strategies using these legal, planning, and policy tools.

A few additional notes about the case studies:

- **The case studies selected prioritize relatable and scalable models from places similar to Louisiana:** Wherever possible, Georgetown Climate Center aimed to acknowledge and lift up the work of jurisdictions and nongovernmental actors in Region Seven and neighboring watershed regions to inspire peer-to-peer sharing and actions from as close to home as possible. These resources are drawn from 12 states, with an emphasis on regions and local areas in the Gulf and Mid-Atlantic: Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Examples and lessons drawn from these regions are easiest to apply to a Louisianan context because they feature similar geography or analogous impacts from flooding and other climate effects.
- **There are no perfect, “one-size-fits-all” solutions:** While the case studies and resource entries informing the Region Vision are instructive for Region Seven and beyond, none of them are “perfect” examples of how to solve these complex and challenging issues. Georgetown Climate Center found no single case study or resource that provides a point-for-point or model for what Region Seven is trying to accomplish. No other jurisdiction identified is currently trying to integrate housing, flooding, equity, resilience, and population changes together in a single plan, ordinance, or policy. However, some jurisdictions are moving in that direction, or are making progress on discrete elements of what will eventually become a more holistic strategy. Therefore, this report and the Regional Vision draw analogous connections and recommendations that can be combined to facilitate more comprehensive planning and land-use efforts.

The case studies in this report were informed by interviews with practitioners and community leaders in charge of designing and overseeing this work. No statements or opinions, however, should be attributed to any individual or organization included in the *Acknowledgements* section of this report.

It is also important to note that the examples described in each case study are ongoing and the content included in this report is current as of spring 2022. For future updates about these and other case studies and the Regional Vision, please visit [Greaxing Resilience at Home: A Regional Vision](#) and Georgetown Climate Center’s [Adaptation Clearinghouse](#).

# *City of Asheville, North Carolina*

## **Affordable Housing, Environmental, and Climate Resiliency Initiatives**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In recent years, Asheville, North Carolina has faced population growth and affordable housing challenges compounded by climate change. Against this backdrop, Asheville also recognizes the importance of retaining its unique sense of place, culture, and character, including protecting trees and natural landscapes. As such, the city is working to ensure that it creates a healthy, livable community resilient to these and other impacts.

Over the last two decades, Asheville has released several plans, assessments, and policies related to growing the city's climate and environmental resilience and ensuring an adequate affordable housing stock. Accordingly, the city has pursued — and plans to continue pursuing — strategies that preserve the city's culture and character while making the area a safer, more affordable place. Many of these strategies are facilitated through prioritizing the environment and affordable housing in different city plans and incentives-based amendments to zoning ordinances. Asheville serves as an example for other jurisdictions seeking to integrate climate and resilience elements within local governance structures, plans, and zoning ordinances while tackling other local challenges, such as maintaining or increasing affordable housing stock or retaining a distinct local culture.

### **BACKGROUND**

Asheville, North Carolina in Buncombe County is the largest city in western North Carolina. It is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains at the confluence of two rivers. Approximately 90,000 residents live in the city, which is classified as a medium-sized, metropolitan-urban area.<sup>1</sup> Asheville's economy is driven by several industries including healthcare, travel and tourism, and many small businesses, entrepreneurs, and breweries that capitalize on the city's natural landscape, art, culture, music, and entertainment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *QuickFacts: Asheville City, North Carolina, U.S.* CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ashevillecitynorthcarolina/POP060210> (last visited July 3, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> *Community and Economic Development*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/community-economic-development/> (last visited Dec. 16, 2021).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Asheville's population is predominantly white.<sup>3</sup> As of 2019, about 48 percent of Asheville's residents were homeowners and the median home price was \$270,400.<sup>4</sup> Approximately 14 percent of Asheville's residents fall below the national poverty line.<sup>5</sup>

The main climate-related threats facing Asheville are extreme rainfall and flood events, drought and wildfires, and temperature variability, including extreme heat events.<sup>6</sup> Despite those threats, the population of residents in the city and the surrounding metropolitan areas have grown consistently over the last four decades.<sup>7</sup> According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Buncombe County's population rose more than ten percent to more than 260,000 between 2010 and 2019.<sup>8</sup> This percentage was more than double that of the state's population growth and nearly ten times the national percentage.<sup>9</sup>

