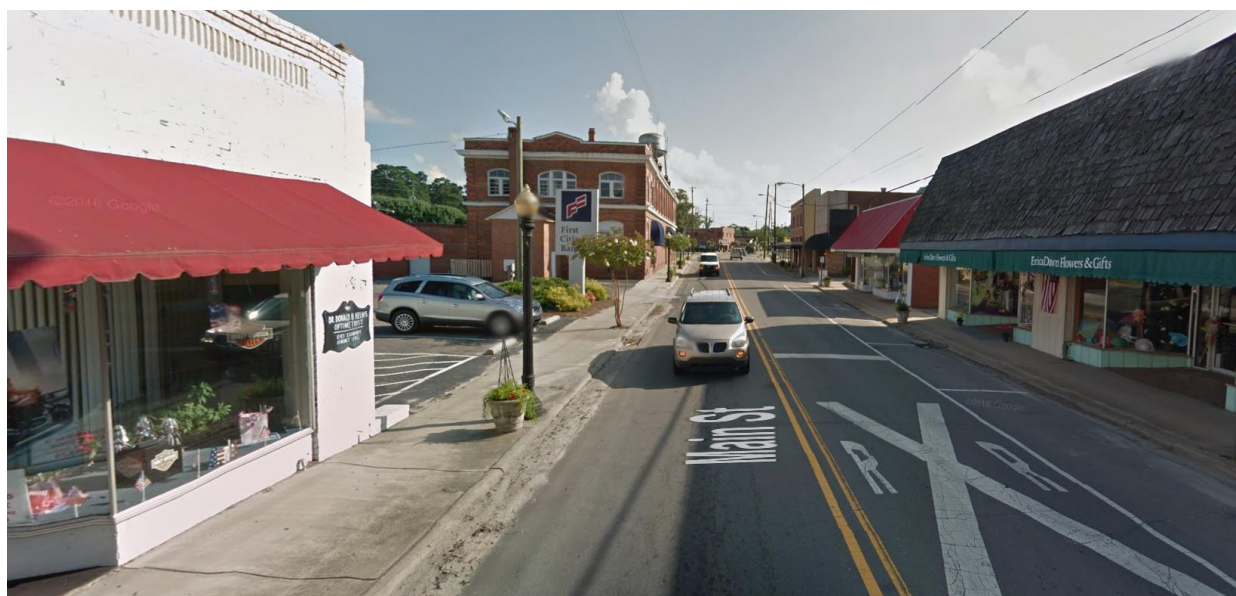


Town of Bladenboro

North Carolina



Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan 2018-2023



For the Town of Bladenboro by the
North Carolina Department of Commerce
Rural Economic Development Division
NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center

May 2018

Acknowledgements



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Staff would like to thank and recognize all who contributed their efforts to the Plan including: citizens, business persons, Project Committee, the Town Planning Board, Town Council, and Town staff. Staff would also like to thank Chuck Heustess – Bladen County Economic Development Commission.

Planning Assistance



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Section 1. Plan Project Summary Overview

This Strategic Plan will help give the Town Council and responsible parties' guidance for economic development, improvement decisions, and allow for the community as a whole to take part in the implementation. The focus of the Plan is to act as a guide to help direct improvements for the Town. The plan will help promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses, and the recruitment of new businesses.

Bladenboro's elected officials, Planning Board members and Town staff as well as the citizens, business owners, and civic volunteers will all play an important role in carrying out the goals, actions, and tasks outlined in this Plan. Implementing the actions in this plan will help improve the Town's long term economic condition.

This Five-Year Plan identifies issues and impacts, and addresses Town economic development with the following:

Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan - Information

- **Vision** – Section 2
- **Brief Town development overview** – Section 3
- **Situation** – Section 4
- **Assessment** – Section 5
- **Strategy implementation** – Section 6
- **Plan: review, adoption, and monitoring** – Section 7



Downtown historic Bladenboro looking north along Main Street.

In the winter of 2016 the North Carolina, Department of Commerce, Rural Economic Development Division - NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center was invited to assist the Town of Bladenboro in the development of an Economic Development Strategic Plan. The Town Council appointed a Project Committee made up of elected officials, engaged citizens and business owners to oversee the development of this Plan. Comments and input were recorded from the Committee and public regarding the Plan's vision, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and outside threats (forces outside beyond Town control). Public input was

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

gathered from a public meeting that included a general economic development survey. Out of these process goals, objectives, strategy actions, and tasks were developed for the Plan.

Towards the conclusion of the Plan creation process it was reviewed by the Planning Board, and reviewed by the Town Council. Comments by the Board and Council were folded into the plan by Town staff. After this was done Town Council adopted the Plan.



Downtown Bladenboro looking west along Seaboard Street.



Some of the newer businesses on north side of Town along NC-131 Highway.

Section 2 – Vision

“Bladenboro is a diverse, active, and prosperous town, that is proud to set the standard for community involvement, investment in families and youth, cleanliness, and support to business. It is a preferred destination to the many visitors to its bustling town.”



The Project Committee and staff at a meeting for the Plan.



Downtown Bladenboro along Main Street.



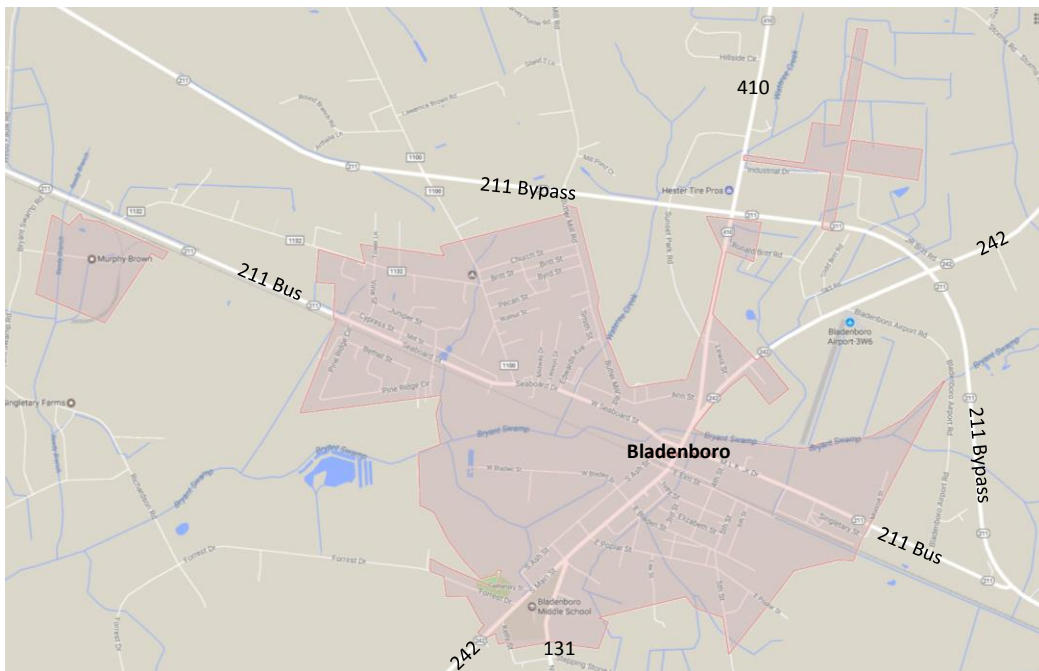
Coming into Town east on Seaboard Street with the Post Office on the left.

Section 3. Brief Town Development Overview

The Town of Bladenboro is a rural community in Bladen County, NC. Nearby towns are Elizabethtown, Lumberton, and Whiteville. Bladenboro is connected by NC highways 131, 211, 242, and 410. The north-south Interstate-95 is approximately 18 miles from town.

Early settlement in Bladenboro occurred in the early 1800s and activity was primarily farming. In 1859 a railway was built that connected Bladenboro to Wilmington in the east and Fayetteville to the northwest, and other points. The railway opened up access to and from the town for freight, goods, and passengers. Town business included turpentine, lumber, cotton and a Town post office. One of the prominent town families in the late 1800s employed many area residents with a farming supply company and general store. The Town of Bladenboro was incorporated in 1903.

The town prospered with Bladenboro Cotton Mills which was established in 1912 and later sold in 1980 to become Highland Mills. The mills in Bladenboro were the town's largest employer. However, textile and manufacturing industries began to move out of the United States and North Carolina in the 1970s for lower costs and cheaper labor. In 2000 the downsized mills in the Town closed and two of the three mills were torn down.



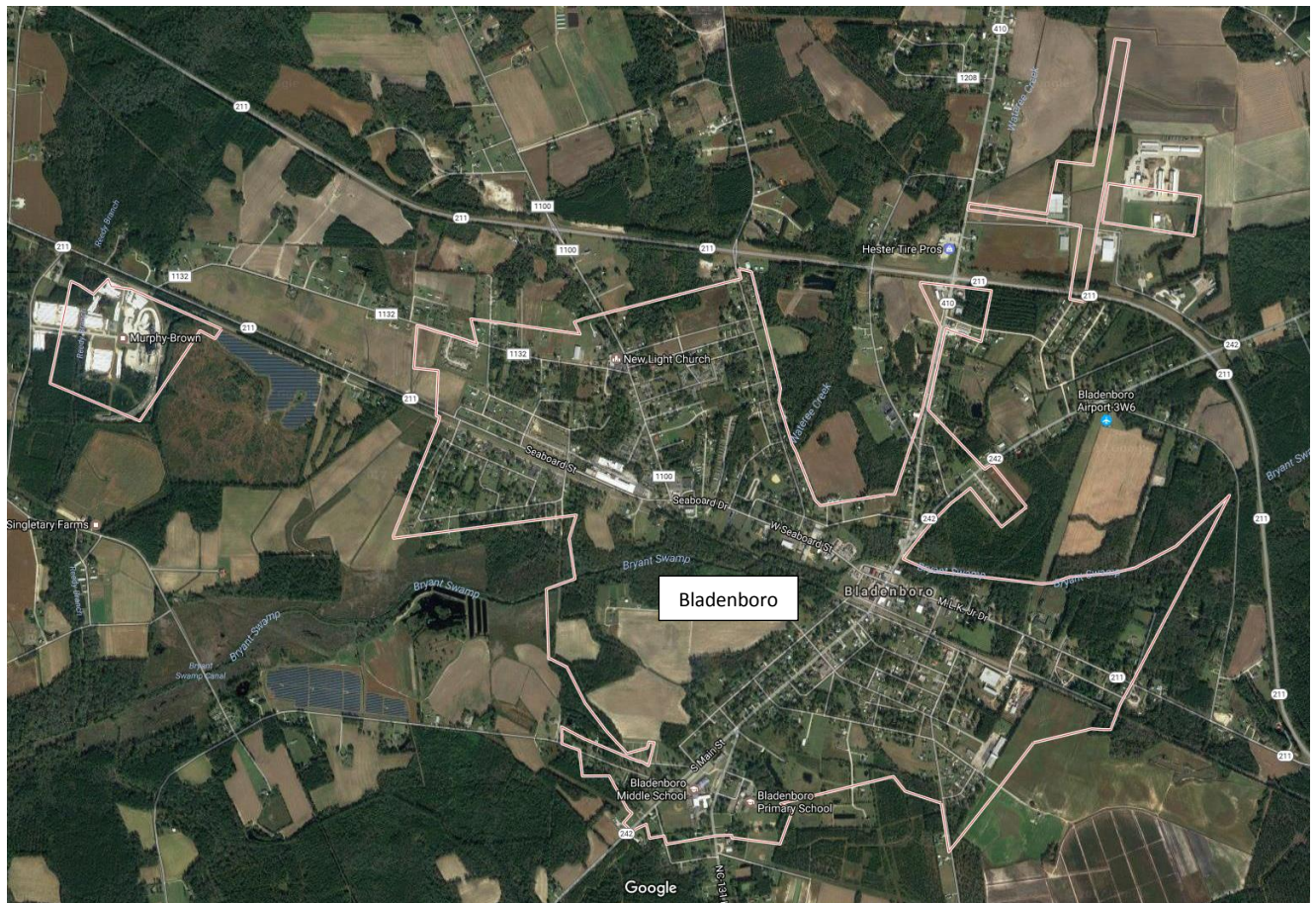
The town limits of Bladenboro.

Currently the Town general economic activity is generally supported and generated from local residents, and to a lesser extent by visitors. Town business activity includes, retail,

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

office, a few restaurants, medical clinics, a dentist, variety stores, a hardware store, convenience stores, a grocery store, and a few industries such as Birdsong and Dymetrol. There are also seven churches, a post office, a primary school, and a middle school. In approximately the last half century there has been a decrease in local industrial activity as a result of globalization of market forces. There has been an increase in a service based economy in the Town with jobs that unfortunately don't pay as well as the former mill industry. Small farm owner animal and agricultural activity has also changed in the last few decades to a larger corporate type of farm system.

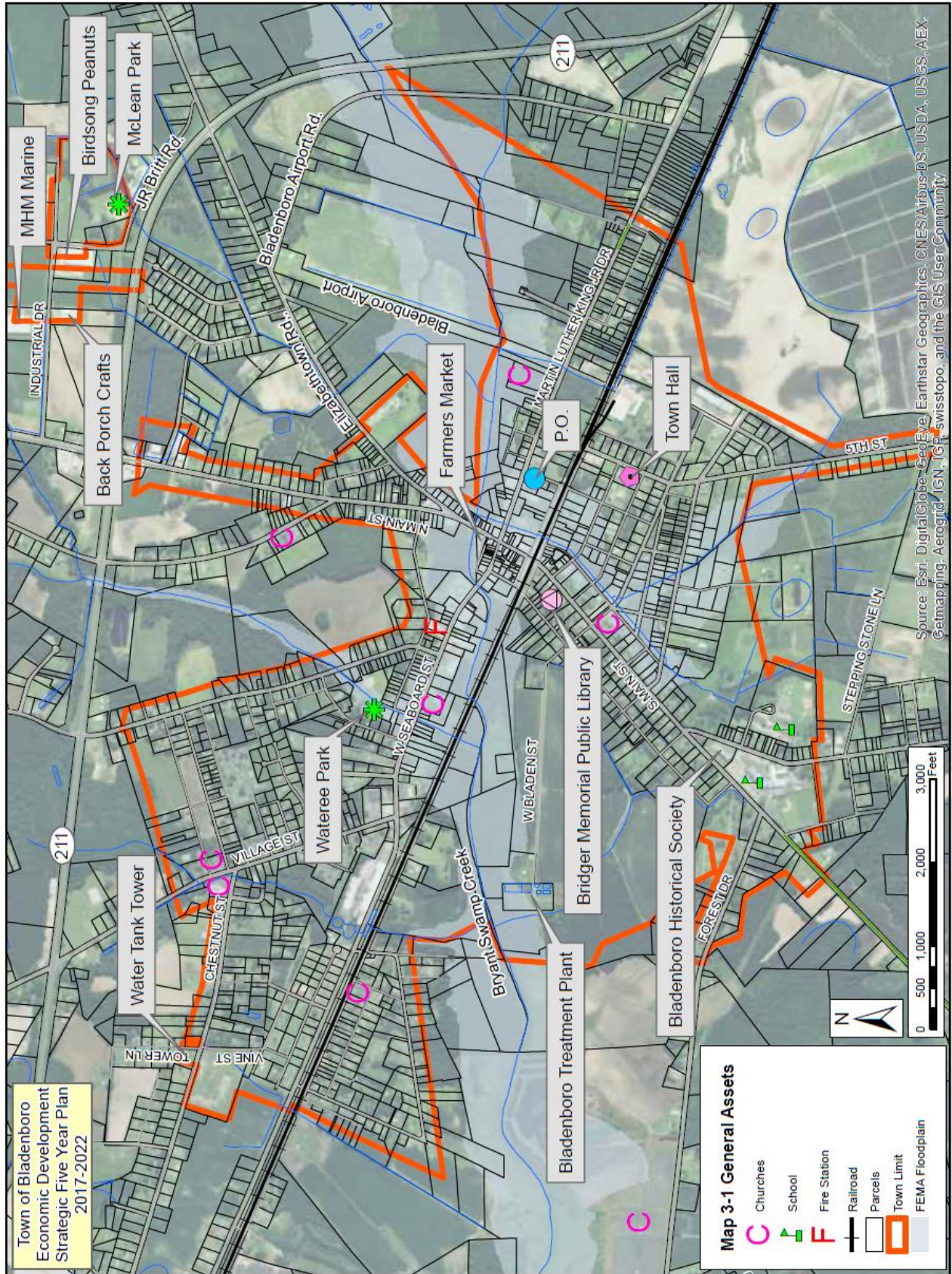
The Town was laid out in a traditional grid pattern of lots and streets. The old historic commercial downtown is in the general vicinity of the intersection of Seaboard Street/ M.L.K Jr. Drive and Main Street. There is historic residential development to the south of downtown. Like many small rural towns in the state, Bladenboro has a historic downtown, with more recent commercial development that has located in a strip development manner on roads radiating out from the center of town.



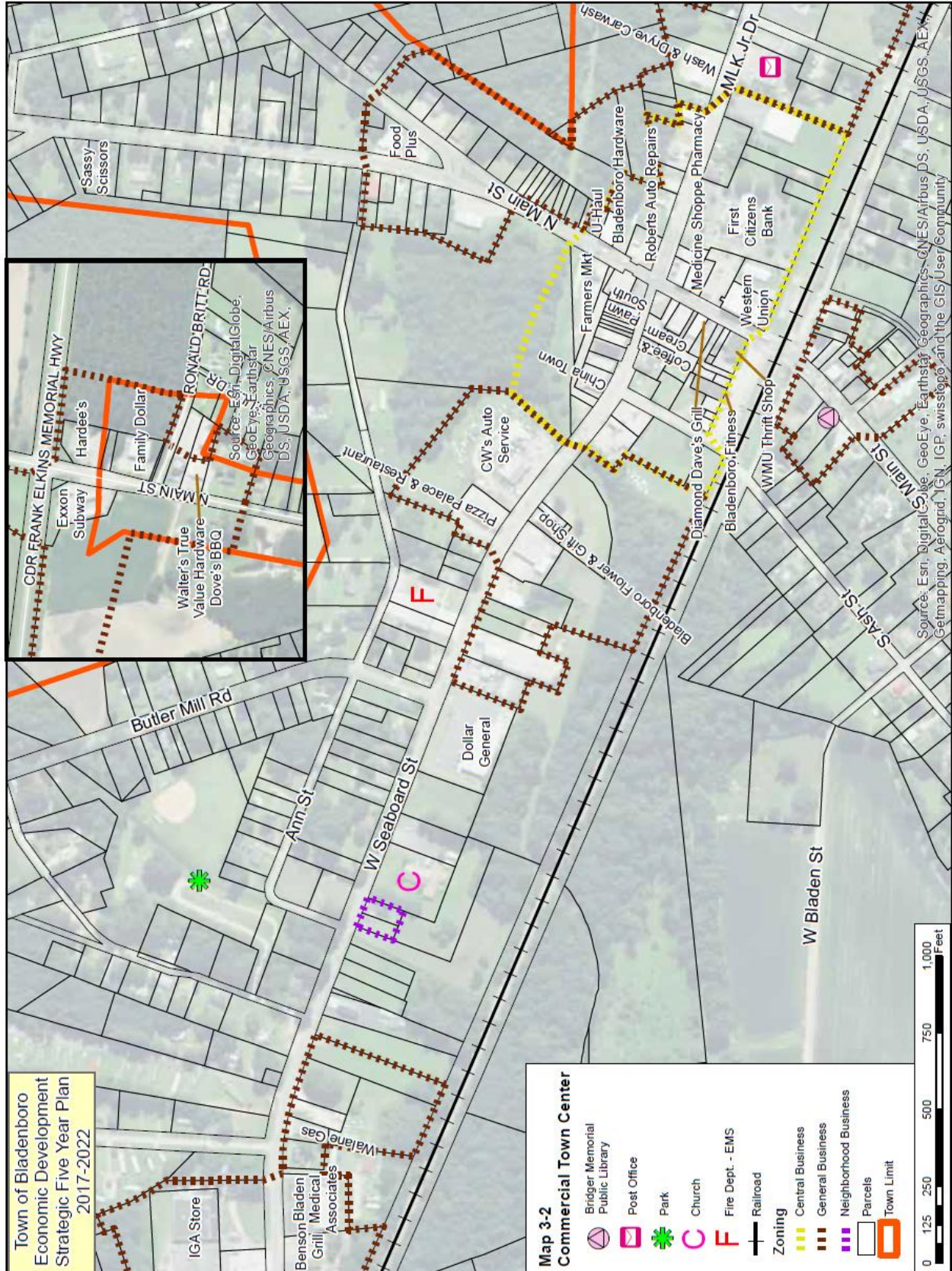
Aerial photograph of Bladenboro.

