

# *West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this plan is the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood. The Neighborhood Association was recognized by the City Council on December 1, 1997 and has been meeting regularly since that time.

Located in the northwest and southwest quadrants of the city, West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood is comprised of seven pockets of residential intermingled with intense commercial and industrial activity. Major thoroughfares traversing the area and a railroad line running through the middle make it difficult to think of this area in terms of a traditional neighborhood. The cohesiveness of the neighborhood is compromised by these factors.

The residential areas are comprised of single-family residences, multi-family complexes and mobile homes bounded on all sides by industrial and/or commercial properties and major roads.

Two major thoroughfares bisect the neighborhood. US 321 carries on average 36,600 vehicles per day. US Highway 70 SW carries 19,000 vehicles per day on average. This type of vehicular traffic is conducive only to commercial enterprise.

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood has experienced a serious rate of social and physical change over the past thirty years. This change is evident in the demographics, types of new development, overall appearance and attitude toward the neighborhood.

The area is predominately commercial and industrial in terms of land use - forty-six percent. Thirty-eight percent of the area is residential. Little vacant land remains. Only ten percent, or approximately eighty acres are available for de-

velopment. Fifty-four percent of the vacant properties are in a zoning category that would allow mobile homes, high-density multi-family or single-family dwellings.

The trend in the residential sector is one of disinvestment. Only fourteen new homes have been built in the neighborhood since 1970. The conversion from owner-occupied, single-family to rental property exacerbates the problem. Fifty-seven percent of the single-family structures in West Hickory/Westmont are rental. Add in the number of multi-family units and the rental rate grows to seventy-six percent.

Long-time West Hickory/Westmont residents consider their neighborhood a good place to live, but have grown frustrated by the changes they see. When an older house is demolished due to neglect, it is replaced by a high-density multi-family structure or mobile home instead of a new single-family home.

"There is nothing for children here." "The neighborhood is diminishing and dying." "Take the school away and it will die." "Families are moving out." "Houses are torn down and apartments are built in their place." "It is too late, the neighborhood is destroyed." These sentiments were expressed in great frustration.

Dedicated neighbors and concerned commercial interests want to plan for ways to enhance the reputation of the neighborhood through problem solving, as well as through promotion of the many assets of the area.

In examining the data collected during the planning process, it becomes apparent that a significant degree of change has occurred within the West Hickory/Westmont

Neighborhood. This change is reflected in general land use, completion of transportation infrastructure, structural conditions, types of residential dwellings occupied and in trends in homeownership.

In 1967, duplexes and multi-family units in West Hickory/Westmont only occupied an estimated seven acres of land. Today, forty-eight percent of the housing units, or fifty-nine acres, in the neighborhood accommodate two or more families.

While there is no historical data regarding homeownership, the current estimate of fifty-seven percent of single-family homes in West Hickory/Westmont owned by investors and occupied by renters is consequential. The affordability of multi-family units and duplexes, combined with the availability of single-family homes purchased as investment properties, creates the potential for a less stable, more transient neighborhood. Neighbors voiced concern that parcels could also be assembled to allow for the construction of more larger scale multi-family units.

The availability of affordable homes is an asset, yet currently it appears investors purchase the property for investment purposes instead of attracting young couples and professionals to the neighborhood.

While not severe at this point, residents of West Hickory/Westmont are noticing more properties that are poorly maintained. Eight percent of the dwellings in the neighborhood were identified as needing minor repairs or major maintenance. All but four of the dwellings in need of repair are investment properties owned by landlords and most are mobile homes.

Homeowners expect others to keep properties well maintained to preserve the appearance and image of the neighborhood. It is widely known that the appearance of properties and the level

of homeownership have an impact on the value assessed to all adjacent properties.

Historically, West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood has been home to several well-known and prosperous industries. The oldest remaining brick industrial building in the city is the Piedmont Wagon warehouse on Main Avenue NW. Older industrial buildings tend to be concentrated along the railroad and most have changed in terms of use over the years. Some of the buildings and grounds are in desperate need of repair. Today, Century Furniture and Institution Food House, Inc., (IFH) are major landholders in the area who take advantage of convenient access to US 321 to move their products.

Commercial property occupancy within the area during the past thirty years has grown considerably due to the growth of US 321 and Highway 70. A wide variety of service-related businesses including warehousing and distribution facilities, auto service and sales, restaurants, and offices are conveniently located. However, neighbors are quick to note the absence of a full service grocery store within the boundaries.

In certain locations, several single-family homes are adjacent to heavy industries creating conflicts and diminishing the quality of life for residents, particularly along Main Avenue NW. While it is easy to blame lack of zoning controls when the area developed, it does not solve the day-to-day inconvenience for homeowners. The business owners tolerate constant complaints and threats of legal action from neighbors while they operate in locations that they have occupied for years.

The strategies, recommended actions and programs set forth in the Plan are designed to address the social and physical develop-

ment needs of the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood over the next five to ten years. However, due to the dominating influence of the major roadways, which bisect this community and the current transportation corridor study, it will be several years before the future composition of the area evolves.

The complex land use pattern and existing conditions of West Hickory/Westmont makes for difficult problem solving that will require implementing several solutions over time. The recommendations in the plan focus on causes of problems and realistic action steps.

West Hickory/Westmont begin the planning process just as the city adopted the development concepts contained in the *Hickory by Choice* Land Use and Transportation Plan. The implementation of *Hickory by Choice* will result in a major overhaul of the current zoning and associated ordinances. Every property in the city will be affected in some way once the ordinances are adopted.

Key recommendations in the *Hickory by Choice* plan are to increase walkability through sidewalk development, and to create neighborhood and community business areas to reduce the need to drive long distances across town. Higher density housing and community services are proposed for areas adjacent to these neighborhood cores, and the street system would link residential areas and neighborhood centers to ease traffic and allow pedestrian access.

While neighbors wistfully speak of returning to the time when kids could walk to the rock corner store for penny candy, the reality is that those days are long gone, not just for West Hickory/Westmont but for the entire city. The people involved in this planning process discovered that there are ways to make the current situation better.

By going through the neighborhood planning process, West Hickory/Westmont residents and business interests have had the opportunity to decide how they want their neighborhood to evolve, to put recommendations in the Plan to reach their goal, and then work toward implementation of the Plan.

This planning process works only if residents, business owners and property owners work together. While these groups share common interests, on some of the issues they are diametrically opposed and must be dealt with accordingly.

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan is dedicated to the memory of two very active neighbors who lived in the area for many years.

*In Memory of*



*Frances B. Johnson*  
*January 29, 1923 - February 9, 2000*



*Clarence G. Howard*  
*August 13, 1916 - June 3, 1999*

## PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan is a working document which addresses the concerns of neighborhood residents, property owners and business interests in an attempt to preserve the livability and long-term viability of the residential parts of the neighborhood, as well as the commercial areas.

The foundation of this Plan is based on active citizen participation and informed decision making. With the input of residents, property owners and business owners, this Plan is more effective in meeting the particular needs of this neighborhood and stands a better chance of being implemented.

This process works only if residents, business owners and property owners work together. The process is about consensus building and that means finding solutions to difficult questions that are acceptable to all parties.

This plan provides an analysis of a wide range of factors which collectively foster West Hickory/Westmont's physical, social and economic environment while affecting its capacity to continue to function as an integral and unique part of Hickory's neighborhood composition.

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan provides the most detailed guidance of any City of Hickory planning document on the issues of planning and development of the area. When guidance is needed on an issue for this neighborhood, it is important to refer to the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan, *Hickory By Choice* Land Development and Transportation Plan, and all other pertinent adopted city plans to review and weigh all public interests in arriving at well thought out and viable decisions.

## Organization of the Plan

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan is organized into seven sections.

Section I - Introduction introduces the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood and identifies its issues, concerns and assets, and explains the purpose, and format of the Plan.

Section II - The Planning Process outlines the process through which this entire plan is derived. The members of the Planning Committee are recognized, as are all of the resource people who helped the Committee formulate the recommendations and strategies included in this Plan by providing information and data for the group to consider.

Section III - Neighborhood Character presents a review and analysis of West Hickory/Westmont's historical development.

Section IV - Existing Conditions describes factors that have physical and social impact on the development and evolution of the neighborhood: demographics; land use; zoning; transportation; public infrastructure; environmental characteristics; structural conditions; trends in homeownership; commercial activity and community safety.

This section also summarizes different concerns, trends and issues raised during the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood planning process based on the perceptions of the Planning Committee, business and commercial property owners, as well as planning staff.

Section V - The Plan contains a full set of strategies and recommended actions and programs designed to address the issues and to provide guidance for West Hick-

ory/Westmont's development over the next five to ten years.

Section VI - Implementation identifies the framework within which these strategies, recommended actions and programs should be implemented.

Section VII - Appendices contain a summary spreadsheet of the recommendations and four maps which illustrate the existing land use, current zoning, existing and proposed sidewalks, building conditions, and property occupancy status in West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood.

### ***Neighborhood Assets***

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood has many strengths and assets, which will contribute to the success in implementing their long-range neighborhood plan. Affordable housing, viable commercial areas, two parks and recreation facilities in the neighborhood are just a few of the assets. The five churches in the area are anchors which the Neighborhood Association should collaborate with to spread the message about how much the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood has to offer.

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood has many assets and strengths, which will contribute to their success in implementing their long-range neighborhood plan.

- Long term neighbors know each other. Residents of West Hickory/Westmont are friendly to their neighbors. This knowledge fosters interest in what is going on in the neighborhood and will contribute to planning success.
- West Hickory/Westmont is a safe and affordable community. Potential homebuyers seek these qualities. West Hickory/Westmont neighbors are willing to work at maintaining these qualities.
- Excellent rapport with community police. The residents and business and commercial property owners consider their PACT officers an integral part of the neighborhood and another resource to achieve neighborhood improvement success.
- History of successful neighborhood events and fundraising efforts. The Neighborhood Association hosts annual fundraising events and community clean-up days. The Poor Man's Supper occurs each year in the fall and serves as the groups best means of raising money for community projects.
- Proximity to downtown and commercial areas. The location of West Hickory/Westmont provides ideal access to shopping, dining, entertainment and workplace opportunities.
- Close to major access points. Business and commercial property owners are attracted to this area because of the high traffic counts generated by US 321 and Highway 70 as well as the ease with which they are able to receive and ship goods.
- History of success in addressing concerns. West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Association successfully addressed concerns about the appearance and maintenance of rental properties, overgrown vacant lots and excess junk in yards.
- Proximity to recreational activities. Residents are able to take advantage of two senior centers, two playgrounds and a public swimming pool.

- Good city services and valuable relationship with the City. Residents overall are pleased with the levels of service they receive and recognize how responsive the City is to neighbors concerns.
- West Hickory/Westmont is home. Such sentiment is shared by a number of long term residents. The group is willing to work hard to strengthen pride in the neighborhood and preserve their sense of community.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Association was organized in April 1997 in response to a rezoning request to allow a developer to build sixty-four affordable multi-family units and forty-eight apartments for elderly off of Nineteenth Street NW and Third Avenue NW. Organizational meetings were facilitated with assistance from members of a group known as United Neighborhoods of Hickory. When the rezoning request was passed, some of the residents lost interest in organizing. Despite the apparent defeat, a group of neighbors stuck to the task of becoming a recognized neighborhood association.

West Hickory/Westmont has actively participated in the City's *Neighborhood Focus* program since becoming a recognized neighborhood association on December 1, 1997. Mr. Warren Wood, Executive Assistant of Administration and Budget was appointed as their Neighborhood Liaison.

Early in their involvement, the neighborhood successfully addressed some immediate concerns and accomplished several short-term goals. In March of 1998, some residents took part in a visual preference exercise where they took photographs of things they liked and things they wanted improved in the neighborhood. The exercise brought to light many issues that could be addressed through code enforce-

ment. All of the issues that the City could resolve were via the inspection and code enforcement process.

Because of some pending issues in the neighborhood, Hickory's Mayor, William R. McDonald, III hosted a Town Hall meeting in West Hickory/Westmont on April 19, 1998. Ever since that meeting, each and every concern that was voiced at that meeting and every subsequent neighborhood meeting has been tracked and updated in a monthly report so that neighbors could read what actions had been taken to address their concerns. No other neighborhood has had such ready access to this type of information for their area.

Some of the residents who attended neighborhood meetings in the start-up stage held on to the perception that nothing was happening to improve West Hickory/Westmont. Frustration grew and ultimately some people quit coming to meetings.

As of February 2000, Mr. Wood has logged 122 requests from citizens of West Hickory/Westmont. Only nine requests remain open. Each of the nine open requests are addressed to the greatest extent possible in this neighborhood plan.

West Hickory/Westmont waited patiently for their turn to undertake the long-range planning process. When the opportunity presented itself, residents and commercial interests came together to participate. They felt that by planning together with the City they could develop positive approaches to resolve their long-standing issues.

Members of the Planning Committee entered into the planning process with different expectations. Through their participation, members hoped to:

- Make a better neighborhood
- Beautify the neighborhood
- Address issues more quickly
- Address causes instead of the symptoms
- Learn more about the area for improvement
- Work together
- Create a safer neighborhood
- Raise awareness of issues
- Build community

The following are issues identified by the neighborhood and their justification for wanting to address these concerns in the Plan.

- Influencing the future use of Grandview Middle School - Neighbors are very concerned about the future use of Grandview Middle School. They feel that if the School Board elects to relocate the Administrative Services office and the alternative high school to the site, or close the middle school completely it will have a detrimental effect on the area.
- Having input into the US 321 Corridor Study - West Hickory/Westmont is bisected by this major roadway. The outcome of the study could have serious impacts on the future development of the neighborhood and the types of development that will occur.
- Improving neighborhood traffic problems - Like many neighborhoods, West Hickory/Westmont is experiencing problems with speeding, cut through traffic, stop sign violations, dangerous intersections and sight distance obstructions. Residents want to work with the City to develop a comprehensive approach to traffic calming and speed enforcement to make the streets safer and less desirable for cut through traffic.
- Enhance parks and recreational activities - Residents enjoy having two neighborhood parks near by, yet it has been many years since the play equipment was upgraded. The Westmont Gymnasium attracts many from outside the neighborhood who play basketball. Neighbors report that older youth and adults dominate the basketball courts and intimidate others by using foul language and being inconsiderate. Expanded programming for youth ages twelve and under would provide opportunities for neighborhood children to better utilize the facility.
- Enhancing the appearance of the neighborhood and the commercial corridors - The commercial corridor along the one-way pairs suffers the most from a lack of landscaping and street trees. In some places vacant commercial buildings and abandoned industrial sites are an eyesore. Residents and business owners know that enhancing the appearance of the neighborhood will in turn enhance the image of West Hickory/Westmont and their property values.
- Addressing community safety and law enforcement issues - Residents of West Hickory/Westmont enjoy the quality of life and low crime rate of the neighborhood. However, speeders and loud music from vehicles cutting through the neighborhood threaten their serenity. The Neighborhood Association wants to be proactive and preserve the peacefulness of the residential areas by formally participating in the Police Department's Community Watch and continuing to work with Hickory Police Department to address these concerns.
- Installing new sidewalks to improve connectivity and pedestrian safety - West Hickory/Westmont is fortunate to have adequate sidewalk in some areas,



however, the major roads that bisect the neighborhood hinder sidewalk connectivity and pedestrian safety. Currently, there is no convenient and safe means for pedestrians to cross US 321 or Highway 70.

- Improving the level of nuisance and minimum housing code enforcement - The residential areas of West Hickory/Westmont are typical of an older neighborhood. There is a notable increase in property neglect, aging building stock, trash left on vacant lots and deposited on the roadways, junk vehicles, and absentee landlords who do not maintain their properties. There is a need to develop plans for comprehensive code enforcement to restore the appearance of the neighborhood, attract new homeowners and stimulate economic development.



*Poorly maintained rental houses harm the image and desirability to live in the neighborhood.*

- Desire to lessen impact of future multi-family residential and commercial development. Neighbors realize that their neighborhood is going to continue to change despite their fervent wish to reverse the changes that have occurred over the years. Planning Committee members discussed ways to lessen the impact of new development through proper landscaping and buffering and adoption of new zoning.
- Enhance and strengthen the Neighborhood Association as an organization. Because there are seven distinct residential areas,

West Hickory/Westmont is not easily identifiable as a neighborhood area. The fragmented nature of the neighborhood makes it difficult for the Neighborhood Association to function as a cohesive organization with ethnically and geographically diverse representation.

One of the most difficult situations for long-time residents to accept is that there are, and will continue to be circumstances beyond their control. Residents and commercial interests are eagerly awaiting the results of the pending US 321 Corridor study. How the neighborhood's concerns and recommendations will influence the study is uncertain and that is an unsettling situation given the potential impacts.

Commercial and residential development is market driven. Factors such as availability of land, zoning and traffic patterns heavily influence how and when a property is developed. These issues are substantial and have a serious effect on the quality of life residents enjoy.

As the planning process began, the group acknowledged that they might have to accept that there are some things beyond the neighborhood's control.

## PLANNING PROCESS

In May of 1996, the Hickory City Council endorsed the concept of a ten-step neighborhood planning process as developed and presented by planning staff. This planning process is based on the philosophy of "What they plan, they own." No one knows better than the people who live and work in a neighborhood what the concerns and needs are and how those issues can be addressed.

The long-range neighborhood planning process is a proactive and responsive systematic evaluation of trends and conditions in the neighborhood. It is a process that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the area to help maintain and stabilize the neighborhood. The process serves as a means to increase citizen participation and effectively allocate resources.

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan is the result of a consensus building process. Through open, honest and thoughtful discussion, the Planning Committee reached points of agreement and developed strategies to address concerns and implementation actions to achieve their goals.

Unlike the concerns voiced at the Mayor's Town Hall meeting and individual requests for service, the neighborhood planning process is geared more towards long-term problem solving and gaining a broader understanding of the issue as opposed to immediate response to someone's complaint.

### *Steps in the Planning Process*

#### **ORGANIZATION AND MEETING PROCESS**

The residents of West Hickory/Westmont formed a Planning Committee and agreed to meet twice a month to hear from resource people and to discuss their issues of concern and develop strategies to address these concerns.

The Planning Committee's primary role was to attend the meetings and openly discuss the issues. Active listening and each person's participation was key to having thorough understanding and debate of the topics. Each member was also encouraged to act as a neighborhood liaison. That is, for members of the Planning Committee to talk about what the Committee was doing to their neighbors in an attempt to keep those not directly involved in the process informed.

Members of the Planning Committee received a notebook to help keep the agendas, minutes and other materials organized throughout the planning process. The notebook contained a narrative describing the Neighborhood Planning Process, a tentative project schedule, and a set of groundrules for the Planning Committee to follow as the process progressed.

On two occasions, postcards were mailed to every owner occupied household and every commercial property owner and identified business operator inviting them to become involved in, or at the very least more aware of, the development of the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan. The high numbers of rental households made it difficult and unrealistic to expect interest, much less participation, from the different residential areas.

#### **CITIZEN PARTICIPATION**

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan represents a consensus of the residents and business owners and others who have participated in preparing the Plan.

The Planning Committee realized early on that the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood as defined for planning purposes is

disparate and segmented. They acknowledged that lack of diverse participation from the different residential sections and the business community would result in a less than inclusive set of recommendations that are not representative of the whole community.

On average, seventeen residents attended semi-monthly planning committee meetings, and actively participated in the development of the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan. Many more were kept abreast of the planning process progress and discussions via mailings.

Such an intensive undertaking would not have been possible without the dedication and determination of a group of neighbors who have a desire to enhance the quality of life in West Hickory/Westmont.

The Planning Committee met a total of twelve times to hear from the resource people, discuss strategies and recommendations to include in the plan and review drafts of the plan.



*Planner Donna Cullum discusses appearance and beautification issues with the Planning Committee.*

Since these people live in the neighborhood or have a vested interest in the health of the area, they are the most knowledgeable of their needs. They also will play a critical role in monitoring the progress of and implementation of the Plan.

#### Neighborhood Planning Committee

Clinton Annas

Sandra Annas  
 Steve Austin  
 Ruth Barringer  
 Jean Bumgarner  
 Salonge Christopher  
 Troy Decker  
 Robin Freeman  
 Adrian Frye  
 Evelyn Helton  
 Ray Huffman  
 Frances Johnson  
 Roger Kerr  
 James Kerr  
 Martha McNuer  
 David Miller  
 Faye Phillips  
 Michael Pierce, Sr.  
 Lib Pope  
 Bruce Pope  
 Edith Poteat  
 Nancy Seagle  
 Judy Sigmon  
 Louise Smith  
 Martha Thomas  
 Mary Turbyfill  
 Bill Watts  
 Martha Watts  
 Rev. Greg Williams -  
     Bethany Lutheran Church  
 Bo Walker  
 Katherine Wilson  
 Rev. Charlene Hutchings -  
     Westview Methodist Church

#### Business and Commercial Property Owners

The business and commercial property owners in West Hickory/Westmont have a substantial influence in the area and represent a very important segment of the neighborhood. A special meeting was held in March 2000 to gather their input in formulating strategies for the Plan. Others have taken the time to personally speak with staff to relay their concerns, ideas and issues.

Clinton Annas - Annas Awning

Sandra Annas - Service League Thrift Shop  
 Edith Brown - Service Distribution Co.  
 Leonard Greenhill - Greenhill Furniture  
 Harold Greenhill - Greenhill Furniture  
 Vance James - James Oxygen  
 James Kerr - Hickory Ready Mix  
 Roger Kerr - Hickory Ready Mix  
 R.L. Maynard Jr. - Maynard Refrigeration  
 Vernice Frye Punch - 13<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
 Alex Rooker - Highway 70 SW  
 Bo Walker - Del Mark Inc.

### Bethany Lutheran Church

Holding the Planning Committee meetings in the neighborhood at a location accessible to the group is an essential element of the process. Pastor Greg Williams and the congregation of Bethany Lutheran Church graciously allowed the Planning Committee to meet at the Church. Special recognition is given to Bill and Martha Watts and Judy Sigmon for always being there to open the Church, provide refreshments and help with organizing the room for the meetings.

### Media

The local media was very supportive throughout the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Planning process. Numerous articles appeared in the headlines of the local papers and the process was featured in a cable television network news story. Continued media attention will be necessary to aid in the implementation of the Plan.

Lynn Braswell - Hickory Daily Record  
 Steven Mackay - Hickory Daily Record

### Hickory Police Department

In 1994, the Hickory Police Department committed to community-based problem solving citywide. The initiative is known as *Police and Community Together*, PACT for short.

PACT has developed into an integral part of the community. Officers work under decentralized supervision, which allows them to identify and

solve problems effectively. Each PACT has a Commander, a Supervisor, a Criminal Investigator and several officers assigned to provide police services with emphasis on problem solving and responsiveness to customer needs. These officers have evolved from the traditional law enforcement role.

Along with targeted enforcement, officers are involved in all aspects of the community. They often serve as a link between the residents of the community and other city and county public service providers.



*Master Police Officer Walt Young chats with a neighbor after a neighborhood meeting.*

Residents and commercial interests are grateful for their strong relationship with the Police Department.

Chief Floyd Lucas  
 Major Merl Hamilton  
 Capt. Steve Wright  
 Sgt. Greg Shook, Traffic Safety Unit

### Edward PACT

Lt. Ron Lamberth, Commander  
 Sgt. Thurman Whisnant  
 Master Officer Joe Frank  
 Master Officer Power Hilderbran  
 Master Officer Larry Wiles  
 Master Officer Keith Yoder  
 Master Officer Walt Young  
 Officer Gill Brown

Officer Jerry Fleming  
Officer David Kilby

### City of Hickory Resources

One of the key tenets of this type of neighborhood-driven, citizen participation based planning process is the involvement of resource people. Individuals who, based on their professional expertise and talents, contributed to the knowledge and informational needs of the Planning Committee to produce this plan are:

Donna Andrews, Parks and Recreation  
Tom Carr, Executive Assistant of  
Development  
Donna Cullum, Planner  
Chuck Hansen, Public Services Director  
Jennifer Marron, Neighborhood Office  
Intern  
Mack McLeod, Parks and Recreation  
Tricia Reynolds-Huffman, Neighborhood  
Coordinator  
Gerald Sherwood, Building Inspections  
Keith Stahley, Planning Director  
J. R. Steigerwald, Economic Development  
Sheila Winstead, Building Inspections  
Warren Wood, Executive Assistant of  
Administration and Neighborhood Liaison  
Nathan Vannoy, Traffic Division



*Hickory High student Jennifer Marron assisted with the data collection and analysis as an intern.*

Other service providers and agencies also contributed to this planning process. The people

listed below assisted the Planning Committee by either speaking to the group or providing necessary information.

### Hickory City Schools Resources

Lavada Porter  
Jean Yoder

### Community Appearance Commission

Bob Vollinger

### Western Piedmont Council of Governments

John Marshall, Planner  
John Tippet, Transportation Planner  
Taylor Dellinger, Data Analyst

### GIS Mapping

Graphic display of information is critical to the understanding of current and proposed conditions in the neighborhood. The final maps contained in Appendix II were produced by Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) staff under the direction of planning staff. Many thanks go to Chris Thomas for his patience and expertise.

### DATA COLLECTION

As part of the planning process, a neighborhood profile was created based on demographics, public safety statistics, infrastructure inventory, and housing data collected by the Planning staff.

Data sources for this information included: 1990 Census of Population and Housing; 1967 Analysis of Hickory's Neighborhoods; Catawba County Real Property Master Index Listings; Hickory-Newton-Conover Urban Area Transportation Plan (1997); Hickory, North Carolina Major Thoroughfare Plan (1962); and field surveys conducted by staff, as well as information provided by City departments and other resource people who either spoke to the Plan-

ning Committee during the course of the planning process or otherwise provided pertinent data.

Most of the information contained in the Plan is up-to-date through April 2000.

The West Hickory/Westmont Planning Committee evaluated all the data presented throughout the process, assessed the implications for their neighborhood, and set forth a set of strategies designed to involve, educate, motivate and most importantly, enhance the neighborhood.

The historical development of West Hickory/Westmont was researched and compiled by Planning Staff and West Hickory/Westmont resident Martha Watts. Sources included: *The Catawbans: Crafters of a North Carolina County* by Dr. Gary R. Freeze; *From Tavern to Town* by Kirk F. Mohny and Laura A.W. Phillips; *The Heritage of Catawba County, North Carolina, Volume I* by Lucille M. Fullbright, Editor; Hickory City Directory of 1925; and Sanborn Insurance Maps 1925-1931.

A variety of newspaper articles from the Hickory Daily Record 1963, 1965, 1968, 1970, 1972; Hickory Daily Record – Service League Edition 1962; Hickory News 1972, 1983; and Charlotte Observer 1980 were consulted for information.

Some of the information was gathered from interviews with the following persons: Michael Pierce Sr., Adrian Frye, William Austin, Jack Beck, Jean and Jerry Bumgarner. Historical photographs were provided by Michael Pierce Sr., Judy Sigmon and Martha Watts.

