



2026-2028

**STRATEGIC
PLAN**

WITH GOALS & OBJECTIVES

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History of Gastonia



The City of Gastonia was incorporated in 1877, the year reconstruction ended. The impetus for the early development of Gastonia, which began in 1873 as a small railroad depot, was the combined effect of the realignment of the Atlanta & Charlotte Airline Railroad (now Norfolk Southern) from its original intended path several miles to the north of the City, the charter of the Chester and Lenoir Narrow Gauge Railroad (now CSX), which crossed the Atlanta & Charlotte railroad, and the introduction of the steam-powered textile mill. The crossing of these two railroads and the beginning of the City's textile industry brought opportunities for employment and social life. The initial population of the town was approximately 200 people, and the land area was less than one square mile.

The City's original population was reflective of the surrounding county and was comprised of English, German, Scotch Highlander, and Scotch-Irish citizens, with a few African American residents also moving into the settlement. Voted the county seat in 1911, Gastonia, today has a population of more than 85,000 and a land area of over 52 square miles. It is the largest of Gaston County's 12 municipalities and is the economic engine of the county. Gastonia is the 13th largest city in North Carolina. The City has operated continuously under the Council-Manager form of government since its adoption in 1919.

L-R (front): Angela Dreher, Mayor
Richard Franks, Jennifer Stepp
L-R (rear): Glenn Silverman, Donyel
Barber, Demetrios Koutsoupas,
Mayor Pro-Tem Jim Gallagher



GASTONIA CITY COUNCIL

Vision

The City of Gastonia serves as a model for civic leadership as we engage our community of dedicated neighbors **(Great People)**. We share a collective passion for personal safety, economic vitality, inclusiveness, cultural richness and overall sustainability **(Great Place)**. Our distinct character is built upon a rich and unique heritage and fueled by enthusiasm for the promise of a bright tomorrow **(Great Promise)**.

Mission

To enhance the quality of life for all by providing innovative, responsive, and cost-effective services at the highest level.

Core Values

We, the Mayor, City Council, and City of Gastonia Employees, practice Accountability, Inclusiveness, Safety, Professionalism, Honesty, and Integrity to safeguard and enhance the public trust in City Government.



Pictured: Street resurfacing funded by 2022 GO Transportation Bonds

INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

Develop and maintain resilient public infrastructure to enhance quality of life, mobility, and economic development.

Transportation / Catalytic Projects:

1. Continue to partner with the Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization (GCLMPO), Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO), North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), Gaston County, surrounding municipalities, Mecklenburg County, and the City of Charlotte on regional transportation projects, including Catawba Crossings, to address the congestion problems experienced on the area transportation network.

Transportation / Infrastructure Improvements:

2. 2022 Transportation General Obligation Bond Projects. Prepare for the issuance of the remaining \$41 million in bond proceeds. Continue the identification, design, and construction of transportation projects related to the 2022 GO bond. These project types include:
 - a. Intersection improvements
 - b. Safety improvements around schools and parks
 - c. Miscellaneous sidewalk and pedestrian projects
 - d. Street resurfacing and roadway manhole repairs
 - e. Planning and engineering for future roadway projects

3. Advance *Connecting Highland: Access, Neighborhood Growth, Equity* (Project CHANGE) by initiating the federally funded feasibility and connectivity studies supported by the \$2 million Reconnecting Communities Pilot Grant to evaluate capping the downtown railroad ditch and improving mobility, access, and economic connectivity between Downtown Gastonia and surrounding transportation-disadvantaged neighborhoods, with work starting in Summer 2026.
4. Implement Transportation Capital Improvement Projects:
 - a. Continue to extend sidewalks and greenways, including partnering with the Carolina Thread Trail (CTT) and private developers to construct new trail segments strategically throughout the City.
 - b. Conduct a comprehensive review of all existing City mobility and active transportation plans—including the Greenway Master Plan, Carolina Thread Trail Master Plan, Comprehensive Pedestrian Plan, Comprehensive Bicycle Plan, and Comprehensive Transportation Plan—and consolidate them into a unified “City of Gastonia Greenways and Active Transportation Network Plan” to provide a coordinated, implementable framework for future investments.
 - c. Complete a master plan for the Sims Legion Park mitigation property and develop partnerships for funding and future use.