These climate and growth challenges are compounded by a fiscal one as Asheville is striving to "[support] a regional economy" beyond municipal boundaries and meet the needs of its existing residents.<sup>10</sup> According to a 2010 report commissioned by the city, Asheville must consider ways to collect more revenues (e.g., annex more land, increase property taxes) as it asks the question, "What kind of city do we want to be, and what will it take to get there?"<sup>11</sup> As such, Asheville is taking steps to combat climate change and to ensure that both current and future residents are resilient to the impacts of climate change.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>3</sup> QuickFacts: Asheville City, North Carolina, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ashevillescitynorthcarolina/POP060210> (last visited July 3, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> James Hrynshyn, *Asheville Makes a Plan for Climate Resilience*, U.S. CLIMATE RESILIENCE TOOLKIT (June 4, 2021, 4:45 P.M.), <https://toolkit.climate.gov/case-studies/asheville-makes-plan-climate-resilience>.

<sup>7</sup> See *Asheville, North Carolina Population 2021*, WORLD POPULATION REV., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/asheville-nc-population> (last visited July 3, 2021); John Boyle, *Asheville population growth slumping as surrounding areas pick up pace*, CITIZEN TIMES (Sept. 11, 2019, 10:11 AM), <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/news/local/2019/09/11/asheville-population-growth-slowing-surrounding-areas-pick-up/2125401001/>.

<sup>8</sup> QuickFacts: Buncombe County, North Carolina, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/buncombecountynorthcarolina> (last visited Dec. 16, 2021); Tom Fiedler, *Come Hell or High Water, Asheville is Climate 'Winner'*, N.C. PUB. RADIO (Mar. 17, 2021, 5:53 P.M.), <https://www.wunc.org/environment/2021-03-17/come-hell-or-high-water-asheville-is-climate-winner>.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Fiedler, *Come Hell or High Water, Asheville os Climate 'Winner'*, N.C. PUB. RADIO (Mar. 17, 2021, 5:53 P.M.), <https://www.wunc.org/environment/2021-03-17/come-hell-or-high-water-asheville-is-climate-winner>.

<sup>10</sup> ASHEVILLE, NC 2010: A FINANCIAL CROSSROADS 10 (Jan. 4, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>12</sup> See Asheville City Council Res. No. 20-25 (2020), available at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5AwblIdPA9m\\_MmFDUE5JaGwwRXBGS3VOeGctUXJCUzk1ZHNv/view?resourcekey=0-sSX\\_QpLeigwKFS4RmUPJw](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5AwblIdPA9m_MmFDUE5JaGwwRXBGS3VOeGctUXJCUzk1ZHNv/view?resourcekey=0-sSX_QpLeigwKFS4RmUPJw).



## OVERVIEW OF SELECT PLANS AND ZONING INITIATIVES

Since the mid-2000s, the City of Asheville has undertaken a significant number of assessment and planning efforts to ensure that Asheville will be a resilient, affordable, and attractive community. In 2018, the City Council of Asheville adopted Living Asheville: A Comprehensive Plan for Our Future. Living Asheville presents a vision for the city for the subsequent ten to 20 years with long-range goals and strategies for local governance, as well as an ambitious agenda and toolkit of ideas that can be used across the city's various departments.<sup>13</sup> Living Asheville is organized around six themes to help guide decisionmaking with respect to the key ongoing challenges and opportunities for: fostering a livable and affordable built environment; to ensure harmony with the natural environment; to grow a resilient economy; to promote interwoven equity; to ensure a healthy community; and to bolster responsible thinking at the regional scale.<sup>14</sup>

The content presented within the comprehensive plan was guided by the opinions of residents. The City Council sought different areas of Asheville to complete neighborhood-scale "Plans on a Page," which were used to gather public input to inform the development of the comprehensive plan from various neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup> These Plans on a Page aggregated localized thinking about individual neighborhood visions, strengths, challenges, and character.<sup>16</sup>

In recent years, the Asheville City Council has been focused on implementing the comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan includes a step-by-step implementation guide for the municipal government to follow in order to prioritize and realize the numerous recommendations made within Living Asheville.<sup>17</sup> Small area plans have also been prepared by communities throughout Asheville to complement the city's comprehensive plan and to focus on specific needs in given areas.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to Living Asheville, the city has also published complementary plans including: the 2008 Affordable Housing Plan, the Asheville 2020 Housing Needs Assessment, the 2018 Asheville Climate Resilience Report, and the 2019 Climate-Resilient Personal Action Guide.