On the following two pages, Map 3-1 shows the General Assets of the Town and Map 3-2 shows the Commercial Town Center.

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan



Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan



Section 4. Situation

This section of the Plan contains demographics, traffic counts, job information, employers, and a retail service economic assessment for the Town.

Information in this Section

-
- Population
 - Race
 - Age
 - Poverty
 - Households
 - Occupancy – vacancy
 - Housing value
 - Working occupation
 - Unemployment
 - Income
 - Traffic counts
 - Jobs – Inflow and Outflow
 - Largest Town Employers
 - Town – Retail Service Economic Assessment

Population

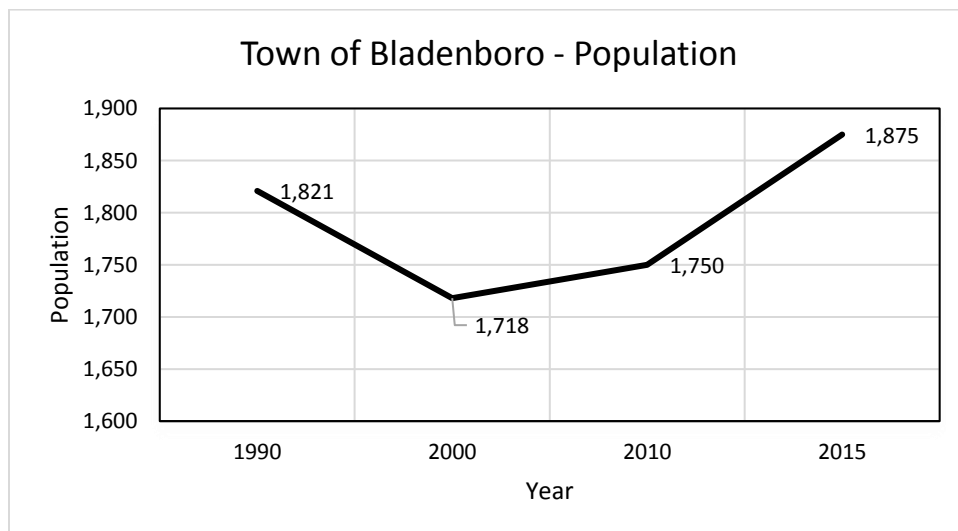
The Town of Bladenboro population decreased from 1990 to 2000, and since then has increased slowly to the 2015 population amount of 1,875 (Table 4-1 and Figure 4-1).

Table 4-1. Bladenboro population changes.

Town of Bladenboro	1990	2000	2010	2015
Population	1,821	1,718	1,750	1,875

U.S. Census Data

Figure 4-1. Population change in the Town of Bladenboro (U.S. Census Data).



Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

The population growth from 1990 to 2015 in the regional four-county area (Table 4-2, and Figure 4-2) shows that Bladen County over the last 25 years grew 21% which is like Cumberland County at 18%. Columbus county was slower at 15% and Robeson faster at 28%.

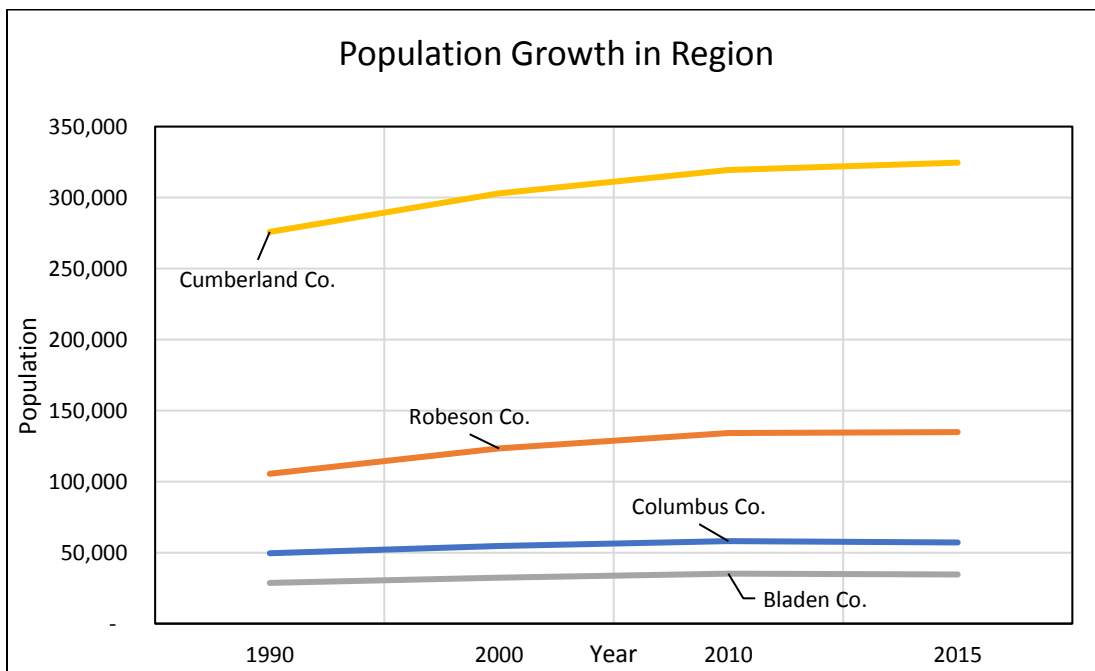
Table 4-2. Regional population growth in Bladen, Columbus, Robeson, and Cumberland counties.

Counties	Bladen	Columbus	Robeson	Cumberland
1990 - 2015	21%	15%	28%	18%
Growth / year	1.4%	1.0%	1.9%	1.2%

U.S. Census Data

During the 25 years' period Bladen County added approximately 5,600 new residents, while the amounts for the other counties were Columbus 7,100, Robeson 28,700, and Cumberland 48,800.

Figure 4-2. Population growth in Cumberland, Robeson, Columbus, and Bladen counties.



U.S. Census Data

Race

Tables 4-3 and 4-4 show the race composition in Bladenboro. Approximately two-thirds of the Town is white, one-third black, and the remainder is in the "other" and mixture census categories. Hispanics make up 12.7% of the Town population.

Table 4-3. Town of Bladenboro percentage of Hispanics – 2015.

Bladenboro	White	Black	American Indian	Some other race	Two or more races (mixture)	Total
Race	63.5%	30.0%	0.4%	1.3%	4.9%	100%

U.S. Census Data

Table 4-4. Town of Bladenboro percentage of Hispanics – 2015.

Bladenboro	Hispanics	Not Hispanic or Latino	Total
Race	12.7%	87.3%	100%

U.S. Census Data

Age

The census data in Table 4-5 shows that Bladenboro's population has become younger, as the median age decreased 4.4 years from 2000 to 2015. This is likely an indication of an increase of more families with children moving to Bladenboro.

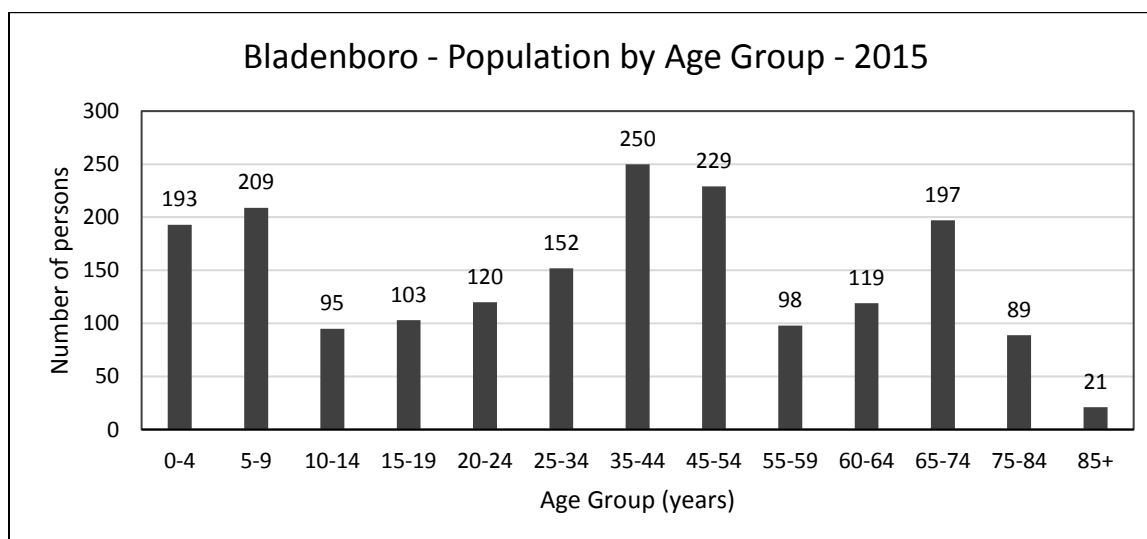
Table 4-5. Town of Bladenboro median age.

Bladenboro	2000	2010	2015	Change in age (2000-2015)
Age (years)	41.7	40.7	37.3	4.4

U.S. Census Data

The census data in Figure 4-3 shows that Bladenboro has a comparatively high number of young persons in the birth to 9 years old group. There are relatively fewer persons in the 10 to 34 age group. There is a relatively large group of persons in the 35 to 54 group, and the 65 to 74 group.

Figure 4-3. Town of Bladenboro population by age group



U.S. Census Data

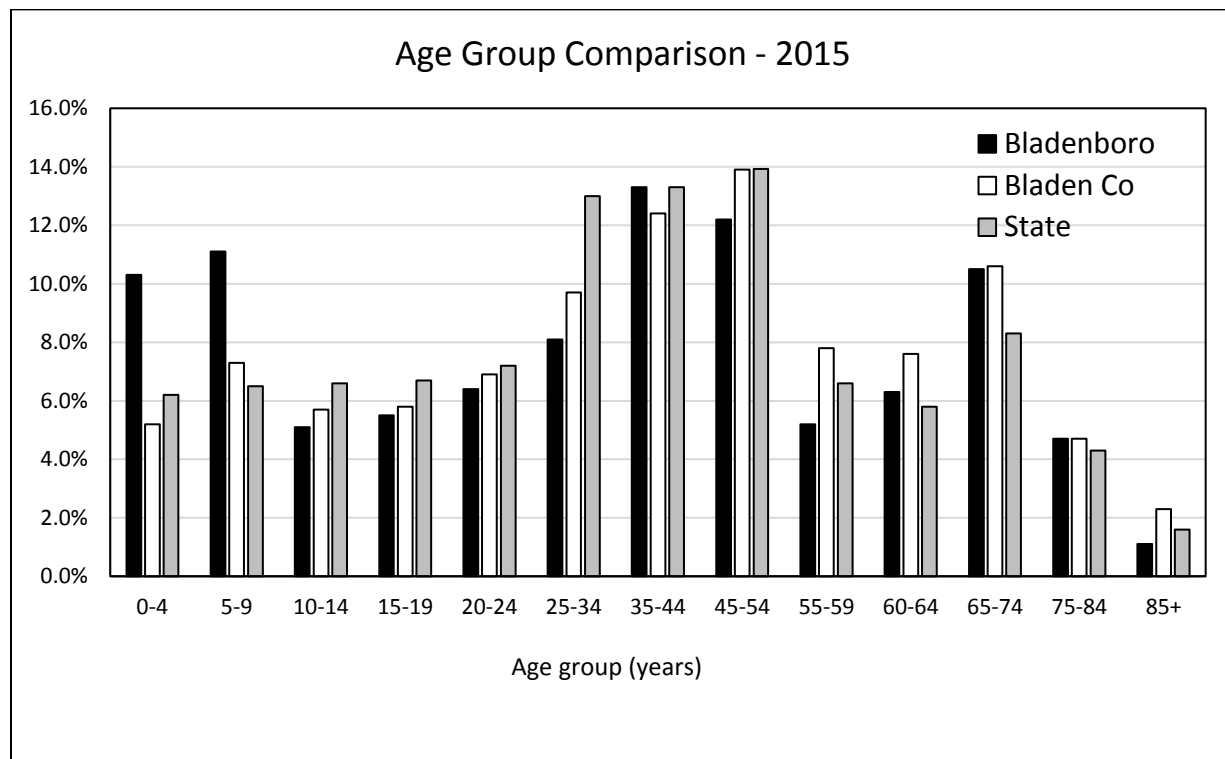
Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

An age group comparison is shown in Figure 4-4 for Bladenboro, Bladen County, and the State. Bladenboro compared to the County and the State has a much higher percentage of persons in the 0 to 9 years old groups, and slightly higher in the 35 to 44 years old group. Bladenboro has fewer persons in the 10 to 34 and 55 to 59 years old groups than the State. Bladenboro has more old age persons compared to the State between 60 to 84 years old groups. Bladenboro has a fewer percentage of persons than the County and the State in the 85 and above year group.

Bladenboro age group highlights compared to State (Figure 4-4)

- Larger percentage of young children - 0-9 age
- Fewer children and young adults - 10-34 age
- About the same young-middle age adults – 35-44 age
- Fewer middle and older age adults - 45-59 age
- More old and elderly persons – 60-84 age
- Fewer old age adults – 85+ age

Figure 4-4. Bladenboro, Bladen County, and State population by age group comparison.



U.S. Census Data

Poverty

The amount of poverty in Bladenboro is approximately twice that compared to the State (Table 4-6). This was for the categories of: total population, under the age of 18 years, and from 18-64 years old. For persons 65 and older the poverty rate was the same as the State.

Table 4-6. Bladenboro, County and State percent persons below poverty, and comparison – 2015.

Poverty	Total Population	Under 18 years	18-64 years	65 years and older
Bladenboro	35%	50%	34%	10%
Bladen County	27%	42%	25%	19%
North Carolina	17%	25%	16%	10%

U.S. Census Data

Households

In 2010 Bladenboro had 798 households (Table 4-7). From 1990 to 2010 the number of households increased by 40.

Table 4-7. Bladenboro number of households.

Town of Bladenboro	1990	2000	2010
Households	758	762	798

U.S. Census Data

From 1990 to 2015 the number of housing units in Bladenboro (Table 4-8) grew by 125 units, or an average increase of approximately 5 new units per year.

Table 4-8. Bladenboro housing unit growth.

Town of Bladenboro	1990	2000	2010	2015
Number of housing units	821	832	897	946

U.S. Census Data

Occupancy - vacancy

Bladenboro housing occupancy in 2015 (Tables 4-9 and 4-10) was 82.6%, which was slightly higher than Bladen County and slightly lower than the State. Similarly, the town vacancy was slightly lower than the County and higher than the State.

Table 4-9. Bladenboro housing occupancy and vacancy – 2015.

Town of Bladenboro	Occupancy	Vacancy
Percent	82.6%	17.4%
Number of housing units	781	165

U.S. Census Data

Table 4-10. Housing occupancy and vacancy comparison – 2015.

	Occupancy	Vacancy
Town of Bladenboro	82.6%	17.4%
Bladen County	81.7%	18.3%
North Carolina	85.5%	14.5%

U.S. Census Data

Housing value

The cost of housing in 2015 as shown in Table 4-11 in Bladenboro was lower than the Bladen County, Columbus County, and Robeson County averages. Bladenboro housing was significantly lower (approximately one-half the cost) and more affordable than Cumberland County with the Fayetteville area.

Table 4-11. Comparison of median value of owner occupied housing units – 2015.

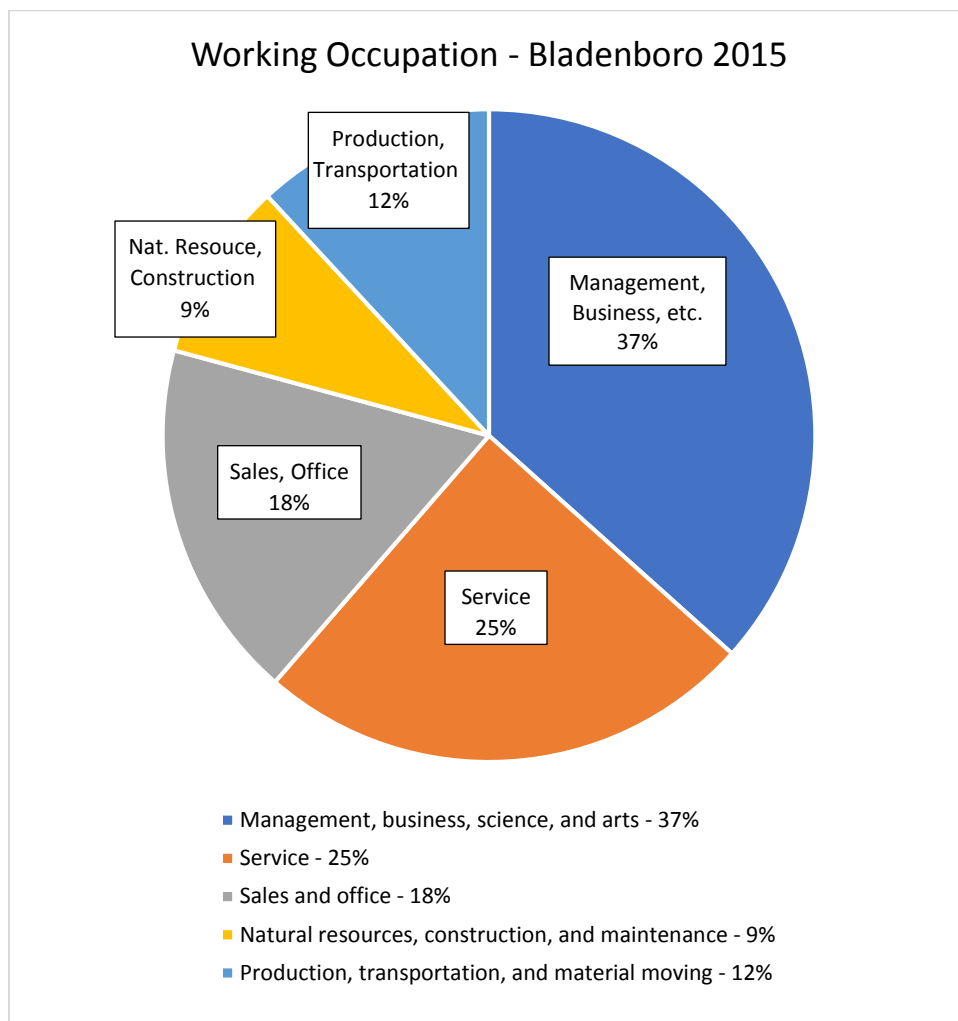
	Bladenboro	Bladen Co.	Columbus Co.	Robeson Co.	Cumberland Co.
Median house value	\$64,500	\$85,000	\$83,900	\$70,200	\$129,300

U.S. Census Data

Working occupation

Worker occupation in Bladenboro is shown in the following pie-chart (Figure 4-5) on the next page. Management and business account for 37% of worker occupation, service 25%, sales and office 18%, natural resource and construction 9%, and production and transportation at 12%.