Transportation / Mobility Improvements:

5. Continue to improve GoGastonia microtransit service by enhancing reliability, rider experience, and operational efficiency through ongoing performance monitoring, service adjustments, and rider engagement.

Water, Sewer, and Stormwater / Infrastructure Improvements:

6. The plan for the installation and implementation of Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) is currently in progress for both water and electric.
7. Complete \$28,000,000 in water and wastewater infrastructure improvements with funding received through the 2023 NC State Budget earmarks. The eight identified projects will increase the reliability of key portions of the system by replacing failing infrastructure and completing design for future critical infrastructure projects. These projects include replacing sections of water and sewer lines, improving the waterline at Rankin Lake, rehabilitating a portion of the supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system, and partial funding of AMI.

8. Continue and/or complete several identified projects in advancement of water and wastewater regionalization, including the Southeast utility extension project and the water and sewer merger with the Town of McAdenville.

Electric / Infrastructure Improvements:

9. Implement the Comprehensive Electric System Study and Capital Improvement Plan.
- a. Complete the construction of Substation #18 and associated distribution extensions.
 - b. Complete substation upgrades, underground line replacement, and other capital projects.



Pictured: GoGastonia vehicle

Mobility Options / Infrastructure Improvements:

10. Explore transit organizational options that provide improved services through bus rapid transit, regional express routes, commuter rail, high speed rail, and multi-modal transportation to the public through potential partnerships with Gaston County, Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), and regional public or private providers.



Pictured: Municipal Operations Center - Electric Division

City Facilities / Infrastructure Improvements:

11. Complete the Facility Assessment Study, Phase I: Assessment of building systems and physical attributes for creation of a 10-year capital improvement plan (CIP).

12. Study and recommend solutions to address building space needs in City Hall, Garland Center, Warehouse, Equipment Services, Public Works Campus, Technology Services facility on Second Avenue, Memorial Hall, and other City facilities.

Airport / Infrastructure Improvements:

13. Complete projects at the Gastonia Municipal Airport (AKH), including the Preliminary Engineering and Environmental Documentation supporting the extension of the runway to 5,000 feet, construction of the Runway Lighting Rehabilitation Project, design and construction of the Apron Pavement Rehabilitation and Runway Pavement Rehabilitation projects, design for the On-Airport Clearing and Grubbing Project, and the design for the Wildlife Fence Project.



Pictured left: Gastonia Municipal Airport Signage



Pictured right: Airplanes at the Gastonia Municipal Airport



Pictured left: Gastonia Municipal Airport Aerial View



Pictured: Residents playing Pickleball at T.Jeffers Center

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Support healthy, active, and resilient communities.

Parks & Recreation / Facilities Planning

14. Work with private developers of greenfield properties to explore dedicated recreation and park properties in strategic areas of the City. Plan a comprehensive upgrade to Martha Rivers Park and to work towards the completion of Phase I at Linwood Park. Update the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.
15. Enhance programming at existing recreational facilities and create new outdoor programming opportunities for all segments of the City's population.

Stormwater / Water Quality

16. Continue to implement a watershed-based Stormwater management program to reduce flooding, improve water quality, and ensure continued compliance with current and future MS4 permit requirements in response to population growth, increased development pressure, and evolving regulatory standards.

- a. Begin and complete construction on the Duharts Creek project.
- b. Using the results of the Catawba Creek watershed hydrologic and hydraulic modeling, develop funding applications for construction projects that will mitigate run off and flooding issues.
- c. Improve the stormwater discharges from all City-owned facilities. Leverage LIDAR drone as an assessment tool to quantify contaminant runoff.

Education/ Partnerships

17. Conduct a study of technology systems for the James H. Lynn Planetarium to inform an upcoming effort by the Schiele Museum Board of Trustees to upgrade the facility.