A special appreciation is expressed to the family of Mr. and Mrs. Joe C. White for allowing the use of Mr. White's information regarding Westmont Elementary School. Mr. White was principal of Westmont from 1946 to 1958 at

which time he became the first principal of Grandview Middle School. Mr. White's son, Joe Mack White graciously provided access to some of the photographs contained in this plan.

#### **PLAN PREPARATION AND REVIEW/ADOPTION**

The final stage of the planning process is review and adoption. Planning Department staff prepared a draft for the Planning Committee to review during the month of May 2000. After receiving the residents' comments plus comments from City staff and other agencies in June, the draft Plan will be taken before the Hickory Regional Planning Commission on June 28 for their review and recommendation. A final draft of the Plan will be presented to City Council for their consideration on July 18, 2000. This Plan, when adopted, will supplement the *Hickory by Choice* Land Development Plan adopted in 1999. The ordinances designed to implement *Hickory by Choice* were being developed concurrently with this planning process and may not be complete prior to the adoption of the West Hickory/Westmont Plan.

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan represents an intensive long-range planning effort, which took nine months to complete. The Plan includes written recommendations of strategies, actions and programs that should be taken or developed to protect and/or improve the neighborhood. Where possible, the costs associated with each recommendation are estimated. Responsibility for implementation of the recommendation or strategies is assigned and a time frame for completing the task is set.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

### *Historical Development of West Hickory/Westmont*

The area now known as West Hickory/Westmont was first known as Berryville. The town was named for its first mayor, Henderson Pickney Berry. Berryville was incorporated on March 12, 1895. Mr. Berry and J.D. Beck, F.S. Miller, and J.M. Maynard served as the first Aldermen.

The town's charter was amended on February 28, 1899 by striking out Berryville and inserting West Hickory thus becoming known as the Town of West Hickory.

Additional mayors who served, listed alphabetically, include Horace A. Abee, William P. Austin, Sr., George T. Barger, Charles E. Cole, A. Johnson Drum, Q.A. Hendrick, Forest B. Hicks, F.S. Klutz, Horn McLemons, Frank S. Miller, Horace Rector, and James M. Walker.

An article written in March 1895 in the Hickory Press and Carolinian stated "Berryville, Catawba County, adjoining Hickory on the west, has been incorporated and although a very weak gosling in comparison to this city, she is now our competitor for municipal honors. What shall the harvest be?"

In 1931, some 36 years later, the Town of West Hickory was annexed and became a part of the City of Hickory. West Hickory had a population of 1,860, one mile of paved streets and electric streetlights. Compared this to Hickory proper with a population of 7,500, 40 miles of paved streets.

### *Government and Utilities*

West Hickory had a post office, a city hall, and a jail. All of these were located in a small building across from Westmont School and beside of the Ward/Bumgarner house, east of the tennis courts on what used to be known as Eleventh Avenue, today we know it as Main Avenue Drive NW.

The jail had only two or three cells. One of the earlier jailers was W.D. Bostain, Sr. (Dave Bostain) who also ran a dairy farm and later worked at the Piedmont Wagon Company.

West Hickory's water supply came from the Henry's Fork part of the Henry River and was pumped to the filter plant located where the Fire Station #3 currently sits on Second Avenue NW and Eleventh Street NW. In 1904, the city constructed a public water and sewer facility, and the water was also pumped from the Catawba River. There were two sewer disposal areas. One was located off Seventeenth Street NW, close to the Southern Furniture Company, and the other was behind Blackwelder Oil Company and Merchants Distributors, Inc. (MDI).

Sometime between 1925 and 1931, a large black standpipe was constructed behind the Ward/Bumgarner home on Main Avenue Drive NW on land sold to West Hickory by Mrs. Susan Whitener Ward. This was the water reservoir for this area for many years and could be seen for miles around. In the later years, it would be painted in an orange and white checkerboard pattern. Due to its deterioration, it was taken down in the early 1980s.

### *The Rock Corner Building*

The Rock Corner building, a familiar landmark for West Hickory, has been home to

many different stores. Located at 1406 First Avenue SW, the first use of the unique building was a mercantile store owned and run by Pickney Berry, the first Mayor of West Hickory. Since then many stores, including The Carolina Grocery and Yoder Grocery, have also occupied this landmark.



*The Rock Corner is a familiar landmark in the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood.*

Other stores in the typical storefront block were Simon's and Smith Grocery, Shirley's Grocery, and Phelp's Store. The latter were sausage and liver mush makers. They would purchase hogs from local farmers and make their products, then deliver them to regular customers' homes. One of the employees of the store, Floyd Huffman, bought the sausage part of the store, and this purchase was the beginning of the Huffman Sausage Company. The Wagner Furniture store was also in the block, between a dime store and Hickman's Hardware, the latter of which closed in 1993. Long-time residents remember Miller's Grocery and Berry's Grocery as being a part of the West Hickory commercial center.

The Rock Corner is the first in a string of commercial buildings typical of construction from the 1910s through the 1930s. The buildings range in height from one to three stories, with the majority being two stories. Fire destroyed the buildings in the middle which were later demolished, leaving a gap in the storefronts. On

the east side of the Rock Corner were a dry cleaners, a restaurant, a barber shop, and a shoe shop. Mr. Lee Seitz was the proprietor of the shoe shop. Across the street was Zeb Biggerstaff's gas station and sandwich shop.

### ***Well-Known Stores***

There were other well-known grocery stores in the West Hickory/Westmont area. Mr. W.P. Austin, Sr. opened his first store in 1929 in a small building across the street from Westmont School on Eleventh Avenue (Main Avenue Drive NW). The store was originally run by Mr. Huffman, who operated this store for about three years before moving to the old Ed Hammond store, located on the corner across from West Hickory Baptist Church on Twenty-third Street (today known as Twelfth Street NW).

Mr. Austin was a meat cutter and his wife and children all worked in the store. Back then, groceries were delivered all over the area if requested. Austin's store operated until 1943, at which time Mr. Austin retired from managing the store and sold it to Bill Hayes. Mr. Austin did not retire from working, however, but instead took a job as a meat cutter for Bob Martin's store in downtown Hickory. After World War II was over, his three sons William Jr., Waitzel and Brice opened the Austin Brothers Grocery Store on First Avenue SW. The store was located where Del's Dry Cleaners is now and was previously Frank Hammonds' Grocery store.

The family was well known in West Hickory, and as business grew, more space was needed. The store was moved to Second Avenue NW. Austin Store closed around 1957. Bill Hayes operated the old store that he bought from Mr. Austin across from the church until it burned down and he moved to the Rock Corner Building. He was there



for two years and then the store moved to its final location on First Avenue SW and Eleventh Street SW in 1951. The Hayes Supermarket is no longer in operation. All of the stores that have been mentioned were within walking distances of most residents in the West Hickory area.

### ***Piedmont Wagon Company (1880)***

In 1880, George Bonniwell and A.L. Ramseur started a small business that later emerged as one of the largest enterprises in our area. Known as the Piedmont Wagon Company, the first shop was located at Ramseur's Mill on the Catawba River. Having outgrown this site in a short time, the plant was moved to its present site, and with more production business growing quite rapidly, the plant expanded to thirty acres of land with the latest and most improved machinery around.

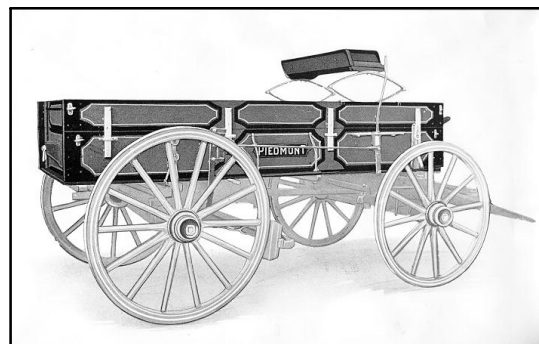
The land was located at the intersection of the Western North Carolina Railroad and the Chester and Lenoir Narrow Gauge Railroad (later known as the Carolina and Northwestern Railroad). The present-day building is located on a slight knoll in the angle formed by the two sets of railroad tracks. The location was thus ideal for the growth of the business. As the company prospered, its physical plant, spread over the thirteen acres, increased in size. The earliest buildings were mostly frame, including a large woodworking shop, an iron storage building, several warehouses, the body shop, the machine shop, and the office. As of 1885 only three buildings—the wheel shop, blacksmith forges, and one warehouse—were brick.

The Piedmont Wagon Company was incorporated in 1882, in the words of the articles of incorporation, "to promote manufacturing and the utilization of the natural and industrial resources in western North Carolina." Hickory, with an 1890 population of 2,850, was in the midst of the period of its greatest growth, a de-

velopment in which the Piedmont Wagon Company played a key role. The editor of *the Press and Carolinian* boasted that the town had three of the best educational institutions in the South, the first post office in the state, the finest opera house in the South, the South's finest modern-style hotel, and "one of the largest wagon factories in the country." The work force at the Piedmont Wagon Company, made up in large part of loyal, long-time employees, grew steadily over the years. The operation began with only four or five workers at Ramseur's place on Horseford Shoals. By 1885 that number had grown to seventy-five, and by 1890 it had increased to one hundred.

Orders came in from local people at first but soon the products manufactured became so widely in demand that the company had to put in electric lights so employees could work at night in order to keep up with the orders that were pouring in from everywhere.

The first wagon had red gears and a green body. Mrs. Bonniwell gave the wagon its trade name "Piedmont" in 1882, which was painted on the finished product. Thus "Piedmont" became the name of thousands upon thousands of wagons to follow.



*The Piedmont Wagon Company was one of the largest wagon manufacturers in the 1890s.*

Shortly after moving the wagon plant to Hickory, Mr. Bonniwell sold his interest in the company and organized the Hickory

Cooperative Association, a wood-working plant that made doors, sashes, blinds, inside trim, and similar items. The industry was discontinued later and converted into a corporation. The name was changed to the Hickory Manufacturing Company. When Mr. Bonniwell sold the plant in 1883, the majority of the stock was bought by W.B. Menzies and K.C. Menzies.

On March 4, 1885, the first of what would be numerous fires over the years struck the plant. The drying houses, frame structures on the west side of the lot, burned on that date. For protection from fire, subsequent frame buildings were constructed with brick dividing walls. Improvements were made to the plant annually during the 1890s and the two following decades. A fifty thousand-gallon reservoir, housed in a raised tank, was by 1907 replaced by a four hundred thousand-gallon brick and cement reservoir. A spur line of the railroad track was placed through the middle of the lot around 1915. Several freestanding structures, including the present-day building, were connected by additions.

The Piedmont Wagon Company underwent numerous ownership changes in the twentieth century. The first of these came around 1910 when the plant was sold to a group of New York investors. In the following year the name of the operation was changed to the Piedmont Wagon and Manufacturing Company. Through these changes G. H. Geitner remained as superintendent of the plant, a position he held until 1918. In 1924 the company was sold for \$300,000 to Daniel E. Rhyne, a prominent Lincoln citizen and benefactor of Lenoir-Rhyne College. Rhyne had been a major investor in the operation even before he bought the company outright. The Rhyne family sold the company to Henry Leonard in the 1940s, about the time production ground to a halt. Due to the invention of the automobile and the mechanization of farm implements, the wagon company began to

decline and finally in the Piedmont Wagon Company had to close its doors.

After long-term financial difficulties, the property was placed at auction in November 1958. Interest in the sale was so great that it was broadcast over a local radio station. The Hickory Development Corporation bought the property for \$60,000 with the intention of using it for new industrial and business sites. Prior to the sale, in February 1958, a fire had caused an estimated \$100,000 damage to the company's physical plant, leaving only the one building standing. Fires in May 1961 and October 1977 also did minor damage to the remaining structure. Although the building has suffered somewhat from deterioration and vandalism in recent years, it remains basically sound.

It is a two-and-one-half-story brick structure with a basement partially above ground, laid in five-to-one common bond. Doors and windows alike have segmental-arched heads with slightly projecting hood molds as well as stone sills. All window openings and some door openings, however, were bricked-in during the late 1970s. Entrances which do remain functional have modern replacement doors. The remaining building is covered by a gable roof which forms a hip at the southwest corner where the two arms of the L meet. Corbelled parapets are found on east and north gable ends, and a parapeted fire wall projects from the roof on the west side of the building. Projecting from the roof ridge are several monitor-like ventilators, once enclosed with glass windows but now boarded-up.

Until the 1970s a loading dock ran the length of the south side the longest side-of the building. Its shed roof was supported by large chamfered wood braces. Now only the vertical bracing members which rest on

small corbelled supports remain. The interior of the building consists of large open spaces with brick walls, wooden floors, and rows of heavy wood posts with chamfered comers and bracket-like caps which support the large wood ceiling joists.



*The Piedmont Wagon building is now used for storage by a hosiery mill.*

The remaining Piedmont Wagon building at 1020 Main Avenue NW is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

### ***Ivey Cotton Mill (1903)***

With the help of A.A. Shuford, George Ivey organized and built the Ivey Cotton Mill between the railroad and First Avenue SW. The building is still standing although it is no longer used for weaving cotton. The building now houses S & W Chemical Company.

While the mill was in operation, a whole community built up around it. This area was called the “Mill Hill.” Many small homes were built for the workers and their families to live in. A park was sited for the residents with a pavilion for picnics and gatherings. The City of Hickory now operates this park as West Hickory Park.

Since Ivey Weavers closed its doors, most of the homes have been torn down and the families have scattered to find work elsewhere. The once-close-knit community is no more.

### ***Southern Desk Company (1908)***

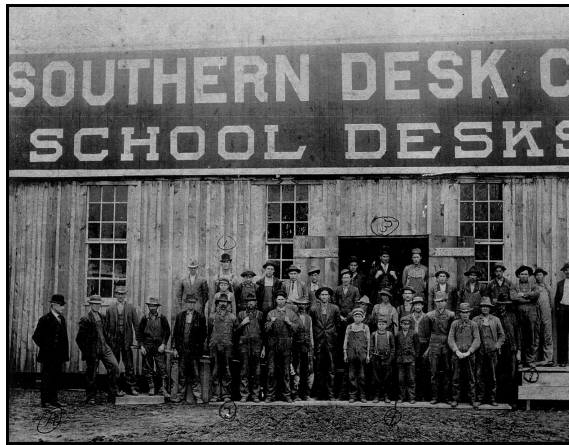
George Ivey invented many mechanical devices for use in mills; some were patented. One of these, a lug strap used in cotton mills, was invented in 1908 and was the beginning of the Southern Desk Company.

Since there was no factory in the state that could manufacture this device, it was necessary to build a 40 by 60-foot facility. It was called the “Ivey and Hice” or “Picker Stick” shop. The name “Southern Desk Company” was adopted in 1911 when the founder decided to begin making school desks. Wagon wheels and toys were manufactured for a while. Church furniture, stadium seats, hotel-motel and office lines were added to the line of manufactured goods.

In 1952, George Ivey died and his son Leon S. Ivey became president of the company.

In 1961, the company merged with Drexel Enterprises Inc. In 1962, a new plant in Hildebran was opened. In 1968, Drexel was acquired by Champion Paper-US Plywood Company. The West Hickory plant closed in the 1970s.

Working at Southern Desk was almost a tradition in some families. One father and his sons had a combined 131 years with the company. Many other individuals had 20, 30, or more years of continuous service with the firm.



*George Ivey, standing on the far left, poses with employees in this undated photo.*

The old Southern Desk building still stands, looking very tired. The families, still left in the neighborhood, have only fond memories of a once bustling factory.

### ***Hickory Foundry and Machine Shop (1918)***

Hickory Foundry and Machine Shop was founded by George F. Ivey, T.W. Clay, and W.L. Newton in 1918.

In 1921, all stock was purchased by W.W. Burns, and in 1946 his son, Charles W. Burns, became the owner. Built in 1919, the building located at 20 Tenth Street SW, is a one-story brick industrial structure with parapeted façade and central double-leaf entrance flanked by pairs of sash windows.

A new building was built in 1989 across the street from the old Hickory Foundry and Machine Shop on Tenth Street SW. The company designs and makes equipment for hosiery and textile manufacturers.

### ***Cox Manufacturing Company (1934)***

Cox Manufacturing Company fabricates boudoir chairs and chaise lounges. It was founded by William Cox in 1934. In 1952, it was purchased by Miss Nellie Burns, Miss Frankie Burns, and E.B. Forester. The firm grew from 10,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet with approximately 85 employees by 1962.

### ***Del-Mark Inc. (1947)***

Del-Mark Inc. got its start when J.J. Dell and W. B. Walker, Jr. saw an opportunity in the hosiery transfer business. The two men incorporated Del-Mark on May 20, 1947 gambling that the hosiery business in Hickory would continue to flourish.

Del-Mark Inc. specializes in the dry transfer of product descriptions and logos onto the soles or welts of hosiery products. As noted by the Hickory Daily Record in 1962, Del-Mark is "a well-rounded company, that maintains a full-time engraving department; a department for the manufacture of inks used in the transfer printing operation."

In 1969, a new production facility was built behind the original on that faced 14<sup>th</sup> Street SW. Today, Del-Mark is located on Main Avenue SW and employs sixteen people.

### **RECORDED HISTORIC STRUCTURES**

In 1979, the City of Hickory commissioned a citywide survey of historic properties. The consultant recorded ten structures or com-

mercial buildings of historical interest in the West Hickory/Westmont area.

### *Houck's Chapel (1888)*

Population growth in Catawba County during the late nineteenth century brought a proliferation of new churches established to serve the numerous emerging communities. From 1870 to 1900 more than fifty new churches were built, and Methodism enjoyed a large share of the growth. Methodists, still feeling the energetic strength generated by the Great Revival of antebellum days, constructed twenty-three new churches during the period.

One of these was Houck's Chapel, located at what was then about two miles northwest of Hickory. Erected in 1888, it testifies to the enduring strength of Methodist evangelism and to the zealous devotion of one minister to carry out his missionary commitment.

The founding of Houck's Chapel was primarily through the efforts of the Reverend William Kelly Houck (1855-1950), a native of Caldwell County. Houck moved to Morganton in 1887, and it was there that he was licensed as a Methodist minister. He supplemented his ministerial income by working as a mortician, peace officer, fire chief, and carpenter. He also founded Oak Forest School in Morganton.

In 1887, the same year he received his license, Houck held a revival near Hickory that lasted for ten days. The crowd attending proved too large for the schoolhouse where services were scheduled, so an arbor was hastily constructed. The revival was held on the land of J. Monroe Frye, and the next year Frye permitted construction of a frame chapel near the arbor. The structure was named Houck's Chapel in honor of the minister whose effort had inspired its construction.

In 1892 Monroe Frye transferred the acre on which the chapel stands to the trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The land was donated with two contingents: that it would be used exclusively for preaching the gospel and that the church would be open to the white congregations of all Protestant faiths when not in use by the Methodists. Failure to observe the restrictions would result in the land reverting to Frye or his heirs. A cemetery was laid out to complement the chapel about the time the latter was constructed. The oldest tombstone dates from 1895, and, interestingly, only one grave is marked with the Houck name. The original cemetery extends around the sides and rear of the building.

The Reverend W. K. Houck had been the strength behind the small congregation and the force that bound it together. Though in existence at the time of Houck's death, the congregation seems to have dissolved shortly afterwards. The lure of larger and wealthier Methodist churches in Hickory and better transportation facilities pulled the members away from the old chapel. True to the restrictions of the original deed, the structure has continued in religious service. For several years it housed Houck's Chapel Assembly of God and then a Baptist congregation.

Houck's Chapel is a simple frame church typical of many built in piedmont North Carolina during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is a small, rectangular building—two bays wide and four deep with a stone pier foundation, German siding, and a sheet-metal-covered gable roof with overhanging eaves and exposed rafter ends. A belfry projects from the north end of the roof, with wood-louvered ventilators on the four sides, a pyramidal roof, and a needle-like spire.

Although currently there is only one modern double-leaf entrance on the north side of the church, originally there were two sets of double-leaf, four-panel doors with four-light transoms. The easternmost of these entrances remains intact, exposed on the interior within the added storage rooms but hidden on the exterior by replacement German siding. The transom of the westernmost entrance also remains. All windows have four-over-four sash with plain surrounds, a molded drip ledge above the lintel, and louvered-wood shutters.

The interior of Houck's Chapel originally consisted of one large room. Around 1975 the interior was remodeled, creating three small rooms across the north end for an office, a storage room, and a bathroom; Sunday School rooms in the southeast and southwest corners; and a raised pulpit area in the center of the south end, separated from the sanctuary by a low segmental arch. The walls were originally sheathed in beaded boards but have been covered by sheet rock except in the classrooms and north end rooms. The beaded board ceiling remains exposed. The Gothic-inspired pews with cut-out trefoil design and the pulpit with its lancet arches, sawn brackets, and scalloped trim may be original.

A cemetery spreads outward from Houck's Chapel on east, south, and west sides. A few stones date from the 1890s and a few from the period between 1900 and 1915. More date from the 1920s and 1930s, but most appear to date from the last fifty years. The mid-twentieth-century, city-operated Fairview Cemetery adjoins Houck's Chapel Cemetery.

The Christian Missionary Baptist Church meets in the building on occasion but not regularly due to their itinerant nature. Houck's Chapel is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

### ***Wood Water Tower***

The 1979 inventory recorded a wooden water tower located at Sixteenth Street SW and Fifth Avenue SW. No further information is available regarding the tower except that it is no longer in existence. It was an unusual industrial water tower constructed of wood and held together by metal bands. It had a metal-sheathed conical roof. By all indications, the tower was located where Spectrum Dyed Yarn plant now is or in West Hickory Park ballfield.

### ***Sherrill House (1899)***

The Sherrill House located at 315 Eleventh Street SW is a one-and one-half story dwelling with a weather-boarded first story, a wood-shingled upper story a gambrel roof which faces the street, a recessed entrance, and a shed-roofed front porch with turned posts, sawn-work brackets and a turned balustrade.

## **HISTORY OF THE CHURCHES**

### ***Westview Methodist Church (1905)***

The first Methodist church in Hickory was called the West Hickory Methodist Church. The first year of worship was held in a one-room frame building purchased from the First Baptist Church in Hickory. It was located at the corner of what was then Tenth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. This structure was torn down and the congregation moved to a lot given by Pinkney Berry (a charter member of the church) on the west side of the old Twenty-fourth Street behind the Rock Corner. This building was used until 1929. The Church moved to the present site on First Avenue and Thirteenth Street SW when new building was constructed.

### ***West Hickory Baptist Church (1907)***

West Hickory Baptist Church traces its origin to a mission started by First Baptist Church of Hickory in 1894 under the leadership of Rev. C. S. Caldwell. Services were held in homes initially. When the Sunday school was organized, it met in a house rented for that purpose. Rev. C. S. Caldwell led the First Baptist Church to buy the present church property and to erect a chapel. The chapel was built at a cost of \$230 and was dedicated Nov. 11, 1900. At that time the address was Burke and Caldwell Streets.

On Feb. 24, 1907, the West Hickory Baptist Church was organized with eighteen charter members. In 1908 the membership of the church was listed at 42, with 85 enrolled in the Sunday school. In 1911, the church property was valued at \$500.00 and the pastor's salary was \$100.00 annually.

On August 21, 1947 the first "The Church Bell," the weekly news bulletin, was printed and sent out to each family of the church. It cost one cent to mail in 1949. The bulletin still goes out weekly.

In 1948, the L. E. Abernathy property at 44 12<sup>th</sup> Street, NW was purchased. The youth building was erected in 1949, and the adult building in 1950-51. The church purchased the front parking lot in 1951, and the Fox property adjacent to the church in 1954.

The sanctuary was completed in January 1954. The first service was held in the new sanctuary on January 23, 1954, with 700 people present.

On September 4, 1955, dedication and cornerstone laying took place. The Colonial style sanctuary was located at the corner of Twelfth Street and Main Avenue Drive, NW. The entire structure contained over 37,000 square feet of

floor space. All three units were designed by Hickory architect D. Carroll Abee. Elmore Construction Company constructed the church building, while the two education units were built under the direction of the late Z. E. Barger.

The sanctuary was designed to be bright and cheery, and features all indirect or concealed lighting. Cork and asphalt tile covered the floor and red and white mahogany pews, built by Southern Desk Company of Hickory, brighten still further the effect.

Southern Church Furniture Company of Hickory made the pulpit furniture. Link-Hyder Iron Works of Hickory did the wrought iron work. Member Andrew John Link built the present baptistery. It is made from steel plate according to code and is skid proof. The organ was Hammond and the piano was a Baldwin Hamilton.

Special glass, hand-blown in Germany, was used in all windows in the sanctuary. Although without color, the glass is slightly opaque and it cuts down on sunlight by diffusing it.

In 1973, the day care center was started for ages 2-5. In January 1996 the final phase of the renovation program began with the sanctuary.

### ***First Church of God (1908)***

The First Church of God had its beginnings in 1908 when several families from the South Mountains of Burke County moved to Hickory. The first church meetings were held in various homes. In 1914, the first church building was completed. It was 30 by 50-foot structure facing north on the present site. State camp meetings were headquartered at this church in Hickory,

and it soon was necessary to build other facilities for these functions.

An L-shaped, two-story building was constructed with kitchen, dining, and sleeping areas. Soon, this building became inadequate and was replaced in 1918 with a tabernacle, which was used until 1941. In 1928, classrooms were built. In 1933 the present order of service, with worship first followed by Sunday School, was instituted. In 1940, Camp Sain was established. This 5.38 acre retreat located southwest of Hickory was given by Sanford and Zona Sain.

In 1929 a new sanctuary was completed. This sanctuary served the congregation until 1954 when plans to expand and build a new sanctuary took place. In 1979, the congregation put in service a new educational facility. The Church of God has grown from a handful of people meeting in a home to more than 600 persons through fellowship and outreach programs.

### ***Bethany Lutheran Church (1910)***

As early as 1908, a small, dedicated group of thirty-six Lutherans were meeting for Sunday school in the old West Hickory School building. A survey was taken of those Lutherans in the West Hickory area and a list compiled of those interested in organizing a church. Under the direction of a Dr. W.A. Deaton, field Missionary for the Lutheran Church, Bethany was founded on August 7, 1910. Application was made for membership in the Tennessee Synod, and on April 11, 1911 the congregation was recognized by the Synod.

The first superintendent was J.T. Leonard and Lee L. Frye was the first secretary and treasurer. Mrs. Lee L. Frye taught the ladies' adult class while Mr. Leonard taught the men's. Plans were made to purchase a building site for the church and a lot behind Westmont School was purchased. However, Mr. J. M. Frye offered to donate the land on which the present

church now stands on the corner of Main Avenue Drive and Seventeenth Street NW. The congregation graciously accepted the offer. On this site, a small 32' x 52' wooden building was constructed. Dr. Deaton was Pastor until 1925, during which the Women's Missionary Society and the Lutheran League were organized.