Figure 4-5. Worker occupation in Bladenboro – 2015.



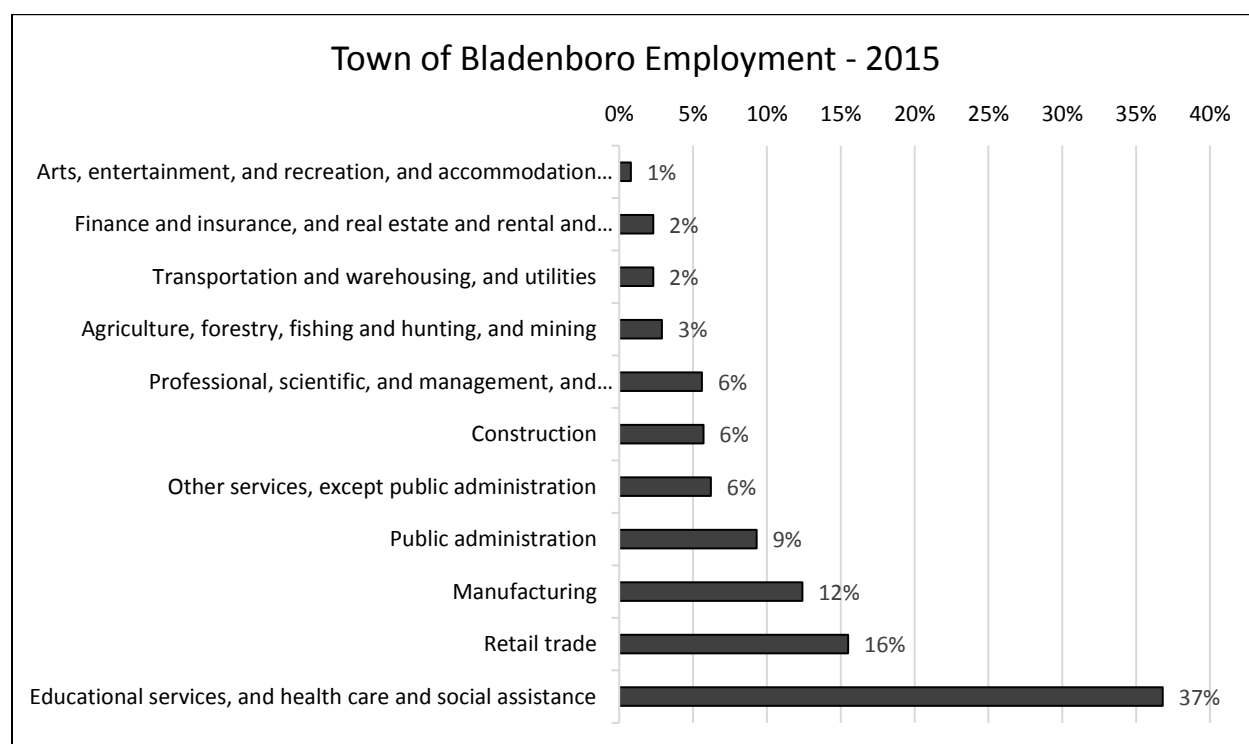
Source: U.S. Census Data – American Community Survey

The following Figure 4-6 (on the next page) shows categories of Bladenboro civilian employed population 16 years and over for 2015.

The **top three fields of employment in Bladenboro** are:

1. Educational services, health care, social assistance
2. Retail trade
3. Manufacturing

Figure 4-6. Town of Bladenboro civilian employed population 16 years and over – 2015.



Source: U.S. Census Data – American Fact Finder. Note the census has two additional industry categories: “wholesale trade” and “information”, both of which had 0% workers in these categories in Bladenboro in 2015.

Unemployment

The unemployment rate for Bladen County was 5.5% in August 2017 (Table 4-12). The Bladen County rate was like the neighboring counties, except that Robeson was slightly higher, and Sampson slightly lower. These five area counties had a higher unemployment rate than the State which was 4.5%. However, these unemployment rates are an improvement from the national recession that occurred in 2008 when the unemployment rate reached approximately 10% statewide.

Table 4-12. Unemployment rates – August 2017.

	Bladen Co.	Columbus Co.	Robeson Co.	Cumberland Co.	Sampson Co.	North Carolina
Unemployment rate	5.8%	5.5%	6.6%	5.6%	4.8%	4.5%

N.C. Department of Commerce

Income

Bladenboro had a lower per capita income and household mean (average) income compared to Bladen County and the State (Table 4-13).

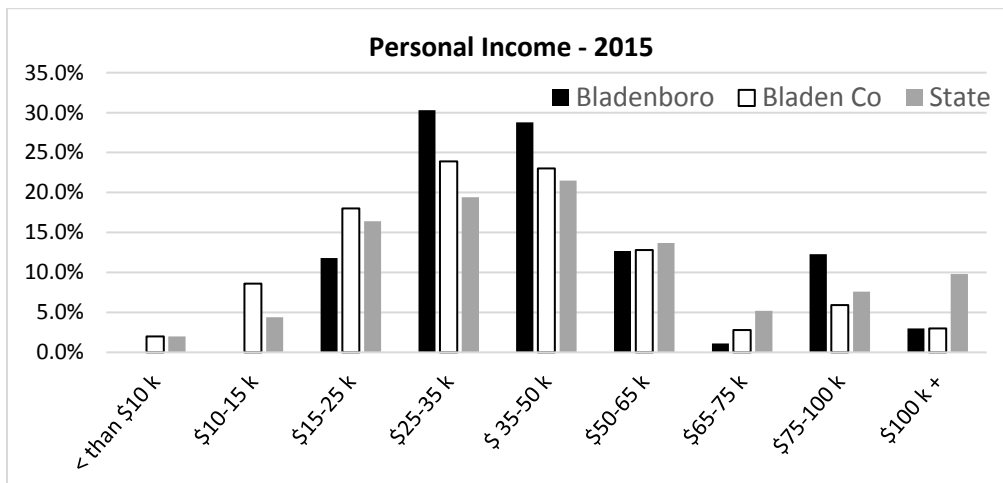
Table 4-13. Per capita and mean household income – 2015.

	Bladenboro	Bladen Co.	North Carolina
Per Capita Income	\$16,281	\$18,903	\$25,920
Household Mean Income	\$38,106	\$43,770	\$65,338

U.S. Census

Personal income and household income distribution 2015 for Bladenboro, Bladen County, and the State is shown in the following Figures 4-7 and 4-8. For personal income (Figure 4-7) Bladenboro has higher percentage of persons with income in the \$25 to \$50 thousand, and \$75 to \$100 thousand income brackets compared to the County and the State. The town has a lower percent of persons than the State in the following income brackets: less than \$25 thousand, \$50 to \$75 thousand, and above the \$100 thousand.

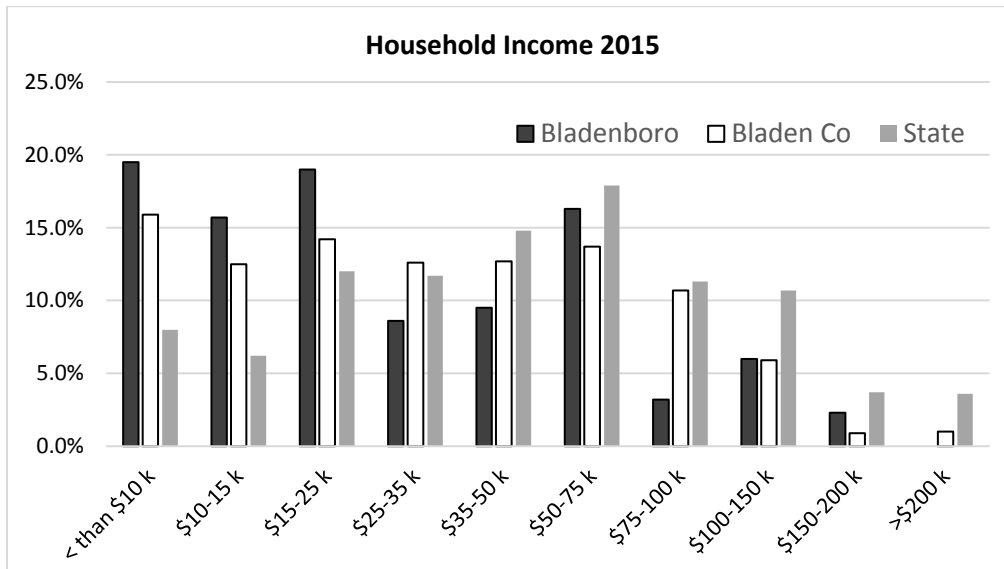
Figure 4-7. Bladenboro personal income \$ income distribution – 2015.



U.S. Census Data

As shown in Figure 4-8 Bladenboro has a higher percentage of households with incomes less than \$25 thousand than the State. The town compared to the State has a lower percentage of households with incomes in all brackets above \$25 thousand.

Figure 4-8. Bladenboro household income \$ income distribution – 2015.



U.S. Census Data

Traffic Counts

Traffic counts show that most roads in Bladenboro do not exceed 6,000 vehicles per day. This is in exception (Figure 4-9) along Main Street in town and at the intersection of Seaboard Street, ML King Drive, and Main Street where vehicle counts are from 8,200 to 8,700 trips per day (ESRI data 2017).

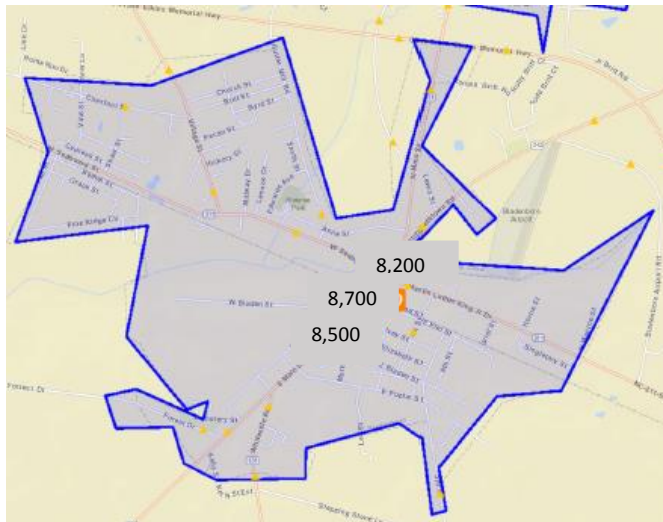


Figure 4-9. Traffic count map of Bladenboro which are in vehicle trips per day.

Jobs – Inflow and Outflow

The following Figure 4-10 map shows 2014 jobs – inflow and outflow analysis where 408 persons are employed in Bladenboro and commute in from outside the town; 425 persons live in Bladenboro and commute outside the town for work; and 37 people are employed and live in Bladenboro.

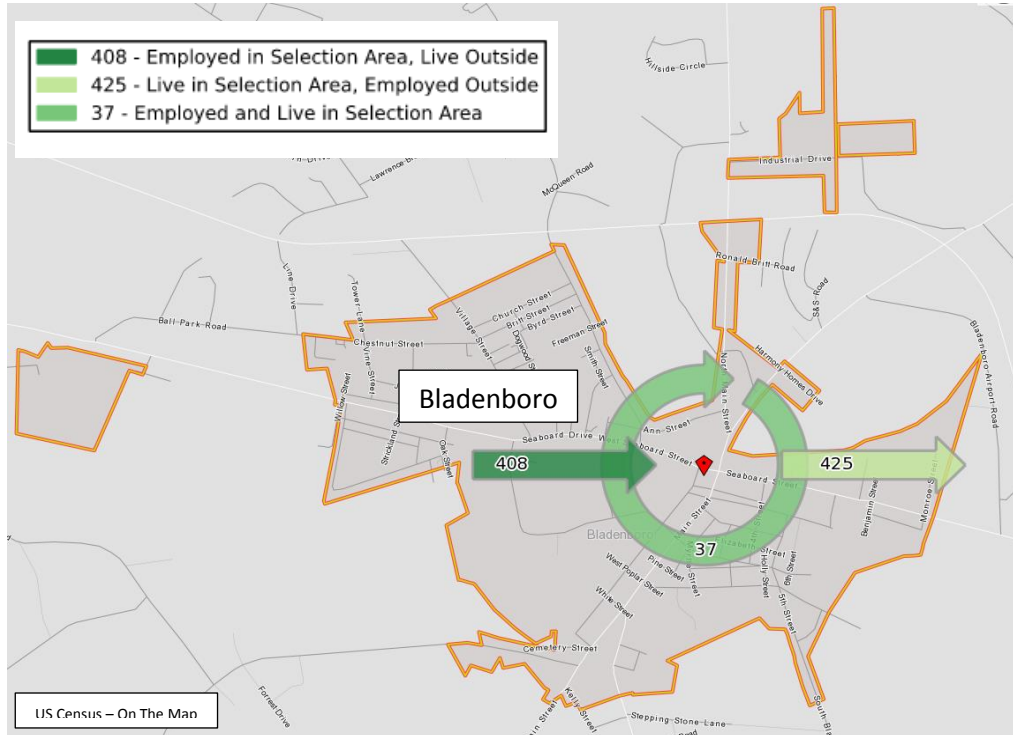
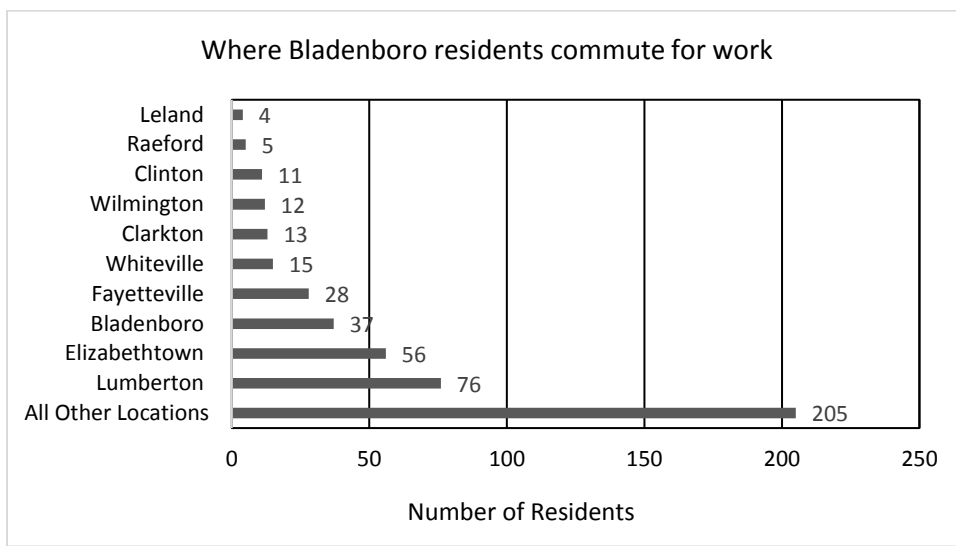


Figure 4-10. Jobs inflow and outflow analysis of Bladenboro – 2014.



(US Census - On The Map)

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Figure 4-11. Where Bladenboro residents commute for work.

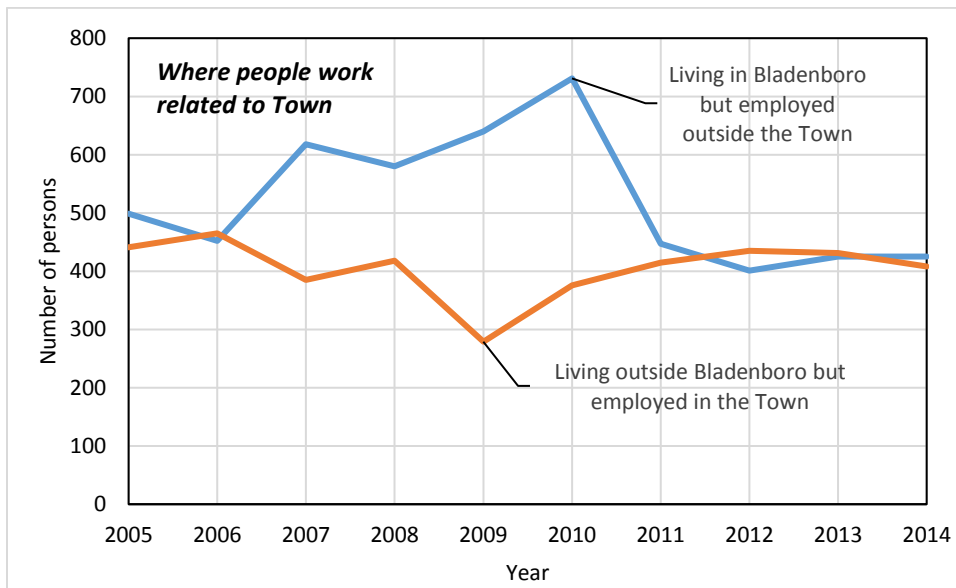
Where Town residents commute to work is shown in the previous Figure 4-11 and the following Table 4-14. Lumberton and Elizabethtown are the largest single percent destinations.

Table 4-14. Where Bladenboro Residents commute to for work (percent).

Commute for Work	Percent
All Other Locations	44%
Lumberton	17%
Elizabethtown	12%
Bladenboro	8%
Fayetteville	6%
Whiteville	3%
Clarkton	3%
Wilmington	3%
Clinton	2%
Raeford	1%
Leland	1%

US Census – On The Map

The following Figure 4-12 shows a decade of job commute analysis from 2005 to 2014. From 2006 to 2011 shows that more Town residents had to commute outside the Town for employment. This was likely exacerbated because of the recession. Since approximately 2011 the number of residents commuting into the Town and out of the Town has been about equal which is an improvement.



US Census – On The Map

Figure 4-12. Jobs inflow and outflow analysis of Bladenboro – 2005 to 2014.

Largest Town Employers

The following Tables 4-15 and 4-16 shown the top largest employers in terms of number of employees and annual dollar sales. The Top employer is the public-school system, and the largest dollar sales company is Birdsong Peanuts.

Table 4-15. Top 9 largest employers in Bladenboro in terms of number of employees.

Company in Bladenboro	Business Description	Company Size
Bladenboro Middle School	Schools	50-99
Bladenboro Primary School	Schools	50-99
Quality Home Care	Home Health Service	50-99
West Bladen High School	Schools	50-99
Bladenboro Historical Society	Non-Profit Organizations	20-49
Columbus County Board of Education	Schools	20-49
Fresh Foods	Grocers-Retail	20-49
Glencare of Bladenboro	Retirement Communities & Homes	20-49
Hester Tire	Truck-Repairing & Service	20-49

NC Department of Commerce – Labor and Economic Analysis Division. Note the company size data is listed as an approximate range.

Table 4-16. Top 8 largest employers in Bladenboro in terms of annual sales (\$ millions).