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<sup>13</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 24 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 53.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 388.

<sup>18</sup> *Planning and Urban Design Small Area Plans*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C. (Sept. 3, 2019), <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/planning-urban-design/plans/small-area-plans/>.



The subsequent sections of this entry introduce how these various plans and related zoning initiatives address affordable housing, climate resilience and justice, and the environment more specifically.

## HOUSING

### Planning

Asheville has three primary guiding plans and documents related to affordable housing: the 2018 comprehensive plan, Living Asheville, the 2008 Affordable Housing Plan, and the 2020 Housing Needs Assessment.

As the city's comprehensive plan, Living Asheville, sets the backdrop for the city's affordable housing plan and policies. In Living Asheville, Asheville explicitly acknowledges that "the future growth of the city is inevitable."<sup>19</sup> As such, a key feature of Living Asheville is a Preferred Growth Scenario to guide those "inevitable" changes already occurring in the city.<sup>20</sup> The city further elaborates that while growth "can yield positive outcomes for Asheville," it must be done in a thoughtful way that reflects the community's preferences of "how to grow and what kind of growth" is consistent with the six overarching themes articulated in Living Asheville.<sup>21</sup> This type of growth can enable greater community connectivity, create more housing opportunities, be more environmentally sustainable, and preserve local culture, among other benefits.

Overall, the Preferred Growth Scenario looks to promote future growth in three different types of areas in the city: the Downtown, Innovation or multi-use Districts, and Transit-Supportive Centers and Corridors. Generally, these already built-out areas have existing or underutilized infrastructure capacity and services that will enable the city to consolidate future growth and protect less dense, open space landscapes. Therefore, the city will not aim to "prioritize[ growth] aggressively" or equally in all parts of the city.<sup>22</sup> However, the city states that growth in each of these three areas will not look the same. For example, larger swaths of land, where available, can potentially accommodate more people and new development compared to existing denser areas where the city will have to pursue more nuanced approaches like infill development and redevelopment.<sup>23</sup>

Specific to housing, the Preferred Growth Scenario communicates the city's intention to "grow responsibly" by promoting infill development in residential and mixed-use districts that is compatible with neighborhood character.<sup>24</sup> This idea of encouraging a range of locally specific

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<sup>19</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 298 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>20</sup> See Book Three in Living Asheville.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 298.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 299.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 92, 301, & 345.

types of housing, such as townhomes, duplexes, and triplexes in addition to single-family housing and large apartment complexes, is called “missing middle housing.”<sup>25</sup> Missing middle housing can maximize positive opportunities for growth in ways that are more consistent with community character than through broad zoning mandates.

As part of the Preferred Growth Scenario, Asheville also identified five different geographies in the city to inform future planning, development, and land-use decisions in ways that are further reflective of local identity.<sup>26</sup> The plan states:

Living Asheville recognizes that effective growth cannot be successfully implemented exclusively, through a citywide lens. Consequently, the plan includes a concept referred to as “five geographies” that should be used for deeper consideration at a finer grain scale to inform small area planning after Living Asheville is implemented.<sup>27</sup>

In line with Living Asheville, the city’s Affordable Housing Plan and Housing Needs Assessment provide a deeper look at the city’s housing challenges and needs to guide planning and zoning actions more effectively. The 2008 Affordable Housing Plan identifies trends in the local housing market, population, and resident incomes and offers recommendations to remedy the city’s affordable housing crisis.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, the plan recommends matching housing resources to the populations with the greatest needs to maximize their chances of success; modifying city ordinances to remove restrictive barriers to new development; implementing new initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing; and providing comprehensive education to stakeholders to overcome the negative myths and stereotypes endemic to affordable housing issues.<sup>29</sup>

Subsequently, in 2020, Asheville published its Housing Needs Assessment to better understand the region’s housing market, identify existing housing policies in need of modification, and expand the region’s housing market to meet future residential needs.<sup>30</sup> In the assessment, the city recommends leveraging government programs at all levels to develop and maintain affordable rental housing, addressing the needs of different populations, and exploring a range of innovative housing solutions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Id.*

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> See CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN FOR THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE (2008), <http://bonnernetnetwork.pbworks.com/f/City+Affordable+Housing+Plan+Final-2.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 12.