In November 1925, the ladies of the congregation raised funds for bricks. In 1926, additional property was purchased from Lewis Frye and additions and improvements were made to the church. The building was moved closer to the parsonage, and the exterior was veneered with brick. The new Sunday school rooms were added behind the Chancel and in the basement. In 1923, Rev. Samuel L. Sox became Pastor and served until 1940 when Rev. G. Dwight Conrad was called. During his twenty-five years of service the church saw much growth.

In 1949, a new educational building was erected and the chancel was remodeled and refurbished. The organ was re-built and new carpet, lighting, and heating were installed.

In 1958, with future development in mind, the church purchased a lot on the corner of Second Avenue NW and Seventeenth Street NW. Additional property was bought on Seventeenth Street and First Avenue NW in 1960. Work began on the facilities in 1961. On November 4, 1962, a consecration service was held for the "New Bethany Lutheran Church."

Bethany was included in the citywide historic resources inventory, which was completed in 1979. While the 1929 brick, Gothic Revival styled building is no longer standing, the church is historically significant to the development of the West Hickory/Westmont area.





*The 1929 Bethany Lutheran Church featured lancet-arched doors and windows, parapeted gables, and a corner tower with a crenellated cornice.*

## **COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

### ***Westmont School (1922)***

Westmont School was a fine brick building constructed in 1922 and located on the corner of Main Avenue Drive and Fourteenth Street NW. Other names for the school over the years were West Hickory Graded School and the West Hickory High School.

For many years before, the students held their classes in different buildings. The first was located east on Main Avenue NW toward West Hickory Baptist Church. It is thought to be the old Havnear Glove Building which was close to the Hammond (later Austin) grocery store. Students also attended classes in a building that would later become the Hickory Shoe Lace Factory.

Trustees for Westmont were John R. Pierce, E.W. Cody, E.R. Burns, Charles O. Deal and J. Lee Brown, with R.H. Shuford serving as Attorney. Cline and Marlow were the builders. This information was taken from the cornerstone of the building, which serves as the only remaining artifact of the school. It can be found at the base of a brick and cement bench on the west side of the existing gymnasium. Westmont

school was torn down in the early 1980s to the best of everyone's recollection.

Enrollment at West Hickory/Westmont School was 373 pupils in 1949, slightly less than 200 pupils in 1955, 266 pupils in 1962, 203 pupils in 1968 and 199 pupils in 1970.

Many West Hickory residents have special memories of attending school at Westmont. There is a feeling that this area suffered a great loss when the elementary school was closed.

## **RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**

### ***West Hickory Park***

In 1956, West Hickory Park became the first recreational park operated by the City. The five-acre park contains a small swimming pool named after George F. Ivey, who was the founder of Ivey Mills and later president of the Southern Desk Company. Ivey is hailed as one of Hickory's most prominent industrialists and civic leaders.



*West Hickory Park was the first park operated by the City in 1956.*

The park also has a lighted youth softball field, a half court basketball court, playground equipment, benches, grills and one picnic table. Since this is considered an active park it closes at 11 p.m.

The 1996 Parks and Recreation Master Plan reports that George Ivey pool attracted on average twenty-seven people per day during the summer season and recommended closing the pool due to maintenance issues and inefficient operations. To date, the City Council and the Parks and Recreation Commission have elected not to close the pool despite the consultant's recommendation.

### ***Westmont Senior Center and Gymnasium***

The main Westmont school building was demolished some time in the early 1970's. Four remaining classrooms and the gymnasium were turned over the Parks and Recreation Department in 1976.

The gymnasium that was built in 1950 as a combination auditorium and school gym continues to be used in such a manner. Citywide there is a lack of adequate indoor facilities to accommodate the demand for basketball courts, which makes Westmont gym a popular place for players from other neighborhoods.

The former classrooms became the Westmont Senior Center. Built in 1959, the 5,217 square foot facility contains a kitchen, billiard tables, tables for card games and open space that is used for dance classes, crafts and other programs targeted toward the elderly.



*Westmont Senior Center stays busy with a variety of programs and activities.*

The three acres surrounding center and the gym has horseshoe pits, picnic tables, a grill, shuffle-

board courts, one basketball court and playground equipment.

The two tennis courts across the street from the Westmont Senior Center were built with Community Development Block Grant funds in the late 70's.

The facilities are supervised Tuesday through Friday, 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

### **ECONOMIC GROWTH INFLUENCES**

The West Hickory/Westmont community was its own town until it was annexed by the city of Hickory in 1931. Undoubtedly, the most important economic growth influence in the early development of this community was the arrival of the railroad around 1860. Industries such as Piedmont Wagon, Southern Desk and Ivey Weavers Mill relied on easy access to the railroad to receive raw materials and ship their finished products nationwide. More industries and small businesses sprang up along the railroad and rapidly began expanding around the perimeter of the area.

Major US highways have had the most significant influence on the development of West Hickory/Westmont in the last thirty years. US 321 was, and continues to be, the primary link to Caldwell County and the mountains to the north.

As late as 1968, Interstate 40 did not exist through Hickory. Opportunities for more commercial and industrial development were realized when the Interstate was finally completed through Hickory in 1975.

The 1962 Hickory Transportation plan shows the US 321 extension to I-40 routed through what is today known as Twelfth Street Drive SW. Until the extension was

completed in the early 80's, US 321 met with Highway 64/70 on what is known today as Thirteenth Street SW and continued east toward the county seat of Newton.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS - 1967**

According to the 1967 study entitled "An Analysis of Hickory's Neighborhoods", prepared for the Hickory Planning Commission by Eric Hill Associates, Inc. of Winston-Salem, West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood was a part of Study Areas 4, 5, 14 and 15.

The boundary of Study Area 15 is the only area that does not contain parts outside the recognized boundaries of the West Hickory/Westmont. Through tedious examination of the maps and data, historical information pertinent to only the defined West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood can be derived and is useful in describing the conditions as they were in 1967.

Area 4 was comprised of the area west of US 321, south of Ninth Avenue to Main Avenue Drive NW. The consultants note that most of the commercial and industrial uses front US 321 and do not have a detrimental or blighting influences on the residences. The consultants did indicate that in areas where residences were in industrial zones, the houses were in substandard conditions. Future expansion of the industrial area should remedy the situation, the consultants predicted, and indeed it has.

They noted that there were several residences located on Main Avenue Drive NW that fronted directly into an industrial zone. Ideally, the consultants note that this arrangement should not exist although sometimes it is inevitable. One solution they offered was to provide a screen of some kind, either a mass planting or other material, to buffer the ill effects of industrial activity. Astute as they were, the consultant added

that requiring buffers was impossible to enforce if the owners are unwilling to cooperate.

Children in this area in 1967 attended Westmont School or Longview. The children had to cross heavily traveled roads and the railroad to reach the schools. Both schools, the consultants noted were on small lots and were overcrowded.

Study Area 5 comprised the area east of US 321, south to Second Avenue SW and east along the railroad. The consultants found it interesting that less than thirteen percent of the non-residential structures were substandard, while forty-seven percent of the residential structures were substandard. The character of the neighborhood could be determined by the fact that approximately five percent of the total population lives in the area, yet it contained nearly eleven percent of all substandard housing in Hickory in 1967.

Examination of the map reveals the majority of the dilapidated and deteriorating structures were residences mixed in with or adjacent to industrial properties. The consultants cite that mixed use plays a key note in the fact that nearly half of the residences are substandard.

The consultants concluded that it was very unlikely that if this area was left alone conditions would improve through private initiative and effort and would be restored to a sound, healthy neighborhood. Treatments such as vigorous code enforcement and rehabilitation projects that include "spot clearance" would be necessary to improve these conditions and eliminate the further spread of blight.

In the 1967 study, the consultants noted the need for additional park area despite the facilities offered at Westmont School.

Vacant land comprised the single largest category of land use in Study Area 14 the consultant notes; however, much of that land was reserved for US 321 and Interstate 40-interchange right-of-way. This area included Grandview Middle School and contains the residential area east of US 321, south of Second Avenue SW to Ninth Street SW and north of Highway 64/70.

At the time of the study, Grandview Middle School was a very modern school located on twenty-four acres. Eight of those acres were taken when the US 321 connection to I-40 was rerouted in the early 1980's to its current configuration. The steady growth of the southwest portion of the city would soon cause the need for additional facilities at the school, the consultants predicted.

The consultant asserted that in this study area the streets were poorly designed in relation to the land served. In almost all cases, the blocks were extremely deep, ranging in upwards of 800 feet, which resulted in wasted land or land-locked parcels. This phenomenon is still evident today. They also noted the number of unpaved roads.

The consultant determined that blight was most serious along Tenth Street SW, Eleventh Street SW, Twelfth Street SW and Third Avenue SW. Again they recommended this area for special treatment through code enforcement, rehabilitation and spot clearance.

Study Area 15 was only slightly in better shape than Study Area 14 in 1967. Area 15 covered from the Long View City limits east to US 321 and the industrial and residential area south of Highway 64/70.

The consultant noted that the blight in this area was far more significant in the residential areas and structures than in the commercial area.

Eleven residential structures and three commercial structures were considered dilapidated. Forty-nine residential structures and six commercial structures were rated deteriorating. The study attributes the blight to mixed land use.

More than one-fourth of all the structures located in the study area were listed as sub-standard; remaining uncontrolled these deteriorating structures could have a serious blighting effect upon the rest of the neighborhood. Again the consultants recommended that this area be given special attention through concentrated code enforcement, spot clearance and rehabilitation.

Overall, the deteriorating and dilapidated conditions that existed in West Hickory/Westmont in 1967 appeared to be equally distributed throughout the area and were related to land uses that are not compatible - not then, not now.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS - 1983**

The next comprehensive housing conditions survey was conducted by college interns in 1983. The students recognized the tremendous growth in commercial properties and the decline of residential structures. They surmised that the deterioration was probably due to deferred maintenance. The increase in declining housing stock lead the students to recommend encouragement of more commercialization or that serious measures be taken by private or public sectors for this area to stabilize.

The number of dilapidated properties had declined as most were removed in the years

between the two studies. They asserted that if more commercialization is allowed to take place, the issue of substandard housing will take care of itself. The students asserted that the area had more potential as a commercial/industrial district than as a residential neighborhood.

The 1983 study noted the decline of single-family dwellings and explained that houses were being replaced with duplexes and multi-family development. Density per acre increased substantially because a number of multi-family units were constructed between 1967 and 1983. Furthermore, where single-family homes once stood, mobile homes were moved into what had become trailer parks.

The construction of US 321 extension to I-40 had taken its toll by 1983. An estimated eighteen mostly deteriorated single-family dwellings were removed to make way for the highway. Road construction also cut-off several smaller streets and rerouted others thus exacerbating the neighborhood connectivity issue.

The students noted that vacant land was in short supply and was probably not suitable for residential development due to the proximity to major roads and industrial property. Examination of the maps reveals that some of the marginal vacant land in 1967 developed into mobile home parks by 1983.

In conclusion, the students questioned this neighborhood's ability to have any real homogeneity to it because of being divided by major thoroughfares.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

The initial step of this neighborhood planning process involved a comprehensive inventory and analysis of the area's existing conditions. The inventory provided a sound basis from which the Planning Committee could formulate strategies to address the neighborhood's needs.

The data collected included demographics, land use characteristics, current zoning, environmental characteristics, public infrastructure and facilities, structural conditions, trends in home-ownership, public safety, and traffic patterns and behavior.

This section describes and summarizes different concerns, trends and issues raised during the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood planning process, based on the perceptions of the Planning Committee and other concerned residents as well as planning staff.

### *Demographic Characteristics*

The demographic characteristics of West Hickory/Westmont have changed moderately over the years according to long-time residents. The US Census of Population and Housing information for 1990 was used to examine and describe the population in West Hickory/Westmont.

The 1990 Census indicated a total population of 2,119 residents. Today's population, however, exceeds 2,985 residents if the accepted formula of 2.5 persons per family in the Census tract is multiplied by the number of residential dwelling units in West Hickory/Westmont. There are a total of 1,194 single-family and multi-family dwelling units in the neighborhood.

Table 1 compares West Hickory/Westmont and the City of Hickory by race. The most noticeable characteristic of the Census data is that West Hickory/Westmont is fairly reflective of the demographics of the entire City.

According to 1990 Census data, only seven percent of the City's population reside in West Hickory/Westmont. Ninety-three percent of the residents in West Hickory/Westmont are white, which is slightly higher than the City's eighty-one percent. Six percent of the population in the neighborhood is black, while seventeen percent of the city's population is black.

Eight percent of the City's white population and two percent of the City's black population reside in West Hickory/Westmont according to the 1990 data. Hispanic and Asian residents represent nine percent and five percent of the population respectively.

**Table 1. 1990 CENSUS DATA BY RACE**

West Hickory/Westmont					
White	Black	Amer. Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Total
1,947	127	8	15	22	<b>2,119</b>
92%	6%	.3%	.7%	1%	7.5%
Hickory					
White	Black	Amer. Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Total
23,032	4,827	77	286	221	<b>28,443</b>
81.4%	17.0%	.3%	1%	.8%	100%

The 1990 Census does not reflect what empirically is known. The numbers of people of Asian and Hispanic origin have increased substantially over the past ten years. The strong economy and low unemployment rate in the Hickory Metro area has attracted more immigrants to the area. Many of these families have chosen to live in West Hickory/Westmont, presumably because of the affordability and availability of housing.

Table 2 shows the number of residents in West Hickory/Westmont and the City of Hickory who in 1990 were under age eighteen. The neighborhood closely compares to the City's percentage, with eight percent of

the City’s youth living in West Hickory/Westmont.

The neighborhood closely compares to the City’s percentage in terms of household size with the average being 2.4 persons per household citywide and 2.32 persons per household in West Hickory/Westmont. The data shows West Hickory/Westmont has a lower percentage of single parent households.

**Table 2. 1990 CENSUS DATA BY AGE AND SINGLE PARENT HOUSEHOLDS**

<b>West Hickory/Westmont</b>		
Under 18	Single Parent Household	
232	48	
8%	4%	

<b>Hickory</b>		
Under 18	Single Parent Household	
3,100	1,011	
11%	14%	

**SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS**

The neighborhood has evolved as perhaps one of the more ethnically diverse neighborhoods in Hickory. Review of Hickory City Schools enrollment records categorized by race and address supports that fact.

Enrollment records for 1999 indicate that only eight percent of all students in Hickory reside in West Hickory/Westmont. Students in West Hickory/Westmont attend four different elementary schools, Grandview Middle School and either of the City’s two high schools.

Table 3 represents the number and percentage of all students in Hickory public schools and those who reside in the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood by race and compares those numbers with the city as a whole.

West Hickory/Westmont elementary students represent ten percent of students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. West Hickory/Westmont youngsters attend Long View, Southwest or Oakwood Elementary. Seven percent of the total middle school student population are from West Hickory/Westmont. All of the neighborhood students in grades sixth through eighth attend Grandview Middle School. Five percent of the total number of high school students are from West Hickory/Westmont. These students attend Hickory or Catawba Valley High. Below is a table showing the racial breakdown of these students.

**Table 3. PERCENT OF ALL HICKORY STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS RESIDING IN WEST HICKORY/WESTMONT BY RACE 1999-2000**

<b>Hickory Students</b>						
Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Multi-Racial	Amer. Indian	Total
428	1147	283	2462	89	2	4411
10%	26%	6%	56%	2%	0.0005%	100%

<b>West Hickory/Westmont Students</b>						
Asian	Black	Hispanic	White	Multi-Racial	Amer. Indian	Total
86	97	35	123	18	2	361
24%	27%	10%	34%	5%	1%	100%

**Percent of Hickory Students Residing in West Hickory/Westmont**

	Elementary	Middle	High	Total
Hickory	2247	1031	1110	4388
West Hickory/Westmont	232	72	57	361
	10%	7%	5%	8%

**HOUSING VALUES AND INCOME**

The mean value of a home in West Hickory/Westmont in 1990 was \$50,606, \$16,694 less than the City’s average of \$67,300. This figure suggests that housing

is very affordable in this neighborhood. However, the data is ten years-old. Housing costs in Hickory have become the third most expensive in the state at \$279,000 average cost for a new home according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

According to the 1990 Census data, the mean contract rent in West Hickory/Westmont was \$368 compared to \$384, the citywide average. Again, this figure suggests affordability, yet the data is somewhat dated and must be considered accordingly.

Income information is not available at the Census block level; therefore an analysis of mean family income for West Hickory/Westmont could not be considered.

### ***Land Use Characteristics***

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood boundaries encompass approximately 731.88 acres or 1.14 square miles.

Review of the data shows that the area is densely developed and contains quite a variety of land uses.

While single family dwellings make up the greatest number of properties in the neighborhood, the predominate land use is commercial and industrial as Table 4 illustrates.

**Table 4. WEST HICKORY/WESTMONT  
LAND USE IN ACRES AND PERCENTAGE**

<b>Land Use</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Single Family	220.79	30.2%
Multi-Family	55.02	7.5%
Commercial	154.62	21.1%
Industrial	177.22	24.2%
Public	51.69	7.1%
Vacant	72.54	9.9%
<b>Total Acreage</b>	<b>731.88</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Residential pockets in West Hickory/Westmont are comprised of every housing option avail-

able. Single family homes, duplexes, multi-family apartments, and single and double-wide mobile homes. One asset for these areas is that the existence of older trees adds value to the homes in the neighborhood in a way new developments cannot offer.

There has been minimal growth in the new single-family housing market over the past thirty years in West Hickory/Westmont. According to Catawba County tax listings and field research, only fourteen new homes have been built since 1967.

Undeniably, most of the new construction has been multi-family units, commercial or installation of a double-wide mobile homes.

Through observation it is easy to see that the multi-family and duplex units do not share the same characteristics as the existing buildings. The duplexes lack porches and multiple apartments do not relate to the street like the existing housing. Proliferation of these buildings tends to diminish the character of the residential areas of the neighborhood.

There are 1,034 total properties in the neighborhood. Of the 472 single-family homes in West Hickory/Westmont, 205 are rental homes, or fifty-seven percent. There are a total of 1,194 housing units in West Hickory/Westmont. Nine hundred and ten of those 1,194 housing units are rental, equaling seventy-six percent of all housing.

Commercial development is concentrated along the major thoroughfares of US 321, Highway 70 SW, along the northern and southern one-way pairs and the Norfolk Southern Railroad. Residents consider being close to service-oriented businesses is an asset to the neighborhood.



The industrial development is along the major thoroughfares adjacent to commercial land uses for the most part. However, in West Hickory/Westmont perhaps more than any other neighborhood, industrial properties abut residential areas creating conflicts and undesirable conditions.

Homes in West Hickory/Westmont for the most part were built before zoning was in place so there was no way to control how things developed. The neighborhood developed at a time when people walked to work so close proximity to industries was not problematic as it is today.

The nine institutional properties in West Hickory/Westmont are Bethany Lutheran Church, Calvary Baptist Church, First Church of God, West Hickory/Westmont Baptist Church and Westview Methodist Church and Grandview Middle School. All of the churches own one or more vacant lots adjacent to the church, most of which are used for parking. Grandview Middle School totals approximately thirteen acres.

There are eighteen parcels totaling fifty-one acres in the area that are publicly owned or used for public utility purposes.

The public and semi-public land in the neighborhood is primarily owned and maintained by the City of Hickory. The Parks and Recreation Department maintains the neighborhood park known as West Hickory Park and Ivey Weaver Pool. The Westmont Senior Center and gymnasium provides park and activity space. Fire Station #3 and the Parks and Recreation Department's park maintenance facility occupy land that was once the city's public works operations center.

The Family Care Center, a local non-profit assistance agency, occupies a former city fire station building on First Avenue SW.

Catawba County operates the West Hickory Senior Center on Seventeenth Street SW which is adjacent to the West Hickory Senior Apartments that are operated and maintained by the Hickory Public Housing Authority.

Duke Energy Corporation operates a power substation between Second and Third Avenues SW close to US 321.

There are 155 vacant lots in the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood, which equals fifteen percent of all properties or slightly less than ten percent of the total land area. Most of these vacant lots are in the residential portion of the neighborhood, but are located adjacent to undeveloped street right-of-ways making lack of accessibility the most likely reason they are not developed. Topography also plays a role in the land development equation.

The *Existing Land Use* map illustrates the current land uses in West Hickory/Westmont and can be referenced in Appendix II - Map I.

### ***Current Zoning and Hickory by Choice***

Zoning regulations and classifications are adopted to implement the City's long range development plan. In essence, the zoning is an indication of how the city thinks development will evolve over time. West Hickory/Westmont's current zoning was put into place after adoption of the 1986 Land Development Plan.

In 1998, the City undertook an ambitious overhaul of its land use and transportation plan. The plan and process became known as Hickory by Choice implying that people choose to live and do business in Hickory because of the quality of life offered here.

The ordinances and codes that result from this process will be different from those in the past.

Analysis of the existing conditions provides some insight into the land use conflicts that have arisen over the years. Examination of the zoning map quickly shows an area with a well-established development pattern that is difficult to change. How the roads and railroad tracks bisect the neighborhood makes it difficult to reverse the development that has occurred over the years.

The *Zoning* map found in Appendix II - Map II illustrates the current zoning in West Hickory/Westmont.

Table 5 provides an overview of how land in West Hickory/Westmont is zoned and how many acres each zoning category comprises. Description of each of the categories follows, and illustrates the diversity of permitted land uses in the area.

**TABLE 5. WEST HICKORY/WESTMONT ZONING IN ACRES AND PERCENTAGES**

Zoning	Acres	Percent	
C-4	5.123	0.70%	Total Commercial = 172.521 or 23.5%
C-5	167.398	22.81%	
ED	84.972	11.58%	Total Residential = 306.554 or 41.76 %
I	119.105	16.23%	
OI-1	37.384	5.09%	
PD-SC(C)	13.496	1.84%	
PD-H-R-6	13.793	1.88%	
PD-MHP	5.869	0.80%	
R-2	13.874	1.89%	
R-5	56.958	7.76%	
R-6	216.06	29.43%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>734.032</b>	<b>100%</b>	

### **COMMERCIAL**

The major roads and railroad provide the types of transportation access commercial and industrial developers seek. So it is no surprise that commercial zoning makes up twenty-three and a half percent of all the area, and industrial sixteen percent. Approximately 428 acres or fifty-

eight percent of the land in West Hickory/Westmont is zoned for uses other than residential.

Only five acres at the intersection of Highway 70 and Ninth Street SW is zoned C-4. This district is for highway business development, which includes restaurants, retail, hotels, and other service oriented businesses.

By far commercial zoning dominates the area. C-5 envelopes almost twenty-three percent of the total land to accommodate general businesses such as retail, service, manufacturing and warehousing activities in areas where past land development practices have produced a mixed pattern of land uses and irregular lotting. This zone is found along the railroad, US 321 and Highway 70, which is considered typical.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The ED or Economic Development zoning category was created to provide for development of light manufacturing, processing and assembly uses, warehousing, distribution and servicing enterprises and office activities controlled by performance standards to limit the effect of such uses on adjacent districts. Eighty-four acres in the area are dedicated to this category which is found in three locations. Namely, Ingold on Seventeenth Street NW, S&W Chemicals in the former Ivey Weavers building on the railroad and Reese's salvage yard and Hickory Wire south of Highway 70 off of Seventeenth Street SW.

### **INDUSTRIAL**

Industrial zoning in West Hickory/Westmont comprises 119 acres or sixteen percent of the land. MDI/IFH and Century Furniture are the largest occupants of

the land, yet conflicts are occurring between residents and industrial property owners more frequently along the railroad tracks where the two zoning categories meet.

**OFFICE AND INSTITUTIONAL**

Office and institutional zoning category, O&I-1, serves as a transition zone between residential and business or industrial districts. Moderate to high intensity residential and office and institutional uses are allowed in this district. Retail, heavy commercial or industrial uses are not allowed. Siecor Headquarters and their parking lots adjacent to Fairview Cemetery are zoned for this use. Grandview Middle school is also zoned for office and institutional use.

**PLANNED DEVELOPMENT**

Planned Development Shopping Center - Community PD-SC(C) zoning applies to the center on the south side of Highway 70 known as the former Kroger Shopping Center where Roses and Helig-Meyers do business. Planned developments are common for sites over two acres and tend to be beneficial because specific site plans must be approved by City Council and offer some degree of planning oversight.

**RESIDENTIAL**

The residential areas are found in pockets rather than in a cohesive cluster like most other Hickory neighborhoods. The lack of homogeneity puts this neighborhood at a relative disadvantage in terms of creating a sense of identity.

The majority of the residential area is zoned R-6, which is a district intended to accommodate a variety of moderate to high intensity residential uses including single- and double-wide manufactured homes, under conventional or planned development controls. The minimum lot size is 6,000 square feet.

Twenty-nine percent of the land in West Hickory/Westmont is zoned R-6. Two hundred and sixteen acres of the 275 acres of residential land is zoned for dense development

There are 154 mobile homes in West Hickory/Westmont. Nine of the existing mobile homes are newer, doublewide models. Any existing single-wide manufactured home can be replaced, however any new siting of this type of housing would have to be a double-wide manufactured home with proper underpinning to make the home appear permanent.

Residential zoning category R-5 allows a variety of moderate intensity residential uses including single family, two-family and multiple family dwelling types under conventional or planned development controls. The minimum lot size is 8,000 square feet, which is small in comparison to other residential areas. Most of this land is south of Highway 70 from Twelfth Street SW west to Seventeenth Street SW. The newly constructed Woodland Apartments located off Nineteenth Street NW and Third Avenue NW are also zoned R-5.

Somewhat of an anomaly is the presence of the R-2 zoning category. In response to the rezoning of vacant land that allowed for the construction of the Woodland Park Apartments, sixteen adjacent single-family property owners requested and were granted in June 1997 a down zoning from R-6 to R-2. Located along Seventeenth Street NW and Second Avenue NW, these property owners have an extra piece of mind knowing that the land cannot be used for anything other than a single-family home unless it was rezoned.

### **NON-CONFORMING LOTS**

Members of the Planning Committee raised questions regarding non-conforming lots and what could or could not be built on the site. Data specific to the number, type or location of non-conforming lots was not collected or analyzed. However, this situation is frequent and typical in areas that developed without controls. Without examining the specifics on a case by case basis, the most general answer to their questions is that if the lot was large enough and the non-conformity was only that the setbacks were not met, then a new structure could be built but not in the same spot.

### **HICKORY BY CHOICE**

This major examination of land use and transportation issues was driven by a twenty-five member steering committee with assistance from a consulting firm and numerous public input meetings. The committee was given the task of developing goals for future development.

The committee presented the plan to City Council on October 12, 1999. City Council adopted the plan after a public hearing on November 16, 1999. Since that time the committee has been working with city staff to develop the new zoning and subdivision regulations to implement the plan. Ordinances are not expected to be complete until the late summer 2000.

The *Hickory by Choice* Land Use and Transportation Plan promotes walkability and addresses strip development, so future development is likely to be different than what has occurred in the past. What impact the zoning revisions may have on the area is difficult to determine at this point.