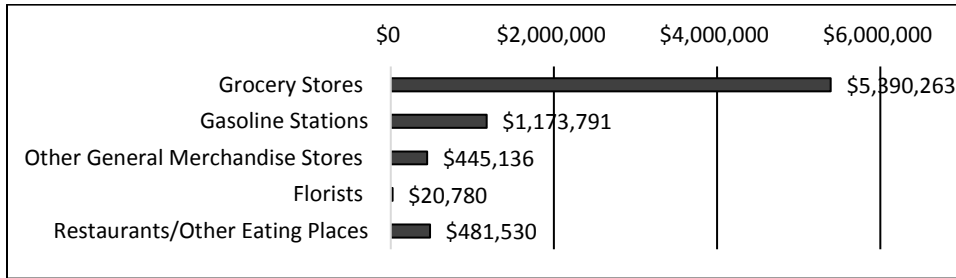
Company in Bladenboro	Business Description	Annual Sales (Million)
Birdsong Peanuts	Peanut products (wholesale)	\$20-\$50
Walane Gas Co	Gas company	\$10-\$20
Pineland Milling Co Inc	Grain dealer (wholesale)	\$10-\$20
Fresh Foods	Grocer retail	\$5-\$10
Marsh Road Lumber Co	Timber & timberland company (wholesale)	\$5-\$10
Hester Tire	Truck repairing & service	\$2.5-\$5
Exxon	Service stations, gasoline & oil	\$2.5-\$5
Brown's of Carolina Feed Mill	Feed dealer (wholesale)	\$2.5-\$5

NC Department of Commerce – Labor and Economic Analysis Division

Town – Retail Service Economic Assessment

The following Figure 4-13 shows an analysis of five different economic retail service categories in the Town of Bladenboro in 2017. The bar-graph for these five categories shows the dollar surplus (\$) amount coming into the town. This means that customers are drawn in from outside the town trade area for the shown town retail service items. For example, “grocery stores” category is the largest positive draw to Bladenboro at approximately \$5.4 million. While “florists” category is still positive but at a small draw at approximately \$ 20,000.

Figure 4-13. **Town of Bladenboro surplus where customers are drawn in from outside the trade town area for the following five retail services (\$ Surplus, 2017).**



Information from ESRI Retail Marketplace Profile - 2017

The same information shown in the previous Figure 4-13 is also shown in the following Table 4-17. The five different retail service categories are listed showing surplus dollar (\$) economic draw to Bladenboro. The total that the town is capturing from outside is approximately \$7.5 million dollars.

Table 4-17. **Bladenboro retail service surplus of two business types (\$) 2017.** (Also shown in Figure 4-13).

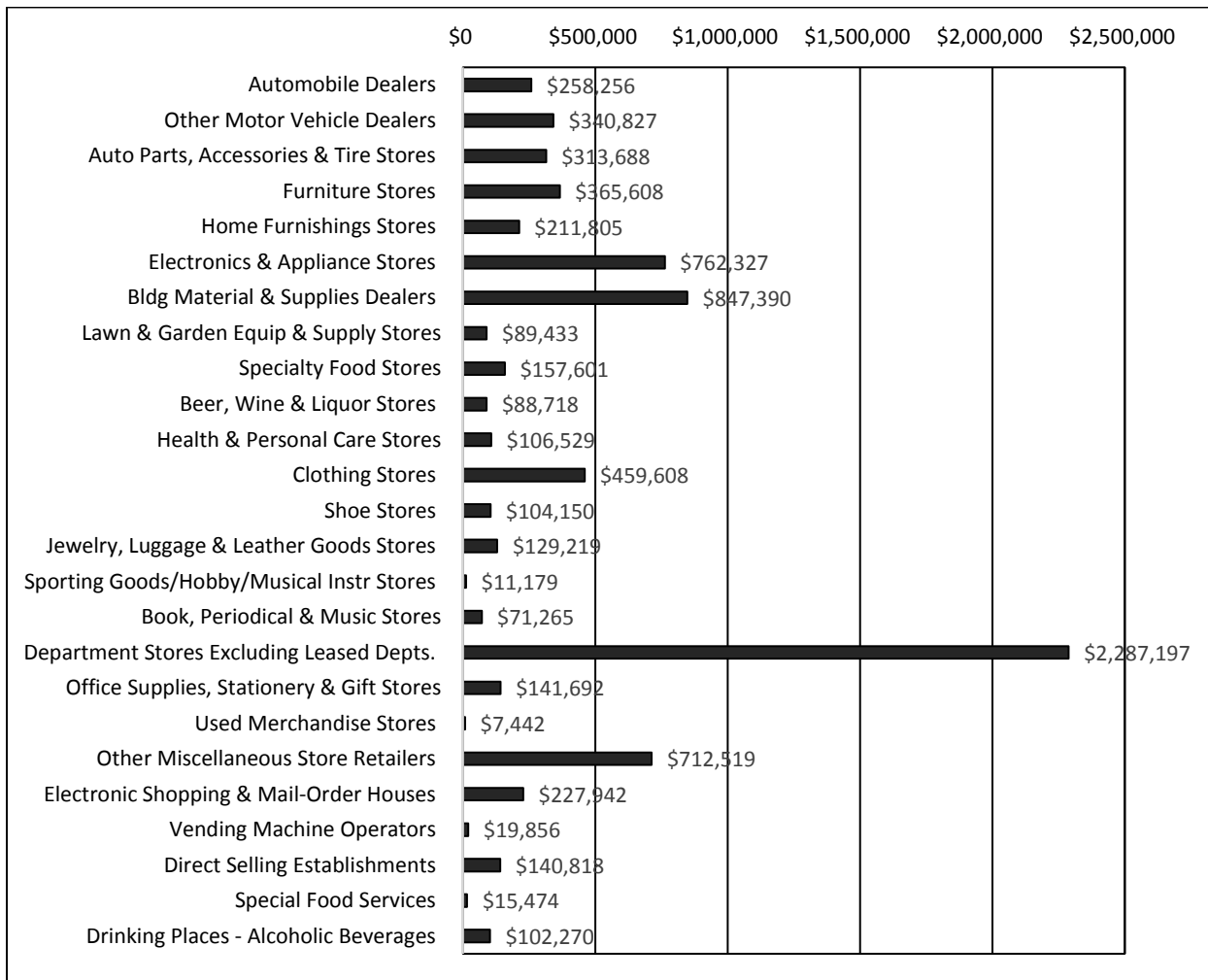
	Retail Service	Surplus (\$)
1.	Grocery Stores	\$5,390,263
2.	Gasoline Stations	\$1,173,791
3.	Restaurants/Other Eating Places	\$481,530
4.	Other General Merchandise Stores	\$445,136
5.	Florists	\$20,780
	Total	\$7,511,500

Information from ESRI Retail Marketplace Profile - 2017

The following Figure 4-14 shows economic leakage from 25 different economic retail service categories in Bladenboro in 2017. The bar-graph shows dollar leakage (\$) that is occurring whereby town customers shop outside the town trade area for the shown retail service categories.

For example, the Town loses (or leaks) to the outside approximately \$2.3 million in “department stores excluding leased departments” services, and leaks to the outside approximately \$7,000 in the “used merchandise stores” category, as well as all the other shown retail categories. Conversely, the retail leakage categories shown in Figure 4-14 represent potential business niche opportunities for growth in the town because of the customer demand, and current dollars being lost to outside the town.

Figure 4-14. Town of Bladenboro retail service dollar (\$) leakage in 2017, and potential business opportunities.



Information from ESRI Retail Marketplace Profile - 2017

The same information shown in the previous Figure 4-14 is also shown in the following Table 4-18. Except the 25 different retail service categories are listed from greatest \$ potential opportunity (leakage from Bladenboro), with “department stores excluding leased departments” at No. 1, to least potential with “used merchandise stores” at No. 25. Another way of stating this is that there is demand for these services in the town that is being lost to the outside market. The total leakage potential opportunity for the town is approximately \$7.9 million dollars.

Table 4-18. **Bladenboro retail service dollar (\$) leakage in 2017, and potential business opportunities** (from Figure 4.14).

	Retail Service	Leakage (\$) and Potential Opportunity
1.	Department Stores Excluding Leased Depts.	\$2,287,197
2	Bldg Material & Supplies Dealers	\$847,390
3.	Electronics & Appliance Stores	\$762,327
4.	Other Miscellaneous Store Retailers	\$712,519
5.	Clothing Stores	\$459,608
6.	Furniture Stores	\$365,608
7.	Other Motor Vehicle Dealers	\$340,827
8.	Auto Parts, Accessories & Tire Stores	\$313,688
9.	Automobile Dealers	\$258,256
10.	Electronic Shopping & Mail-Order Houses	\$227,942
11.	Home Furnishings Stores	\$211,805
12.	Specialty Food Stores	\$157,601
13.	Office Supplies, Stationery & Gift Stores	\$141,692
14.	Direct Selling Establishments	\$140,818
15.	Jewelry, Luggage & Leather Goods Stores	\$129,219
16.	Health & Personal Care Stores	\$106,529
17.	Shoe Stores	\$104,150
18.	Drinking Places - Alcoholic Beverages	\$102,270
19.	Lawn & Garden Equip & Supply Stores	\$89,433
20	Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores	\$88,718
21.	Book, Periodical & Music Stores	\$71,265
22.	Vending Machine Operators	\$19,856
23.	Special Food Services	\$15,474
24.	Sporting Goods/Hobby/Musical Instr Stores	\$11,179
25.	Used Merchandise Stores	\$7,442
	Total	\$7,972,813

Information from ESRI Retail Marketplace Profile – 2017

Section 5. Assessment

The Town economic development Plan assessment information was gathered with the following.

Assessment Information

- **Assets and Economic Drivers input from Project Committee**
- **SWOT Analysis from the public Town Meeting – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats**
- **Plan Questionnaire Survey – Appendix A**
- **Telephone interview with Project Committee and Stakeholders – Appendix B**

Assets and Economic Drivers Input from Project Committee

The following information was recorded from the Project Committee at the 4-25-17 and 5-23-17 meetings. Note: (5) etc. denotes number of persons who commented on the same item, etc.

Economic

- Rail (5)
- Natural gas line access (4)
- Bird Song peanut plant (3)
- Murphy Brown feed mill
- Boat factory
- Fresh Fruit - Southern Bell Organics
- Carroll Chicken
- Empty buildings (3)
- Available land
- Room for growth
- Strong agriculture industry
- Vast (amounts) of real estate
- Old historic buildings (2)
- Historic downtown
- Vicinity to Wilmington, Brunswick Co. beaches, Myrtle Beach
- Airport in Bladenboro and at Elizabethtown
- Small town life and close to large towns
- Close to I-95 Highway
- Southern Peanut Co.

- Dance studio - teaching
- Active youth ball
- Family – church
- State champions (old high school)
- Greatest people in the state when doing fund raiser for sick people - More (done by a) small town that most large towns can raise
- Pageants
- Arts
- Fun Day (3), Spring Fling, Christmas Parade
- 4H
- Faith

Natural and Recreational

- Historical buildings
- Downtown buildings
- Veterans memorial
- Parks
- Green spot - open free to all picnickers (2)
- Active sports – golf
- Strong area for ball players
- Batting cage
- Organized baseball in the summer
- Team sports
- Hunting and fishing (2)
- Hunting land and preserves nearby
- Agricultural land
- Strong farming
- Swamp areas
- Walking trails at graveyard and McLean Park

Cultural

- Beast Fest (7)
- Active Bladenboro historical society (2)
- Bladenboro history
- Historical buildings
- Cotton Mill artifacts
- Museum (2)
- Old textile town (2)
- Auditorium

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Governmental

- Local County Commission (representation)
- Active Town Board members (2)
- Council of Governments – Lumber River
- County Commissioners (2)
- Charles Ray Peterson - county
- William Brisson – state
- State has us “too cut up” causing not good coverage
- Water and sewer by Town

Community and Human Resource

- Boost-the-boro (6)
- Rotary (4)
- Garden club (4)
- Benefits committee (3)
- Dixie youth (2)
- Dixie youth baseball (2)
- Food bank (2)
- Senior center – assisted living
- Home – health agencies
- Church basketball
- Book club
- Thrift shops
- Strong community support for fundraisers
- Charlie
- Batting cages
- West Bladen Assisted Living

Institutional

- 17 Churches in town limits (2)
- Large middle school
- Bladen Co. – Cape Fear Valley medical clinic (3)
- Rotary
- Anchor academy (3)
- Bladen Community College – satellite branch
- Extension classes – Community College
- Close to Community College
- K-8 school education
- Senior center
- Spauling Monroe Culture Center
- Churches
- Fire department

SWOT Analysis – Public Town Meeting

The following Town information was recorded at the public input meeting with 32 people attending on July 27, 2017 at the Bladenboro Community Building. The input information is in four SWOT categories: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and (outside external) threats. This is followed by some general input comments from that meeting.

Note: Number of persons with same responses (2) i.e. 2 persons, etc.

Strengths

- Friendly people, nice people (2), Good people (2)
- Good response from police department to alarms, police department (3), fire department (2), EMS services
- Community resident owned businesses
- Room for growth, potential
- Affordable real estate, supportive citizens, access to transportation, history of success



- Boost-the-boro, economic non-profit group
- Promote youth programs
- Quiet community and living (2), family ties, beautiful main street, near neighborhood communities with job opportunities (Whiteville, Lumberton, Elizabethtown, Fayetteville, Wilmington)
- Small (town), home, small town atmosphere, established community
- Town has qualities of “Mayberry”, sense of community
- Willingness to help people with sickness

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

- Knowing those who live around you
- Good community support, community unites for causes, caring people who unite to help people who have suffered financial difficulty, result of illness, fire, etc. (3)
- Make use of parks that are available
- Close to beach

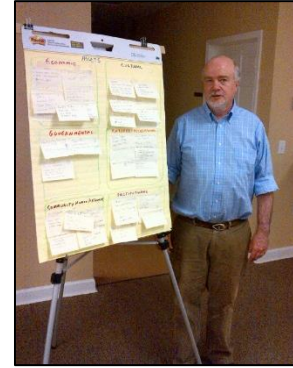
Weaknesses

- Employment opportunities, access to project funding, realistic vision for the future
 - Need to do more to clean up town, clean up buildings that are not rented by owners
 - Poor: roads, drainage, recreation (opportunities)
 - Recreation facilities not being kept up, ball park has no lights
 - No youth involvement, few businesses
 - Lack of business and industry, closed businesses
 - Town is always in a defense mode; need to change to an offensive position to get things done
 - Not enough shopping, not enough activities for youth, main street needs improvement
 - Buildings in Central Business District don't meet code
 - Rundown houses and business, junky yards, nasty areas, drugs (3), dogs (not) on leashes
-
- No social programs of support: alcoholics anonymous, narcotics anonymous, families anonymous
 - Crime (2)
 - Citizen apathy, as evidenced by (lack of) attendance (this meeting)
 - Local people spend their money outside of Bladenboro
 - Limited amount of trained, educated employment pool
 - Poor condition of retail business, most are not tenant ready, poor enforcement of code violations, need for more suitable single family homes (move in ready)
 - Too far from the (I-95) interstate
 - County has too many rules on new businesses
 - Transportation, lack of retail stores, lack of sidewalks, little to no jobs in Town
 - Too many burned out houses, (Town) looks un-kept to people passing through, town appearance
-
- Large gap in low income and high income families
 - (Activities) for more young people in town
 - Lack of retail, cluttered downtown, lack of sidewalks, no jobs in Bladenboro
 - Condition of streets not so good



Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

- Sewage (system and treatment), sewage capacity
- Trash pickup
- Groundwater control
- Areas un-kept
- Street improvements
- Old buildings need updating, McLean Park (has) no lights
- Flooding issues (3)
- No one seems to care what their property looks like
- Few opportunities to keep young citizens
- Parking lot (condition) behind Farmers Market
- Lack of enough good jobs to bring our college graduates back to our area
- Sub-standard housing, property owners not maintaining properties
- After-school programs for children of all ages (for) the community
- Lack of realistic start point for action and planning
- Leaving things in the current state
- Young population does not become involved, older population has lost interest
- No rural jobs within town limits
- Few purchasers of real estate, slum lord paradise
- Not enough funding for the Town




Opportunities


- Natural gas
- Railroad
- Grants – lights at McLean Park
- Community citizens be more supportive of: local schools, sports, clubs, etc.
- Restore downtown to a more “boutique” setting
- Change in the thinking of elected officials, mover to a Town manager system
- Growth: residential, business, financial
- Improved vision of Town’s appearance with building owners becoming more active
- Support local business owners
- Room for growth with residential and business
- Cleaning-up the Town would bring more people
- More retail
- Bringing the youth back
- (There is) money available to small Towns if they are willing to go after it (grants)
- Clearing canals and major ditches to improve draining during storms
- Finish up the new park for the youth
- Have seen some new businesses coming so things are improving, even after the storm
- Fix the streets
- Tax incentives to attract business and industry



Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

- Grants to improve parking areas around businesses
 - (Apply for) more grants
 - We are in such bad shape that we need to start over
 - Lights at the park
 - Clean town
 - Expand industrial park
 - Improve drainage
 - Dress-up (the) business district
 - Develop incubators in open buildings by partnering with Golden Leaf or other grants
 - Recruit business and industry for vacant buildings
 - Work on parks appearance
- 
- (Have) more Town events
 - Business growth, and more business promotion
 - Grants to assist business and industry
 - McClean Park and Wateree Park
 - Empty buildings ready to be rented
 - Industrial park
 - Affordable commercial space
 - Proximity to the coast and large commercial employment
 - Energetic citizens
 - Restless youth – needs are challenging
 - Need to leverage the fact that many people want to live near family and have jobs in neighborhood communities. We need to develop single-family home construction to attract (people) to live here and drive to work in nearby communities
 - Need more citizen involvement

Outside External Threats

- Dirty politics
 - Another hurricane
 - Middle school being moved
 - County taxes being increased
 - Being pushed to the rear of the line by E-Town
 - Reduction in grant and project money availability
 - Little vision from the (County) Commissioners
 - Inability to expand the Town limits and therefore the tax base (2)
 - Bypassed by major available transportation
 - Lack of: job training readiness by public schools, coop training for businesses
- 
- Charter schools threaten our local schools
 - Poverty level in the area
 - Losing business and jobs to other towns
 - No growth, the town is shrinking (loosing population), dwindling population due to lack of jobs
 - Walmart in Elizabethtown and Lumberton but no big businesses here

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

- Other Counties and Town reaping the financial gain from our citizens

Additional General Comments

- Town is a bedroom community: family, church, downtown; need to leverage this; need incentives to attract residential developers, for example build 1,200 square foot homes
- There is a lack of residential housing
- Many people must commute and work outside of town
- Don't want Town to have really high growth like big city metro areas, but do want some growth
- Vacant buildings on main street need renovation
- A problem is that the Town no longer can annex adjacent areas next to Town
- Flood control needed with canals; swamp drainage is an issue – affects development; drainage system needs maintenance and improvements
- Need good roads
- McLean Park needs to be cleaned up (2) and made usable, glass in park makes it unusable; need to research and find if there are grants to apply for the park
- Farmers market needs attention

- Need to attract travel traffic to stop and shop in Town; need to capture more retail sales
- Old drugstore needs attention
- A problem: people not willing to spend more money to support school programs such as sports
- Discussion: school needs, lack of money, lack of support
- Sewage capacity an issue
- Would like to see: (elected officials) leadership; a more proactive approach for Town issues; need to change from defense to offense mentality; E-Town has done this
- Missed opportunities for youth social activities, for example Pokémon Go; need more youth activities
- Used to have a JC Club (US Junior Chamber - Jaycees) in the 1960s-70s, no longer have this