<sup>30</sup> PATRICK M. BOWEN, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA REGIONAL HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT 1 (2020), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yD7VyC7828cqBtt2oHcWjxPOs2HBo30n/view>.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 20, 21, & 23.

## Land Use and Zoning

Asheville also plans to use zoning strategies to increase local affordable housing stock. Living Asheville states that the city will increase and diversify housing supply by removing administrative barriers to housing development; increasing density; expanding areas allowing high-density, mixed-use development; modifying permitted lot dimensions to facilitate additional housing; and studying potential dwelling types to identify which types should be permitted in the future.<sup>32</sup> Notably, beginning in 2016 and later in 2017, Asheville took steps to encourage neighborhood-compatible infill housing by adopting zoning amendments that allow for decreases in minimum lot size and width and approving zoning incentives for townhomes and small-scale multi-family housing.<sup>33</sup>

One year after adopting Living Asheville, the city passed a temporary moratorium on hotel construction that began a year-and-a half study to review hotel policy. The city found that hotel development was a proxy for other concerns, such as infrastructure needs, low wages, and affordable workforce housing, and that specific policy and regulatory tools could be enacted to manage hotel development.<sup>34</sup>

In February 2021, the moratorium on new construction ended.<sup>35</sup> The moratorium was simultaneously replaced with new hotel development regulations.<sup>36</sup> The goals of the amendments are threefold: (1) restrict the location of hotels and enhance zoning standards to minimize negative community impacts; (2) incentivize the adoption of priority community benefits; and (3) create a review process that promotes or preserves quality architecture and buildings and enhances a local sense of place.<sup>37</sup>

To implement the first goal, the city created a Hotel Overlay District.<sup>38</sup> Within the district, the city is carrying out its second and third goals by allowing development proposals to earn a minimum number of public benefits points to be eligible for a permit without having to go through City Council review. According to the public benefits table codified in the city's code, developers can earn points for actions like building energy efficient structures, creating new affordable housing

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<sup>32</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., *LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE* 178–79 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 300.

<sup>34</sup> Polly McDaniel, *City Council approves 1-year Asheville hotel moratorium*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE (Sept. 24, 2019), <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/news/city-council-approves-1-year-asheville-hotel-moratorium/>.

<sup>35</sup> *Hotel Development Study*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/department/planning-urban-design/planning-projects/hotel-moratorium/> (last updated Mar. 26, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C. CODE OF ORDINANCES art. IX, §7-9-7 (2021), *available at* [https://library.municode.com/nc/asheville/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR\\_CH7DE\\_ARTIXOVDI\\_S7-9-7HOOVDI](https://library.municode.com/nc/asheville/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR_CH7DE_ARTIXOVDI_S7-9-7HOOVDI).



units, donating money to the city's Housing Trust Fund, and creating public outdoor spaces.<sup>39</sup> Alternatively, developers can lose points for demolishing historic buildings or causing the displacement of existing businesses or housing.<sup>40</sup> Here, only the former set of actions increase resilience and are therefore rewarded with points.