The plan proposes zoning categories referred to as primary residential, secondary residential, neighborhood core, community commercial, regional commercial, industrial, parks and con-

servation. Much of the following text is excerpted directly from the adopted plan and are only the categories that would apply to West Hickory/Westmont.

#### ***Primary Residential***

The primary residential area should be within a convenient walking distance (approximately ¼ mile) from the edge of neighborhood and community core commercial areas. These should include a variety of housing types including townhouses, condominiums, apartments, and single-family homes with smaller lot sizes on the average.

The design of in-fill housing in these higher density primary residential areas needs to reflect the character and context of existing neighborhoods in the immediate vicinity. The design guidelines for new development should respect current architectural details and housing densities but the guidelines should not require specific architectural styles. These primary residential areas will provide a transition to lower density housing in the secondary residential areas and focus a larger population within walking and biking distance of shopping, employment, parks, and transit stops.

Multi-family development in primary residential areas should incorporate screening and landscape amenities to buffer the high density housing from medium density in the secondary residential areas. These higher density developments are an appropriate transition between the neighborhood core commercial and community commercial districts and the balance of the housing in the neighborhood. The predominant type of multi-family structures should be small-scale apartment buildings that respects existing neighborhood character. This transition will ensure that the current residential character

of surrounding housing will be maintained. Multi-family housing would provide additional options for seniors and others desiring more affordable housing.

The street and sidewalk system in primary residential areas should be considered a social space in the neighborhood. This inter-connected system of pedestrian friendly roadways would direct traffic to the neighborhood core area or to collector and arterial streets. This roadway system, which would provide direct access to surrounding neighborhoods, also offer drivers more routes to reach their destination, which should help reduce congestion on major thoroughfares.

Local roads in the primary residential area would have narrow driving lanes, and on street parking in appropriate locations. Pedestrian friendly design of the circulation system could include development of shorter blocks to create a better context for smaller lot residential lots and shorter setbacks and put a more human scale to the neighborhood.

### ***Secondary Residential***

A secondary residential area is recommended for medium-density housing types. These areas provide larger homes on larger lots but still have the advantages of proximity to the neighborhood core. This residential areas provides a transition between the Neighborhood Core district, primary residential, and lower density single-family housing.

The secondary residential area can provide a number of open space conservation opportunities. Conservation can be achieved by clustering homes near the primary residential area. Under this clustering concept, the overall density of the development remains consistent with other development in the same, but the development is focused on only part of the site while the remaining area is conserved as open space. This

allows for the preservation of valuable natural resources such as wetlands, hillsides, floodplains, farm fields, and wood lots.

### ***Neighborhood Core***

Neighborhood Core districts permit a mix of retail and service establishments such as grocery stores, pharmacies, laundry/dry cleaners, restaurants, and a variety of convenience type businesses to serve surrounding residential areas. The commercial development should be in context to the housing in surrounding neighborhoods. A typical neighborhood commercial district would have approximately 80,000 to 140,000 square feet of retail space. This mix could also include professional office space for doctors, dentists, and other service businesses as well as childcare, civic functions, and schools.

Neighborhood Core areas should be located at intersections of major thoroughfares to provide adequate traffic access and volumes that will help enhance the sustainability of retail establishments. These roadways should generally be two-way streets to further enhance accessibility and sustainability of the retail establishments.

The configuration of these commercial districts should balance pedestrian and automobile needs. Buildings in commercial districts should engage the street with short, or zero setbacks. Larger stores need to orient toward the arterial and smaller, more convenience-oriented businesses should orient more toward the surrounding neighborhood. Retail uses that front onto streets should not have blank walls facing the roadways. These commercial buildings could utilize a combination of glass windows, landscaping, or architectural details to enhance the appeal of the neighborhood commercial district. The architectural and

site amenities should also be identifiable with the surrounding residential neighborhood by using, when possible, similar building materials, architectural elements, and landscape materials.

Pedestrian circulation needs to be an integral element of the design of commercial area and the surrounding residential neighborhood. A continuous network of sidewalks in the commercial and residential areas would encourage people to leave their cars at home and walk to retail shops, parks, and neighbors. To make the commercial district more attractive for pedestrians, landscape amenities and public open space should be provided. These amenities should include tree-lined streets, benches, and small, formal open spaces or neighborhood parks.

Formal open spaces, neighborhood parks, and commercial districts provide opportunities for the placement of public art. Plant materials such as trees and shrubs should provide aesthetic amenities and protection from the sun, but still allow visual access to retail businesses. From the neighborhood side, the neighborhood commercial center must be pedestrian friendly, from the arterial it must be auto convenient.

To establish the neighborhood core commercial district as part of the neighborhood that includes primary residential, the architecture in the commercial development should be in context with those surrounding neighborhoods. Commercial development building materials should be consistent with materials used for local housing. Other design elements such as plant materials, landscape design, and signage could also be consistent between commercial and residential development to provide distinct sense of place. The upper floors of commercial buildings could be appropriate spaces for limited residential uses. This type of housing would give storeowners an opportunity to live above their establishments and for persons looking for a more "urban" housing option.

Measures would be incorporated in the design of the commercial development and roadway to slow traffic in the commercial district. Where possible, the roadway should narrow slightly and a center landscape median could be constructed. Another measure to provide more "friction" is to slow automobiles by incorporating landscaping on the side of roadways. This will slow traffic within the area while enhancing the viability of the businesses and increasing pedestrian safety. On-street parking would provide shoppers easy access to stores and provide another cue to slow automobiles. Landscaping along the roadway and in medians, in association with architectural details would also help establish an identity for each neighborhood and commercial area.

Intersection control would be incorporated as a traffic calming measure to improve pedestrian and motorist safety. These measures could include pedestrian friendly traffic signalization, changes in pavement materials, and the construction of roundabouts. Roundabouts could also serve the purpose of providing an aesthetic focal point for the commercial district. The roundabout would be an excellent location for a design element that helps to identify the commercial district as a distinct location within the city.

Parking lots would integrate into the design of Neighborhood Core commercial districts in a way that does not visually dominate the appearance of the development. They should not interrupt pedestrian routes, or negatively impact surrounding residential areas. Most parking should be located behind buildings or in the interior of a development. Only on-street parking, where appropriate, should be in front of buildings. Curb cuts leading to parking lots on major thoroughfares should be minimized to enhance the safety of those entering and exiting commercial establishments.

A transition from commercial development to residential neighborhoods surrounding the district should be provided. These transitions should include landscaping/buffering, office developments, a variety of multi-family housing, formal open space, and higher density single family housing.

Transit stops should be incorporated into the design of the commercial district. The higher density of housing in the surrounding neighborhood should aid in sustaining the transit service

### ***Community Commercial***

The Community Commercial district concept is intended to provide city residents the opportunity to travel a short distance to patronize a larger scale retail establishment. Although this district would allow a "big-box" or superstore, these commercial districts would be based on the same principle of serving residents of surrounding neighborhoods with grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware and other uses. The overall goal for establishing these commercial districts would be to reduce the amount of traffic driving across town to reach the large-scale retail establishments along the U.S. 70/I-40 regional shopping corridor by providing commercial districts in locations that serve a large portion of the city.

The Community Commercial district would not be located in all quadrants of the city, but could serve the northwest, northeast, and southern portions of the city. Community Commercial districts could include up to 500,000 square feet of retail, but no single building should exceed 160,000 square feet in order to help keep the overall scale of the district down to a compact size.

These districts would incorporate pedestrian and vehicular connectivity to surrounding residential neighborhoods; transit stops, off-street

parking; appropriate transitions to residential neighborhoods, and traffic calming measures. This district is intended to serve a larger customer base, which would result in larger volumes of traffic than in Neighborhood Core districts. To maximize safety of pedestrians and prevent automobile accidents, the number and location of curb cuts should be regulated.

The same urban design principles for Neighborhood Core districts would be required in Community Commercial districts. Larger buildings should be oriented toward the major thoroughfare and smaller structures should be oriented toward the residential neighborhood. It is also important to note that when a "big-box" store is constructed it does not create a vast blank wall along the thoroughfare.

Because this commercial district allows larger buildings care must be taken during site design to ensure that the scale of this development does not adversely affect surrounding neighborhoods. Because of the increase in scale for this type of commercial development, it would be appropriate for the development of housing on the upper floors of commercial buildings. This type of housing offers storeowners the opportunity to live above their establishment, or for persons looking for a more "urban" housing option

### ***Regional Commercial***

The Regional Commercial district includes large commercial establishments that serve Hickory residents as well as people living in the surrounding counties. The large building footprint and large parking requirements of these establishments are not in context with many parts of the city, particularly single-family residential neighborhoods. These stores usually require access to roads that are intended to handle large volumes of traf-

fic. It was determined that the existing location along the U.S. 70/I-40 corridor is the most appropriate place for this type of retail.

Because these commercial areas generate large amounts of traffic, methods to mitigate vehicle circulation impacts are vital. Minimizing curb cuts and providing improved internal vehicle and promoting pedestrian circulation could reduce the number of automobile trips within and around these commercial areas. Better circulation and drop-off sites for transit services would also improve traffic flow along this commercial corridor.

### ***Industrial***

The large industrial employment center located on US 321 north of US 70 has minimal capacity for expansion and construction of new large facilities. There is, however, potential for redevelopment or reuse of older industrial and commercial properties, particularly along Old Lenoir Road/Eleventh Street NW. Several of the existing establishments along this road and may be good targets for redevelopment. A significant role for businesses in this area is improving the aesthetics of the US 321/Old Lenoir Road corridor and providing an attractive gateway into the city.

Although the industrial sector is healthy, several other older industrial facilities are now vacant. One factor for these vacancies is that older industrial facilities may not be designed to meet modern industrial needs. These facilities should be analyzed and a program developed to reuse or redevelop these older structures. Use of older structures may be appropriate for start-up or smaller industrial businesses.

As a strategy, *Hickory by Choice* recommends developing reasonable landscape standards that focus on industrial areas that are in public view. Set higher standards for property on major thoroughfares and abutting residential

neighborhoods, and less stringent standards in areas away from major streets and housing.

Industrial growth would be directed to traditional areas along Tate Boulevard and around the Hickory Metropolitan Airport, while new models for mixing business parks, housing, parks, schools and shopping would be developed for US 321.

### ***Transportation***

The design of streets would change by adding sidewalks, medians, bike lanes and landscaping to reduce the impact of traffic on neighborhoods. Major road improvements in the regional shopping and industrial areas remain a goal, but planning for pedestrian and bus access between businesses, hotels and restaurants would be emphasized.

As part of the US 321 Corridor Study, *Hickory by Choice* calls for an analysis of the need for a new interchange on US 321 to provide access to/from Main Avenue NW. A new interchange could provide access from US 321 to the major industrial employment center along Tate and Highland Boulevards as well as provide sufficient traffic volumes to help support the proposed neighborhood business area in the Four Points area, and the commercial establishments along the roadways in the City Center.

*Hickory by Choice* recommends establishing Seventeenth Street NW on the west side of US 321, and Twelfth Street Drive NW/Old Lenoir Road on the east side as business access roads. These roads could provide access to the commercial and industrial businesses along US 321 and remove a significant number of vehicles from this busy roadway. Access to these roads from US 321 at Clement Boulevard and extending



them south to First and Second Avenues SW would have the potential to reduce traffic volumes on US 321.

To improve traffic flow along US 321, it is recommended that the intersections be studied to determine if it would be feasible to add off ramps to provide access to city streets. These off-ramps would remove traffic from the road more efficiently and safely, and would provide space for vehicle-stacking which would reduce congestion at intersections.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD CONSERVATION OVERLAY**

A Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District, (NCOD) when adopted, applies to whatever zoning classifications regulate development in a defined area. A major purpose of this zoning category is to maintain the general quality of residential neighborhoods. Development that is sensitive to neighborhood character can be encouraged through overlay zoning regulations that are “customized” to neighborhood needs as defined by the neighborhood plan.

The overlay district applies to new development only in terms of setbacks, building height, lot frontage and size, lot width at the right-of-way, building entrances, building placement on the lot, including building setbacks and distances between buildings. Nothing else can be regulated through the NCOD. Permitted land use, density, landscaping and other appearance, architectural style, maintenance, and outbuildings typically cannot be regulated through the NCOD.

When an overlay zoning regulation is applied to an area, the existing zoning remains intact but is modified by the overlay regulation. The neighborhood will be outlined and highlighted on the official City zoning map as a “Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District.” Particular regulations of the NCOD are “laid over” those of the existing zoning.

A conservation district makes no existing structure or lot non-conforming; the emphasis is rather on making new construction be similar in character with the existing neighborhood.

Other neighborhoods that have completed the neighborhood planning process have developed and implemented a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District specific to their area to help control future development. However, here in West Hickory/Westmont the Conservation Overlay might not be an appropriate tool to apply due to the fragmented nature of the residential areas.

Zoning changes and the development of new ordinances in accordance with *Hickory by Choice* are likely to be similar to what would be contained in a Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District.

### **REQUIRED BUFFERING AND SCREENING**

Planning Committee members had several questions about buffering incompatible uses. It is difficult to set requirements after the fact. Many of the businesses and industries in the area are established so the city cannot make them install buffers retroactively. If a business or apartment was built before the regulations were adopted, then it is considered “grandfathered”. The City looks for opportunities such as when a business expands or a new structure is built to require buffers and screening as part of the development approval.

Buffer is the distance in feet from the property line required to reduce the impact of the land use on adjacent uses that are significantly different in character, density or intensity. Screening is the actual plant material or fence required along the property

line. Screening may also apply to mechanical equipment and open storage.

The current zoning ordinance mandates that buffers and screening are required according to the intensity of development and zoning of adjacent properties. For example, of a new apartment complex of less than twelve units was being built next to a single family home only five feet of buffer would be required. If the complex was proposed to be twelve units or more, a ten foot buffer would be required. If a commercial property were being constructed next to a single-family home, then anywhere between ten to thirty feet of buffer would be required depending on which group the commercial use fell into on the matrix. Group one is the least intensive being churches, schools and cultural facilities. Group two includes retail, service-oriented businesses and lodging places. Group three is the most intense and includes manufacturing and assembly plants, warehousing and heavy open uses of land such as junkyards.

*Hickory by Choice* is likely to change the current requirements. As implementation progresses through ordinance revisions, West Hickory/Westmont neighbors need to be proactive and provide comment on the issue of buffering and screening.

### ***Environmental Characteristics***

Forty-three percent of the properties in West Hickory/Westmont are within the watershed protection area. All properties in this area are required to comply with Article 18 of the Zoning Code. These rules apply to any development that includes land-disturbing activities. They also prohibit certain uses such as landfills that can threaten a drinking water source.

The regulations require that an engineer design the site plan so that at least eighty-five percent of the total suspended solids be removed from

the stormwater before it leaves the property. They also limit the amount of impervious area that may be constructed on the site. Previously paved areas are not counted toward this limitation so redevelopment may be possible.

West Hickory/Westmont is affected by three creek beds, which traverse the neighborhood. In the northern portion of the neighborhood, Frye Creek bed runs across MDI/IFH property, under US 321, through the Ingold property toward the newly constructed Woodland Park Apartments and beyond the neighborhood boundaries.

In the southwestern portion of the neighborhood, Long View Creek begins just north of Highway 70 in what is now West Hickory Senior Apartments flows south across the highway toward industrial property and beyond.

In the southeastern portion of the neighborhood, Geitner Branch Creek begins just south of First Avenue SW behind the Hickory Foundry and Machine Company, flowing south through Butler Mobile Home Park toward Ninth Street SW.

These features can be scenic and typically provide wooded green space in the neighborhood. However, in West Hickory/Westmont these areas for the most part are developed either as a mobile home park or remain vacant on the periphery of industrial property.

### ***Public Infrastructure***

#### **SIDEWALKS**

West Hickory/Westmont has good sidewalk coverage with approximately 83,442 linear

feet or fifteen miles of sidewalk. There is fair connectivity of the sidewalks most likely due to the presence of former Westmont Elementary School and Grandview Middle School and the parks.

However, the existing sidewalks are in need of some maintenance particularly along the one-way pair corridor and at street intersections.

The lack of sidewalks in good repair creates a dangerous situation for all pedestrians.

The *Sidewalks* map found in Appendix II - Map IV illustrates the locations of existing sidewalks and proposed locations for new sidewalks in West Hickory/Westmont.

The Planning Committee is recommending an additional 24,420 linear feet or 4.6 miles of new sidewalks. Some of the proposed sidewalk falls outside the actual boundaries of the neighborhood, yet the group felt strongly about providing connectivity to other neighborhoods and therefore recommended extending the sidewalk to meet existing sidewalks.

Sidewalks in Hickory are constructed in one of four ways. First, the City Council allocates funds each year to implement the Sidewalk Master Plan. The Plan was developed by a citizen committee and adopted by City Council in 1997 and is currently being updated. The plan prioritizes locations for new sidewalk in all quadrants. Extra weight was given to locations around the ten most used Piedmont Wagon bus stops, parks and schools. If a neighborhood has completed the planning process and has identified a sidewalk need, then that location is placed on the list.

The second way to get sidewalks installed is for NCDOT to install sidewalks as part of any new road construction project as the city requests. Third, the City requires developers to install sidewalk as new development occurs in areas

that were identified in the Master Plan. Finally, property owners can petition for sidewalks to be installed in front of their property. This way requires the owners to pay the linear foot cost to install the sidewalk. Curb and gutter is an extra cost, but it only adds value to the property.

*Hickory by Choice* places great emphasis on providing pedestrian access and promoting walkability. Therefore, the community is likely to see policies change to advance those goals.

### **STREET LIGHTING**

The City bears the cost of streetlights under a lease agreement with Duke Power and spends over \$380,000 a year on roadway illumination.

The City follows accepted professional standards for the placement and illumination quality of streetlights. While irregular placement of streetlights has occurred in the past, the preferred policy is that the lights should be on one side. This avoids a checkerboard effect on the roadway causing adverse effects on the driver's eyes.

In the past, lights were placed at intersections and midpoints only. The current policy calls for streetlights to be placed approximately every 200 feet. The future goal is to have uniform coverage to meet the accepted professional standards.

A comprehensive inventory of the location of streetlights and security lighting was not undertaken during the planning process. The inventory can be completed and presented to the Neighborhood Association at a later date. Members can then assess the existing conditions and indicate their suggestions for approximate locations for more streetlights. The map could then be submit-

ted to the Traffic Division for their review and determination of need.

### **DRAINAGE**

While there maybe other drainage problems in the neighborhood, the Planning Committee focused only on the ditch at the intersection of Fourteenth Street SW and Seventh Avenue SW in front of 616 Fourteenth Street SW.

Neighbors contend that there is a safety issue at this location and to install the pipe would be a greater good for the community.



*Located at the intersection of 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW and 14<sup>th</sup> Street SW, this ditch causes safety and appearance concerns.*

The City's policy for installing pipe is if the property owner purchases the pipe the City will install it. The property owner is aware of this option and to date has not agreed to have the work done. The City did clean the ditch and reseed it recently.

The Traffic Safety Unit reports that no accidents have occurred at this intersection due to the ditch. Thus, the accident history does not justify the expense of the City solely taking on the project.

A second option is for the neighborhood to request Community Development Block Grant funds to install curb and gutter. The southwest quadrant of the neighborhood qualifies for

CDBG funding and curb and gutter installation is an eligible activity.

### **UNPAVED STREETS**

There is 6,029 feet or 1.14 miles of dirt streets in West Hickory/Westmont. The *Sidewalks* map found in Appendix II - Map IV illustrates the locations of the seventeen road segments in West Hickory/Westmont that are unpaved.

The city Engineering Department and Street Division maintain a list of unpaved streets. Priorities are determined based on factors such as adequate right-of-way to meet paving standards, existing gravel width, drainage structure required, whether it is a through street or dead end, and number of houses and businesses served.

There are suitability issues with each and every road. In some cases the road is privately maintained and the property owner would have to dedicate it to the city before city maintenance would take effect. Lack of right-of-way, severe drainage and funding impede the timely paving of these streets.

City Council has committed to paving one mile of dirt streets per year at a cost estimated to be \$30,000 per mile. That figure does not take into account any additional purchase of needed right-of-way, excessive base material or curb and gutter.

Property owners along the street may also petition to have the street paved and have the cost assessed to their property. The cost is \$5.50 per square yard per half the pavement width for the entire property frontage as measured along the right-of-way line. The assessment can be paid in five annual installments at eight percent interest.

## ***Public Facilities***

### **GRANDVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Grandview Middle School, one of two Middle Schools in the Hickory Public School System, was built in 1958, expanded in 1962. According to historical accounts, the property was sold to the school system with the provision that the property only be used for a school. Back then, the property totaled sixteen acres until US 321 constructed taking away three acres on the eastside. Today, the school site totals approximately thirteen acres.

The Hickory City School Board is currently undecided as to what to do with Grandview now that a new middle school is set to open in the fall of 2000.

The West Hickory/Westmont Planning Committee was told during the planning process that the School Board's ten-year plan called for moving the school systems administrative services and Catawba Valley Alternative High School to Grandview Middle. The administration wants to move out of their current location at Green Park School building because it needs too much renovation work. The current location of Catawba Valley Alternative High School on the SALT Block campus is hindering the expansion of the Catawba Science Center.

After the new northeast middle school is finished, the plan called for the conversion of College Park Middle to an elementary school. Uncertainty surrounded the plan since the last five years of the plan are not funded and the status of future bond projects unknown.

The School Board's plan also called for a second new middle school to be built most likely somewhere in the southern quadrants of the city. New middle schools require twenty acres plus an additional acre for every 100 students. According to school officials, ten to fourteen

acres are needed for an elementary school, and twenty-three to twenty-five acres are needed for a middle school. This amount of acreage is necessary to accommodate a playground and parking spaces. Finding that much undeveloped land in an area as dense as West Hickory/Westmont would be close to impossible.

As recent as April 2000, the School Board discussed complications with the plan to convert College Park Middle to an elementary school. Fire code compliance and asbestos removal increased the renovation costs from \$2.7 million to \$7 million making the conversion less feasible. According to the newspaper account, the School Superintendent suggested moving the administration and alternative high school to College Park rather than Grandview. He also acknowledged the Board's desire to replace Grandview and the need for another elementary school.

Residents are very concerned over the school system's plans for Grandview to cease being a middle school to become the administration building and location for the alternative high school. Some members of the Planning Committee voiced their frustration over how they perceive their neighborhood to be dying because there is no longer a neighborhood school and the neighborhood is not growing anymore.

This new revelation is cause for even greater concern. The Grandview Middle School site would not meet the criteria for a new school under the State's standards. No one can predict what might happen to the middle school at this point, which only adds to the neighbors anxiety level.

**LONG VIEW ELEMENTARY**

Eighty-seven percent of the elementary school students from West Hickory/Westmont attend Long View. The school was built in 1923 and later additions occurred in 1950 and 1956.

According to information disseminated by the County, Long View Elementary is currently over capacity by 100 pupils.

Members of the Planning Committee expressed their concern that Long View Elementary did not get the support that other schools seem get. The inequity is such that some parents find a way to send their kids to a different school just because of the disparity.

**RECREATION**

In the Parks and Recreation Master Plan completed in 1996, several maintenance issues were recommended for completion within the next five years.

***Westmont Senior Center and Gym***

The plan recommends minor improvements to the Westmont gym such as ventilation upgrades and repairs to the bathrooms. New basketball score clocks were installed recently.

One of the greatest needs neighbors identified was for improved playground equipment. In the past equipment was either donated or funded through the civic groups. Approximately \$2,000 has been raised and dedicated for equipment at Westmont. Only recently the City began allocating funds for playground equipment.

Recommendations from the Master Plan for the Senior Center included an ice machine and suggested an outdoor walking track, and that the retaining wall be replaced. The plan recommends expanding the main assembly room by 1,000 square feet toward the outdoor shuffle-

board court in the future. The fitness and playground equipment is scheduled for an upgrade. The Center upgrades are programmed to be in the FY 2003-2004 budget.

The neighborhood has some concerns regarding the maintenance and upkeep of the park. When it rains, water puddles on the outdoor basketball court.

***West Hickory Park***

West Hickory Park was the first park in the City, opened in 1956. West Hickory/Westmont Park is where youth girls softball is played.

In recent years, the Parks and Recreation Department has been forced to close the pool earlier in the season because as college and high school students go back to school staff becomes scarce.

The playground equipment at West Hickory Park is also scheduled to be upgraded. The playground equipment is programmed into the fiscal year 2001-2002 budget.

**PARKS & RECREATION MAINTENANCE FACILITY**

As was recommended in the Recreation Master Plan, park maintenance equipment and associated employees were relocated to the former city public works facility on Second Avenue NW in 1999. This consolidation provides a more centralized location for operations and appropriate storage for equipment and materials.

The Parks and Recreation Department has brought back into service a once underutilized property and improved the appearance of the surrounding lot by installing fencing and landscaping.

## Structural Conditions

The structural conditions in West Hickory/Westmont are good despite the exterior appearance of some structures. Compared to housing conditions that existed in 1967 and 1983, this neighborhood today is much better off. According to a field survey, ninety-three percent of the structures are well maintained, seven percent are in need of repair.

Based on the field survey conducted by staff in February 2000, the physical condition of the neighborhood's buildings were placed in one of two categories: well-maintained or in need of repair. The results of the study are illustrated in the *Housing Conditions and Rental Status* map in Appendix II - Map V.

Dwellings classified as "well-maintained" were considered free of any obvious building deficiencies. Dwellings classified as in need of repair exhibit signs of serious conditions such as foundation or roof damage. Appearance items such as peeling paint or unkept yard were not considered in the rating.

The condition of each structure was evaluated from the street by looking at exterior features such as the roof, chimney, exterior walls, doors, windows, gutters, soffits, barge boards, foundation, porch, stairs, and paint.

The data presented in Table 6 and Table 7, which compare 1967 and 2000 housing conditions, indicates that there has been great improvement in terms of the number of seriously deteriorated structures. The improvement came primarily because all of the dilapidated and most of the deteriorating single-family homes were demolished and replaced by either commercial buildings or mobile homes.

In 1967, approximately thirty-nine percent of the total residential dwelling units were identified as substandard compared to 2000 in which only nine percent of the total residential dwelling units have been identified as substandard. This indicates that during the past thirty years, efforts to reduce the physical decline of housing within West Hickory/Westmont has retarded further decline and impacted positively by reducing the number of substandard dwellings. However, new single-family housing construction has not kept pace with the removal of substandard dwellings.

The majority of the dwelling units in need of repair are rental properties and are primarily found in four of the five mobile home parks. The commercial properties in need of repair are located along the southern one-way pairs except for one, which is on Second Avenue NW.