Section 6 - Strategy Implementation

Vision: Bladenboro is a diverse, active, and prosperous town, that is proud to set the standard for community involvement, investment in families and youth, cleanliness, and support to business. It is a preferred destination to the many visitors to its bustling town. (from Section 2)					
Strategic Goal #1: Create an environment conducive to prosperity.					
Objective 1.A: Fill vacant commercial buildings.					
Action 1.A.1: Create a recruiting toolbox for the use of town leaders.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Develop and maintain an inventory of buildings and sites that shows address, owner, square footage, current use, tax rate, and photograph(s).	Town	Bladen County Economic Development, COG		9/18	
Task: Post inventory on town's website and share with county Economic Developer and NC's Southeast Economic Development Partnership (NCSE.)	Town	NCSE, County, COG		10/18	
Task: Create a "How to Open a Business in Bladenboro" document that includes relevant information on incentives, state and federal tax credit and grants information for potential business owners.	Town	NCSE, County, COG		8/18	
Task: Using data from market analysis, actively recruit businesses that address leakage and align with vacant properties in town.	Town	NCSE, Main Street & Rural Planning Center		8/18	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Action 1.A.2: Associate with NC Main Street to learn best practices.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Identify NC Main Street communities that have successfully filled vacant buildings.	Town			7/18	
Task: Attend NC Main Street "Promotion" and "Economic Vitality" information meetings ("boot camps").	Town			2018-2019	
Objective 1.B: Recruit vital businesses.					
Action Item 1.B.1: Recruit a parts store in order to reduce retail leakage and create local jobs.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Using market analysis data, identify the need in the marketplace for a parts store, as well as vacant sites and buildings conducive to the operation of same.	Town			7/18	
Task: Identify locally owned parts stores in nearby communities to contact for recruitment.	Town			7/18	
Task: Schedule and conduct recruiting visits to potential parts stores in the region.	Town			9/18	
Action Item 1.B.2: Recruit a grocery store in order to reduce retail leakage and create local jobs.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Using market analysis data, identify the need in the marketplace for a grocery store, as well as vacant sites and buildings conducive to the operation of same.	Town			TBD - Based on Beer - Wine Sales	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Task: Contact potential grocery store chains/merchants for recruitment.	Town			TBD - Based on Beer - Wine Sales	
Action Item 1.B.3: Approve the sale of beer and wine in order to facilitate the recruitment of a major grocery store.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Survey residents to determine acceptability / preference for beer and wine sales in town.	Town			7/18	
Task: Conduct required preliminary steps (petition, attorney review, etc.) to include referendum on upcoming ballot.	Town			8/18	
Task: Include referendum on a regularly scheduled election day ballot to approve sales of beer and wine in town.	Town			11/18	
Objective 1.C: Address internet/broadband challenges to economic development.					
Action Item 1.C.1: Contact NC broadband office for advice and assessment of options.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Contact George Collier (919-754-6558) at NC Broadband (Department of Commerce) to arrange for meeting with the Town.	Town Administrator			7/18	
Action Item 1.C.2: Contact private sector broadband providers for advice and assessment of options.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Identify regional private sector providers.	Town			7/18	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Task: Arrange for private sector providers to meet with Town.	Town			8/18	
Action Item 1.C.3: Apply for at least one broadband-related grant in 2018.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Following meetings with state and private sector representatives, select grant most likely to be awarded.	Town Administrator			9/18	
Task: Make application for selected grant by deadline.	Town Administrator			12/18	
Objective 1.D: Support local businesses in order to facilitate investment and business growth.					
Action Item 1.D.1: Assess needs, attitudes and outlook of local businesses.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Interview existing local businesses to determine their challenges, opportunities, issues and outlook for retention or expansion.	Town			3/19	
Action Item 1.D.2: Encourage and equip local businesses to utilize the county, region and state existing business support infrastructure.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Enlist the support of Bladen Community College, County Economic Developer, Southeast Economic Development Partnership and Economic Development Partnership of NC as appropriate in support of expanding local businesses.	Town			Ongoing	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Strategic Goal #2: Ensure that the town is attractive in order to encourage investment.					
Objective 2.A: Address dilapidated properties.					
Action Item 2.A.1: Enforce existing applicable ordinances.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Comprehensively identify existing violations and formally notify owners of non-compliance.	Town			12/18	
Task: Establish compliance deadline and determine enforcement means for non-compliance beyond that date.	Town			12/18	
Action Item 2.A.2: Where necessary, create additional appropriate ordinances.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Identify cleanliness issues that are not currently the subject of enforceable ordinances.	Town			12/18	
Task: Make recommendations for new/revised ordinances to town government that address overall issues of cleanliness.	Town			3/19	
Objective 2.B: Develop plan and continually provide for the maintenance of streets and sidewalks.					
Action Item 2.B.1: Establish a plan to ensure that the regular cleaning of streets, sidewalks, and rights of way is conducted to high standards.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Task: Develop white paper that identifies what resources are required to ensure that the tenets of this objective are realized.	Town Administrator			10/18	
Task: Develop a beautification plan, for consideration by the Town Council, that addresses policies and resources required to achieve this Objective.	Town			12/18	
Task: When appropriate, take actions necessary to ensure that the beautification plan is adapted and enforced.	Town			Ongoing	
Action Item 2.B.2: Establish a plan to ensure that the structural maintenance of streets, sidewalks and rights of way is conducted timely and to high standards.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Develop a report that lists structural maintenance issues and prioritizes improvements, for consideration by the town government.	Town			1/19	
Task: Develop a list of potential resources to support priority improvements, for consideration by the Town Council.	Town			1/19	
Objective 2.C: Develop a plan for Bryant Swamp.					
Action Item 2.C.1: Develop a broad concept for the development of Bryant Swamp as a park.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Develop vision, goals and objectives for the establishment of a "Bryant Park"	Town	Council of Governments		11/18	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Task: Identify stakeholders, listing their interests, contact info, and historic interaction with the town.	Town	COG, Main Street & Rural Planning Center		12/18	
Task: Develop a plan that combines multiple beneficial components of storm water management; town beautification; parks and recreation; and overall sense of place, which contributes to economic development.	Town			1/19	
Action Item 2.C.2: Conduct preliminary meetings with stakeholders to determine interests.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Schedule and conduct site visits with stakeholders when appropriate to glean interests and concerns.	Town			3/19	
Task: Compile results of stakeholder outreach for consideration by the town government and potential partners.	Town			3/19	
Action Item 2.C.3: Conduct a combined stakeholder workshop in 2018 to seek agreement on proposed grant action and outcomes.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Schedule a round-table workshop that includes all stakeholders to socialize the concept of a "Bryant Park" and glean feedback, reactions/recommendations.	Town			5/19	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Strategic Goal #3: Improve quality of life amenities in order to make Bladenboro a preferred place to live.					
Objective 3.A: Grow and foster the continuation of youth activities.					
Action Item 3.A.1: Complete McLean Park.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Create a prioritized list of improvements necessary to complete McLean Park, for consideration by the town government	Town			9/18	
Task: Research and identify grants and other resources to address accomplishment of this Action Item.	Town			12/18	
Action Item 3.A.2: Upgrade Wateree Park.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Create a prioritized list of improvements necessary to upgrade Wateree Park, for consideration by the town government	Town			9/18	
Task: Research and identify grants and other resources to address accomplishment of this Action Item.	Town			8/18	
Action Item 3.A.3: Establish the position of "Youth Director" for the town.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Research and recommend actions to accomplish this Action Item, for consideration/implementation by the town government.	Town			9/18	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Task: Meet with county Parks & Recreation staff to discuss opportunities for joint programs, resources and/or facilities.	Town			8/18	
Objective 3.B: Grow and foster the continuation of family activities.					
Action Item 3.B.1: Explore the idea of seasonal outdoor movie nights.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Develop a conceptual plan for consideration by the town and other entities are appropriate.	Town			9/18	
Action Item 3.B.2: Identify grants and other resources to leverage vacant buildings and sites in support of youth and family activities.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: List potential buildings and sites conducive to use as a community center.	Town			12/18	
Task: Discuss with appropriate stakeholders the use of schools, places of worship, civic organization, and town facilities to support community-wide activities.	Town			12/18	
Objective 3.C: Create an environment that is conducive to the town's elderly population aging in place.					
Action Item 3.C.1: Partner with community college to expand senior activities in town.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Conduct a workshop with Bladen Community College's Continuing Education Vice President to discuss expansion of community service course offerings in Bladenboro.	Town			9/18	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Action Item 3.C.2: Assess future requirements and economic development potential for increased senior and assisted living capacity in town.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Gather market data that forecasts future demand for senior services and housing in the Bladenboro area.	Town		Main Street & Rural Planning Center; NCSE; COG; Bladen County Aging Agency.	2/19	
Task: Develop recruitment plan, if appropriate, for senior services and housing to meet current or future demand.	Town			5/19	
Objective 3.D: Develop a consolidated grant-writing program to supports execution of the Strategic Plan.					
Action Item 3.D.1: Evaluate options for retaining grant-writing expertise to support the town in the execution of the Strategic Plan.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Research options and create a matrix that identifies public, private and non-profit sources of grants expertise that facilitates decision-making by the town government.	Town		COG, Main Street & Rural Planning Center; Bladen County; Rural Center.	9/18	

Town of Bladenboro – Economic Development Strategic Five-Year Plan

Action Item 3.D.2: Create a matrix of applicable grants that includes timelines, match requirements, stakeholders, etc., and supports decision-making by the town and/or other entities.					
	Person Responsible	Partners	Resources	Due By	Notes
Task: Prepare grants matrix related to Economic Development.	Town		Main Street & Rural Planning Center, COG	1/19	
Task: Prepare grants matrix related to cleanliness/beautification.	Town		MS&RPC, COG	1/19	
Task: Prepare grants matrix related to quality of life.	Town		MS&RPC, COG	1/19	

List of Partners and Resources Listed in Section 6

- Bladen County
- Bladen County Economic Development Program
- Bladen County Division on Aging Program
- Bladen Community College
- NC Main Street and Rural Planning Center (MS&RPC) – NC Department of Commerce
- Lumber River Council of Governments (COG)
- NC's Southeast Regional Economic Development Partnership (NCSE)
- Economic Development Partnership of NC (EDP-NC)
- NC Rural Center

Section 7. Plan: Review, Adoption, and Monitoring

The following are recommended steps to review, adopt, monitor, and implement this five-year Town Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Plan Progress Items to Address and Follow

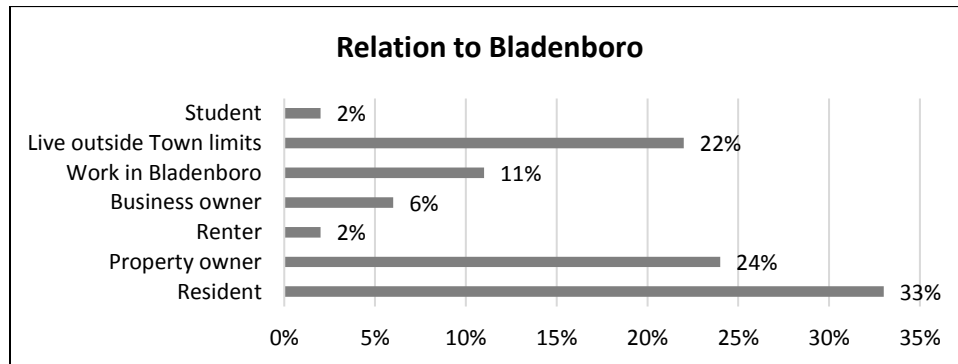
- ✓ Project Committee reviews Plan, makes any changes, recommends approval of the Plan, and forwards it to the Planning Board.
- ✓ Planning Board reviews Plan, makes any changes, recommends approval, and forwards Plan to Town Council.
- ✓ Town Council reviews, makes any changes, and adopts the Economic Development Strategic Plan.
- ✓ Recommend every six months after plan adoption Town Council has a Plan progress update from the Town Administrator. The progress concerns addressing the Goals, Objectives, Actions, and Task items in Section 6 of the Plan.
- ✓ One year after adoption the North Carolina Department of Commerce – Rural Economic Development Division staff meets with Town Administrator to review Plan progress. The Department of Commerce thereafter has annual progress visits with the Town Administrator for the five years of the Plan.
- ✓ If Goals, Objectives, Actions, and Task items in Section 6 need revisions or adjustments the Plan should be amended by the Town. These amendments should also be adopted by the Town Council.
- ✓ A recommendation for the Plan is the that the easiest Objectives, Actions, and Task items (“gathering low hanging fruit”) in Section 6 be addressed and accomplished. The more difficult items will take more persistence and time by the Town working with the partners and resources identified in Section 6.

Appendix A – Survey Results

The following are the results of the Town’s economic development survey. One-hundred-fourteen people answered the survey. Generally, survey respondents were supportive of economic development planning improvements, and program improvements. For specific topics see each of the following 38 questions and results concerning the Town.

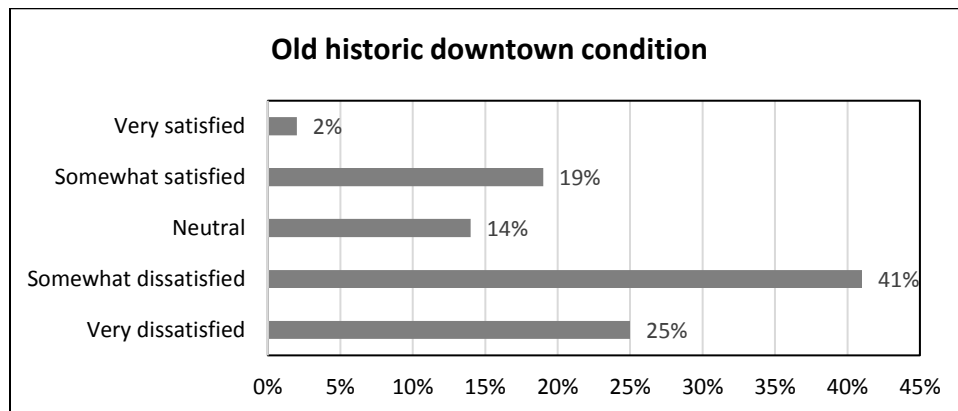
Town relationship

1. Your relationship with the Town? (check all that apply)

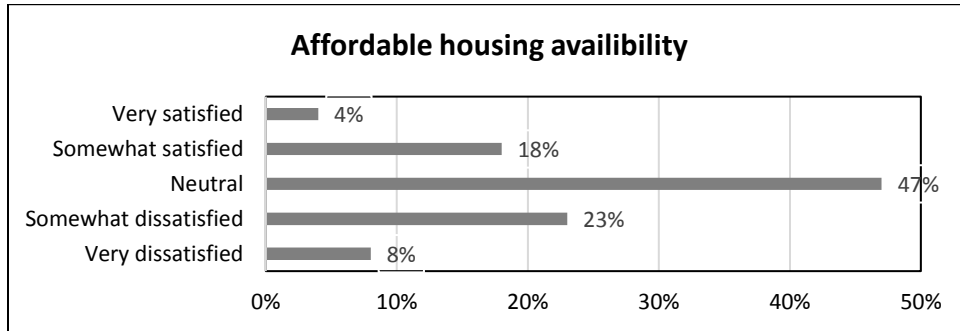


Please rate the following items

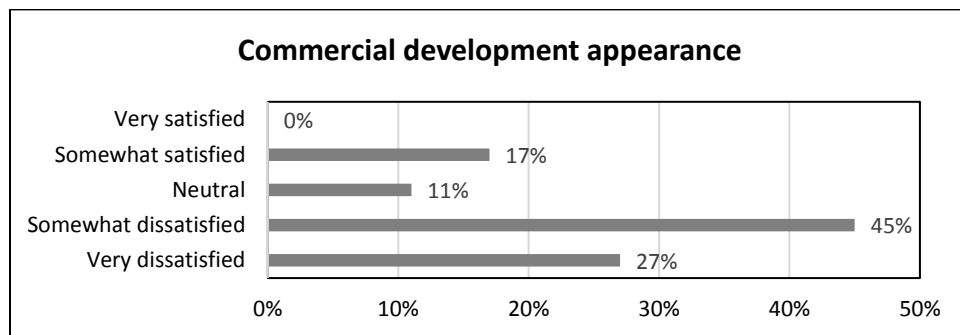
2. Old historic downtown condition?



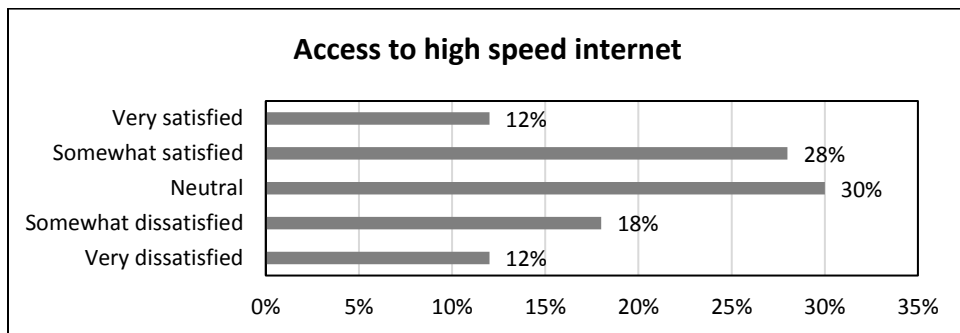
3. Availability of affordable housing in Town?



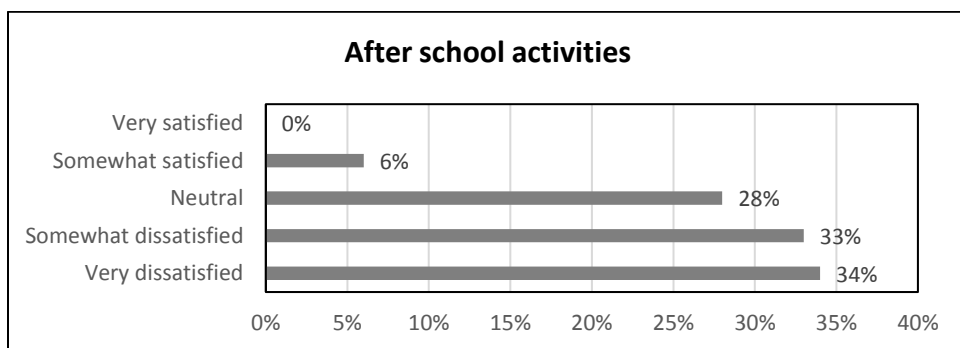
4. Overall appearance of commercial development in the Town?



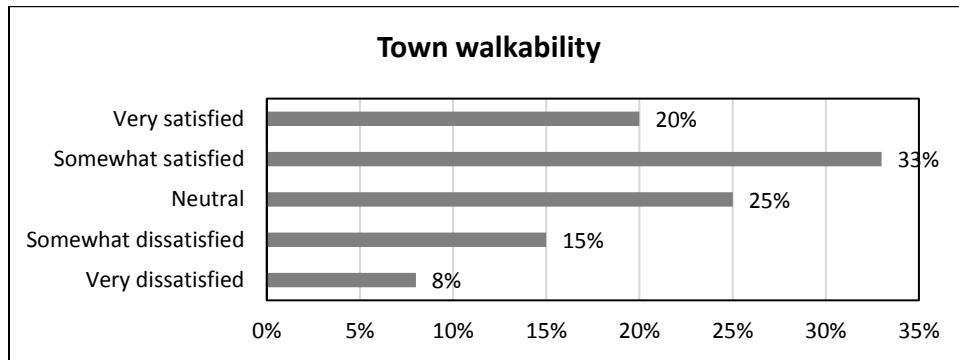
5. Access to high speed internet (broadband) in the Town?