Health and Food

18. Expand the current Farm-to-Table Program which addresses food desert conditions, provides community education, and food items. The project is a collaborative effort of Keep Gastonia Beautiful, Gastonia Farmers Market, and Healthy Highland/RAMS Kitchen. Expansion is to include other population segments and will add a healthy market component for area residents to receive produce.



Pictured: Schiele Museum of Natural History



Pictured: Gastonia Farmers Market



Pictured: City Hall & Garland Center

GOOD GOVERNMENT

Lead an effective and efficient city government that stewards public resources and grows an inclusive workplace culture.

Employee Development

19. Employee Development and Engagement Manager will work with departments to create opportunities for employee engagement with a focus on professional development, leadership, and training. Employee surveys will be used to monitor the progress of employee engagement.

Recruitment

20. Continue to monitor the job market for compensation and hiring trends, making adjustments when and where needed to ensure the City continues to attract and retain qualified City employees in an efficient and timely manner, including, but not limited to, exercising opportunities to partner with Gaston County Schools, Gaston College, and/or Belmont Abbey for affordable day care for employees.

Finance

21. Create a Popular Annual Financial Reporting (PAFR) and obtain the City's first Triple Crown Award.

Capital Funding

22. Implement necessary rate adjustments to provide additional funding for repair and replacement of critical infrastructure in the stormwater, water, and wastewater conveyance and treatment systems and the electric distribution system and implement necessary development fees adjustments for water and wastewater conveyance and treatment systems.

Planning

23. With the recent adoption of City's Comprehensive Plan, staff will work to update the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO).

24. Implement a process to create a 3-year Strategic Plan for the Schiele Museum, involving City staff, Schiele Board of Trustees, community stakeholders, and the public.

Strategic Communication

25. Implement a City of Gastonia Communications Plan to provide a structured, consistent, and strategic approach to how the City communicates with internal and external stakeholders, which includes City employees, the public, the media, and municipal partners.



Pictured: Gastonia 2050 Comprehensive Plan Workshop



Pictured: Main Avenue in Downtown Gastonia



Pictured: Real Time Crime Center, Gastonia Police Department

SAFETY

Bolster public safety by investing in highly engaged and qualified personnel, effective facilities, and innovative technology.

Public Safety / Recruitment

26. Meet and exceed personnel levels through improved social media presence and focused recruitment and retention efforts to better serve our community, maximize officer and firefighter safety, and promote professional standards.

Public Safety / Enforcement

27. Manage public safety issues to increase public confidence and promote accountability through community policing tactics that focus on statistics, problem solving, and evidence-based solutions.

Public Safety / Facilities

28. Begin design and funding for future fire station expansion, including increased personnel, apparatus, and facilities. Evaluation has begun on a 2-bay station, staff, and apparatus needs for the southeast station, as well as a single-bay station, staff, and apparatus needs for the downtown center city station.

29. Continuing building out the Real Time Crime Center and investing in technology and tools to help improve the coordination, support, and management of a comprehensive public safety camera system.

30. Standardize the physical access control for city facilities from the current setup of three systems to one physical access control system, while maintaining a higher level of security.

Safety / Transportation

31. Work to create a safer, more accessible environment for all users of our highways, streets, and roadways, including pedestrians, bicyclists, public transportation users, motorists, personal conveyance and micromobility users, and commercial vehicle operators by upgrading the citywide traffic signal system and implementing the Safety Action Plan.



Pictured: Peel Scooters

Safety / Communications

32. Create a replacement schedule for Fire and Police mobile and portable radios of 20% of radios each year.

33. Evaluate the more effective Fire and Police radio communications system between the Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders (VIPER) and Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) systems.



Pictured: Gastonia Fire & Police Radio



COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Pictured: 4th of July
Celebration at Rotary
Centennial Pavilion

Foster a community identity through active engagement, effective partnerships, and a strong sense of place.