As the city continues to experience new population and housing growth, the city has been mindful of promoting development and land reuse that are aligned with the city's historic charm and character. The city seeks to foster a building environment that combines quality architecture, historic preservation, and smart urban planning.<sup>41</sup> To that end, the City Council implemented form-based codes in various parts of the city and has approved zoning amendments and the use of conditional zoning to facilitate compatible infill housing on a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis.<sup>42</sup> The city has also formed a committee to review Downtown design processes and bring them into alignment with historic preservation goals.<sup>43</sup>

The city is also considering creating design handbooks for neighborhoods that focus on major character defining elements of the city's various neighborhoods and allowing residents to select appropriate elements for their community and apply them on a voluntary basis for new construction and additions.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the city will evaluate opportunities to pursue "soft" or non-regulatory neighborhood design interventions to celebrate local identity like street sign toppers and banners.<sup>45</sup> Notably, the future development and maintenance of affordable housing will be required to blend with the character of the area.<sup>46</sup>

## Financial Incentives and Funding

The City of Asheville has both focused on maintaining existing affordable housing stock and increasing the size and variety of its affordable housing stock. Asheville has struggled to provide housing stock suitable for middle- and low-income residents, as well as renters. In 2016, residents voted to pass a \$74-million bond for public improvements with \$25 million total for affordable housing.<sup>47</sup> Of that \$25 million, \$10 million went to the city's Housing Trust Fund, the city's low-

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<sup>39</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C. CODE OF ORDINANCES app. 7-A, "Public Benefits Table" (2021), *available at* [https://library.municode.com/nc/asheville/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR\\_CH7DE\\_APX7-APUBETA](https://library.municode.com/nc/asheville/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR_CH7DE_APX7-APUBETA).

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 102 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>42</sup> *Id.* at 102–03.

<sup>43</sup> *Id.* at 104–05.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.* at 153.

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 154.

<sup>47</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 78 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

rate loan program to encourage the development of new affordable housing.<sup>48</sup> Since 2014, the city has funded over 400 affordable housing units with the Housing Trust Fund and the HOME Investment Partnerships Program.<sup>49</sup>

The remaining \$15 million from the bond will enable Asheville to repurpose city-owned land for development that supports housing affordability.<sup>50</sup> In 2019, the city council adopted a policy for affordable housing projects on city-owned land.<sup>51</sup> Under the policy, new developments must reserve a minimum of 20 percent of new units for a period of no less than 20 years for individuals and families at 60 percent Area Median Income and accept Housing Choice Vouchers.<sup>52</sup>

The city has also expanded landlord education efforts regarding affordable housing programs, and created a Land Use Incentive Grant Program through the Community Development Office to encourage affordable housing in new developments.<sup>53</sup> The Land Use Incentive Grant program provides developers with future property tax abatements in the form of rebates in exchange for building affordable housing according to requirements set by a city policy.<sup>54</sup> Developers can obtain the property tax rebate for more years by adopting enhanced affordable housing and resiliency standards, such as increasing the minimum percentage of affordable housing units offered, locating housing within close proximity to transit and urban centers, and using solar panels.<sup>55</sup>

Lastly, the city promotes an expedited plan review process for certain developments that include affordable housing.<sup>56</sup> To be eligible for the expedited plan review process, developers must build within specified parameters. For affordable rental housing, a project proponent must dedicate 20 percent of units at or below 80 percent Area Median Income for a minimum of a 20-year

<sup>48</sup> *Affordable Housing*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/community-economic-development/community-development/affordable-housing/> (last updated Nov. 19, 2021); CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., HOUSING TRUST FUND POLICY GUIDELINES, available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QVfzFPHwByCuw2UgTJIFS395HKZxMU7D/view>.

<sup>49</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 91 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>50</sup> *Affordable Housing*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/community-economic-development/community-development/affordable-housing/> (last updated Nov. 19, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> Asheville City Council Res. No. 29-229, Resolution Adopting a Policy Entitled “Policies for Implementing Affordable Housing on City-Owned Land” (Sept. 24, 2019), available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XZV414t3oT4SKIYI6-BIE0cpyPXGFeii/view>.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 178–79 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>54</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LAND USE INCENTIVE GRANT POLICY (AS AMENDED AND UPDATED ON JUNE 22, 2021/RESOLUTION NO. 21-139), available at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Wadxt2vNgH7fb6aKoX7Ww-ggPGqoOCyo/view>.

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 2–3.