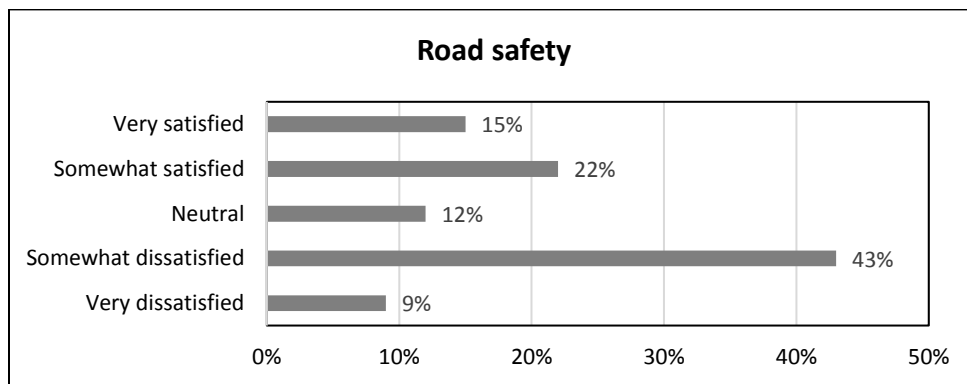
6. How satisfied are you with the amount of after school activities for children?



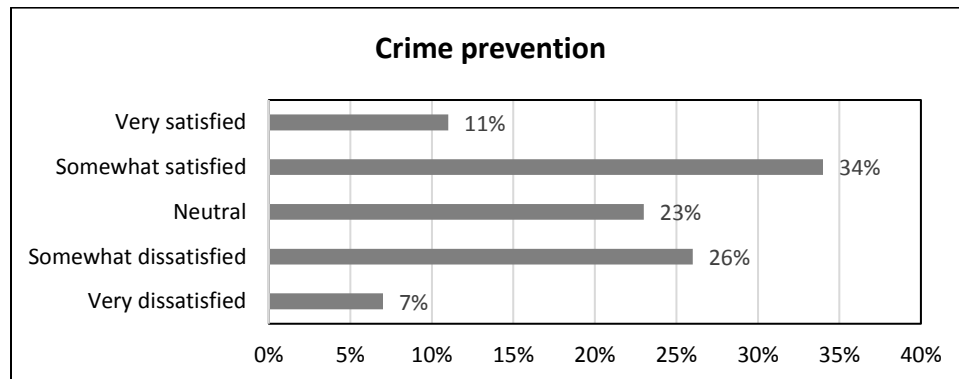
7. Walkability in the Town?



8. Road safety of the Town's streets

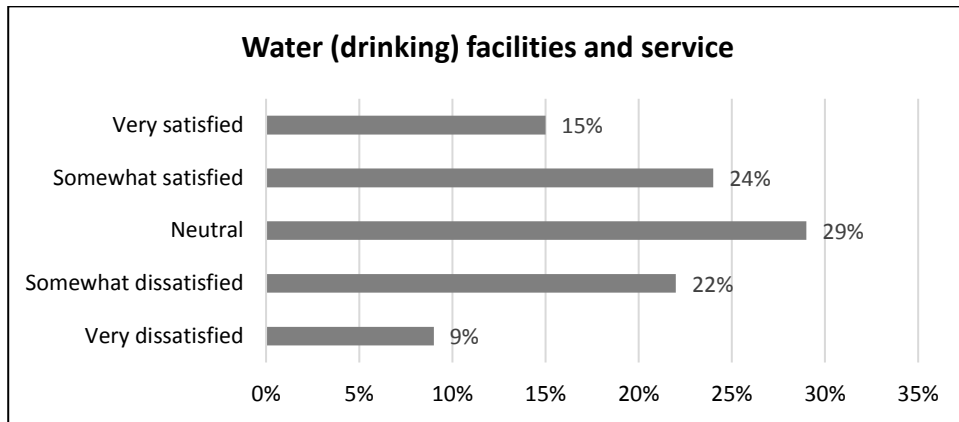


9. Crime prevention in the Town?

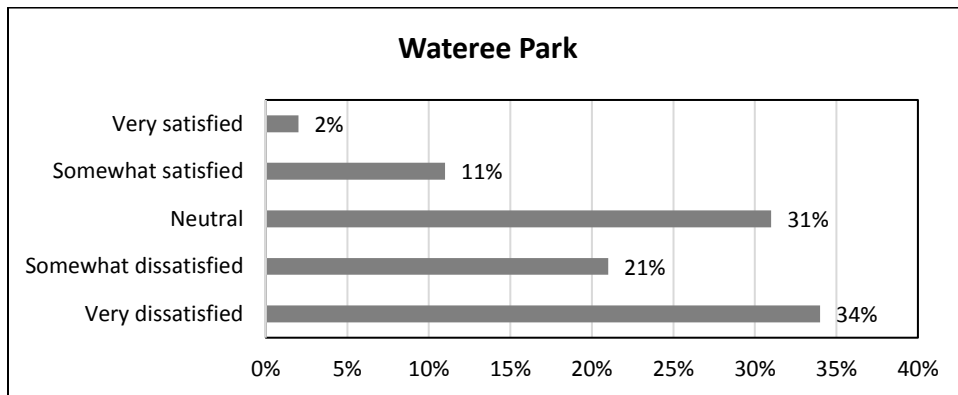


Please rate the following services

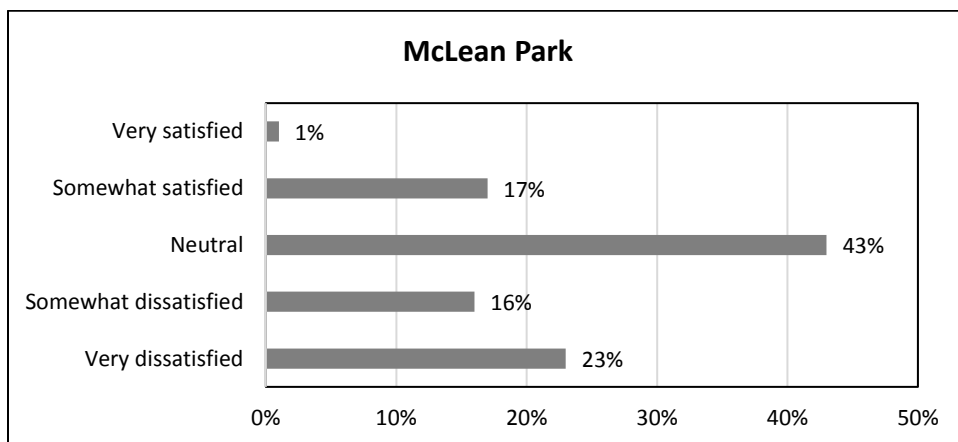
10. Water (drinking) facilities and service in the Town?



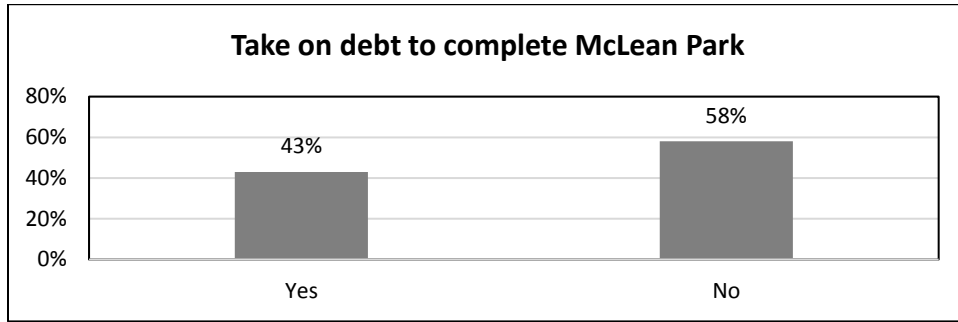
11. Quality of Wateree Park?



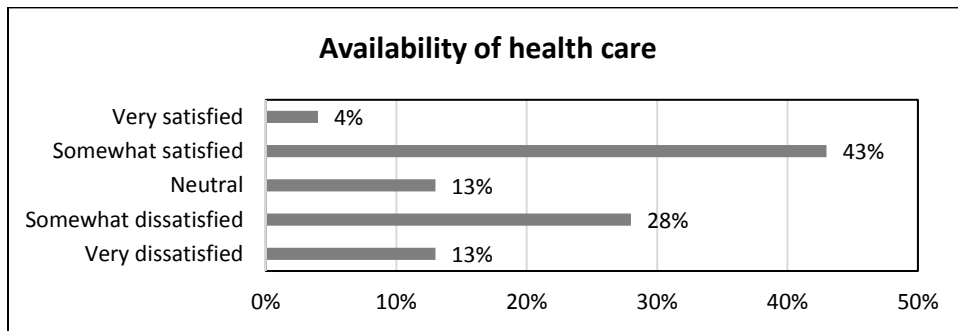
12. Quality of McLean Park?



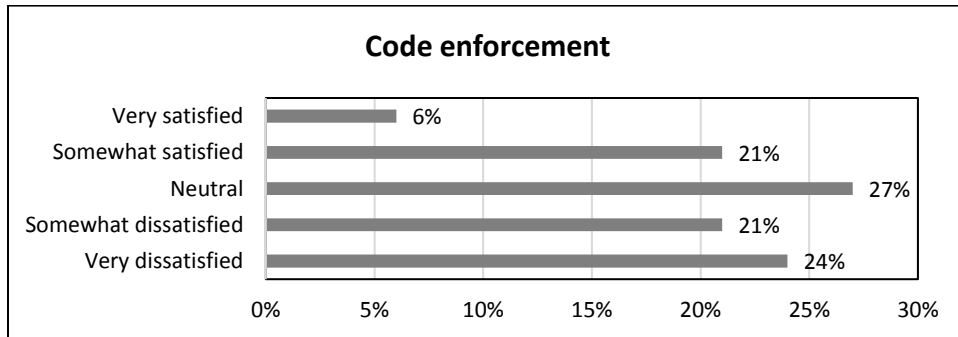
13. Are you in favor of the Town taking on a long-term debt to complete McLean Park?



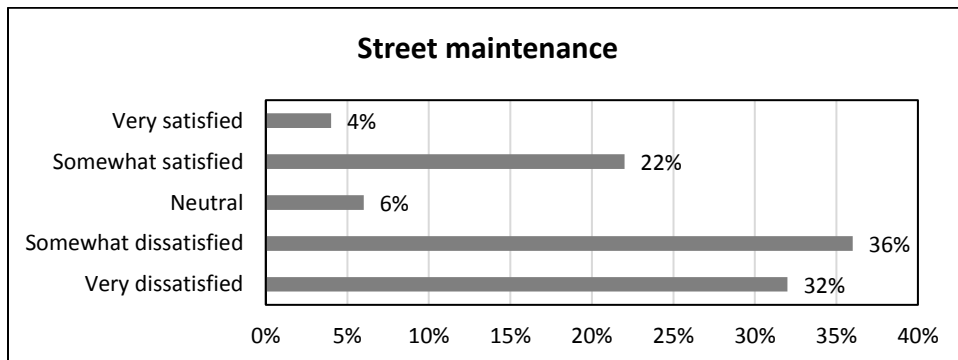
14. Availability of general health care services within the Town?



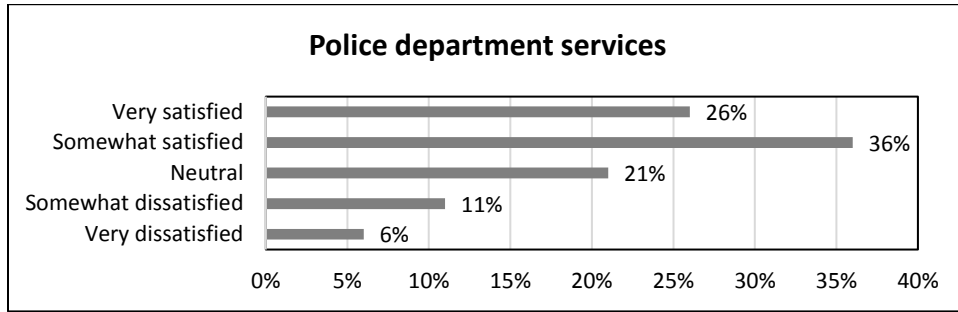
15. Quality of code enforcement in the Town?



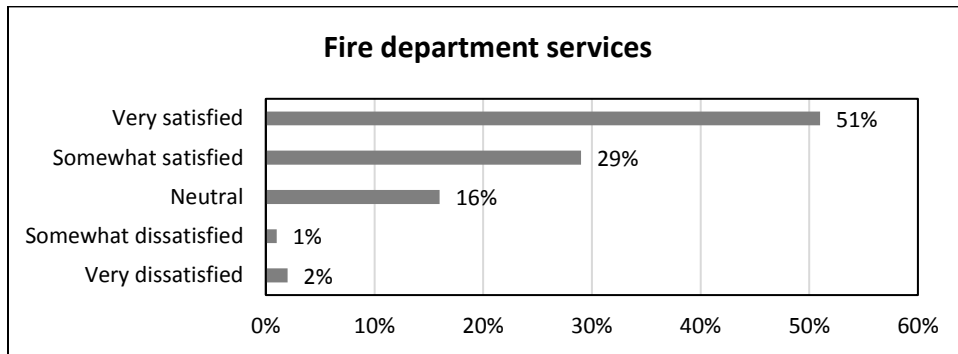
16. Maintenance of streets in Town?



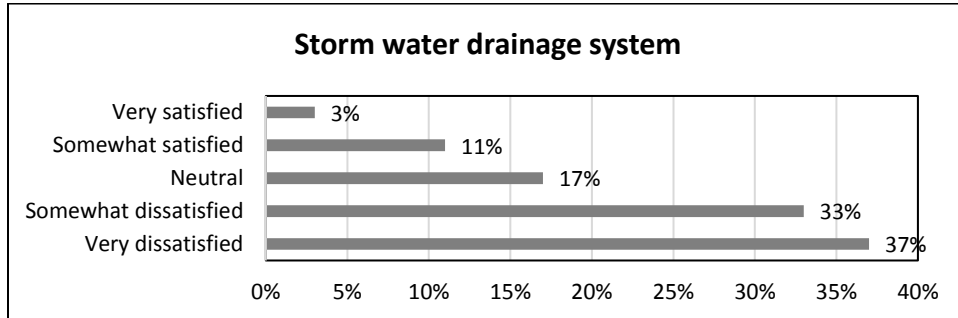
17. Police department service within the Town?



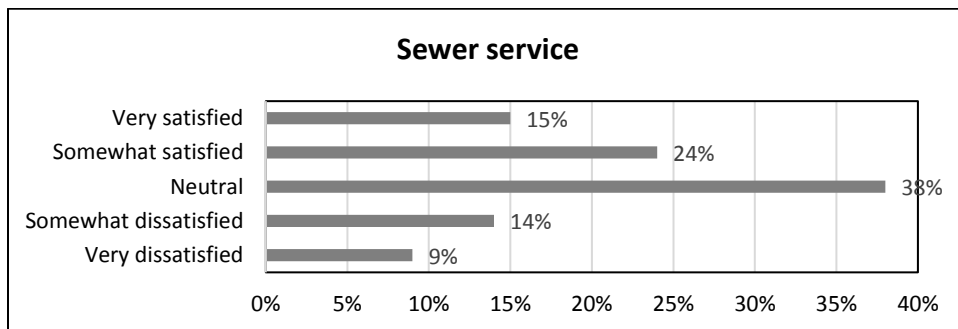
18. Fire department service within the Town?



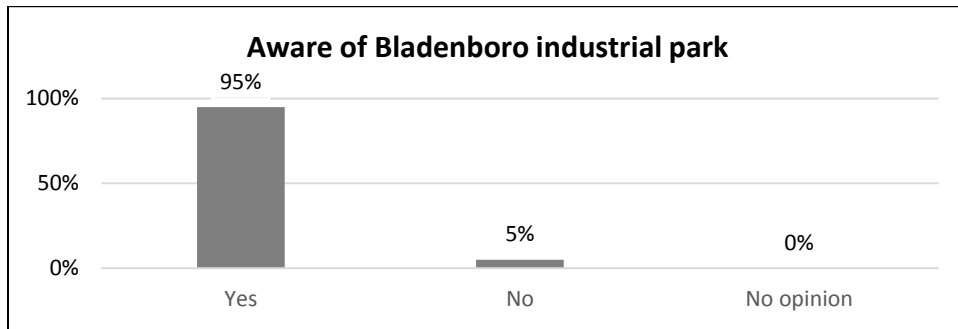
19. How satisfied are you with the storm water drainage system in the Town?



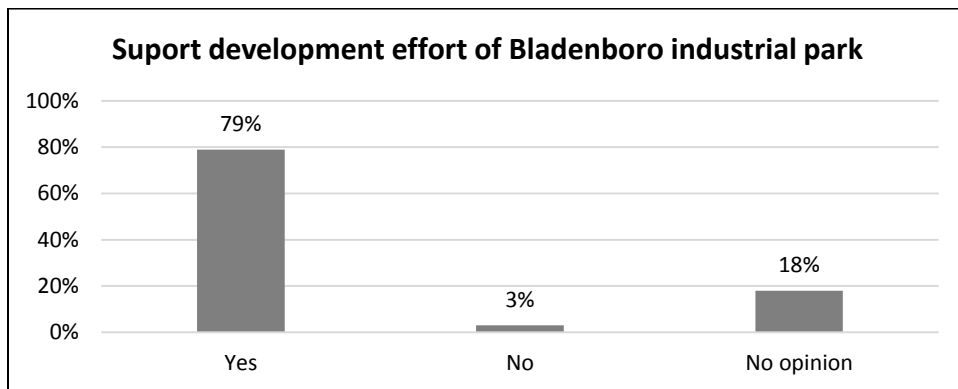
20. Sewer service in the Town?



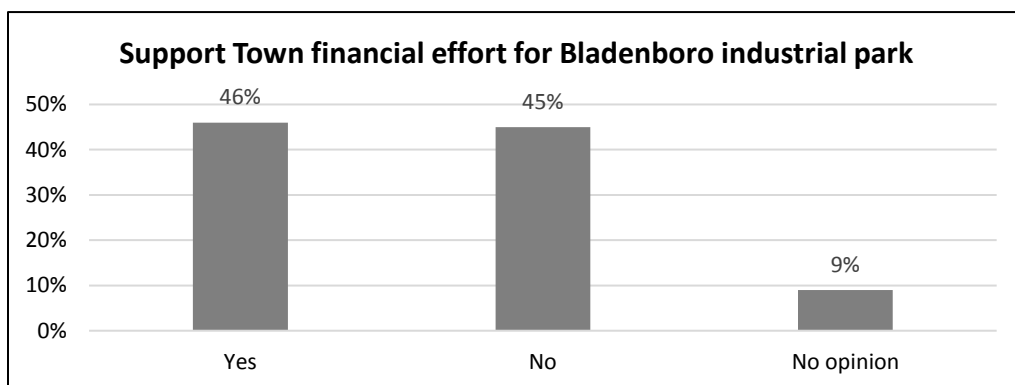
21. Are you aware of Bladenboro's Industrial Park?