Community Asset / Engagement

34. Complete installation and open the new Elizabeth William Robinson Hall of Dinosaurs at the Schiele Museum.

Partnerships / Housing

35. Continue to seek funding and support solutions to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of reducing homelessness, as well as researching the feasibility of partnering with others to create a homeless shelter, and to work with all interested stakeholders including, but not limited to, Gaston County, downtown merchants, non-profit organizations, and faith-based groups that work with those experiencing homelessness to provide assistance to those in need. Continued partnership with Gaston County, Gaston-Lincoln-Cleveland Continuum of Care, and other organizations to carry out the following activities:

- a. Cooling Station Support (Summer 2026): Explore operational models and identify a location to support a cooling station to address seasonal needs crucial for vulnerable populations during extreme heat events. To issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) designed to solicit proposals from organizations with the capacity to manage either shelter or cooling facility operations at their own facility.
- b. Continued engagement with HealthNet Gaston and Unity Baptist Church for consideration of operation for the Fall/Winter 2026 or in the event no organization is identified, possible Issuance of an RFP for the facility and operation of a Warming Center for Fall/Winter 2026-2027.
- c. Pilot Panhandling Program – Downtown/Main Street: Continued discussions with the proposed administrator on terms to implement an agreement for program operation.



Pictured: Fairhaven Apartments

36. Continued planning for use of the HOME–American Rescue Plan (HOME-ARP) funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Funds are designated for the construction of a non-congregate shelter (NCS) for qualifying populations to include homeless individuals and families. Efforts will focus on securing funding and broad community support to strengthen long-term strategies for reducing homelessness.



Pictured: Homebuyers Assistance Program Opportunity

Public Art

37. Parks and Recreation, Keep Gastonia Beautiful and other staff and stakeholders continue to provide guidance to the City Council Arts Committee in the development of arts opportunities to include a future performing Arts Center, seeking additional partnerships for public art installations, and art-related activities and education.

Community Engagement

38. Continue to improve residents' experience with city government by focusing on customer service.

39. Continue to improve the Alliance for Community Engagement (ACE) program by enrolling additional neighborhoods across the City.

40. Develop and implement a community engagement initiative that brings together neighborhood leaders and residents to foster dialogue, showcase City services and resources, highlight neighborhood accomplishments, address neighborhood priorities, and encourage greater civic involvement.



Pictured: Highland Art Plaza ribbon cutting



Pictured: A.C.E. Recognized Community



ECONOMIC VITALITY

Encourage a diverse and vibrant economy that provides opportunities for all of our residents and businesses.

Catalytic Investments / Developments

41. Work with development partners in the Franklin Urban Sports & Entertainment (FUSE) District, Downtown, and surrounding historic area to continue construction and project development to grow commercial and multi-family opportunities.

Recruitment

42. Marketing and issuing Requests for Proposals (RFP) for key city-owned properties in Downtown and FUSE Districts.

43. Implement strategic planning and recruitment efforts to improve key commercial corridors in Gastonia:

- a. Highway 7 Corridor
- b. Garrison LEARNS District
- c. New Hope Road Business Corridor
- d. Eastridge Mall Redevelopment
- e. 321 Corridor

Plan Implementation

44. Identify key goals from the Downtown Envisioning and Downtown Parking Study plans to move forward with implementation.

Promotion

45. Work with the Zawyer Sports and Entertainment, Gaston College, GoGastonNC, the Gaston Business Association, and the Montcross Area Chamber of Commerce to promote tourism, sporting events, festivals, and visitation to Gastonia.



Pictured: CaroMont
Health Park

Pictured: City Hall



Learn more about
our great city!

About Gastonia

Gastonia, N.C., just minutes west of Charlotte, is one of the area's best places to live and work with an ideal combination of location, size and livability. Gastonia is the largest of Gaston County's 13 municipalities and one of the largest cities in the Charlotte metropolitan area. Selected as an All-America City three times, Gastonia's desirable quality of life is the result of its beautiful natural surroundings, friendly neighborhoods, responsive government and vibrant business environment.