<sup>56</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., AFFORDABLE HOUSING EXPEDITED PLAN REVIEW, available at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/127c\\_JM5AWq8Z4qqikg7W6FAznp6HXS4Y/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/127c_JM5AWq8Z4qqikg7W6FAznp6HXS4Y/view).

affordability period.<sup>57</sup> The same requirements, minus the 20-year affordability period, apply for affordable homes that are sold.<sup>58</sup> According to the city, the review process can be reduced by as much as 30 percent, which can be a big time saver for developers.<sup>59</sup>

## Planning for Resilience and Climate Justice in Asheville

Beginning in 2017, the City of Asheville developed a suite of plans and resources related to climate resilience and justice. These plans were not created for the explicit purposes of aligning affordable housing or environmental considerations with climate adaptation and resilience. However, they are noteworthy for the city's attempts to integrate resilience and climate justice into citywide planning and initiatives, including Living Asheville, which can have tangential benefits for affordable housing and the local environment in the future. Other regional and local governments can evaluate ongoing actions in Asheville to discover a potential roadmap for how to similarly coordinate these types of related actions.

In 2018, the city partnered with the University of North Carolina, Asheville to lead city staff through the first phase of the climate resilience planning process identified in the U.S. Climate Resilience Toolkit.<sup>60</sup> This effort culminated in the Asheville Climate Resilience Assessment Report, which identifies the seven primary climate-related threats facing Asheville and key community assets and then evaluates each community asset for its vulnerability to each identified climate threat.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, the report identifies approximately 100 options for resilience-building within Asheville.<sup>62</sup> These findings were integrated into the city's latest comprehensive plan, Living Asheville, to coordinate municipal actions to mitigate climate risks.

Additionally, in 2019, Asheville published a Climate-Resilient Personal Action Guide to assist residents and commercial business owners in building resilience at the individual, local level.<sup>63</sup> The Personal Action Guide divides the city into several geographic areas and identifies the most pressing climate-related threats for each area. The guide also provides personal actions that individuals and businesses can take to increase their resilience to emergencies and natural disasters. Notably, the Personal Action Guide advocates for the use of green infrastructure techniques to combat flood risk and erosion. This guide

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<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., PLANNING FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE CITY OF ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT 1 (2018), [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X\\_Gr4eUCmkXP0zAcvyxCe-uZPkX84Byz/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X_Gr4eUCmkXP0zAcvyxCe-uZPkX84Byz/view).

<sup>61</sup> *See generally id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., BUILDING A CLIMATE-RESILIENT ASHEVILLE PERSONAL ACTION GUIDE (2019), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BzZzONRPV-VAVF9vb2pOMUtkRmFJR1AyNFluYU5ESU9rODRJ/view?resourcekey=0-ZQ80xC-a8bw4JDs7z0Neaw>.



illustrates how the city is tackling climate change on different scales from the community- to the individual-level.

To implement the Climate Resilience Assessment through an equity lens and support both societal and personal resilience, the city developed a complementary effort, the Climate Justice Initiative. The initiative stemmed from a January 2020 City Council resolution that established a local climate emergency and called for the city to create a Climate Justice Plan that will be applied to Living Asheville and other related plans.<sup>64</sup> The broader initiative, of which the Climate Justice Plan will be one part, “explores and defines Climate Equity with the City’s frontline community members, [who are] those most directly affected by climate change impacts identified in the City’s Climate Resilience Assessment.”<sup>65</sup> Specifically, the city is working with local Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) to shape “a locally relevant understanding of Climate Equity” to “help the city incorporate community recommendations and perspectives through a [forthcoming] Climate Justice Screening Tool to prioritize Climate Equity in city projects and initiatives.”<sup>66</sup>

As a preliminary step to the Climate Justice Screening Tool, Asheville built a Climate Justice Data Map, an online GIS map of the city that overlays climate impacts with social and economic vulnerabilities.<sup>67</sup> The map gives a quantitative “Climate Justice Index Score” showing how these compounding threats are facing each part of the city and the BIPOC members that reside in them.<sup>68</sup> The aim of this tool is to help decisionmakers better identify the disproportionate impacts facing different neighborhoods and groups of residents in Asheville to guide more resilient city planning and investments. The tool was developed with the help of a consultant, Tepeyac Consulting.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to the Climate Justice Data Map, Tepeyac Consulting has also been leading “Story Circles” to engage select communities, as informed by the map.<sup>70</sup> Through the Story Circles, the city, Tepeyac Consulting, youth, and other partners will work with local artists “to explore topics of climate change, justice, and equity and to document and record their observations through their art” in a final product expected to be released in early 2022.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Asheville City Council Res. No. 20-25 pts. 5 & 6 (2020), available at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5AwbIdPA9m\\_MmFDUE5JaGwRXBGS3VOeGctUXJCUzk1ZHNv/view?resourcekey=0-sSX\\_QpLeiagwkFS4RmUPJw](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5AwbIdPA9m_MmFDUE5JaGwRXBGS3VOeGctUXJCUzk1ZHNv/view?resourcekey=0-sSX_QpLeiagwkFS4RmUPJw).