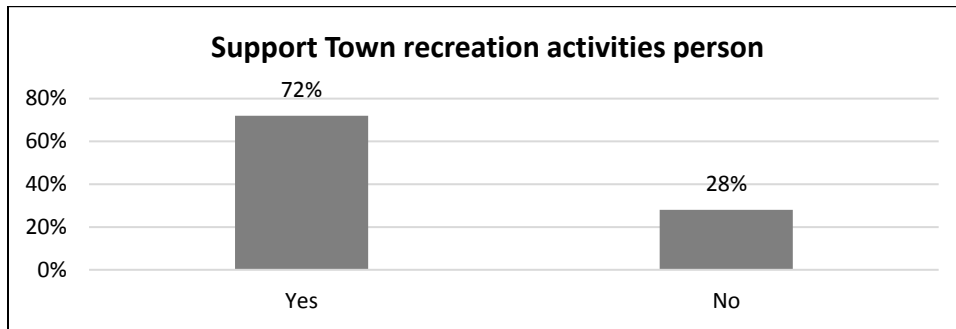
22. Would you like to see more focus placed on development of Bladenboro's Industrial Park by Town and County Economic Development efforts?



23. Would you be willing to see an increase in City Tax rates or other revenue generating means to expand infrastructure needs to accommodate growth in the Industrial Park?

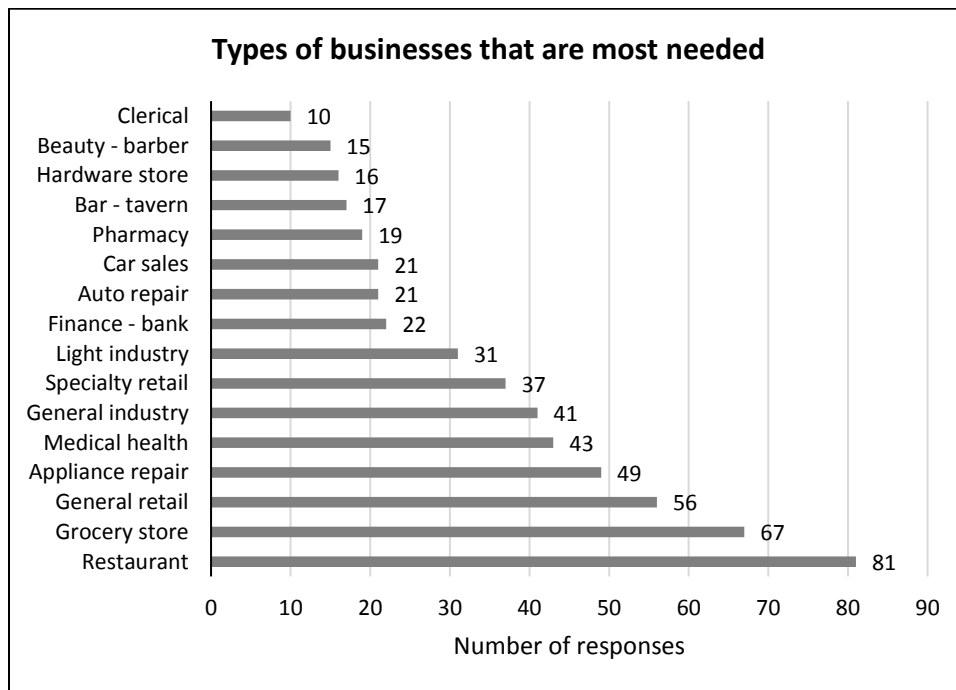


24. Would you be in favor of the Town having a part time recreation activities person?



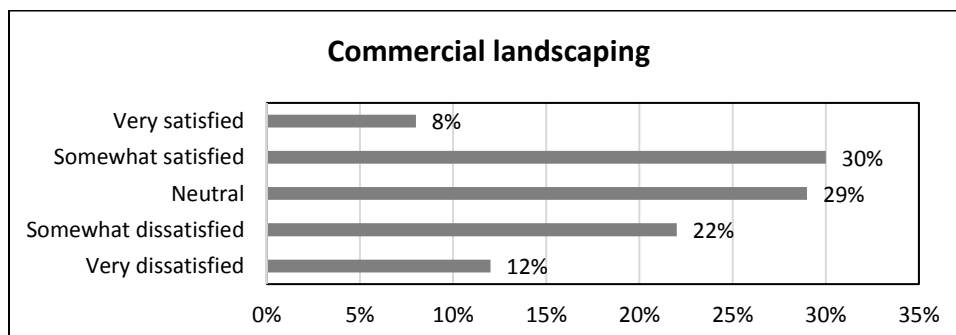
General Town Questions

25. Please indicate the type of businesses that are most needed in the Town? (check all that apply)

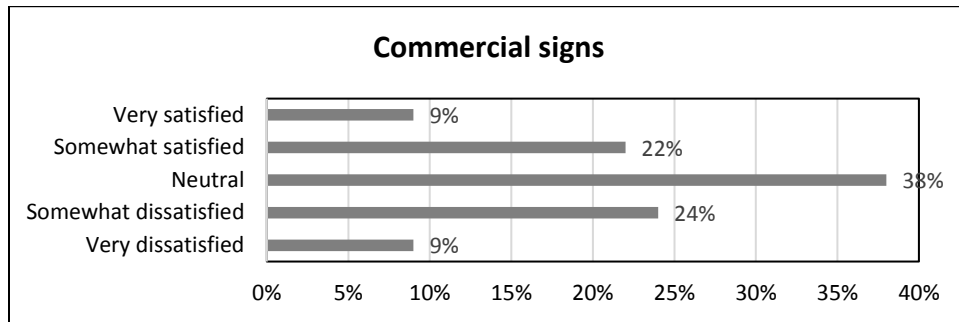


Written comments: *Also, need clothing store. Mental health services.*

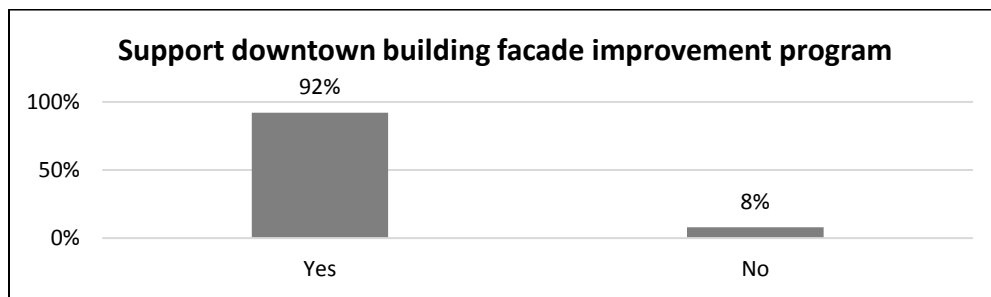
26. Quality of commercial landscaping in the Town?



27. Appearance of commercial signs in the Town?

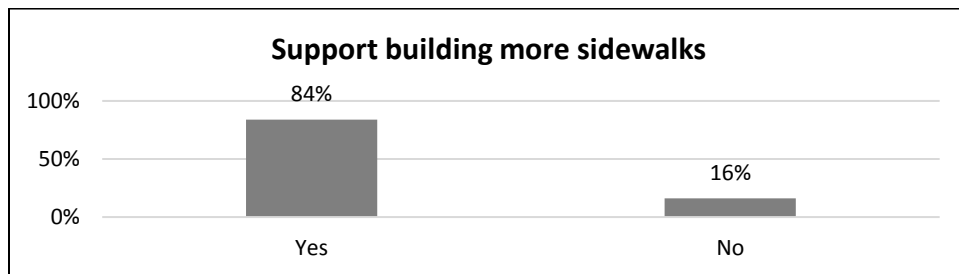


28. Would you support a Town sponsored façade improvement program with grant funds for downtown building owners?

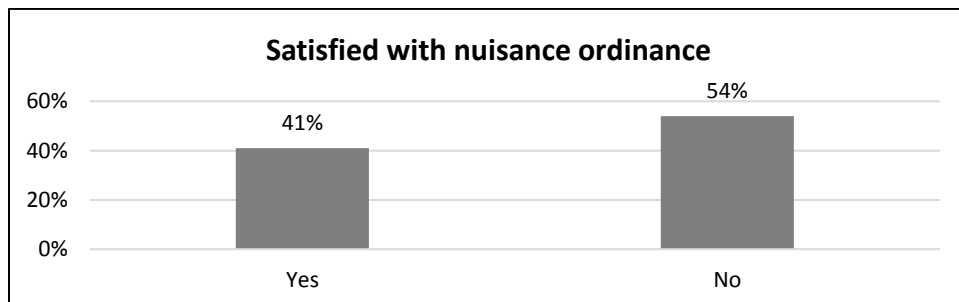


Written comment: *Appealing building façades are necessary to attract residents and businesses.*

29. Are you in favor of the Town prioritizing and over time building additional sidewalks?



30. Are you satisfied with the current nuisance ordinance (grass height, trash on property, noise, dilapidated structures, abandoned vehicles, etc.)?



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Written responses

- *(7) Existing ordinance isn't enforced. Note: (7) is the number of same responses.*
- *We have adequate ordinances, just a failure to enforce them.*
- *No action is (being) taken to enforce owner's property.*
- *Too many properties go un-mowed and maintained.*
- *Need to repair or remove dilapidated buildings.*

- *(Need to improve) trash pickup system.*
- *Ordinances are already in place.*
- *We have a lot of dilapidated houses with grass, and weeds (not mowed).*
- *There are too many dilapidated buildings which no one is doing anything about.*
- *Our town is not inviting at all.*

- *Some people get letters from the Town to mow grass. Others don't seem to be bothered.*
- *I don't know if the code needs to be re-written or if the existing code simply needs to be enforced. However, significant steps need to be taken!*
- *Looking at the auto repair shops in town, looks like they don't have a nuisance code.*
- *There are abandoned dilapidated buildings throughout the town that need attention. There is litter behind some businesses that needs to be cleaned up.*
- *Too many houses and businesses are not taken care of. Grass has not been mowed. Old buildings need to be fixed or torn down.*

- *(2) No. Note: (2) is the number of same responses.*
- *It only seems to be enforced for some residents not all.*
- *Look at the corner of Fifth and Bladen where that house burned.*
- *There is very little action taken (regarding) enforcement. The violators of these ordinances have no incentive to take corrective actions. Penalties (fines) need to be assessed to property owners that violate ordinances, otherwise, the ordinances are of no value. Some examples need to be made to motivate folks to pick up the place.*
- *It's not enforced, so it's nonexistent.*

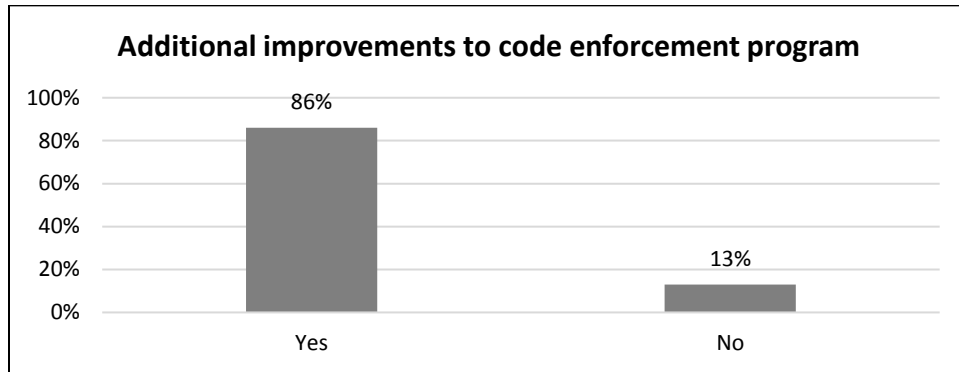
- *The garage beside Pizza Palace is somewhat cleaned up but the one across the street looks very junky when you drive by and behind it. Makes it look "trashy".*
- *I don't feel it is enforced, abandon houses with broken windows, they belong to someone, they should clean them up or be fined and so should the building in town, grass two-foot high, junk cars.*
- *Property not kept up old cars and junk piled up. Grass (is) not (being) cut till and gets real high; makes town look bad.*
- *People walk up and down main street: play in the trees, cuss loudly, and outside dogs bark nonstop.*
- *There is a noise ordinance that isn't enforced. There are properties with old appliances on porches and old vehicles in yards. There are old vehicles scattered behind the old station at the train tracks on Ashe Street that are an eye sore. Loitering (is a problem).*

- *If I own a property and I pay taxes, as long as I don't bother others, I should be free to do whatever I want on my property.*
- *Mostly because it seems nothing is being done to fix the problem.*
- *Vehicles in the down town area.*
- *Tall grass. Abandoned property. Junk cars.*
- *Cars at Roberts and CW's look bad.*

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- *There are too many junk cars that set at local repair shops for months even year and are an eyesore to the town.*
- *It isn't being enforced.*

31. Would you be in favor of an additional code enforcement program to address commercial and industrial property owner nuisance problems?



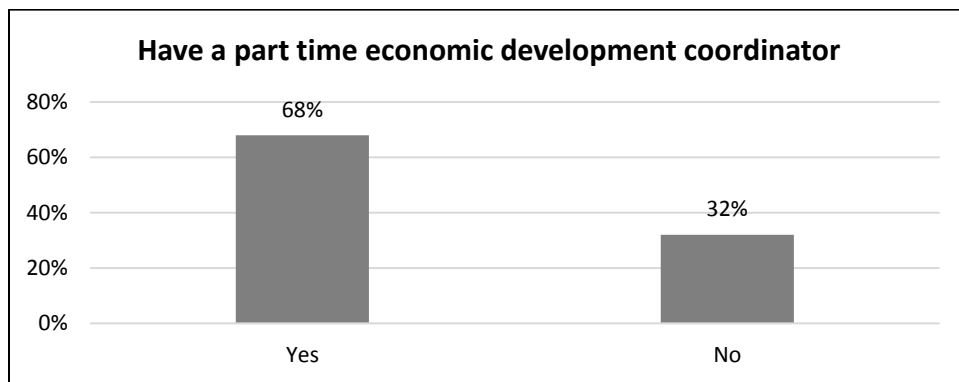
Written responses

- *Someone must answer complaints and implement solutions per the ordinances.*
- *To many dilapidated buildings downtown.*
- *Overall appearance indicates lack of interest and general apathy of community.*
- *Town looks like a junk yard.*
- *Too many commercial properties where no effort is being made to make ready for rent or use.*
- *Whatever it takes (to improve enforcement).*
- *Old buildings and houses (need code enforcement).*
- *As long as the Town addresses their (program).*
- *(Need to) improve the Town.*
- *Need to enforce (the code).*
- *It would keep our town on a higher standards level.*
- *(Need to enforce) appearance.*
- *Also, need residential code enforcement.*
- *If they can't keep up their properties, then they should be torn down. Rental owners should be made to keep their properties up. We have some slum lords.*
- *(Yes) if it would help get the Town looking better.*
- *If the code, we have now was enforced we would need no other additional code.*
- *Needs improvements.*
- *Rules are needed to keep issues and needs organized.*
- *(Need) to keep things neater.*
- *The property owners need to be held accountable. Not keeping their property up to standards hurts the value of our area.*
- *No.*
- *Need to have someone trained in enforcement guidelines, in the community more, and looking for violations.*
- *If residents have to abide by the ordinance business owners should be required to also.*
- *There is no such thing as too much.*

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- *Someone needs to coordinate efforts.*
- *Yes, clean your property up or be fined!*
- *Make them clean up their yards and businesses! I am tired of seeing nasty, unmanicured yards and junk cars.*
- *What is allowed will continue. There should not be old junk cars and old appliances visible within the town limits. Known criminals shouldn't be allowed to loiter.*
- *There are far too many empty buildings that look run down.*
- *There are many vacant lots where grass is extremely high and buildings that are falling that need attention.*
- *Vehicles in the downtown area (need code enforcement).*
- *I'm no fan of wasting money but if we could see some return on investment of said position, I feel it would be beneficial.*
- *Job opportunity.*
- *Junks cars and grass growing up around downtown area (is needed).*

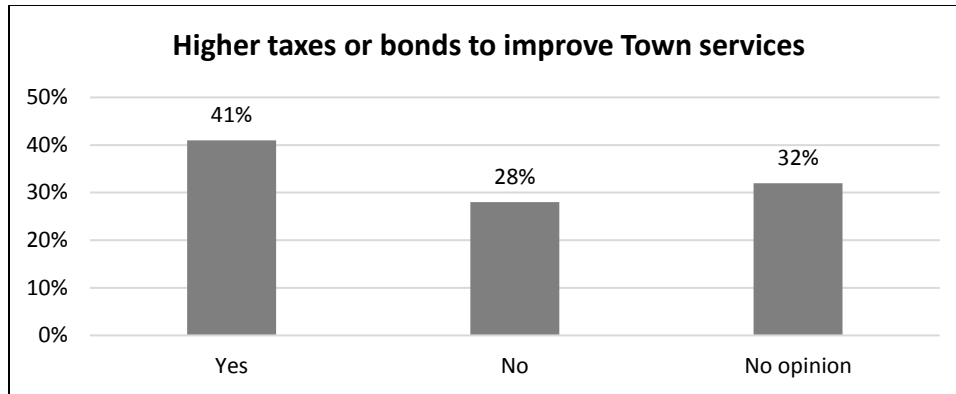
32. Would you be in favor of the Town setting aside funds for a part time economic development coordinator?



Written response

- *Our revenue streams are limited. Additional funds would have to come from the above sources or grants.*

33. Would you be willing to pay higher taxes or bonds to improve any of the Town services or facilities listed in the survey?



Written responses

- *We need another Bryant Swamp cleanout and would support extra tax to get it going.*
- *Can't intelligently answer now – not enough information given.*
- *Waste treatment, ball park, downtown revitalization.*
- *Modernize waste water (treatment).*
- *Keeping drainage areas clear.*

- *(Needs improvement) trash pickup system and street cleaning.*
- *(Have a) façade program.*
- *Yes, for all the Town services.*
- *(Yes for) improved water lines.*
- *Would like to see the streets improved. i.e. in front of the community building.*

- *Our town deserves updated beautification.*
- *Our town deserves much better.*
- *Clean up our town. This is our home.*
- *Grass cutting, removing old autos, and have furniture maintenance on the streets.*
- *Need: Façade incentives and improvements. Economic development incentives. And incentives for individual family housing. All are all worthwhile endeavors.*

- *Anything that would improve our town and be beneficial!*
- *Keep Fire and Police station up to date with the latest equipment and products needed to do their jobs, extra money to use as needed in times of hardships. Our town needs revamping, but it's getting there. People need to realize; you have to spend money to make things better. No excuse.*
- *Whatever is needed.*
- *I would like to see bonds used to help with the upkeep of Wateree Park.*
- *Yes.*

- *I am aware that it takes money to make money.*
- *Expansion of our waste treatment facilities and also improvements or replacements to much of our infrastructure, such as streets, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, drainage, public parking lots.*
- *Both athletic parks. We could hold tournaments at them and bring in revenue.*
- *Yes, for any of them. Once teens from our area graduate high school they move off to other areas simply for the lack of employment opportunities in Bladen County and Bladenboro. Without proper funds our town absolutely cannot grow, expand, or provide the services citizens or visitors want and/or need.*
- *Water tastes bad and I mean no disrespect to our overworked town employees. Infrastructure many times goes unnoticed until something goes wrong.*

34. Do you have any additional community planning and economic development comments regarding the Town?

Written responses

- *It will take at least a part-time person to work toward and implement any improvements.*
- *McLean Park is not maintained as it should be.*
- *We need leadership to focus on issues in the Town, (apply for) grants, (need) downtown improvement.*
- *A town employee dedicated to economic development would help Bladenboro grow. You have to show and tell to sell it.*
- *If you don't keep the drainage areas clear, there is no incentive to build a successful business downtown.*

- *Bladen County brought in \$216.3 million. We're missing out on a lot of the money.*
- *Some town roads are still dirt, or poor quality with pot holes.*
- *Do something for aging people.*
- *The town is nasty. It needs to be cleaned up and maintained daily. There are too many dogs on (tethered) leashes.*
- *We need to focus on the fact that our Town is now a bedroom community. More focus needs to be placed on improvement of the appearance of the Town and focus on working with local individuals and developers to build some "spec" homes to encourage young families to stay here as opposed to neighboring communities.*

- *The town should keep up the ditches they dug years ago that only multiplies mosquitos and bugs now.*
- *The town, through its leadership, needs to move its efforts towards a more proactive position as opposed to an inactive (defensive) effort. Our town needs to become more aggressive in applying for grants and come out of its hibernation mode to step forward.*
- *Need to get rid of the two junkyards in the town! Cars with missing parts and covered in weeds are not being worked on!*
- *I don't feel like the town ordinances are enforced, the town streets are dirty, the grass in the ditch at the end of Ash Street is in need of cutting. Town workers don't seem to be able to keep up with the grass mowing the streets are never sweep, trash behind buildings. I myself have worked on cleanup days with Boost-the-boro members to clean up the town where I feel the town employees were slack and not doing much of the work that needs to be done. The post office is becoming an eye sore with broken (auto) bumpers, pine straw over the drain, and just trash along the sidewalk.*
- *There needs to be more enforcement of the law with regards to police not allowing known criminals to loiter in vehicles or stand around on property. There also needs to be more enforcement of the law on them when they have expired license plates.*

- *(Need) activities for youth.*
- *Take down the stop signs on Ash Street.*
- *As a group, we need to realize that Bladenboro is more of a place that people live. We are putting money into unnecessary things. The town itself looks nasty and is a major turn off for young couples and recent college grads. I am a soon to be college graduate and do not plan on moving back to Bladenboro once I get back on my feet. There are yards with high grass, houses and buildings that a falling in, dogs on chains, junk cars everywhere and nothing "pretty" about the town. There is also an issue about the town not picking up yard clippings weekly*

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like they used to. They will sit there for weeks until someone complains about it. Until the rules are strictly enforced, the town is going to continue to get ugly for the lack of a better word. There is also a strong need for a sit-down restaurant that is open on nights and weekends. Most of the time, we have to go out of town and eat because of the lack of food choices here. I would like to see strict enforcement of how residents keep their yards (especially on Main Street), and a better beautification process. I would also like to see better laws regarding outside dogs.