**Table 6. 1967 - WEST HICKORY/WESTMONT STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS**

	Number of Buildings						% of Total
	Single Family	Multi-Family	Public & Semi-Pub.	Commercial	Industrial	Total	
Standard	480	17	16	82	24	619	<b>63%</b>
Deteriorating	246	3	2	17	3	271	<b>28%</b>
Dilapidated	64	2	5	13	6	90	<b>9%</b>
Totals	790	22	23	112	33	980	100 %
% of Total Substandard	<b>71%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>8%</b>		

**Table 7. 2000 - WEST HICKORY/WESTMONT STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS**

	Number of Buildings					Total	% of Total
	Single Family	Multi-Family	Public & Semi-Pub.	Commercial	Industrial		
Standard	560	83	16	155	75	889	<b>92%</b>
Need of Repair	72	1	0	4	0	77	<b>8%</b>
Totals	632	84	16	159	75	966	<b>100%</b>
% of Total in need of repair	<b>93%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>0%</b>		

Structures in need of repair create a negative visual image for the neighborhood to visitors. However, just because a property looks bad from the outside does not mean it is below standards. If the property is not maintained, there usually is a reason. The owner could be physically or financially unable to take care of the property. This is an issue aesthetically critical homeowners easily overlook.

#### **MINIMUM HOUSING CODE ENFORCEMENT**

Code enforcement officials must walk a fine line between causing a property owner to correct deficiencies and requiring corrections so costly as to effectively take the building out of service completely. Often the cost of purchasing and restoring an existing deteriorated or dilapidated structure exceeds the appraised value of the structure following rehabilitation.

While structural conditions in West Hickory/Westmont are good at the moment, the housing stock continues to age. The need to develop plans for comprehensive code enforcement is imperative before more of the deteriorating structures slip into further disrepair.

Neighbor to neighbor communication is often the best way to deal with problems in the neighborhood. It may take several contacts to motivate the owner to improve the property, but this approach advances everyone's understanding of the situation.

The City's Minimum Housing Code does not regulate appearance much to the dismay of many neighbors who live next door to a poorly maintained structure. The City adopted a new procedure for boarding up vacant buildings in 1997. The procedure makes vacant buildings more secure, but once the property owner boards up the building, it could stay that way forever.

The City employs one full-time person as a Minimum Housing Code Inspector and Enforcement officer. Inspections are scheduled based on complaints received from tenants of rental properties, the City's Action Center and citizens.

Minimum housing code enforcement is complex with legalities, and the process can take up to two years or more, particularly if the property owner refuses to cooperate.

Even though the City is able to issue a \$50 a day civil penalty for not fixing Minimum Housing or Nuisance Code problems in a timely manner, the threat of a fine does not seem to be an adequate motivator for many landlords or obstinate homeowners.

In both the Kenworth and Green Park Neighborhood Plans, it was recommended that resources be added to help distribute the workload and allow the inspector to do more systematic inspections rather than respond to complaints only. As a result of those recommendations, additional staff was



added to the Building Inspections department.

Code enforcement staff warns that not all complaints are valid. That is, just because a dwelling looks bad from the street does not mean that it is in violation of the code. The chief concern for inspectors is the health and safety of the occupants of a residential dwelling, not the aesthetics. Many times staff discovers that complaints are the result of a dispute between neighbors or someone just doesn't like what the dwelling looks like. Regardless of the situation, staff checks out each complaint.

When a complaint is received, staff goes to the location and determines if it is valid. If violations are visible, the owner is contacted and access to the dwelling within one week is requested. If the property owner doesn't respond, an inspection warrant to enter the dwelling can be obtained.

Once the inspection is done, the owner has 30 days to bring the dwelling up to code if there are violations. More time is given if the necessary repairs are extensive. The dwelling is posted as condemned or unsafe depending on the extent of the hazardous conditions. If a property owner refuses to complete repairs before a tenant moves in, staff can ask the City water billing department to place a message on the water tap which forces the property owner to make the repairs and have the building inspected prior to getting water service.

Once the 30-day compliance period is up, the dwelling is re-checked to see if any work was done. If staff finds that the property owner has not complied, a request via certified mail is sent to the owner requiring them to attend a hearing at the Building Inspections department to work out the issues. If the property owner fails to appear at the hearing, a finding of fact order is issued to make the repairs. The city can levy civil penalties in the amount of \$50 per day if

the property owner continues to not comply with the repair order.

Every effort is made to get the property owner to repair the dwelling if feasible, or board up and secure it so no one can gain access. Once a dwelling is boarded up properly it can stay that way indefinitely according to the code. The final stage in the process is for City Council to approve demolition after the City's Legal department completes a title search. If the city demolishes the building then a lien is placed on the property.

These procedures take time to get through the process. Inspectors can grant extensions if it is determined that the property owner is trying to make progress. Cases often carry over year to year.

The Planning Committee questioned what the City could do about too many people living in one house and what constitutes overcrowding. Building Inspections refers to a "rule of thumb" chart and an interpretation of the City code to determine if overcrowding conditions exist.

Landlords have the ability to put restrictions or conditions, such as no parking in the grass or limit the number of people who may live in the dwelling, in the lease and enforce them.

Members of the Planning Committee questioned why commercial properties were not required to maintain a minimum code. While a provision for commercial buildings does not currently exist in the city code, a State statute authorizes the local government to condemn unsafe buildings which appear to the inspector to be especially dangerous to life because of its liability to fire or because of bad condition of walls,

overloaded floors, defective construction, decay, unsafe wiring or heating system, inadequate means of egress or other causes.

If such a structure is identified as a result of a fire prevention inspection or an occupancy request, the inspector has to follow procedures outlined in the building code and the statute. The procedure is very liberal and owners are given every opportunity to make corrections regarding safety and structural soundness of the building.

The Planning Committee seemed to agree that commercial buildings should have some kind of code to regulate how these buildings are maintained.

### **NUISANCE CODE ENFORCEMENT**

Nuisance code enforcement is closely related to minimum housing code enforcement. The City's Nuisance Code covers abandoned, junked and nuisance motor vehicles, overgrown lots, wooded lots, and trashy yards. One person is employed full time to deal with these types of code enforcement issues.

As a matter of policy, if a vehicle is on private property, then the Nuisance code officer investigates. If the vehicle is abandoned in the street, it is a matter for the Police to handle. Neighbors are encouraged to report junked vehicles on private property or in the streets to the proper department.

According to the Code, a vehicle is considered "junked" if it does not have a current tag, cannot be moved or is partially dismantled or wrecked. When staff finds such a vehicle or a complaint is turned in, the property owner is notified that they have ten days to contact staff or to get the vehicle running or put in an enclosed building. Putting a cover over the vehicle does not satisfy the code, but will get an exten-

sion in order get more time to comply. If the owner cannot be located, staff stickers the vehicle and checks back in ten days. If it is still there, the vehicle is towed.

Conditions constituting nuisances that Inspections staff deal with are overgrown weeds and grass that are over one foot in height, accumulation of rubbish, trash or junk causing or threatening to cause the inhabitation of rats, mice, snakes or vermin of any kind. Barking dog and noise nuisances are dealt with through the police department.

Once staff gives the property owner notice of violation of the nuisance code, they have ten days to abate the nuisance. Weather can sometimes delay an overgrown lot from being mowed in a timely manner. If the property owner refuses to abate the nuisance, the city may go on the property to abate or remove the condition constituting a nuisance and charge the property owner. The City charges \$110 to mow a lot and \$55 for each additional hour. If the owner does not pay the charge, a lien is placed on the property. The code enforcement officer holds an administrative hearing with the property owner to try to work out a solution.

Neighbors complain frequently about a particular lot on Twelfth Street Drive NW where the owner stores junk and vehicles on the lot and usually let the lot become overgrown. This is a classic example of conflict inherent of industrial property adjacent to residentially zoned properties. The lot is in an industrial zone and junkyards are a permitted use. The lot is fenced and the owner is aware of the nuisance his lot causes to neighbors.

The idea of restricting people from parking in the grass front yards was discussed by the

Planning Committee. The perception is that it is mostly renters who do this. Landlords have the ability to include such a provision in their lease prohibiting the tenants from parking on the grass.

Code enforcement officers work diligently with property owners by granting extensions if they believe the property owner is making a concerted effort to clean up or make repairs.

**LITTER**

Litter is a problem citywide. Neighbors are frustrated that seemingly there is a lack of enforcement as well as a lack of effort to clean up the litter. The Neighborhood Association conducts a litter pick-up once a year, yet that does not seem to be enough to stay ahead of the problem. The Street Division does some picking up of litter in right-of-ways. The City working with the Community Appearance Commission has contracted to have community service workers clean up the worst litter areas in the City. Neighbors are encouraged to report to Public Services any location needs cleaning up.

***Trends in Homeownership***

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood has evolved very little since 1967 in terms of mixed land uses. What has changed over the past thirty-three years is the ratio of owner occupied, single-family homes to rental properties.

There are a total of 1,194 residential units in West Hickory/Westmont, and of those, seventy-six percent, or 910 units are rental.

Of the 472 single-family homes in West Hickory/Westmont, 205, or fifty-seven percent of the single-family residences are rental properties.

For comparison, Table 8 illustrates the 1990 Census Data of the city’s overall percentage of

owner occupied dwellings compared to West Hickory/Westmont in 2000. Citywide owner occupancy stands at about fifty-two percent; the remaining forty-eight percent are rental homes.

**Table 8. OWNER AND RENTER OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS COMPARISON**

Housing Units	City of Hickory		West Hickory /Westmont	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Owner Occupied	6,098	52%	284	24%
Renter Occupied	5,687	48%	910	76%
TOTAL	11,785		1,194	

Table 9 illustrates in another way the residential occupancy status of all the dwelling units in West Hickory/Westmont.

**Table 9. 2000 - RESIDENTIAL OCCUPANCY STATUS IN WEST HICKORY/WESTMONT**

Single-Family - Owner Occupied	284
Single-Family - Rental	322
Multi-Family Rental Units	568

1194	Total residential dwelling units
57%	Single-Family units are rental
910	Total rental units
76%	Housing units in West Hickory/Westmont are rental

No one section of the neighborhood has a higher concentration of rental housing than another. Rental units seem to be equally distributed throughout the residential pockets of West Hickory/Westmont.

The *Housing Conditions and Rental Status* map in Appendix II - Map VI illustrates the number and location of all the rental properties in West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood according to Catawba County Real Property Tax Index as of March 2000.

In 1967, approximately ninety-seven percent of the residential dwelling units in West Hickory/Westmont were single-family dwellings compared to 2000 in which only

about forty-six percent are single-family dwelling units.

During the past thirty-three years, there has been a net loss in the number of single-family homes in the neighborhood. Only fourteen single-family dwelling units have been constructed between 1967 and 2000.

In contrast, multi-family units have proliferated in West Hickory/Westmont. Seventeen apartment complexes containing three or more units were constructed in the past thirty-three years for a total of 484 units. Eight homes were converted to multi-family use. Add the thirty-six duplexes constructed in this same time frame, and approximately 572 multi-family dwelling units have been added to the neighborhood since 1967.

The installation of mobile homes is not factored in because there is no data available indicating the year a mobile home was located on a piece of property.

The 2000 study indicates that only twenty-four percent of the neighborhood residents are homeowners. Although data is not available for the percentage of homeownership in 1967, it is suspected that they were the majority during that period.

As the comparison of the data on residential types from 1967 and 2000 clearly illustrates, the character of the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood has changed due in large part to the proliferation of multi-family development and the conversion of single family homes from owner occupied to rental.

The neighborhood would have to make a concerted effort to gain control of properties as they come available to keep single family homes from turning over into rental properties and increase levels of homeownership.

## ***Community Safety***

The City of Hickory is divided into five sections for police resource allocation purposes. Each section is known as a PACT. The officers of Edward PACT serve the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood.

Edward PACT has two supervisors and nine officers. Edward PACT takes fewer numbers of calls for service hence this PACT has a fewer number of officers than other PACT's.

Officers work 11.5-hour shifts with two officers on during the day and two at night with an additional officer on duty during the peak times. Five officers in Edward PACT are certified for bike patrol. These officers are out mostly at night. Bike patrol is effective because they can get places cars cannot and have the ability sneak up on unsuspecting criminals.

The boundaries of Edward PACT include West Hickory/Westmont and Green Park residential areas, as well as the commercially developed regions along Highway 70 SW and US 321 business corridors, the regional airport, L.P. Frans Stadium, and the Merchants Distributors Incorporated complex across the Catawba River in Caldwell County.

Over the City, the calls for police service have increased due to growth and annexation. Police officials expect the calls for service to go up with more commercial development along Highway 70, and the growth of US 321.

Citywide police officers respond to over 47,000 calls for service a year. In a twelve-month period (November 1, 1998 to October 31, 1999) officers responded to 3,199

calls for service in West Hickory/Westmont. This is considered normal for a mixed commercial and residential area.

Neighbors perceived problems with speeding, cut through traffic, a high number of accidents at key intersections, vandalism to businesses and vehicles, cats and dogs running loose, and noise.

Most of the accidents with property damage and personal injury happen along the one-way pairs, US 321 and Highway 70 SW. The intersection of Second Avenue NW and US 321 is one of the most dangerous intersections in the city. The most accidents in the twelve-month time frame were recorded there. The intersection of US 321 and Highway 70 SW also has a high number of accidents. These numbers are high due to the volume of traffic daily along the major roads.

### **NOISE COMPLAINTS**

Noise complaints and fights are predominately reported at multi-family complexes and mobile home parks or near businesses, but there are quite a few incidents within the neighborhood. No doubt a result of people living close together and not knowing their neighbors.

Sometimes a noise complaint cannot be tracked so the call is attributed to the address of whoever made the call. The call could range from a barking dog to a loud party.

Neighbors continue to report loud music from the "boom boxes" of passing vehicles. Violators are difficult to catch in the act because once the incident is reported to police, the violator is gone. Repeat offenders, when they are caught, are tracked and issued civil citations.

Other noise complaints stem from industries conducting business adjacent to residences.

Loud noises from jackhammers and heavy trucks early in the morning disturb the neighborhood's peacefulness. While the businesses are lawfully operating on land zoned for that purpose, this is another example of residential and industrial uses not being compatible and unable to co-exist without infringing on each other.

The Planning and Development Department responds to persistent noise nuisances from businesses by taking decibel readings and contacting the property owner if they are in violation of the zoning code. The code currently sets a performance standard stating that sound levels shall not exceed sixty decibels between 7:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. if the receiving use is residential. The decibel level drops to fifty-five dBA between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. If the receiving use is commercial the acceptable decibel levels are sixty-five and sixty respectively.

### **SPEEDING**

Speeding is a problem on residential roads all over Hickory. Drivers disregard the posted speed limit and travel at a speed that is comfortable. Pedestrians or neighbors visiting in their yards have no idea how fast a vehicle is traveling as it passes them, yet they know it makes them feel uncomfortable to walk along the road or on the sidewalk.

Particular concern was expressed on Seventeenth Street NW and Thirteenth Street SW.

Concern over people running the stop sign at Main Avenue Drive NW and 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW was expressed. Issues such as these can be brought to the attention of the Traffic Safety Unit

Neighbors contend that there are some very dangerous intersections in the neighborhood, a problem which needs to be addressed.

### **SPEEDING AND CUT THROUGH TRAFFIC**

It is no surprise that active enforcement and police presence deters speeders, but officers cannot be in every neighborhood all the time. One of the best means of slowing speeders is for an area to have the reputation of enforced speed limits. West Hickory/Westmont can gain this kind of reputation through the continued efforts of the Edward PACT officers and the Traffic Safety Unit.

Design features such as road widths, on-street parking and other conditions that affect the environment of the roadway are also effective means of slowing traffic. This approach is known as traffic calming, which is discussed further in the *Traffic Calming* section.

### **TRAFFIC SAFETY UNIT**

In 1997, Hickory Police Department received funding from the State Governor's Highway Safety Program to create a Traffic Safety Unit. Four police officers are dedicated to the unit, and are specially trained in the use of speed detection equipment and field sobriety testing techniques among other things.

The goal of the unit is to reduce the growth of vehicle crashes and raise public awareness through educational efforts and increased enforcement. One speed detection and display trailer the size of a phone booth was acquired as part of the grant.

The traffic calming policy adopted in February 2000 recommended purchasing four additional trailers to allow for the continuous deployment of a radar trailer in each PACT. One of the trailers would have the ability to perform speed counts.

The trailers are equipped with radar and a display that shows the vehicle's speed as it passes, providing immediate feedback to the driver. After the trailer has been in place for a few days, officers follow-up by running radar in the area and issuing citations.

The intersection of US 321 and Second Avenue NW has one of the highest accident incident rates in the city. The Traffic Safety Unit has targeted this intersection for increased police visibility. Traffic Safety Unit officers regularly monitor this intersection, and the nine other "most dangerous" intersections in Hickory, for accident causing violations such as excessive speed and drivers running red lights.

### **ANIMAL CONTROL**

Animal Control Officers are dispatched by the Hickory Police Department in response to complaints and animal bite calls. When laws are violated, Animal Control officers can issue written warnings and citations. Officers also capture animals running at large in violation of the law.

The City of Hickory adopted ordinances to help promote responsible pet ownership and prevent the mistreatment of animals. Under the city ordinances, it is unlawful to: allow a dog or cat to run at large; keep a vicious animal in the city; tease or molest an animal; and have an animal that repeatedly barks or cries. Owners and keepers of animals are supposed to be responsible for the acts of their animals.

Animal control calls that were reported are concentrated in southern portion of the neighborhood, and mostly around Seventh Avenue SW and Twelfth Street SW. These

types of calls can be about animals running loose or constantly barking.

The group briefly discussed the problem of animals defecating on others property. Members of the Planning Committee considered the idea of a pet poopie ordinance similar to one the City of Charlotte recently adopted.

While for West Hickory/Westmont the problem seems to be one offender in particular with a large dog, it is an issue that is being discussed in many neighborhoods. If such an ordinance were adopted in Hickory, enforcement and effective use of limited staff resources would become an issue. Police encourage neighbors to speak to the dog owner personally and ask them to clean up after their pet.

Some neighbors assert that clever dog owners in the area let their pets run free after five o'clock when the animal control officers are off duty. While there is no hard data to support this claim, police officers are aware of the situation and do respond when reported.

Overall, West Hickory/Westmont is a safe and peaceful place to live and work. Officers maintain that no place in the city is without problems. Officers try prevention over enforcement. Officers will park in an area that they know is a problem for something like speeding and sit there in the vehicle to write reports. The visibility of the police car is a good deterrent.

**OTHER TYPES OF CALLS FOR SERVICE**

Recently, the Police Department has adopted policies to decrease the number of calls related to unlocking vehicles that the owner has locked their keys in. These types of calls take officers away from something else they could be doing. Since a policy was adopted in 1999, officers only respond to this type of call in emergency situations.

Edward PACT officers respond every time an alarm is activated. A policy regarding the number of false alarms officers respond to and a graduated fee for repeated alarms was instituted in 1999. Given the high number of commercial properties in the area, alarm calls account for 232 of the total calls for service. One of the Edward Pact Officer's problem solving projects is to approach owners of alarms systems that have a high number of false alarms and encourage them to educate employees on the proper use of the system or take steps to improve their system.

***Transportation Influences***

Major transportation thoroughfares that are owned and maintained by North Carolina State Department of Transportation bisect the neighborhood.

Over the years the major roads which bisect the neighborhood - the one-way pairs, US 321 and Highway 70 - have had a tremendous impact on the development of West Hickory/Westmont, particularly commercial development. The land use is what it is in West Hickory/Westmont primarily because of good access to Interstate 40, US 321 and Highway 70. The railroad tracks historically have attracted heavy industrial development.

Table 10 illustrates the projections for major roads in West Hickory/Westmont in 2020. These counts were forecast in the Hickory-Newton-Conover Urban Area Thoroughfare Plan adopted in 1986 and amended in 1997.

**Table 10. AVERAGE VEHICLES PER DAY ON MAJOR STREETS 1997 AND PROJECTED 2020**

	1997	2020
9 <sup>th</sup> St. SW at 7 <sup>th</sup> Ave. SW	1,300	5,500

1 <sup>st</sup> Ave. SW at 17 <sup>th</sup> St. SW	8,200	13,500
2 <sup>nd</sup> Ave. NW at 12 <sup>th</sup> St. NW	9,800	11,700
2 <sup>nd</sup> Ave. SW before 14 <sup>th</sup> St. SW	4,400	6,800
2 <sup>nd</sup> Ave. SW at 13 <sup>th</sup> St. SW	5,200	6,800
US Hwy. 70 SW at Grandview	18,100	8,700
13 <sup>th</sup> St. SW at 7 <sup>th</sup> Ave. SW	6,600	11,300

### **US 321**

Interstate 40 was completed through Hickory in 1975. In the early 1980's, US 321 was extended to join Interstate 40. This connection created a major transportation link for shipping goods from the Port of Charleston, South Carolina to points east and north.

Regional access improved when the US 321 connection to I-85 was completed in 1999. This thoroughfare also serves a third type of travel. A significant amount of traffic is generated from the developments adjacent to the corridor.

The average vehicles per day on US 321 will only continue to increase as anticipated growth in population and traffic volumes causes concern for both major thoroughfares and local streets. Table 11 illustrates the vehicles per day increase in only two years.

**Table 11. AVERAGE VEHICLES PER DAY ON US 321 AT VARIOUS LOCATIONS**

US 321 at...	1997	1999	Increase
North of 7 <sup>th</sup> Ave. SW bridge	30,700	33,000	2,300
Hardee's	31,300	35,000	3,700
Hickory Home & Garden	28,500	33,000	4,500
Clement Blvd.	25,100	29,000	3,900
Caldwell County Bridge	36,600	38,000	1,400

Transportation planners state the problem as one of capacity. Design capacity is determined by number of lanes, number of driveway cuts into the roadway, number and placement of traffic signals among other things. US 321 has a design capacity of 40,000 vehicles per day and currently is carrying 36,600 vehicles per day on average.

According to the Transportation Plan, the level of service has continued to deteriorate due to three inter-connected factors: 1) an increase in through travel and the external-internal between the planning area and the urban areas in Caldwell County; 2) increase in strip developments along the corridor and; 3) break down of access control.

The 1986 plan recommended widening the road to six lanes. The Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) stated that their top priority is to have the widening of US 321 to six lanes placed in the NCDOT State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). This project is not currently on the list and is not funded.

Planners maintain that US 321's projected traffic volume of 66,500 at the Caldwell County Bridge will exceed its design capacity in the year 2020 even if it is widened to six lanes. NCDOT has prepared a feasibility study that justifies the widening of US 321.

Due to the complexity of the situation and potential solutions, the plan recommended a detailed corridor study be undertaken. The scope of the corridor study originally only included the section within the planning area, but was extended to include the Lenoir urban area at the request of Caldwell County and other municipalities along this section of US 321.

### ***Corridor Study***

The US 321 Corridor Study will examine all conditions from Highway 70 SW in Hickory to the Lenoir City Limits. The Hickory segment of the study constitutes a very small portion of the entire study.



The US 321 Corridor study will coordinate the transportation plans of Hickory-Newton-Conover and Caldwell County.

A committee formed of NCDOT professionals and staff from the six local governments with assistance from the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) will explore several alternatives during the study.

Possibilities that could be studied include creating service roads, closing side street access to US 321, consolidation of driveway access to businesses, better traffic signal coordination, and development of an interchange.

The results of the study could change some of the priorities on the local and/or STIP. The time frame for this study is one year.

In preparation for the beginning of the study, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments conducted a survey of local government officials and other users of US 321. The survey was distributed to the West Hickory/Westmont Planning Committee in the winter of 1999. The survey asked respondents to identify both short and long-range transportation and land use needs along the corridor. The results of the survey will be helpful to the committee in providing a basic understanding of the perception of local officials, residents and business along US 321 as to existing conditions, improvements, alternatives and solutions.

### ***Study Impact and Community Input***

The Planning Committee discussed the status of the US 321 Corridor Study and its impact on the neighborhood at length. Perhaps no one issue is more frustrating to residents and business and commercial property owners due to the fact that it has taken so long to get the study underway and they feel so helpless against NCDOT. Hickory citizens need to realize and accept that US 321 serves a significant area, not

just Hickory. Yet there are ways for residents, business and property owners to be involved and have input into the process.

### **HIGHWAY 70 SW**

The Highway 70 corridor functions as a radial serving both external-internal and inter-city traffic. It also serves developments abutting the corridor ranging from industrial to major commercial. The one-mile segment through West Hickory/Westmont is five lanes.

According to the Transportation Plan, this portion of the road is functioning at an acceptable level and will not exceed capacity until near 2020.

### **MAIN AVENUE CORRIDOR**

The City Center Plan calls for Main Avenue north and south of the railroad tracks to connect from US 321 to downtown and serve as an entranceway to the city.

The advantage to creating a downtown entranceway of Main Avenue Corridor rather than improving the one-way pairs is that there is much under-utilized property along the corridor. It could also serve as an alternative route to the one-way pairs and would direct traffic away from residential areas.

One of the suggestions calls for traffic to be channeled to Main Avenue by way of the old Piedmont Wagon building at Tenth Street Place SW through the City's Solid Waste Transfer Station. In one design scenario, a roundabout that bisects the railroad tracks was shown in front of the Piedmont Wagon building.

Because the US 321 Corridor Study had yet to begin back when City Center was adopted in 1998, the City Council agreed to

wait on the results of the study before making a decision about how to prioritize the Main Avenue Corridor enhancement recommendation.

Staff acknowledges that the goals of the *City Center Plan* and the US 321 Corridor study might not be compatible due to the conflicting ideas of connectivity and limited access.

### **FIRST AND SECOND AVENUES SW**

First and Second Avenues SW are recognized as an east-west major thoroughfare in the Transportation Plan. It serves predominately commercial and industrial properties. Current traffic on this road ranges from 6,500 vehicles per day to 8,800 vehicles per day with no major traffic problems being experienced.

It is recommended in the plan to be upgraded to three lanes from Highway 70 in Hildebran to the one-way pair as the area develops. The upgrade is not funded or considered a priority by the MPO.

### **SECOND AVENUE NW**

Second Avenue NW, from the northern one-way pairs to the Long View City limits, functions as a major east-west thoroughfare and serves a mixture of business, industrial and residential development. Currently, traffic is heaviest in the vicinity of the intersection with US 321.

The adopted Thoroughfare Plan projects that with growth in Long View and eastern Burke County travel pressure on this road will be increased. The plan recommends that Second Avenue NW be widened to five lanes from the one-way pairs to well into Burke County. This project is not funded and is not considered a priority by the MPO.

The MPO has requested support from NCDOT to add a bicycle lane on Second Avenue NW in conjunction with any future widening project.

### **SEVENTEENTH STREET NW/SW**

Within the neighborhood, residential streets carry a higher than normal vehicle count most likely as a result of traffic cutting through the neighborhood to get to other thoroughfares. Seventeenth Street NW/SW is classified as a minor thoroughfare which means the road is designed to collect traffic from local access streets and carry it to the major thoroughfare system.

Seventeenth Street NW and SW is an important collector road that serves as a north south connector. The function and capacity of this road will almost certainly be factored into the alternatives generated during the US 321 Corridor study. Table 12 shows the average vehicles per day on Seventeenth Street NW/SW from 1996 to 1999.