<sup>65</sup> *Climate Justice Initiative*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/projects/climate-justice-initiative/> (last visited Dec. 16, 2021).

<sup>66</sup> *Id.*

<sup>67</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C. CLIMATE JUSTICE MAP, <https://avl.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/lookup/index.html?appid=10e2c4ae45614b92ad4efaa61342b249> (last visited Dec. 16, 2021).

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

<sup>69</sup> *Climate Justice Initiative*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/projects/climate-justice-initiative/> (last visited Dec. 16, 2021).

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

All of these complementary efforts will culminate in the city's development of a Climate Justice Plan in 2022.

## ENVIRONMENT

### Planning and Green Infrastructure

Through Living Asheville, Asheville is pursuing green infrastructure solutions to mitigate natural hazards and promote smart growth strategies. Asheville plans to implement green infrastructure in streets and parks to reduce stormwater impacts and the effects of high temperatures. Specifically, the city will aim to utilize rain gardens, landscaped swales, bioretention areas, increase tree canopy, and expand green infrastructure options approved for use and educate the public on the multiple benefits of these nature-based solutions.<sup>72</sup> Building on the priorities in Living Asheville, the city assembled the Asheville Stormwater Task Force to review local stormwater issues.<sup>73</sup> In 2021, the task force produced a final report with recommendations to the city including to create a Watershed Overlay Zone and prioritize the use of green infrastructure.<sup>74</sup>

In addition, Living Asheville provides that the City Council may adopt a zoning code that promotes more transit-supportive, higher-density, mixed-use development along existing transit corridors and better integrates complete streets, greenways, and sidewalks and bike lanes throughout the city to grow resilience to climate change.<sup>75</sup>

### Land Use, Zoning, Green Spaces, and Trees

Since adopting Living Asheville, the City Council passed a tree canopy preservation ordinance that requires proponents of specific types of new development to plant, preserve, or pay a fee-in-lieu-of protecting existing trees.<sup>76</sup> By enhancing standards for trees, the city can mitigate the effects of climate change like flooding and extreme heat. As a part of any resilient urban

<sup>72</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 208–09 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>73</sup> ASHEVILLE STORMWATER TASK FORCE 2020–2021, FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND REPORT TO THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE (July 2021), available at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/11cTi\\_qR7mUf1qHg\\_-KorBuHhkcANpSP/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11cTi_qR7mUf1qHg_-KorBuHhkcANpSP/view).

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*

<sup>75</sup> CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., LIVING ASHEVILLE: A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR FUTURE 110–11 (2017), <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/106269/12/>.

<sup>76</sup> *Development Services Latest News*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C. (Oct. 27, 2020), <https://www.ashevilenc.gov/departments/development-services/latest-news/>; CITY OF ASHEVILLE CODE OF ORDINANCES art. XIX, “Tree Canopy Preservation” (2021), available at [https://library.municode.com/nc/asheville/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR\\_CH7DE\\_ARTXIXTRCA\\_PR](https://library.municode.com/nc/asheville/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOOR_CH7DE_ARTXIXTRCA_PR).

ecosystem, it is just as important to ensure a thriving and distributed tree canopy throughout the city as it is to create and protect parks and other larger green spaces.