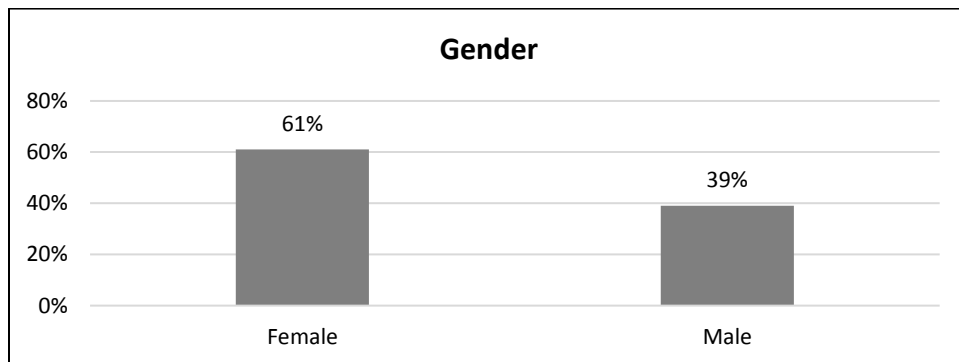
- *Need jobs for locals.*
- *Good planning.*

- *Planned uses of the Green Space for various things in late Spring and early Fall.*
- *Bladenboro no longer needs to be "dry". It's about time to legalize the sales of alcohol.*
- *There needs to be more activities and/or programs for our town's children. They need somewhere safe to enjoy and have fun such as a YMCA, and other venues for our young people.*
- *Make the ones that are hired to do the jobs listed in the survey. They need to perform the job in which they were hired or be replaced. We do not need additional positions with additional payroll.*
- *I think you are working in right direction to improve the Town.*

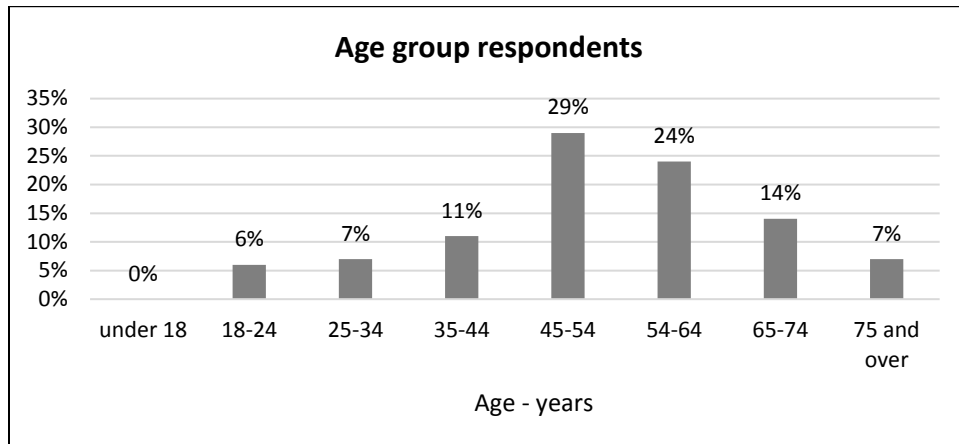
- *We need more activities for our youth, and I would like to see the fair return to Bladenboro, we used to have one years ago. And I would like the Beast Fest to continue to grow - that's one of the best things we have ever started.*

Demographics

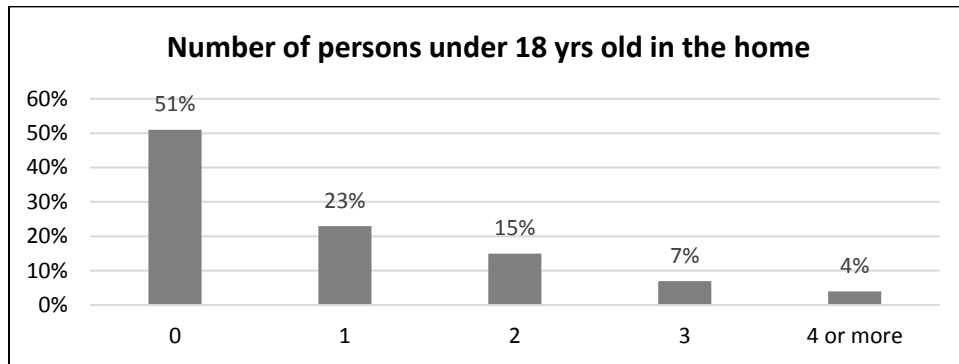
35. Your gender?



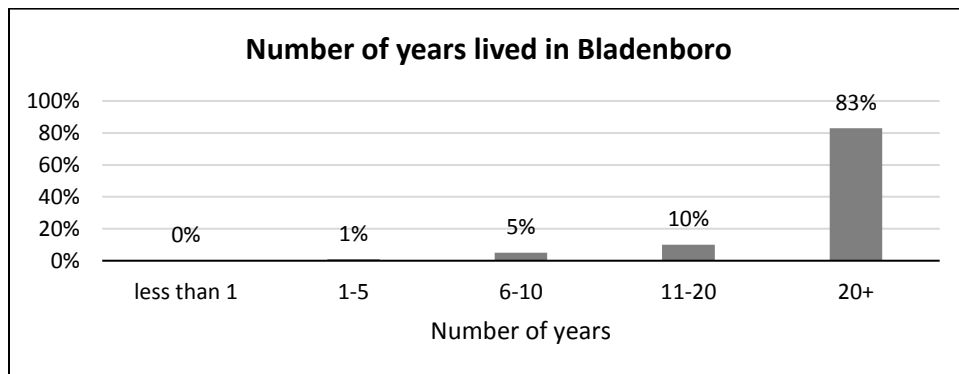
36. Select your age group – years?



37. Number of person(s) under the age of 18 in the home?



38. How long have you lived in Bladenboro?



Appendix B - Telephone Interview Results

The following information was collected by project staff with telephone interviews in May 2017 from the Project Committee, and Bladenboro citizens (stakeholders) that the Committee recommended being contacted. A total of 13 interviews were conducted.

Note: “(3)” means the number of people who had the same comment on this item i.e. three people, etc.

1. What brought you and keeps you in Bladenboro?

- Family (5), raise children
- Born or raised in Town (9)
- Operated bank in Town as family business
- Had a clothing store in Town until retired
- Lifelong resident

2. What is distinctive about the Town?

- Legend of Beast of Bladenboro and festival (3)
- Small rural community
- Know most of Town people
- Good people, good place to live (4)

3. What are the Town’s greatest strengths?

- High level of community support, strong family roots in town, caring for each other (13)
- Small town, friendly
- Railway through town (3)
- Natural gas access (3)
- Industrial park that could expand
- Peanut plant, pallet company
- Good people, active churches helping people
- People out-going, loving and helpful; for example, barbeque and cake sale benefit events raised tens of thousands-of-dollars for persons with medical bills
- Volunteerism such as Boost-a-boro
- Town is near to I-95 highway
- Available vacant land

4. What are the Town’s greatest weaknesses?

- Some in workforce lack training and education
- The lack of industry, empty buildings, inability to shop locally (6)
- Some of the older buildings in downtown, some have lack of maintenance and attractiveness
- Small population of Town, small market
- Town is not a destination
- Large stores don’t want to locate in a small Town like Bladenboro (2)
- Little industry
- Aging population, younger people have to move away to find work (2)
- Not a lot of commercial service stores
- Lack of leadership, initiative, and activity
- Illegal drug issues i.e. opioids (3); lack of enough law enforcement
- Textile mill closed and lost industry jobs (2)
- Lack of activity to grow town (2)
- 23 empty buildings in town
- School board needs improvement

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- Large retail stores for example Wal-Mart have hurt mom and pop smaller stores in small towns
5. What are the recent external changes and trends - things that the Town doesn't have much control of - that you think will have the greatest impact on the community over the next five years?
- Larger stores usually locating to larger towns (2)
 - Online shopping
 - Potential flooding in downtown i.e. from hurricanes, storms. Hurricanes Matthew and Floyd flooded downtown (2)
 - For example, drug problem perception, may hinder businesses wanting to locate to Town; had heard there may be some gang activity
 - Lack of manufacturing
 - Trend in agriculture has been for more productivity and more efficiency resulting in less jobs
 - Government over-regulation in the agriculture business
6. What future opportunities do you think the Town has in the next 5 years from now?
- Expand the Town industrial park – try and get businesses to park (2)
 - Expand and improve Town infrastructure
 - Have STEM program (**science, technology, engineering and mathematics**) for better training of Town workforce (2)
 - Try and get new industry
 - A well maintained and beautified Town that is appealing
 - Town has an airport, an asset, possible opportunity for business growth
 - Town should research and apply for grant opportunities (2)
 - Smaller retail stores (2), like Dollar General, Dollar Tree
 - Warehouse industry
 - Improved leadership, reaching out, become more active
7. What changes do you think could improve the quality of life in the Town in the next 5 years?
- Population growth – need more working citizens to expand tax base (2)
 - More jobs (2)
 - Obtaining grant money
 - Higher incomes
 - Better and cheaper housing
 - New businesses that would open
8. What type of commercial development and or businesses would be good for the Town in the next 5 years?
- Any type of businesses
 - Grocery store i.e. Food Lion (4)
 - Big box and chain stores
 - Another fast food restaurant
 - Competitive gas station
9. Thinking specifically about downtown, what do you think would be the best types of businesses to fill vacant storefronts?
- Any suitable businesses
 - A variety of small businesses i.e. shoe store (3), telephone - cellphone store
 - Restaurant (2)

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10. What could the Town do to try to create better paying jobs?

- Encourage education and training of work force (2)
- Help bring businesses to Town industrial park
- Offer tax breaks for companies to locate in Town
- Support vocational training for jobs – high school and community college level (3)
- Business recruitment

11. Are there Town workforce development, training and educational needs? If so what would they be?

- Yes, for example STEM (**science, technology, engineering and mathematics**) workforce training program (6)
- Vocational jobs (6)

12. What could the Town do to improve its programs and services?

- Implement “continuous quality improvement” program
- Increase efficiency
- Support Town Council activities
- Improve Town Police department and Town maintenance; better accountability
- Town government does a satisfactory job
- I like that there is public citizen access to Town Mayor and Town Administrator
- Need to add lights to Town ball field, could recruit softball tournament activity
- Sewer system needs improvement, expansion challenges
- Apply for grants (2)
- Recruit business
- Return to Town manager type of town government

13. Do you have an opinion, about how is the Town viewed by the business community in the surrounding area of Bladen, Columbus, and Robeson counties?

- Town has a small market (4)
- Some outside business persons see Town as too small (low population) to start a business
- Potential perception issues for new business moving to downtown because of flooding events

14. Do you have input on a plan vision that would like to share?

- Use vision input from Project Committee
- Town beautification that is appealing to visitors; flowers and landscaping; like what Elizabethtown has done of their main street
- Need input from committee and citizens

15. Do you have any other comments or suggestions that will help aid the Town in its economic development and planning efforts?

- No (4) – addressed in above information
- Make town more presentable with cared for, maintained, clean look

16. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

- Would like to help in any way that I can
- Need to plan that Town water, sewer, and all other infrastructure capacity is adequate – could affect attracting new businesses
- Town has increasingly become a bedroom community as people have to commute out of Town for work (2)
- Retired and live happily in the Town
- No, do not (2)
- Remember when in high school many decades ago when town was vibrant, stores had more shoppers, had more downtown street activity, don’t see this anymore
- Would like for example local grocery store that can sell beer and wine, and for restaurants to offer beer and wine – town is “dry”

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- The town's large number of churches may be an indication of divisions in the town – may hinder new business recruitment
- Better flood control for the town – Bryan Swamp flood issues
- Need an affordable family clothing store (including men's clothing (4)
- Very important to include persons owning existing businesses and retired business owners ("merchant class") in Plan implementation
- Make sure to include Town Historical Society in Plan implementation

Appendix C – Business Retention, Expansion, and Recruitment Information

To carry out the economic development actions of this Plan (Section 6) the Town should consider the following. A successful Economic Development Strategic Plan will retain existing quality businesses in the community, expand them where possible, and will also help in recruiting new businesses.

Visits should be made with owners of existing businesses to identify problems, and weaknesses that may need to be addressed. Business opportunities should be identified that could be met by existing business expansion. New businesses should be identified for recruitment that would be complementary and would attract customers for existing businesses as well.

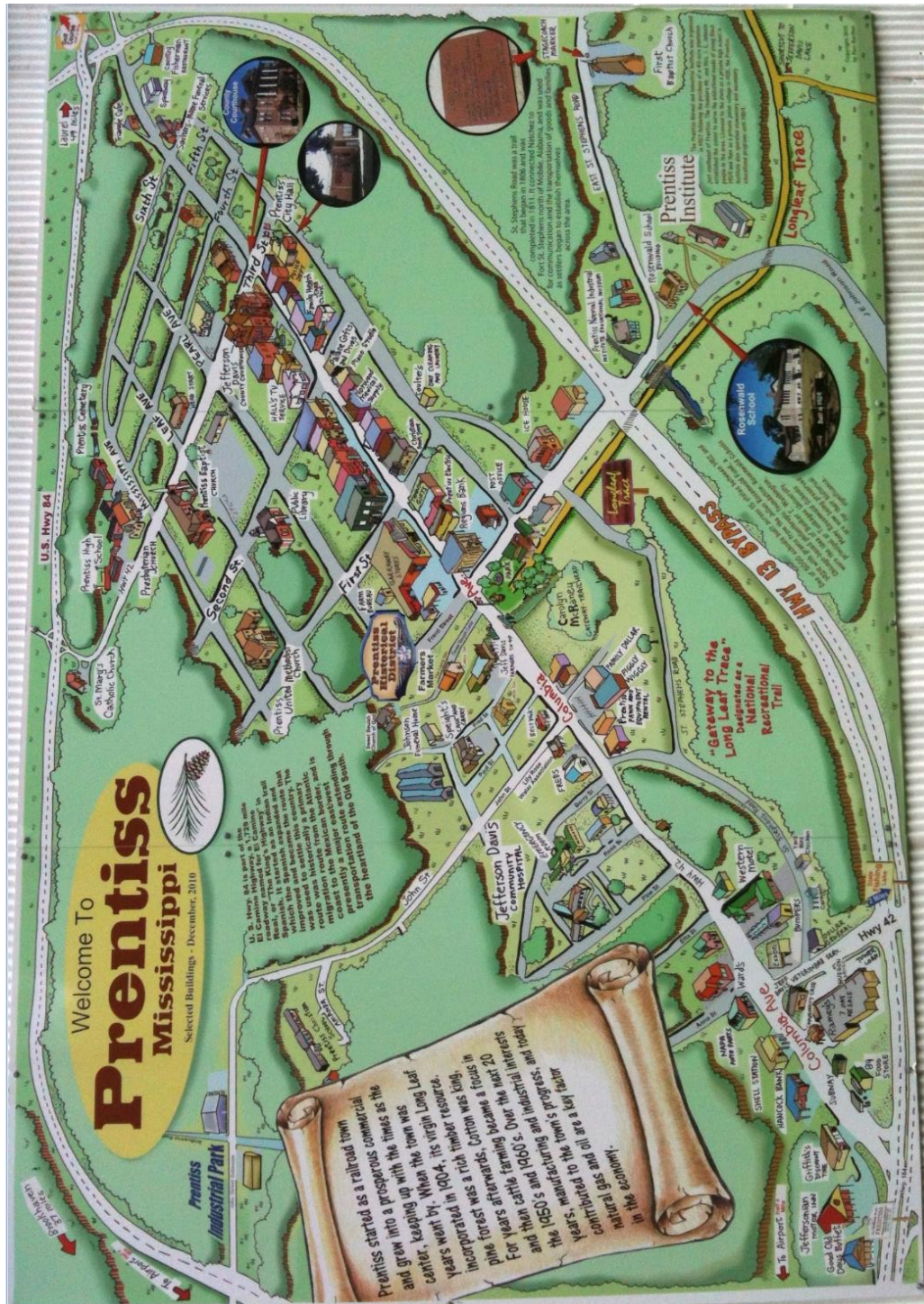
A general method for business recruitment would be the following. New business types that are likely to succeed in the Town and downtown should be identified and solicited (for example see Section 4 - Table 4-18, and Chart #25 in Appendix A). A general economic assessment has been conducted in this Plan in Section 4 - Table 4-18. It can be used as a starting point about what products or services citizens must go for outside the Town to purchase, and what businesses are desired in the Town.

Identification of market potential for goods and services in order to add or expand the availability is important. Business feasibility would need to be identified and a business plan for each business type should be prepared. A review with local bankers and business development professionals would be advisable. A list of similar businesses located in nearby communities should be prepared. A recruitment package would then be developed including information gathered from a community assessment, market data, and business plans.

A recommendation is that the Town conduct a recruitment effort with letters of market information on: available buildings, sources of assistance, financing options, and market Information. Follow-up efforts by the Town should include: phone calls, personal visit to the prospects, invitations for the prospects to visit the community, maintaining contact until a decision is made, assistance in establishing the business until it is open, and regular contact afterwards to retain the business.

Appendix D – Town Example – Assets Promotional Map

The following is an example of an Assets Promotional Map from Prentiss, Mississippi, with population of 982 persons. Bladenboro could consider preparing a similar type of Town assets promotional map.



End of Plan