**Table 12. AVERAGE VEHICLES PER DAY ON 17<sup>th</sup> STREET NW/SW**

	1996	1997	1999
North of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Avenue NW	3,600	3,500	3,200
South of 2 <sup>nd</sup> Avenue NW	4,600	4,400	5,300

These counts show that traffic has decreased slightly in three years on Seventeenth Street NW north of Second Avenue NW, and increased on Seventeenth Street NW south of Second Avenue NW. This suggests a demand on the south side going toward First Avenue SW and Highway 70 SW.

According to the Hickory-Newton-Conover Transportation Plan, Seventeenth Street NW, south of Second Avenue NW functions as a minor thoroughfare and has a current practical capacity of 9,400 vehicles per

day. The year 2020 projection for this road segment is 10,200 average daily traffic. The Transportation plan recommends widening this segment to three lanes. This is an identified future need and is not funded.

### **CLEMENT BLVD./OLD LENOIR ROAD**

While this intersection lies just outside the boundaries of the neighborhood, how it functions in terms of connectivity and traffic impacts the area.

For years, vehicles traveling from the center of the city or northwest Hickory to US 321, the airport or the stadium have had to travel a circuitous route. Since 1998, the city has been planning, designing and seeking NCDOT approval for a roundabout to connect Clement Boulevard and US 321 to Old Lenoir Road.

A roundabout is a large circle typically with a landscaped island in the middle in which traffic flows through without signalization. Its function is based on the rule that vehicles in the roundabout have the right-of-way over vehicles trying to get into the circle from the five side streets. Roundabouts are commonly used to slow traffic and reduce intersection collisions.

The two brick buildings at the intersection of Old Lenoir Road and Twelfth Street Drive NW will be removed to accommodate construction of the roundabout.

Plans call for traffic signals on mast arms to be placed at the Clement Boulevard Extension and on Old Lenoir Road where it meets Eleventh Street NW near the Jack B Quick market. Railroad crossing arms will close off the road when a train is present.

Roundabout construction is supposed to begin in the late summer of 2000 in conjunction with

the rough grading for the construction of the Racetrac gas station on US 321.

The project will likely take eight months to complete according to engineers. During construction, the traffic that usually turns left from US 321 onto Old Lenoir Road will most likely divert to Second Avenue NW.

This is a very complex project due to the existing conditions and presence of main water lines, fiber optic connections to Caldwell County, sewer lines, the rail crossing and the steep grade. The utilities will be placed underground in the project area constituting one-third of the cost of the whole project. NCDOT will resurface Old Lenoir Road after the project is completed.

When completed, this will be Hickory's first roundabout, and will facilitate better traffic movement and access to US 321.

### **RAIL CROSSING CLOSINGS**

In March 2000, the Hickory City Council approved the recommendations of the NCDOT Rail Division's updated *Western Piedmont Traffic Separation Study*. The purpose of the study is to reduce accidents at rail/highway at-grade crossings. A significant factor motivating the study is the possible return of rail passenger service to Hickory and the need to improve safety and reduce crossing conflicts in that event.

This plan was originally presented to Council on August 18, 1998. At that time Council deferred action pending the completion of the *City Center Plan* and *Hickory by Choice* studies.

The Council's 1999-2000 goals and objectives said that Council will, "Consider the NCDOT railroad crossing study and make

recommendations on individual crossings based on community input and needs.”

There are twenty-two crossings in the study. In eleven cases, improved crossing gates, pavement markings, signage or improving sight distances are the actions that will result. Eight of the crossings will be closed. Three of those crossings are in the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood.

All crossings were evaluated using the criteria developed for the NC DOT Rail Crossing Safety Program. Criteria used in evaluating the Hickory crossings include: accident history; present and future vehicle traffic; train traffic; hazardous materials; type of roadway; type of property served; school bus route; emergency route; type of warning devices present; redundant crossing; potential for grade separation; feasibility of implementing roadway improvements and economic impact if crossing is closed.

Table 13 illustrates the average of vehicles per day at each of the proposed rail crossing closings in West Hickory/Westmont.

**Table 13. VEHICLE PER DAY COUNT AT WEST HICKORY/WESTMONT PROPOSED RAIL CROSSING CLOSINGS**

10 <sup>th</sup> Street NW/SW at Piedmont Wagon	267
12 <sup>th</sup> Street NW/SW east of Del-Mark	925
18 <sup>th</sup> Street NW/SW West of Southern Desk	2,688

The study recommends making major improvements to three crossings, one of which is in the West Hickory/Westmont area. These improvements involve significant construction or reconstruction. The Fourteenth Street SW crossing, south of the Westmont Recreation Center needs to be reconstructed to eliminate a truck drive located between the crossing gate and the railroad track and to improve Main Avenue SW to handle truck turns.



One of the improvements recommended at 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW is to relocate a truck drive that currently is located in front of the railroad crossing gate.

In January 2000, Council approved an engineering design contract with Gannett, Fleming, Corddry and Carpenter, Inc. for the design of these projects. The redesign on the Fourteenth Street NW/SW crossing will not be complete till approximately September 2000.

The primary justification given for the proposed rail crossing closures and improvements is to improve safety for the proposed passenger rail service. *Hickory by Choice* recommends reestablishing passenger rail service to the Union Square area, but makes no specific recommendations about rail crossings.

However, the *City Center Plan* recommends against most of the proposed closings. It specifically recommends maintaining the crossings at Tenth and Twelfth Streets SW to facilitate the proposed use of Main Avenue as an additional access corridor to downtown from US 321. *City Center Plan* notes the lack of fatalities and low accident levels at Hickory’s rail crossings and suggests that the few accidents that have occurred could have been limited with modern crossing gates. It also notes that further study of the Main Avenue corridor to pro-

vide additional downtown access may even require additional crossings at key locations.

West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Association hosted a citywide neighborhood informational meeting in February 1999 to discuss the study. Generally, people object to the closings as causing inconvenience to their travel patterns or businesses. Property owners who may be affected by right of way acquisition for crossing improvements could also object.

Prior to closing a crossing, a public hearing will have to be held and the City Council will have to vote on each closing. The three crossings could be closed as soon as Fall 2000.

For each closed crossing the study found that there are reasonable alternative crossing locations, and the Hickory Police and Fire Departments have not expressed opposition to any of the proposed closings.

Receipt of state funding for the construction of improvements is contingent on approval of this study and its recommendations. The improvements are needed to promote passenger rail, improve safety, and reconstruct three crossings that are badly in need of improvement.

### **FUTURE PASSENGER RAIL**

According to recommendations from Governor Jim Hunt's Transit 2001 Commission report issued in January 1997, Hickory will be a passenger stop on the new service connecting Asheville and Raleigh, via Salisbury and Hickory. Transportation planners are hopeful to have passenger rail service in Hickory by 2003. The goal is to build a multi-modal transportation system and lessen the dependency on automobiles by connecting to nation-wide passenger train service operated by Amtrak.

The long term impact of passenger rail is significant for all of western North Carolina in terms of reduction in automotive trips, tourism and visibility of the region.

The location of the train depot has not been determined, but a downtown site is preferred. Passenger rail will certainly bring more potential customers to the downtown area, which could lead to the conversion of existing business and commercial uses to retail and service oriented businesses that cater to travelers and tourists, such as rental car agencies or taxi services.

For the West Hickory/Westmont area, the impact of passenger rail is important. Passenger rail travels at a higher speed than freight thereby requiring fewer public at-grade crossings.

### **PUBLIC TRANSIT**

There are fourteen Piedmont Wagon bus stops in West Hickory/Westmont. The bus travels in one direction along Second Avenue NW from Eleventh Street NW west to Eighteenth Street Place NW. It crosses the railroad tracks at Eighteenth Street NW, turns onto First Avenue SW for one block, then heads south on Seventeenth Street SW past West Hickory Senior Apartments and the park and Weaver Pool. The route turns east on Fifth Avenue SW behind the Spectrum Yarn plant to Fifteenth Street SW where it continues along Seventh Avenue SW crossing Thirteenth Street SW and going past Grandview Middle School.

The future of the bus stops is uncertain at this time. Piedmont Wagon officials are examining the current routes to provide more efficient coverage.

## CURRENT SPEED LIMITS

Throughout the city, residential speed limits are typically 35 miles per hour. Only in specific areas, such as the downtown area and high pedestrian areas such as school zones, are speed limits reduced to 20 or 25 miles per hour.

Typically, speed limits are determined by what is known as the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile rule: the speed at which eighty-five percent of the traffic travels or less. Other factors such as the geometry of the road and the density of driveway cuts are taken into consideration when considering operating speeds.

West Hickory/Westmont residents and other Hickory neighborhoods are questioning the appropriateness of the posted speed limits in residential areas. The safety of pedestrians and peacefulness of the neighborhood are more important than accommodating cut-through drivers who are in a hurry.

Based on repeated complaints about speeding, the City initiated a reduction of the speed limit from 35 mph to 25 mph on Seventeenth Street NW from Main Avenue NW north to Second Avenue NW. This stretch of road passes by Bethany Lutheran Church through a residential area.

## TRAFFIC CALMING

The City Council, at its November 2, 1999 Council Meeting, requested the City Manager to develop options for a traffic calming program, identify potential streets for speed limit reductions and investigate the feasibility of using monitoring equipment to enforce red light violations.

On February 15, 2000, the City Council adopted a traffic calming policy, which provides the means for residents to request speed limit reductions, multi-way stops and speed humps.

This process involves five distinct steps:

1. **Citizen Request** – A citizen would contact the City Planning Department and identify a speeding or cut through traffic problem.
2. **Evaluation** – Staff including traffic, police, fire and planning would evaluate the complaint and determine if a valid problem exists and if the street is appropriate for traffic calming.
3. **Criteria** -- If a valid problem is found to exist, staff would use the following criteria to determine if a traffic calming program could be developed:
  - A street must be classified as a two-lane, local residential street. (not a major Transportation Plan Roadway or minor transportation plan roadway carrying more than 5,000 vehicles per day)
  - The street's pavement width must be less than or equal to 40 feet.
  - The average annual daily traffic volume is greater than 500 vehicles per day and less than 5,000 vehicles per day.
  - The speed of at least 15% of the traffic on the street exceeds the posted speed limit by at least 5 mph.
4. **Resident Petition** – If the street qualifies for traffic calming, staff would develop a program that may include speed reductions, multi-way stops, speed humps, or other appropriate measures and forward this program and an official petition to the interested citizen. A petition bearing the signature of 75% of the residents of the affected street or streets would be required to proceed with the process.
5. **Prioritization of Installation** – After submittal of the petition the street will be rated for priority and scheduled for

installation depending on funds budgeted.

6. **Cost** – The cost of the installation of traffic calming measures including speed humps is borne by the City of Hickory.

Following receipt of a written notice of a speeding or cut-through traffic problem by the Planning Department, staff will determine if the problem is valid and if the street meets the qualifying criteria. If it is determined that the problem is valid and that the street meets the criteria, a petition will be mailed to the interested party. The policy states that it is the interested party's responsibility to complete the petition and return it to the City.

The effectiveness of this new policy has yet to be tested. To date, five requests for traffic calming devices have been submitted and are currently under review by the Traffic Division.

On-street parking is another way to slow traffic because it reduces the lane width. Typically, the road must be twenty-three feet or wider to accommodate on street parking on one side. Any changes to existing on street parking areas would require an amendment to the City's current parking ordinance and City Council action.

### **SIGHT DISTANCE PROBLEM SPOTS**

Planning Committee members discussed the line of sight problem at Fourteenth Street NW and First Avenue NW at the northwest corner of Westmont Senior Center lot. Motorist must inch into the intersection to see around a five-foot stone wall looking for traffic traveling southbound.

The Traffic Safety Unit reviewed their records for 1998 through March 2000. Only two crashes were reported at that intersection. One was a hit-run crash where a vehicle ran the stop sign. The other was a single vehicle crash where the vehicle ran off the road to the left just prior

to the intersection. The low accident rate could be attributed to drivers on First Avenue NW who have learned to approach that intersection with caution. Planning Committee members can easily recall several near misses.

Since the use of the Westmont Center has changed over the years, the solution could be to remove the bank and rework the wall and install some low landscaping. Extra consideration should be given to what types of underground utilities might exist in that area. Water, sewer and/or gas lines would complicate the situation.

Planning Committee members identified Fourteenth Street Drive SW just south of Seventh Avenue SW as a sight distance problem spot due to curve in the road. Neighborhood concern was raised recently when a woman was struck and injured by a vehicle while trying to cross the street.

The Traffic Division measured the sight distance at this intersection to be greater than 500 feet. The minimum acceptable sight distance is 230 feet. A large oak tree does limit the sight distance some, but not enough to warrant removal.

City engineers attribute the problem to the super elevation in the curve on Fourteenth Street Drive SW. They agree that if someone was speeding up the road it could be dangerous. The Traffic Safety Unit has on occasion set up license check points in that area.

Review of accident data showed that in 1999, three crashes occurred. Two were yield violations and one was an unsafe movement. No accidents were the result of excessive speed.

## ***Business and Commercial Interests***

The business sector was represented on the West Hickory/Westmont planning committee throughout the planning process by three family owned and operated companies who have been in the area for many years.

A special meeting was held in March 2000 specifically for businesses and commercial property owners to gather their input because of their substantial influence in the area. Others took the time to personally speak with staff to relay their concerns, ideas and issues.

Business and commercial property owners feel somewhat disconnected from the neighborhood even though some of these businesses have been in the area for many years.

West Hickory/Westmont industries and commercial businesses have witnessed a gradual progression of change in the character and composition of the area. Several small, family-owned specialty companies remain in the area while other necessary neighborhood service oriented businesses have long since left. The most obvious need is for a neighborhood grocery store.

West Hickory/Westmont is home to a several major employers. Traditional textile and furniture manufacturing industries are mixed in with the many of the region's growing employment base of high technology, information management, retail wholesaling and distribution.

Proximity to the airport as well as the major thoroughfares makes West Hickory/Westmont a desirable location for business. The trend in the area is toward commercial development. High traffic counts on US 321 drive this development. However, site availability and traffic may effect the area's ability to develop. Market

driven land prices have risen steadily particularly for the US 321 area.

The corporate headquarters for an international fiber optic cable manufacturing company and a major food distribution and warehouse facility dominates development along US 321. Gas station and convenience stores, fast food, furniture sales, offices, home and commercial fuel sales and auto services are other types of businesses in the area.

While Highway 70 development is not as robust as US 321, by no means is it considered stagnant. It is characterized by furniture retail, fast food, discount retail stores, pawn shop, tattoo parlors, auto service and detailing, and adult entertainment clubs. In 1998, the only grocery store serving the southwest quadrant closed leaving quite a void. Kroger left because they were closing stores in northwest North Carolina, not the demographics of the area according to staff. Helig-Meyers has since leased half the space in the building. It is difficult for another retailer needing square footage to utilize the remainder.

Based on the feedback the city's Economic Development Coordinator is getting from developers, grocery stores can't afford to build on the land that is available. Developers claim that there is a lack of rooftops and income levels in West Hickory/Westmont have not kept pace with other parts of the city making it less desirable to develop in this area.

South of Highway 70 SW, Thirteenth and Seventeenth Streets SW serve several industries with potential for future development as much of the land is vacant and zoned for economic development.



First and Second Avenues SW is predominately commercial in nature, yet there are single family homes interspersed amongst the businesses. These houses will likely be converted to commercial uses similar to those currently in business or be removed due to neglect or to make way for new development.

Businesses along the southern one-way pairs have been there for many years. Most of them are family-owned and operated and provide specialty services or products. Structures in the corridor are aging and, with a few exceptions, are in need of appearance and landscape improvements. It is likely that the older buildings located along the commercial areas will need capital renovations in the near future. The most recent construction between the one-way pairs was in 1989. Opportunities for redevelopment are plentiful and are likely to become more apparent as land values in other parts of the city surpass what some entrepreneurs can afford.

The desire to have facilities close to the city and to neighborhoods could translate into fewer vacant buildings and job opportunities closer to where people live. There is a certified enterprise zone that extends over to the West Hickory/Westmont area. It provides tax credits for capital investment and job creation.

A significant amount of development activity is occurring just north of the neighborhood boundaries. In the US 321 corridor, developers have revealed plans for new retail space behind the Lowes Food store. A Racetrac gas station, CVS drugstore and Taco Bell are planned for the intersection of the Clement Boulevard extension to Old Lenoir Road. A new office building is planned for the area where Catawba Dunbrick was located.

Just outside the eastern boundary on Highway 70 SW, the Gateway Center Hotel was recently remodeled, a new four-story office building and

the new Catawba County Chamber of Commerce building were built on adjacent property. Hickory Plaza was remodeled and the parking lot extensively landscaped. Ellis Hosiery, south of the neighborhood boundaries, expanded recently.

West Hickory/Westmont business owners for the most part want the same things as residents - streets fixed and old buildings refurbished and occupied. Yet they expressed concerns about city incentives for improvements that they felt should be taken care of by the private sector.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

The West Hickory/Westmont commercial and industrial areas have outstanding access to major transportation arterials, which will only improve over time.

Like the residents, property owners and business managers are intently waiting for the opportunity to have input into the US 321 Corridor study in the coming year.

Transportation improvements are slightly more distant for property owners along Highway 70, yet could act as the much needed catalyst to stimulate new development. Construction on a new interchange at I-40 and Thirty-third Street SW could begin as soon as October 2000. Known as the Northwest Loop project, the interchange will provide a major radial service for the Town of Long View as well as an eventual connection to Clement Boulevard via Eighth Avenue NW near the airport. Immediate plans are not showing ramps from Thirty-third Street SW to connect to Highway 70, but could be justified given the development opportunities and the potential impact.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Given the excellent access of the area and the central location to serve Hickory businesses, there is no reason to expect development along these commercial corridors to cease. In the coming years, the air quality issue will have an impact on where industries locate.

As industries in the area grow they either expand where they are if land is available or move further out, like MDI/IFH for example. Edelweiss and UPS are two of the most recent commercial and industrial interests who have left the area. Those two buildings, which sit on the corner of Main Avenue Drive NW and Seventeenth Street NW are now vacant. Their value is lower due to limited loading space and square footage.

Unfortunately for West Hickory/Westmont, multi-story industrial buildings, such as the old Southern Desk on First Avenue SW, are obsolete. While it is desirable to promote the reuse of older, perhaps historic buildings, the reality is that rehabilitation is expensive and some developers choose to demolish the existing building to make way for a new structure. In some cases demolition is the best option as some of the commercial structures have been neglected over the years and have become eyesores to the community.

### **COMPATIBILITY WITH RESIDENTIAL AREAS**

More often than not, any time residential areas abut industrial or commercial properties without the added benefit of a transitional zone of offices or less intense service businesses, the result is extremely unfavorable for all parties.



*Hickory Ready Mix, a concrete manufacturer located on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SW, is in an industrial zone that adjoins a residential zone.*

Where conflicts do exist, business owners have made concerted efforts to abate some of the negative impacts their industry causes. Granted, these efforts may not completely satisfy the near-by residents, but these businesses have completed appearance improvement projects and altered operational aspects in an attempt to be a better neighbor. In the absence of local ordinances restricting specific actions, these industries are within the law.

Undoubtedly, these two competing interests share the desire to stabilize and enhance the area. The challenge is to find ways businesses and residents can co-exist peacefully all the while being mindful of each others concerns.

## PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The West Hickory/Westmont Plan is the result of a planning process that proactively involved the residents and other interested individuals who worked together to identify their priorities and devise action steps which meet the current and future needs of this neighborhood.

The set of strategies, action steps and recommendations in this plan were developed to preserve or improve the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood and commercial areas.

While the plan does not attempt to address all the issues and concerns in the neighborhood, the plan does provide the frame work to begin the process of making living and working in West Hickory/Westmont more desirable. Specific recommendations address concerns of: public safety; managing traffic; monitoring progress of the US 321 Corridor study; strengthening code enforcement efforts; proposing zoning changes; enhancing corridors within the neighborhood; improving the appearance of vacant buildings, and building the neighborhood's organizational capacity to sustain the neighborhood's cooperative spirit while progressing toward implementation of their goals.

The recommendations are the result of thoughtful consideration of information provided to the Planning Committee by the various resource people during the planning meetings. Thorough analysis of the data presented and examination of feasible options aided in the group's justification for making the recommendations.

### *Grandview Middle School*

The West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood is concerned with the future use of Grandview Middle School should the School Board decide to relocate the Administrative Services and the alternative high school to Grandview Middle

School. Neighbors want to retain a school whether it be an elementary or a middle school, in their neighborhood. They recognize the value a school brings to the neighborhood. Neighbors realize they must be proactive and active participants in this decision making process and make their desires known to the School Board.

The neighborhood could address Board members individually or ask to appear before them as part of their regular meeting. The School Board meets on the second Monday at Green Park School for an informal work session at 5:30 PM and on the fourth Monday at 7:00 PM at City Hall for a regular business meeting.

Recently, the School Board was informed that since the conversion of College Park Middle School to an elementary school was cost prohibitive, that College Park maybe be better suited for the alternative high school and administrative offices. As of May 2000, the School Board was considering using Grandview as an elementary school for fourth and fifth graders to create more space in the other elementary schools. The School Board is considering building a new elementary school on what is currently the ballfield at Grandview, and remove the forty-two year old building once the new building is complete.

The Planning Committee proposed that the neighborhood group form a committee to formulate a strategy to build support for a neighborhood school. After garnering enough support from neighbors and other resources, the group could approach the school board with their strategy for maintaining a neighborhood school. While some Planning Committee members were skeptical about the outcome, most agreed the request was worth pursuing and the time to

act is before the School Board moves forward with their long-term plans.

← Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **FORM NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

#### ***Recommendation***

- Form a committee to study and build support for a neighborhood school. Explore options for retaining Grandview Middle School or relocating an elementary school to the area. Depending on the results, the Committee must be prepared to state their case in the form of a formal request to the Hickory City School Board.
  - ← Justification: Residents are truly concerned that if Grandview Middle School is closed the vitality of the neighborhood will suffer resulting in fewer young families choosing to live in the area
  - ← Cost: None
  - ← Time table: Begin immediately, complete within two years
  - ← Responsible parties: Neighborhood, working with the School Board and other interested parties

### **ADDRESS THE SCHOOL BOARD**

#### ***Recommendation***

- Address Hickory Public School Board regarding future use of Grandview Middle School.
  - ← Justification: The future use of this property is of great concern to the neighborhood. Replacing the Middle School with the Alternative High School and School Administration offices is less desirable than maintaining the property as it was originally intended.
  - ← Cost: None
  - ← Time table: Begin immediately, complete within two years

### ***US Highway 321 Corridor***

The North Carolina Department of Transportation and the Western Piedmont Council of Governments had just begun working with municipalities on the long awaited US 321 Corridor Study as the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood began the planning process. While the Hickory portion of the study only represents a fraction of the scope of the entire study, the issues and impact are significant.

Residents and business and commercial property owners are anxious for an opportunity to comment and have input into the process. NCDOT is tentatively planning to hold community meetings during the summer of 2000. At that time the public will have a chance to hear about what the Corridor Study committee has discussed and what options might be emerging.

It would be premature for the Planning Committee to make specific recommendations regarding US 321 at this stage. However, this issue was discussed at length during the process and the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Association endorses the following suggestions and proposals.

- Request replacement the traffic signal at Main Avenue Drive NW and US 321  
*The signal was removed from this location sixteen years ago. NCDOT removed the signal for two reasons. First, the blind curve traveling northbound on US 321 creates a high accident potential for motorists crossing at Main Avenue Drive NW. Second, the fewer signals on US 321 allow for better flow of*

traffic. Some businesses and residents are still feeling inconvenienced, yet safety concerns have created a difference in opinion.

- Create a safe pedestrian crossing on US 321  
*The Planning Committee understood that pedestrian crossings will be addressed in the US 321 corridor study. To add a pedestrian phase in the traffic signal sequence would add 80 seconds more to the travel time according the city staff. That is, to add a pedestrian crossing signal would double the wait time for motorists. The study should also address ways to enhance the bridge at Fourteenth Street SW to make it user-friendly. Sidewalks are a critical element to pedestrian safety that should not be overlooked.*
- Help traffic move more efficiently around the Siecor/Seventh Avenue NW/Twelfth Street Drive NW area  
*There are currently signals at Seventh Avenue and Ninth Avenue NW. The US 321 Corridor Study could recommend that one of the signals is removed and the other improved, or even realignment of the roads near Siecor and US 321.*
- Request transportation enhancements for US 321 such as sidewalks, planted median and underground utilities as construction is happening  
*The Planning Committee learned about the availability of Transportation Enhancement Funds to undertake projects such as landscaping and facilities for pedestrians and bicycles among other types of projects. This funding is part of the federal act known as the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21). These funds are for non-traditional transportation projects such as bike paths, beautification and rehabilitat-*

*ing or operating historic transportation facilities. The Planning Committee is aware that transportation enhancements have been completed in the City recently have happened because the City contributed to the cost of the project. Examples include installing underground power to the streetlights along US 321, the tree plantings along Tate Boulevard, and the sidewalks at the Lenoir-Rhyne College crossover.*

- Consider recommendations from City Center Plan to create access to downtown via Main Avenue Corridor  
*The group briefly discussed the merits of a Main Avenue NW/US 321 connection and the difficulties and benefits of the proposal. If this connection were made the Rantex building on Fourteenth Street NW would have to be demolished and as well as the James Oxygen warehouses. Traffic would be routed partially through a residential section.*
- Design attractive entranceway at Thirteenth Street SW and US 321  
*Currently, the entranceway is landscaped, but there is not signage welcoming travelers to Hickory or the neighborhood.*

Given the current and future impact this heavily traveled corridor has on the neighborhood, it is imperative that residents, business and commercial property owners participate in the planning process to the greatest extent possible. Transportation planning is a long and deliberate process. A process that can result in the best possible outcome if all parties actively and openly engage them in working toward reasonable solutions for as long as it may take.

## ***Public Transit***

### ***Recommendation***

#### **REDESIGN PIEDMONT WAGON ROUTES**

Members of the Planning Committee suggested adjusting the route to include stops on Twelfth Street NW near West Hickory Baptist Church. Parks and Recreation staff suggested that in order to serve the elderly population better, a route with stops past the Westmont Senior Center at Main Avenue Drive NW and Fourteenth Street NW be considered.

- ⇐ Justification: Suggested routes would provide better coverage and meet the identified needs of the community
- ⇐ Cost: Staff time
- ⇐ Time table: Within one year
- ⇐ Responsible party: Transit Division

## ***Traffic Safety***

As the City grows, traffic safety issues have become a great concern to the West Hickory/Westmont neighborhood. Members of the Planning Committee shared a number of personal near miss traffic accident experiences at intersections in the neighborhood and problems with speeding cut-through traffic.

The intersection of US 321 and Second Avenue NW is recognized as one of the most dangerous intersections in the city according to the Traffic Safety Unit. Heavy traffic flow, large trucks, numerous turning conflicts, excessive speed and red light runners' combine to create a hazardous situation.