Additionally, in 2021, the City Council established an Open Space Task Force.<sup>77</sup> Concluding its work in October 2021, the task force was charged with determining how to amend and improve the city's open space regulations to remove barriers to infill development and the provision of affordable housing.<sup>78</sup> The task force operated on a consensus-based approach to evaluate ways to better balance Asheville's population growth with environmental conservation for new development projects.<sup>79</sup> Members of the task force included representatives from the city's Planning and Zoning Commission, Affordable Housing Committee, Neighborhood Advisory Committee, Sustainable Advisory Committee on Energy and the Environment, and Urban Forestry Commission.<sup>80</sup> The operating framework and diverse composition of the task force were intended to produce well-rounded recommendations to the City Council. In early 2022, it is anticipated that the proposed zoning changes coming out of the task force will be presented to the Asheville Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council for review and public comment.<sup>81</sup>

## CONSIDERATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Asheville presents several planning and zoning ideas that other local jurisdictions can consider as they work to balance housing and environmental resilience in the face of increasing climate and growth pressures.

Living Asheville is a noteworthy example of a local comprehensive plan that attempts to ground and integrate the city's various supplemental plans, assessments, policies, and initiatives on resilience, housing, and the environment. All of these sectors are interconnected and local governments need to approach them holistically to maximize benefits for communities. In particular, local governments should evaluate opportunities to adopt more sector-specific plans into their comprehensive plans to elevate the legal significance of supplemental plans and work from a centralized platform.

Living Asheville also illustrates the need for local governments, particularly in larger urban areas, to think in terms of different geographic scales. Living Asheville devoted an entire section to outlining a Preferred Growth Scenario for the city that includes identifying three types of priority areas for new development, rather than proposing a citywide target. In addition, Living Asheville seeks to elevate and preserve the character and culture of five distinct area-based geographies as

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<sup>77</sup> *Planning and Urban Design Open Space Task Force*, CITY OF ASHEVILLE, N.C., <https://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/planning-urban-design/planning-projects/open-space-task-force/> (last updated Dec. 30, 2021).

<sup>78</sup> *Id.*

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

<sup>81</sup> *Id.*



Asheville accommodates new development and growth. It is important for policymakers facing similar types of population transitions to think about planning and zoning on both city and neighborhood scales, as resilience is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Other policies similarly illustrate this principle of scale. For example, the city's new tree canopy preservation ordinance shows that it is important to protect the environment both in terms of larger parks and green spaces and individual trees distributed throughout a city. Through its Climate-Resilient Personal Action Guide and Climate Justice Initiative, the city is also taking scalable actions to build resilience for individuals. Local governments should evaluate opportunities to provide education and information to allow citizens to participate in community-resilience building processes.

In implementing Living Asheville, the city is taking several consensus-based approaches to address zoning updates. This is exemplified through Asheville's recent changes to its hotel development regulations and ongoing work through the Open Space Task Force and Climate Justice Initiative. Similar processes could be replicated or scaled up in other jurisdictions to inform updates to discrete parts of or entire codes or development ordinances, respectively. This can help bring all sides of an issue to the decisionmaking table and lead to more effective and beneficial zoning laws and policies. By giving more government agencies a chance to collaborate and community stakeholders the opportunity to be heard, these types of processes can also decrease administrative inefficiencies, inequitable outcomes, and public opposition to new laws and policies.

Outside of the direct zoning process, the city is using different tools including density bonuses and financial and administrative incentives to encourage resilience and the production of affordable housing. From the city's Land Use Incentive Grant Program and expedited plan review process to the public benefits points table for new hotels, non-regulatory encouragements like these can be one way to increase the number and resiliency of affordable housing units. Incentives promote city goals while offering developers the flexibility necessary to design cost-effective projects. Incentives can be especially helpful for governments facing fiscal challenges or a lack of funding to invest in publicly owned or supported affordable housing options.

Lastly, Asheville's different plans, assessments, laws, and policies suggest the need for other local jurisdictions to consider stacking tools and approaches to achieve resilient ends. On their own, plans, zoning codes, and policy incentives may not be successful in increasing resilience and affordable housing and conserving the environment. In combining different tools, a jurisdiction can likely increase its chances of making overall progress by applying a suite of targeted actions with each aimed at addressing specific partners or challenges. This more direct and thoughtful approach can lead a city to make a larger, collective difference built on the sum of its parts — rather than relying only or primarily on one of those parts.