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Harrisburg wants to remain small town with core values

Objectives include maintaining open spaces and low density as it plans how to manage growth.

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Harrisburg wants to remain what it is: a small town in the shadow of Charlotte, with no pretense of big-city life.

So in recent weeks, town officials have been hammering out a vision statement and five core values to preserve Harrisburg as “the best small town in North Carolina” as they determine how it will grow.

As Charlotte and nearby cities strive for denser population and housing, Harrisburg wants low density, open spaces, diverse restaurants and a connected system of roads, sidewalks, greenways and bicycle lanes.

“These are all things that everyone needs to start looking at if we are going to maintain an efficient, solid standard of living in Harrisburg,” said Mayor Tim Hagler. “It’s a roadmap to where we want to go, something to show developers where we’re headed.”

The core values:

Valuing Harrisburg as a small town and doing everything possible to preserve that identity as the town grows.

Connecting roads to sidewalks, bike paths and greenways to enhance quality of life.

Preserving and enhancing the town's beauty and history.

Seeking open communication by urging citizen engagement and involvement.

Recruiting and creating skilled and well-paid jobs to support a balance of commercial and residential development in the tax base is “critical to developing a town characterized by sustainable growth.”

Last year, town officials restricted commercial development to 80,000 square feet, which all but bans big-box stores.

“We want to make sure we’re not one-dimensional as we grow ... that we’re not just supporting residential development, but looking at the whole gamut of economic development,” Hagler

said. "We need to take a look at adopting or changing our land-use plan, which is seven to eight years old."

The town is getting help from the Urban Institute at nearby UNCCCharlotte. At last week's Town Council meeting, no timeline was attached to any of the objectives. The council wants to give new Town Administrator Joel Davis time to absorb objectives and help come up with a plan.

Some of the objectives require money and will take longer to achieve than others. In September, the council will decide which objectives they'll take on in the short or long range, Hagler said.

It's all about image.

"We want to better define what we are," the mayor said. "We're not trying to be Mayberry, but there's a quality to small-town life. We want to enhance that quality and be self-sustaining, but by no means close the gate behind us."

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