One short-term solution to improving the safety of this intersection would be to add a protected left turn signal from Second Avenue NW, eastbound and westbound onto US 321. The City supports the neighborhood's request for pro-

ected left turn signals at this intersection and has corresponded with NCDOT regarding this issue. The problem is that adding left turns adds to the time traffic stacks up on US 321 causing travel time delays. The signal timing plans would have to be upgraded.

### ***Recommendation***

- Request NCDOT consent to add protected left turn signals to Second Avenue NW eastbound and westbound to improve safety at this intersection.
  - ⇐ Justification: This is one of the top ten most dangerous intersections in the city. Protected left turn signals would provide an added degree of safe turning movement.
  - ⇐ Cost: Undetermined
  - ⇐ Time table: Immediately
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Traffic Division, Traffic Safety Unit, NCDOT

#### **CORRECT SIGHT DISTANCE PROBLEM**

Neighbors reported and city staff confirmed a sight distance problem exists at Fourteenth Street NW and First Avenue NW (the northwest corner of Westmont Senior Center lot). Parks and Recreation and Street Division staff have determined that removal of the bank and stone retaining wall is the only means of correcting this problem.

### ***Recommendation***

- Correct line of sight problem at Fourteenth Street NW and First Avenue NW (the northwest corner of Westmont Senior Center lot).
  - ⇐ Justification: Motorists on First Avenue NW cannot clearly see oncoming traffic traveling

- northbound on Fourteenth Street NW
- ⇐ Cost: Estimate ?
- ⇐ Time table: Within one year
- ⇐ Responsible Parties: Parks and Recreation Department, Street Division

### **ASSESS OPTIONS TO IMPROVE TRAFFIC SAFETY AT FOURTEENTH STREET DRIVE SW**

Neighbors perceive there to be a sight distance problem at Fourteenth Street Drive SW, just south of Seventh Avenue SW. Staff measured and found adequate sight distance, yet three accidents have been recorded at this intersection. Concern among residents heightened when a vehicle recently struck a neighbor. Decreased speed limits and/or increased signage to warn motorists of dangerous conditions are two suggestions that could be explored.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Assess options to improve traffic safety and line of sight problem in the 800 block of Fourteenth Street Drive SW, south of Seventh Avenue SW.
  - ⇐ Justification: Neighbors feel this intersection is hazardous and warrants study for traffic safety improvements.
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within two years
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Traffic Division, Traffic Safety Unit

### **ASSESS ON-STREET PARKING AT TWELFTH STREET SW**

Neighbors who live along 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW, south of Highway 70, are concerned about tractor trailers parking in the street near the intersection adjacent to the Burger King. They are concerned about safety and feel the area should be designated a "no parking" zone. Motorists traveling north must move into on-coming traffic to

get around trucks when they are parked in the street. Neighbors and staff disagree on the issue of disallowing on-street parking on Twelfth Street SW. The road is wide enough at this location to support on-street parking of vehicles and trucks. Traffic Division recommends studying the issue with assistance from the police at different times during the day and night to determine frequency and alleged sight distance obstruction.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Assess on-street parking situation at Twelfth Street SW and Hwy 70 SW at the Burger King to determine need for posting "no parking" signs.
  - ⇐ Justification: Formal analysis and disposition of situation is necessary to satisfy neighbor's persistent dissatisfaction.
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Traffic Division, Traffic Safety Unit, Hickory Police Department

### **IMPROVE PAVEMENT MARKINGS**

Motorists, particularly elderly motorists, have trouble seeing pavement markings at night or in foul weather. Neighbors perceive this to mean that streets in West Hickory/Westmont are neglected.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Request that the Traffic Division survey the area and identify locations where pavement markings should be installed or refreshed. Determine need for painting of center lines both in the residential and industrial areas.
  - ⇐ Justification: To improve the safety of roadways through in-

creased visibility of edge of pavement lines, center lines, turn arrows and stop bars.

- ⇐ Cost: Estimated at \$40 per intersection
- ⇐ Time table: Within six months
- ⇐ Responsible party: Traffic Division

### **INITIATE PROCESS TO REDUCE SPEED LIMITS**

Lowering the residential speed limit from 35 mph to 25 mph has been debated and discussed for some time. The issue was brought to the forefront in November 1999, when the City Council requested that options for a traffic calming program that included means for residents to petition for a reduction of speed limits on roads that met certain criteria. The policy was adopted on February 15, 2000. Neighbors must now submit to the Planning and Development Department specific roads where they think the speed limit should be reduced. The street must meet the criteria as specified. The Planning Department staff will determine if the problem is valid and if the street meets the qualifying criteria in the adopted policy. If it is determined that the problem is valid and that the street meets the criteria, a petition will be mailed to the interested party. It will be the interested party's responsibility to complete the petition and return it to the City.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Identify streets with speeding problems. Submit request to lower speed limits on those streets.
  - ⇐ Justification: The current 35 mph speed limit is not appropriate in certain residential areas
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **EXPLORE TRAFFIC CALMING**

The traffic situation in neighborhoods seems to be getting worse citywide. Speeding and cut through traffic degrades the peacefulness and jeopardizes pedestrian safety in the neighborhood. The newly adopted Traffic Calming policy is designed to enable residents to petition for the appropriate traffic calming device in their neighborhood. The idea of traffic calming for places that experience habitual problems like speeding, cut-through traffic and running stop signs needs to be explored further by the Neighborhood Association.

The traffic ordinance was amended in April 2000 to reduce the speed limit on the Seventeenth Street NW from the intersection of Second Avenue NW, south to Main Avenue NW from 35 mph to 25 mph.

Neighbors and Edward PACT officers should assess the effectiveness of the speed reduction and enforcement over a period of time to determine need for further traffic calming measures.

#### ***Recommendations***

- Submit request for study of the traffic on Seventeenth Street NW if speed reduction is not sufficient to address the problem.
  - ⇐ Justification: Neighbors have already identified Seventeenth Street NW as a problem area in need of traffic calming solution
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood
- Identify other streets with persistent speeding or cut through problems and present request for appropriate traffic



calming device to Planning and Development Department.

- ⇐ Justification: Neighbors must take the initiative and use the polices and process instituted by the city to ensure and promote safe residential streets.
- ⇐ Cost: None
- ⇐ Time table: On-going
- ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood

## **Public Infrastructure**

### **ADDITIONAL SIDEWALK NEEDS**

The Planning Committee is aware of the Sidewalk/Bikeway Task Force and their charge. The Committee had the opportunity to identify locations where they believe sidewalks would be beneficial. The Committee felt there is a need for more connecting sidewalks to provide a safe means for pedestrians near heavily traveled roadways.

Proposed locations for new sidewalks are indicated on the accompanying map in Appendix II. Based the Planning Committee's suggestions, staff estimated that an additional 24,420 linear feet or 4.6 miles of new sidewalks are needed in West Hickory/Westmont.

The group identified the following locations for sidewalks:

- Seventeenth Street NW from Seventh Avenue NW south to First Avenue SW
- First Avenue Place NW from Fifteenth Street NW east to Twelfth Street NW
- Fourteenth Street NW from Second Avenue NW south to Main Avenue Drive NW
- Main Avenue NW from Twelfth Street NW east to Tenth Street NW
- Thirteenth Street SW from Highway 70 SW south to City limits

- Second Avenue NW from the Eleventh Street NW boundary to Ninth Street NW
- Eleventh Street SW from Seventh Avenue SW to Second Avenue NW
- Twelfth Street NW from Main Avenue NW south to First Avenue SW
- Fourteenth Street SW from Hwy. 70 SW to Seventh Avenue SW

### **Recommendation**

- Request that the identified sidewalk needs in West Hickory/Westmont is placed on the Sidewalk/Bikeway Master Plan priority list.
  - ⇐ Justification: A safe, serviceable pedestrian circulation system needs to be established to serve the needs of the neighborhood and provide pedestrian access to downtown, the parks and Piedmont Wagon stops.
  - ⇐ Cost: \$268,620 (24,420 X \$11.00 per foot)
  - ⇐ Time table: Dependent on appropriation of funds and construction
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Engineering Department, Street Department

### **ASSESS SIDEWALK MAINTENANCE NEEDS**

In parts of West Hickory/Westmont, sidewalks are in need of repair and general maintenance. The appearance and image of the neighborhood is jeopardized when public infrastructure is allowed to deteriorate.

### **Recommendation**

- Request that the Street Department conduct a comprehensive assessment of the sidewalk conditions in West Hickory/Westmont, and perform necessary maintenance.

- ⇐ Justification: A serviceable and attractive sidewalk system is important for pedestrian safety
- ⇐ Cost: Staff time materials and labor
- ⇐ Time table: Within six months
- ⇐ Responsible party: Street Department

### **UNPAVED ROADS ON PRIORITY LIST**

Currently there is an estimated 6,029 feet or 1.14 miles of unpaved streets in West Hickory/Westmont. These dirt streets contribute to the negative image and decreased land value in the neighborhood.

The majority of the homes located along these seventeen segments of unpaved roads are rental properties. The chance of getting everyone to agree to the assessment is highly unlikely.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Request that priority consideration be given to the segments of dirt streets in West Hickory/Westmont for paving.
  - ⇐ Justification: Paving the dirt streets could have a positive impact on the image of the neighborhood and land values.
  - ⇐ Cost: Estimated at \$35,000
  - ⇐ Time table: Within three years
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Engineering Department, Street Division

### **ASSESS ADDITIONAL STREET LIGHTING NEEDS**

As a follow-up to the planning process, a comprehensive inventory of the location of streetlights and security lighting should be completed. It is well known that ample street lighting can be a major deterrent to crime as well as creating a greater sense of security in the area. Staff should conduct an inventory of current street lighting within the neighborhood and present

the information to the Neighborhood Association at a later date. Members of the Neighborhood Association can then assess the existing conditions and indicate their suggestions for approximate locations for more streetlights. The map should then be submitted to the Traffic Division for their review and determination of need.

#### ***Recommendations***

- Request staff conducts a comprehensive inventory of streetlights and map locations for review by the Neighborhood Association. Submit completed assessment and suggestions for new street lighting to Traffic Department for their review and determination of need.
  - ⇐ Justification: Inventory and map is necessary to illustrate where street lights are needed
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within six months
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Office of Neighborhoods, Neighborhood, Traffic Division
- Request installation of new streetlights as Traffic Department for their review and determination of need.
  - ⇐ Justification: Street lights should be added to enhance motorist and pedestrian safety and deter crime
  - ⇐ Cost: Monthly charge to the City per light. (Approximately \$8.00 per light)
  - ⇐ Time table: Within three years
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Traffic Division, Duke Power

#### ***Community Safety***

The Planning Committee learned that West Hickory/Westmont is a safe and secure neighborhood. Yet there is always room for

improvement and opportunities to work with PACT officers to ensure the health and safety of the neighborhood. Police rely on neighbors to be their "eyes on the street" since officers cannot be everywhere all the time. More neighbors should be willing to look out for their neighbors and report suspicious activity.

Members of the Planning Committee would like to have more officers on patrol so that vehicular and bicycle police visibility is increased.

### **ENFORCE SPEED LIMITS**

The Planning Committee voiced concerns about speeding vehicles and their perception that police officers are not enforcing the speed limits. Edward PACT has the fewest number of officers in comparison to other PACTs. Simply put, it is a matter of manpower and priorities. If officers spend more time issuing speeding citations, then less time is spent doing other police duties.

Recommendations to request traffic calming measures according to city policy are included in the Plan. Neighbors feel strongly about the need for more enforcement of the speed limits, and would welcome creative ways to be involved in the enforcement effort.

#### ***Recommendations***

- Encourage officers to be diligent about enforcing the speed limits, particularly in the residential areas.
  - ⇐ Justification: Speeding vehicles are a safety concern, and the perception of lax enforcement of the speed limits is harmful to the relationship between citizens and the police.
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Immediately
  - ⇐ Responsible Party: Hickory Police Department

- Explore the possibility of implementing innovative programs that involve neighbors in the enforcement of speed limits.
  - ⇐ Justification: Neighbors are so concerned about enforcement of posted speed limits that they are willing to be part of any effort to slow traffic down.
  - ⇐ Cost: Depending on type of program - Staff time for research
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible Party: Neighborhood, Hickory Police Department

### **PROMOTE CRIME PREVENTION**

The group agreed that re-establishing a Community Watch program and learning more about crime prevention were important to fostering a sense of neighborliness and maintaining the low crime rate in the neighborhood.

Persistent community action and continued involvement from a Community Watch Block Captain network is necessary to restore a sense of safety and well being in West Hickory/Westmont.

#### ***Recommendations***

- Continue to encourage neighbors to report incidents of illegal activity in the neighborhood to the PACT Commander and Hickory Police.
  - ⇐ Justification: PACT officers rely on neighbors to report suspicious activity
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

- Invigorate the Community Watch and Block Captain system for communication and crime prevention.
  - ⇐ Justification: Community Watch promotes neighbor to neighbor communication and fosters a sense of security
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Within six months
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Hickory Police Department

### **ENFORCE NOISE ORDINANCE**

Loud music from vehicles cruising through the neighborhood is disruptive and frustrating to residents. The Committee maintains that most of the offenders may not necessarily live in the neighborhood, but are usually the same people visiting others who live in apartment complexes or rental units.

In response to complaints concerning “boom boxes” and loud music from vehicles, Hickory Police developed and is using a specific civil citation form to address violations of the noise ordinance. The civil citation carries a fine of \$50.00, which must be paid within 72 hours. If this penalty is not paid, the City may proceed in civil court and the fine continues at \$50.00 per day. All police officers can issue the citation without prior warning or supervisory approval. An incident report is not necessary. An officer may determine a violation has occurred without a citizen complaint.

The Planning Committee understands that at times when a complaint is reported that the offender is gone before an officer arrives at the scene. The PACT Commander encouraged the neighbors to record the license tags, time and date each time someone drives through the neighborhood creating a disturbance, so that an officer can be made aware of the frequency of the problem.

Examination of the police calls for service data indicate that the majority of noise complaints that were responded to by an Edward PACT police officer in the twelve-month time frame were located at a rental or multi-family complex. Landlords have the ability to include a noise clause in their lease agreements and evict residents who fail to comply. If problems are reoccurring with a particular property, the neighbors can ask the property owner to consider such a clause.

Inconsiderate motorists who insist on driving through the residential neighborhood blasting their stereos will continue to do so unless they are issued a citation or two. While the problem with loud music from vehicles may never be completely eliminated, residents are urged to continue to report persistent problems.

### ***Recommendation***

- Encourage officers to be more diligent about issuing civil citations for violations of the noise ordinance.
  - ⇐ Justification: Loud music emanating from vehicles disrupts the peace and quiet of the neighborhood and is against the law
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Hickory Police Department

### ***Land Development and Zoning***

Land use and zoning is probably the most important long-term issue facing the West Hickory/Westmont area. Incompatible land uses create much of the conflict between residents and industrial and commercial interests. The fact that this neighborhood developed substantially prior to zoning regula-

tions accounts for most of the problem. How to correct the inconsistencies of the past is a challenging situation.

The Planning Committee identified some of the problems with incompatible land uses as:

- Dust
- Noise
- Design of multi-family housing
- Structures not oriented to the neighborhood or the street
- Lack of buffering for commercial, industrial and multi-family properties
- Density
- Junkyards
- Appearance of abandon or vacant buildings
- "Grandfathering" industrial buildings
- Truck traffic through narrow residential streets
- Paving entire lot or too close to property line for parking
- Code enforcement - overgrown buffers
- Drainage/runoff from parking lots
- Vacant industrial properties - redevelopment options
- Property maintenance - standards have changed over time

### **PARTICIPATE IN *HICKORY BY CHOICE* PROCESS**

The Planning Committee agreed that promoting and preserving the single-family character of West Hickory/Westmont is a priority. Residents are concerned about the possibility of more multi-family units and encroachment of commercial and industrial uses in the remaining residential areas. Over the years, residents have witnessed house after house being removed to make way for multi-family complexes. The current zoning allows for the highest density multi-family development and mobile homes as well as single-family homes. *Hickory by Choice* will affect change to some degree, but the zoning

changes might not be as restrictive as neighbors desire.

The most effective action residents, business and property owners could take in the upcoming months is to educate themselves and get involved in the *Hickory by Choice* ordinance and zoning development process. Meetings are open to the public. Drafts are available for review. The neighborhood even has a resident appointed to the Committee.

### ***Recommendation***

- As an organized Neighborhood Association, formulate a unified strategy for neighborhood residential development to present to the *Hickory by Choice* committee as the ordinances are being developed.
  - ⇐ Justification: Constructive citizen involvement throughout the policy development is the most effective means of influencing the decision making process.
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Immediately
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **SUPPORT ADOPTION OF DESIGN STANDARDS**

*Hickory by Choice* committee is considering the adoption of an appearance code that would include design standards for new development. Given the appearance of the kinds of multi-family units that have been built in the area recently, the neighbors wholeheartedly support the adoption of design standards that would require new development be constructed in keeping with the character of the traditional neighborhood.

**Recommendation**

- Support *Hickory by Choice* committee as they consider adoption of ordinances containing design standards.
  - ⇐ Justification: The residential areas of West Hickory/Westmont have suffered from incompatible and ill-conceived multi-family development
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, *Hickory by Choice* committee

**DRAFT ORDINANCE PROHIBITING FRONT YARD PARKING**

Residents are complaining that motor vehicles parking on lawns create visual blight in the neighborhood, lower property values, and in some cases, create a safety concern.

**Recommendation**

- Encourage the City to draft and adopt an ordinance to prohibit front yard parking
  - ⇐ Justification: Vehicles parked in the front yard outside of a driveway imparts a negative image
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within three years
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Planning & Development, Building Inspections, Legal

**EXPLORE INDOOR FURNITURE BAN FROM FRONT PORCHES**

Planning Committee members suggested that the city explore adopting an ordinance banning the keeping of indoor furniture on front porches after reading about the experiences from other North Carolina municipalities.

**Recommendation**

- Explore adoption of an ordinance that bans indoor furniture from front porches.
  - ⇐ Justification: Furniture that is intended for indoor use only when exposed to weather and other deteriorating factors quickly becomes an eyesore and potential health hazard
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within four years
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Planning & Development, Building Inspections, Legal

**FORMALLY/INFORMALLY MEET WITH DEVELOPERS**

Neighbors want the trend toward incompatible development to stop. While they reluctantly accept that change is inevitable, neighbors want developers to "raise the bar" on the types and designs of new development. One of the more creative solutions in this case would be for neighbors to meet formally or informally with developers and investors to begin building a relationship. Neighbors want to know from the developers perspective what it takes to redevelop the area in keeping with traditional neighborhood.

**Recommendation**

- Compile list of prospective developers and investors in the West Hickory/Westmont area. Determine format of meeting and invite them.
  - ⇐ Justification: The neighborhood would be making a valid attempt to learn more about and influence the types and design of new development in their area.

- ⇐ Cost: Dependant on number of participants and type of meeting
- ⇐ Time table: Within one year
- ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **SUPPORT REVITALIZATION OF MAIN AVENUE CORRIDOR**

Members of the Planning Committee became aware of the recommendation for the revitalization of Main Avenue Corridor as recommended in the City Center Plan. They felt if implemented, the recommendation could revitalize West Hickory/Westmont. Others fear that making Main Avenue connect to US 321 would further divide the community. Without knowing what kinds of recommendations will come out of the US 321 Corridor Study, the Planning Committee was unsure about which design scenario would best benefit the neighborhood, but seemed to agree to support any efforts to revitalize the Main Avenue Corridor.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Continue to support efforts to revitalize the Main Avenue Corridor while the US 321 Corridor Study is on going.
  - ⇐ Justification: Without knowing the results of the study, it is difficult to advocate one recommendation over another.
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **EXPLORE ELIGIBILITY FOR HISTORIC DESIGNATION**

West Hickory/Westmont Planning Committee members recognize that there are opportunities to preserve the historical structures that remain in the neighborhood. Most of those present agreed that it would be valuable to at least have the area surveyed so that the neighborhood and property owners would know which properties

in what areas could be eligible. The recommendation will be to request that the Historic Preservation Commission consider retaining the services of a historic resource professional to survey the area and prepare study list applications if warranted.

There is no real downside of National Register listing since it is purely honorary. One of the financial benefits is that homeowners can claim a thirty percent state income tax credit on the amount of money spent over two years to substantially rehabilitate the structure. Owners of income producing properties can claim a forty- percent federal and state income tax credit. Listing affords a certain degree of limited protection. Section 106 of the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires that prior to undertaking any federally funded, licensed or assisted project a determination of effect on a National Register resource must be made.

Some property owners dislike the extra control the locally designated historic district zoning overlay places on their property. By ordinance, any property within a designated historic district is required to follow the adopted Design Review Guidelines and seek approval from the Commission prior to making major changes to the exterior of the structure.

The residential areas of West Hickory/Westmont are traditional with pockets of several architecturally significant homes. Equally important and often overlooked are the commercial and industrial properties within the boundaries of the neighborhood.

An inventory of historic properties could show that parts of the neighborhood are potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and possibly the creation of one or more historic

districts. Historic property designation would be pursued only if eligible property owners in West Hickory/Westmont were in favor of the proposal.

The city's inventory of historic properties was last updated in 1999. The scope of the update did not include any properties in the West Hickory/Westmont area due to budget limitations. The Hickory Historic Preservation Commission would have to agree to commit resources for a survey of this neighborhood.

### ***Recommendations***

- Request that the Historic Preservation Commission incorporate into their workplan and budget for a survey of West Hickory/Westmont to expand the city's historic resource inventory.
  - ⇐ Justification: Determine eligibility of properties for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and record the historically and architecturally significant buildings in the neighborhood
  - ⇐ Cost: None for the inventory as it will be included in Historic Preservation Commission budget
  - ⇐ Time table: Within three years
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Historic Preservation Commission, Planning and Development
- Based on the results of the survey and property owners' desire, pursue the creation of a historic district in West Hickory/Westmont.
  - ⇐ Justification: To preserve the historic structures in the neighborhood, and enhance property values
  - ⇐ Cost: Dependent on the number of properties
  - ⇐ Time table: Within four years

⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Historic Preservation Commission

### **PROMOTE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

The City supports and promotes housing programs that improve living conditions primarily for low to moderate-income people. Seventy percent of the funds must go to benefit low to moderate-income families with housing needs who meet income requirements. Over the past year, only seven families in the West Hickory/Westmont area have benefited from City Housing Programs. Funds are dispersed on a first come basis and may be exhausted before the year is over. The Citizens Advisory Committee is a group of Hickory residents appointed by the Mayor to review and assess all requests for Community Development funds.

The Housing Rehabilitation program allows income eligible homeowners to borrow money at a favorable interest rate to fix up single family homes. The Urgent Repair program is designed to alleviate conditions, which pose an imminent threat to the life or safety of very low income and low-income homeowners with special needs. HELP or Home Energy Loan Program funds may be used to effect energy-efficiency measures in association with the comprehensive rehabilitation of owner occupied dwelling units. The City is currently looking for more land in the city to partner with an affordable housing builder to complete another subdivision similar to Hickory Hollow in north-east Hickory.

Typically, Community Development funds are not used to improve private property such as the old Southern Desk building, but could be used to help stimulate economic



development if it was determined that it was an eligible activity.

The Planning Committee inquired about the existing community development homeownership and rehabilitation programs. Residents are particularly interested in ways to get landlords involved in rehabilitating their rental properties.

**Recommendations**

- Support the City’s First Time Homebuyers, Housing and Rental Rehabilitation programs to promote homeownership and housing rehabilitation in the neighborhood through the distribution of literature at meetings and other events.
  - ⊖ Justification: Providing information and encouraging applications could stimulate interest in homeownership and could lead to a decrease in the number of structures in the neighborhood in need of minor or major repairs thus enhancing the overall appearance of the neighborhood
  - ⊖ Cost: Reproduction of handouts
  - ⊖ Time table: Immediately
  - ⊖ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Community Development
  
- Target tenants and investment property owners with a mailing of information regarding the City’s First Time Homebuyers program.
  - ⊖ Justification: Providing information and encouraging the conversion of rental properties back to owner occupied homes will help stabilize the neighborhood
  - ⊖ Cost: Estimated \$300.30 in postage (.33 x 910 housing units)
  - ⊖ Time table: Within two years
  - ⊖ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Community Development

**ASSESS COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS YEARLY**

Each year the Community Development Department is required to hold public meetings to gather citizen input in determining needs and priorities. Typically, these meetings are poorly attended most likely because people do not realize the importance of voicing their concerns or feel they do not have a stake in the issue.

If West Hickory/Westmont neighbors are serious about improving housing conditions, raising levels of homeownership or providing sidewalks in an area that might not otherwise have the opportunity, then neighbors, churches and other service agencies need to assess the community's needs and attend the Community Development public meetings when advertised.

**Recommendation**

- Assess housing and infrastructure needs in the eligible areas yearly, determine priorities and voice neighborhood concerns at the Community Development Block Grant neighborhood meetings.
  - ⊖ Justification: It is going to take a concerted neighborhood effort to make needs and priorities known to the Citizens Advisory Committee and Community Development staff.
  - ⊖ Cost: None
  - ⊖ Time table: Within six months
  - ⊖ Responsible parties: Neighborhood

**REQUEST CURB AND GUTTER AND SIDEWALKS IN INCOME ELIGIBLE AREAS**

Public infrastructure such as curb and gutter and sidewalks in income eligible areas are funded with Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) as needs are identified and priorities. Generally, the southeast

and southwest quadrants of Hickory meet these requirements. CDBG funds could be used to pay the sidewalk and curb and gutter assessment on behalf of a low-income family if such a project was to take place.

### ***Recommendation***

- Request curb and gutter and sidewalks be funded with CDBG money where eligible
  - ⇐ Justification: Eligible areas of the neighborhood are in need of this type of infrastructure to improve property values, image and drainage
  - ⇐ Cost: Dependant on actual footage installed
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Community Development, Citizens Advisory Committee

### ***Parks & Recreation***

Residents of West Hickory/Westmont consider themselves fortunate to have parks and recreational activities in the vicinity. However, neighbors observe some deficiencies in programming and playground equipment.

A previous recommendation addresses the sight distance problem at the intersection of Fourteenth Street and First Avenue NW. Any solution is going to require reconfiguration of Parks and Recreation property.

### **EXPAND PROGRAMMING FOR 12 YEAR-OLDS AND UNDER**

The Planning Committee discussed the use of the gym and how young kids cannot use the gym when bigger kids or adults are playing. There seems to be problems with rough housing and use of foul language when groups gather to play basketball during the free play times. Some expressed concerns that people from other

neighborhoods were dominating the facilities making it difficult for neighbors to use the facility.

### ***Recommendation***

- Explore need for user designated reserved time for younger kids to have equal access to the Westmont gym.
  - ⇐ Justification: To determine need for programming for younger kids to use the facility without having to compete with other users.
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Parks and Recreation Department

### **PROVIDE EQUIPMENT FOR YOUNGER KIDS**

#### ***Recommendation***

- Provide basketball ball goals for little people at the Westmont Gym.
  - ⇐ Justification: To provide necessary equipment to encourage the use of the facility by younger kids
  - ⇐ Cost: ?
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Parks and Recreation Department

### **ENHANCEMENTS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS**

Some of the play equipment at Westmont was removed due to safety concerns leaving very few pieces of equipment for younger children to play on. The Planning Committee believes that with a little attention and a few enhancements Westmont and West Hickory Park will attract more residents and others.

**Recommendations**

- Request playground equipment at both parks be considered a top priority for funding and moved up in the Capital Improvement Program
  - ⇐ Justification: New playground equipment is needed to attract children to the park and provide safe environment to play
  - ⇐ Cost: Undetermined
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Parks and Recreation Department, Parks and Recreation Commission
  
- Consider installing a picnic shelter at West Hickory Park
  - ⇐ Justification: A covered shelter would invite more residents, particularly the elderly from West Hickory Senior Apartments, to enjoy the park
  - ⇐ Cost: Estimated at \$10,000
  - ⇐ Time table: Within three years
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Parks & Recreation Department

**ADDITIONAL PARK LIGHTING NEEDS**

The group agreed that having more lighting installed at the park is important for security and crime prevention and providing the opportunity to use the park after dark. Parks and Recreation staff would determine potential locations for the lights.

**Recommendation**

- Recommend that additional lighting be installed at key locations in West Hickory Park and Westmont Park.
  - ⇐ Justification: Adequate lighting is important for security, crime pre-

vention and providing the opportunity to use the park after dark

- ⇐ Cost: Dependent on number of lights
- ⇐ Time table: Within one year
- ⇐ Responsible parties: Parks & Recreation Department, Duke Power

**Code Enforcement**

Structures in need of repair create a negative visual image for the neighborhood and harm property values. West Hickory/Westmont neighbors feel like they have put up with sub-standard buildings for long enough.

**ACCEPT DONATION OF CONDEMNED RENTAL HOUSES**

Two condemned rental houses on Fourteenth Street SW were offered as a donation to the city in lieu of making necessary repairs or assuming the cost of demolition. City Council voted to accept the donation in March 2000. Once the city takes ownership, neighbors want the city to remove the eyesores. The City accepted the property to help facilitate the improvement of the neighborhood as the opportunity presented itself. The City will sell the properties when appropriate.

**Recommendation**

- Encourage the City to accept the donation of Fourteenth Street SW condemned rental houses.
  - ⇐ Justification: Take advantage of opportunity to remove deteriorated dwellings
  - ⇐ Cost: Demolition estimated at \$17,000
  - ⇐ Time table: COMPLETE

⇐ Responsible party: Administration

### **EXPLORE MINIMUM COMMERCIAL BUILDING MAINTENANCE CODE**

Unlike the Minimum Housing code, there is no state enabling legislation to allow cities to regulate the XXX

State statute authorizes the local government to condemn unsafe buildings

#### ***Recommendation***

- Explore development of a commercial building code to regulate how these buildings are maintained.
  - ⇐ Justification: Lack of an enforceable ordinance pertaining to commercial buildings allows eyesores to remain in the community
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within two years
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Planning & Development, Building Inspections, Legal

### **EXPLORE POSSIBILITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT TO OLD SOUTHERN DESK BUILDING**

Neighbors have a hard time understanding the lack of a commercial property maintenance code similar to the Minimum Housing code. West Hickory/Westmont is particularly concerned about the appearance of the Old Southern Desk property on Seventeenth Street and First Avenue SW. The current property owners have done little to tidy up the property since the demolition of the east-end of the building and continue to store discarded machinery on the premises. Any solution to improving the appearance of the property will require effort from all parties.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Contact Southern Desk property owners and discuss neighborhood concerns and planning effort for improvement of the area.
  - ⇐ Justification: Personal contact and open dialogue regarding the neighborhood's concerns is the all important first step to making this kind of improvement
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible Party: Neighborhood

### **CONTACT OWNERS OF NEGLECTED PROPERTIES**

The Planning Committee discussed the benefits of personal contact with landlords and property management companies regarding problematic and unkept properties. The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood is willing to put pressure on property owners and provide information to them in an attempt to get them to maintain their properties.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Develop a dialogue with the owners of neglected properties to encourage housing rehabilitation and to inform owners of the existing programs and funding sources for housing rehabilitation.
  - ⇐ Justification: Personal contact allows for open communications of neighborhood desires and property owners positions
  - ⇐ Cost: Dependent on method of contact, postage and materials
  - ⇐ Time table: Within six months
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **REVISE MINIMUM HOUSING CODE TO EXPEDITE PROCESS**

The Minimum Housing code is weak in part due to the lengthy process. Planning Committee members feel that in order to strengthen the code the time allowed for compliance should be reduced.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Strengthen Minimum Housing code by shortening the time the process takes
  - ⇐ Justification: The longer a property is allowed to remain in a deteriorated state the more harmful the impact and less likely the structure will be repaired
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within two years
  - ⇐ Responsible Parties: Planning & Development, Building Inspections, Legal

### **REVISE OVERCROWDING STANDARDS**

The "rule of thumb" the city follows to determine the maximum number of persons living in a dwelling is outdated. The current standard allows nine people to live in a 1,000 square foot dwelling. Neighbors feel that this standard encourages rental of houses to multiple families in shifts and know that with that many occupants comes near as many vehicles parked in the yard.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Examine overcrowding specifications and legal aspects of reducing the allowable number of people per square foot
  - ⇐ Justification: Limiting the number of individuals allowed to live in one dwelling will help preserve the residential character of the neighborhood.
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within two years

- ⇐ Responsible Parties: Planning & Development, Building Inspections, Legal

### **ASSISTANCE FOR PROPERTY OWNERS TO COMPLY WITH CODES**

Often if a property is poorly maintained there is a reason. The reason could be that the owner is unable to take care of the property due to ill health, age or financial reasons. The Planning Committee felt that by joining with other groups they could be part of the solution.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Form a coalition of churches, schools, civic groups, scouts, neighbors and non-profit organizations who could offer assistance for property owners in order to comply with Minimum Housing code and Nuisance codes
  - ⇐ Justification: Overall neighborhood improvement is going to require the efforts of many targeting an identified need and working to assist those who truly are unable to comply with codes
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Churches, other service and civic agencies

### **GRADUATED FINES FOR REPEAT OFFENDERS**

When the code enforcement staff met with the West Hickory/Westmont Planning Committee, many of the properties that neighbors complained about staff knew by name without referring to their files. That is an indication that code enforcement officers are familiar with these people and their

properties because they have contacted them more than once.

The committee thought one solution to the repeat offender problem would be for the city to develop and adopt a graduated fine schedule similar to the one adopted to address the issue of police responding to false alarms more than three times in a year.

### ***Recommendation***

- Institute a graduated fine for repeat nuisance code offenders.
  - ◀ Justification: Discourage repeated violations of the Minimum Housing code and Nuisance code
  - ◀ Cost: Staff time
  - ◀ Time table: Within three years
  - ◀ Responsible Parties: Planning & Development, Building Inspections

### **HIRE ADDITIONAL INSPECTORS**

West Hickory/Westmont residents have a strong desire to restore neighborhood appearances and attract new homeowners. To have poorly maintained vacant buildings, junk vehicles in yards and homes in substandard condition only hinders West Hickory/Westmont's ability to recognize higher levels of homeownership, property maintenance and stabilized property values.

The City of Hickory employs only two people whose responsibilities include inspections and enforcement of the minimum housing code and junk vehicle ordinance and completion of all the associated paperwork. After hearing from city staff, the Planning Committee concluded that the most apparent deficiency in the current housing code enforcement process is the lack of staff. Expecting limited staff to perform this duty in an expeditious manner is unrealistic and unfair to any neighborhood in Hickory that must deal with property owners whose properties are not in compliance with the City's minimum housing

code standards.

### ***Recommendation***

- Request that the City hire at least one more minimum housing code enforcement officer.
  - ◀ Justification: The need for comprehensive and timely code enforcement inspections and follow-up is needed, not only in West Hickory/Westmont, but for the whole city
  - ◀ Cost: Undetermined at this time
  - ◀ Time table: Within one year
  - ◀ Responsible parties: Planning and Development - Building Inspections

### ***Neighborhood Enhancement***

West Hickory/Westmont is and has been a good place to live and raise a family. Enhancing livability factors will increase levels of homeownership by potential homebuyers.

### **SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF A LANDSCAPE INCENTIVE GRANT PROGRAM**

The Planning Committee learned of a Community Appearance Commission initiative to provide an economic incentive for commercial property owners to beautify their properties with landscaping. The neighborhood supports the encouragement of cooperative tree plantings especially along heavily traveled corridors, even though some of the business owners do not agree with the use of public funds for such activity.

This is a proposed program to provide an economic incentive for the improved appearance of privately owned non-residential properties along major corridors within the

city. The purpose is to promote the beautification of the city by encouraging private property owners to make an investment in the environment and aesthetics of the city. The proposed program, as designed, is a fifty-fifty match grant that is reimbursable to the property owner after submission of proof of payment for the completed landscaping.

The application would be reviewed by the Community Appearance Commission and awarded based on the merit of the project. The maximum grant amount is \$ 2,500.00. The applicant would have 120 days to complete the project. The proposed program is modeled after the Downtown Appearance Improvement Grant Program.

### **Recommendation**

- Support development and funding of the Commercial Landscaping Incentive Matching Grant program.
  - ⇐ Justification: A significant percentage of the properties in West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood are commercial or industrial in nature. Providing an incentive for improving commercial landscaping would enhance appearance citywide.
  - ⇐ Cost: \$45,000
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Community Appearance Commission

### **SECOND AVENUE NW STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS**

For at least two years, the Neighborhood Association has complained about the appearance of the chain link fence along Second Avenue NW near US 321. In late March 2000, city landscapers planted 175 eleagnus shrubs that will grow about eight feet tall along the 825 feet of road frontage. MDI Management owns the property and agreed with the project. Second Avenue

NW is an NCDOT road, so a right-of-way encroachment agreement was necessary for this landscaping project.

### **Recommendations**

- Request landscape improvements to Second Avenue NW
  - ⇐ Justification: Entranceway beautification in accordance with city master plans
  - ⇐ Cost: \$1,750 plus labor
  - ⇐ Time table: COMPLETE March 2000
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Landscape Services Division, NCDOT
- Request that the Second Avenue NW sidewalk and curb and gutter improvements from Ninth Street NW to Long View City Limits be treated as a high priority.
  - ⇐ Justification: Sidewalk and curb and gutter improvements are needed to enhance the appearance and improve pedestrian safety and sidewalk connectivity
  - ⇐ Cost: Undetermined at this time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within two years
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Planning & Development, Sidewalk/Bikeway Task Force

### **MAIN AVENUE LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS**

Committee members commented on the attractiveness of the trees along the railroad at 4<sup>th</sup> Street SW and Main Avenue SW and Highway 70 SW. The *City Center Plan* recommends better utilization of the Main Avenue NW/SW corridor as an entranceway to downtown. When the city becomes a passenger rail stop, the Main Avenue corridor will become an important part of the

City's landscaping and appearance improvement plans.

### **Recommendation**

- Work with Community Appearance Commission on Urban Forestry grants and tree planting incentives along the Main Avenue NW/SW corridor.
  - ⇐ Justification: Beautification of this corridor serves multiple revitalization purposes and meets the recommendations of City Center Plan and landscaping and appearance improvement plans.
  - ⇐ Cost: Undetermined - depending on grant amount
  - ⇐ Time table: Within three years
  - ⇐ Responsible Party: Neighborhood, Community Appearance Commission, Landscape Services

### **BEAUTIFY ENTRANCEWAYS**

The Planning Committee recognizes that there are no clearly defined entranceways into the neighborhood. There are several streets and avenues that lead into West Hickory/Westmont; several opportunities to let anyone who enters into the neighborhood know that they are in West Hickory/Westmont via a distinctive feature. These entranceways can be used to create a sense of neighborhood identity and upgrade the image of the neighborhood.

The Planning Committee discussed the idea of creating landscaped entrances. The owners of property at the entrances could be contacted to see if they are interested in allowing such a project to occur on their property. The Planning Committee learned about the City's Adopt-A-Spots program. The program was established to encourage individuals, businesses and organizations to contribute to the beautification of the city. Copies of the operating guidelines and agreement were distributed. Participants must

agree to an 18-month commitment to maintain the spot. The spot must be on city property and plantings should not exceed 30 inches in height. The participant must supply all landscaping materials and labor. Adopt-A-Spot sponsors are identified with a small plaque supplied by the city.

The City has adopted a Neighborhood Identification Sign policy that enables recognized Neighborhood Association to pay part of the cost for signage attached to the existing street name signs to demarcate the neighborhood.

These projects would be eligible for funding under the city's proposed Neighborhood Matching Grant Fund program.

### **Recommendation**

- Determine best approach to beautifying entrances and come to agreement on how to fund and execute the plan. Options include but are not limited to participating in the City's Adopt-A-Spot program, Neighborhood Identification sign program and/or collaborative efforts with businesses.
  - ⇐ Justification: Neighbors need to take the lead in determining beautification needs for the entranceways.
  - ⇐ Cost: None until plan is determined
  - ⇐ Time table: Within six months
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, others as needed

### **EXPLORE OPTIONS TO IMPROVE TWELFTH STREET/SECOND AVENUE NW ENTRANCE**

The property on the corner of Twelfth Street/Second Avenue NW is a small rental mobile home. Neighbors expressed a desire



exploring options to improve this entranceway. Alternatives could include the actual purchase of the property and removal of the trailer to create a passive park or "Welcome to West Hickory/Westmont" entrance sign. The City owns the two adjacent parcels. Neighbors are interested in working with the city to acquire the property to make aesthetic improvements.

### ***Recommendation***

- Contact property owner of 138 Twelfth Street NW to gauge interest in selling property. Develop alternatives and formulate acquisition and re-use plan.
  - ⇐ Justification: Twelfth Street at Second Avenue NW is a major entranceway to the neighborhood. Neighbors feel there are better uses for the parcel.
  - ⇐ Cost: Undetermined at this time
  - ⇐ Time table: Within three years
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood initially

### **IMPROVE ANTI-LITTER EFFORTS**

Litter is everywhere it seems. It is even more noticeable to neighbors who have participated in community clean-up days. Trash along the roadsides harms the image of the city and individual neighborhoods. Neighbors identified the need for more neighborhood clean-ups and stronger enforcement of litter laws.

City officials agree. Each spring the City participates in the NCDOT's Litter Sweep campaign. Neighbors are encouraged to report worst areas to the Street Division. The city contracts with a non-profit agency to provide a supervisor for a work crew of folks who must fulfill community service hours. Each Saturday, the crews hit the locations identified as problem spots to pick-up litter.

To step-up enforcement efforts, in April 2000, the Hickory Police Department introduced a new program, designed to allow citizens to report those who litter by filling out a post card. The citizen reporting the littering remains anonymous. This post card asks for the license plate number of the vehicle, where someone was seen littering, the make of the car, color of the car, street and intersection where someone was seen littering, and the date and time when a person was spotted littering from a vehicle.

The HPD Community Services P.A.C.T. (Police and Community Together) will then send a letter to the registered owner of the vehicle, along with the North Carolina General Statute on littering (14-399). No fines are attached with the letter, but recipients of the letter are reminded that if caught by law enforcement, the fine could be a maximum fine of \$1,000.

The Litter Watch post cards are available in the Hickory Police Department lobby, City Hall, neighborhood meetings, community watch meetings, and any business that would like to keep a supply for its customers.

### ***Recommendation***

- Request that the City continue to support litter clean-up efforts and enforcement of litter laws.
  - ⇐ Justification: Neighborhoods alone cannot win the battle against litter.
  - ⇐ Cost: \$5,000
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going
  - ⇐ Responsible Parties: Community Appearance Commission, Street Division, Hickory Police Department

### **EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS ABOUT TRASH COLLECTION**

West Hickory/Westmont has residents who are either uninformed or unconcerned about the city ordinance requiring the removal of rollout trash cans from the curb within 24 hours. Non-compliance is high most likely due to the turnover of renters. Neighbors feel that the city needs to develop educational materials in multiple languages to provide information about proper disposal of household trash as well as junk and white goods. The city should consider adopting a policy instituting a graduated fine system similar to the police department's false alarm fine for repeat offenders.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Develop a means of providing information in multiple languages about the residential rollout trash container requirements to city sanitation customers. Consider developing a graduated fine for repeat offenders.
  - ⇐ Justification: The transient nature of the neighborhood results in violation of the city ordinance
  - ⇐ Cost: Staff time and division materials
  - ⇐ Time table: Within six months
  - ⇐ Responsible Parties: Sanitation Division, Waste Reduction Task Force

### **SUPPORT CONTINUED STUDY OF UNDERGROUND UTILITIES**

The Planning Committee learned that the Community Appearance Commission and the city have been exploring underground utilities and the costs associated with having existing lines put underground. All new subdivisions in the city are required to have underground utilities. As in most cases, there are pros and cons to buried utilities most notably the initial costs associated with placing overhead wires underground. While underground lines negate worry

about losing power during wind and ice storms, the issue is reliability over the years and how long people were willing to wait to have power restored in case of failure. With underground lines, problems are harder to locate and fix. Furthermore, Duke Power will not put the primary feeders underground so the need for some utilities to remain above ground exists.

Even though burying utilities is expensive, committing to improving the appearance of the community is an important decision the City needs to make. For established areas, solutions such as consolidating lines on poles or making the poles higher should be explored.

#### ***Recommendation***

- Request the City and the Community Appearance Commission continue to deliberate this issue with the utility companies. Involve property owners as the situation warrants.
  - ⇐ Justification: An abundance of overhead utilities are unsightly and harm the appearance of the city.
  - ⇐ Cost: None as the issue is debated
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going
  - ⇐ Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Community Appearance Commission

### **EXTEND DOWNTOWN APPEARANCE GRANT PROGRAM BOUNDARIES**

The Downtown Appearance Grant Program developed out of a recommendation from the First and Second Avenue SE/SW Business Plan and *City Center Plan*. The program was developed to add an incentive for property owners to make aesthetic improvements. The idea is that if one property

is spruced-up, then others will follow. Property owners are required to match half the cost of the project (50/50 matching grant - \$5,000 maximum). The Community Appearance Commission must approve all projects.

The boundaries of the grant program area are the one-mile radius from downtown. Currently only Eleventh Street SW area in West Hickory/Westmont would qualify. Planning Committee members support a request that the area be expanded to include up to US 321.

### ***Recommendation***

- Request that the boundaries of the Downtown Appearance Grant Program be extended from Eleventh Street SW west to include up to US 321.
  - ← Justification: The appearance of the southern one-way pairs would greatly be enhanced if property owners were able to take advantage of the matching grants.
  - ← Cost: None
  - ← Time table: Within six months
  - ← Responsible parties: Neighborhood, Community Appearance Commission

### ***Neighborhood Organization and Capacity Building***

The organization and continued involvement of the Neighborhood Association is important to the success of the neighborhood planning process. A formal structure is necessary to provide leadership and accountability to the group. The current leadership is interested in developing a constructive way to deal with complaints during meetings. Participation from the different groups that live and work in the neighborhood is very important to building a sense of community and shared vision for the future of the neighborhood.

The Neighborhood Association should look for opportunities to publicize the success of the neighborhood through events and press releases. One of the keys to building the capacity of the neighborhood is being informed of decisions made by the City of Hickory that might affect West Hickory/Westmont.

### **ENCOURAGE DIVERSE PARTICIPATION**

Although the existing Neighborhood Association is active, only a small percentage of residents attend neighborhood meetings and/or actively participate in community activities.

Most of the members of the Neighborhood Association are homeowners. A significant proportion of West Hickory/Westmont residents are renters. The Neighborhood Association needs representation from all residents. Emphasis should be placed on one-on-one communication, neighbors talking to neighbors, encouraging renters to get involved.

### ***Recommendation***

- Reach out to residents who traditionally are not involved in Neighborhood Association activities through face to face contact, fliers and other means.
  - ← Justification: Community-wide involvement is necessary to the sustained viability of the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Association
  - ← Cost: None
  - ← Time table: Within one year
  - ← Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY**

While an effort such as the neighborhood identification signs is a good start, the

Neighborhood Association needs to be diligent about generating positive publicity for and about West Hickory/Westmont. Continued promotion of West Hickory/Westmont's community spirit, and most importantly, celebrating the successes as they occur will aid in the effort to promote the image of a quality neighborhood.

### ***Recommendation***

- Appoint one person in the Neighborhood Association to serve as the Community Liaison. This person would work at promoting the good things about the neighborhood (low crime, affordable housing, and location) through press releases, person to person contact, door hangers and personal contact with the media and others such as Realtors.
  - ⇐ Justification: Good publicity will stimulate interest in the neighborhood and help to promote a quality image
  - ⇐ Cost: Budget for supplies necessary to create articles (e.g., paper, photographs, etc.)
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **EXPAND INVOLVEMENT COMMUNITY-WIDE**

There is an overall need to disseminate information to the residents of the neighborhood. Many residents are not aware of certain ordinances, laws and items of general interest such as the other master plans adopted by the City.

There are a variety of citywide initiatives in progress, which affect West Hickory/Westmont. In order for the Neighborhood Association to stay informed on issues impacting the neighborhood, it is important for a member of the Association to attend city meetings and actively participate in decision-making processes.

### ***Recommendation***

- Appoint one or two people from the Neighborhood Association to serve as a Government Liaison. These people would attend City Council meetings and relevant Board and Commission meetings and report back to the group.
  - ⇐ Justification: Positions the neighborhood to be proactive and respond to activities or proposals that may affect the neighborhood
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood

### **PLAN MORE NEIGHBORHOOD EVENTS**

Scheduling neighborhood clean-up days is a great way to raise awareness and get others involved in improving the neighborhood. Such events say to the whole community "We care about our neighborhood!"

### ***Recommendations***

- Sponsor two neighborhood clean up days yearly.
  - ⇐ Justification: To beautify West Hickory/Westmont, raise awareness and show support for the neighborhood
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: Within one year
  - ⇐ Responsible party: Neighborhood
- Plan Neighborhood Association social events at the Westmont Senior Center or West Hickory Park.
  - ⇐ Justification: More residents should be invited to become involved in the Neighborhood Association. Socials are a less formal means of meeting neighbors.
  - ⇐ Cost: None
  - ⇐ Time table: On-going

← Responsible party: Neighborhood

**REQUEST CHANGE IN VOTING DISTRICT  
BOUNDARIES**

Some West Hickory/Westmont residents are in the voting district known as "Greenmont". Some neighbors feel the name is confusing and resent that some voters have to go to Long View to vote which is inconvenient. This issue can only be resolved through the Board of Elections. Given that the results of the 2000 Census are likely to show a change in the population, the voting district boundaries might be subject to change in 2001. If neighbors feel strongly about this issue, then they will have to present their case to the Board of Elections directly.

***Recommendation***

- Formulate a position regarding the voting district boundaries for West Hickory/Westmont and present a request in writing to the Catawba County Board of Elections.
  - ← Justification: Current name is confusing and present polling place is inconvenient
  - ← Cost: None
  - ← Time table: Within one year
  - ← Responsible party: Neighborhood

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

Guidance offered in the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan should be referred to during relevant decision-making processes about the area. To the extent that this Plan charts a course for West Hickory/Westmont's future, the strategies and recommended actions should be followed and carried out by the Neighborhood Association, the City and other agencies as referenced in the Plan. The residents of West Hickory/Westmont themselves, regardless of whether or not they participated in the planning process, are viewed as playing a key role in all implementation efforts. This section discusses the mechanisms that may be used toward that end.

### *Plan Adoption*

The residents of West Hickory/Westmont play an important role in moving a draft plan that they can support through the public review process to adoption, with a minimum of delays and serious changes. After the Hickory City Council accepts the West Hickory/Westmont Plan, it will become the official detailed guide for managing West Hickory/Westmont's future development. It will provide the most detailed guidance of any City document on planning and development issues within this neighborhood. This Plan is generally compatible and supportive of other City adopted plans.

To the greatest extent possible, active citizen input was involved in the Plan's formulation, review and adoption and has resulted in a plan that reflects a general community consensus on how West Hickory/Westmont should develop and address issues of concern.

### *Plan Implementation*

The true measure of a Plan's acceptance may best be described in terms of the degree to which it is used and supported during relevant decision-making processes. The residents of West Hickory/Westmont, the Hickory City Council, service provider agencies, and the City Administration each have important roles in the implementation processes.

The residents of West Hickory/Westmont, particularly the members of the Planning Committee, have a very critical role in participating in and monitoring the use of the Plan's provisions. West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood confirms its support for the Plan by including the recommendations in their Neighborhood Association activities and structure and initiating the petition processes necessary to accomplish the recommended policy changes.

The City Council demonstrates its support for the Plan by adopting the Plan's strategies, providing the resources necessary where applicable, and encouraging timely implementation.

The Plan sets forth several strategies that require the active involvement of service providing agencies including the City. These organizations are crucial to the implementation of the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan. The neighbors can participate in support of the programs provided by these organizations; likewise the programs can be used by the neighbors to address concerns, stabilize unhealthy trends and enhance the quality of life for all West Hickory/Westmont residents.

Several of the City Council appointed Boards and Commissions are affected by

some of the recommendations in the West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan. Support and advice from these boards and commissions is critical to the successful implementation of the Plan. The Appearance Commission, the Citizens Advisory Committee, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Historic Preservation Commission and the Animal Control Advisory Board should be informed and involved as necessary.

Finally, the City Administration plays an important role by overseeing the implementation responsibilities assigned to the various departments. The specific city departments must commit to implementing the Plan by incorporating the recommendations into their workplans within the recommended timetable. Revising strategies and even seeking more resources at a later date may be necessary to follow through on implementation of the Plan.

### ***Conclusion***

The West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan identifies the issues and concerns of the neighborhood, the tasks involved in addressing them, a time frame in which the strategy or action should be implemented, and the various parties involved in resolving them. Implementation is by far the most difficult phase of any planning process.

The reality is that the neighborhood has less of an influence on some issues, such as the development of the US 321 corridor or the future use of the school, than others do. Yet, the recommendations are included in the Plan so that others know the group discussed the issue during the planning process and actions which can be pursued in the future.

Above all, by participating in the planning process, members of the Committee got to know their neighbors better and collectively partici-

pate in a process that will generate positive change in the neighborhood over time. Many of the group discussions revealed many pleasant surprises, such as the commercial vitality, evidence of a low crime rate and number of well maintained properties which indicate that the quality of life is good in West Hickory/Westmont.

In short, this long-range neighborhood planning process offered, and will continue to offer the residents, business owners and commercial property owners of West Hickory/Westmont the opportunity to plan proactively for the future of their neighborhood.





# *West Hickory/Westmont Neighborhood Plan*

## *Table of Contents*

### **APPENDICES**

1. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS
2. MAPS

### **LIST OF TABLES**