



TOWN OF CLAYTON

STRATEGIC PLAN | 2024

Table of Contents

01

Letter from the Mayor

02

Strategic Plan Framework

04

Think Clayton

07

Clayton by the Numbers

08

The Strategic Planning Process

12

Our Strategic Plan

14

Key Focus Areas and
Strategic Priorities

City Council and Town Staff

Top row from left: Dolores Gill *Deputy Town Manager*, Greg Tart *Chief of Police*, Robert McKie *Finance Director*, Rich Cappola *Town Manager*, Jim Cauley *Town Attorney*, Lee Barbee *Deputy Town Manager*, David Ranes *Fire Chief*, and Heidi Holland *Town Clerk*

Front row from left: Andria Archer *Councilmember*, Porter Casey *Councilmember*, Jody McLeod *Mayor*, Michael Sims *Mayor Pro Tem*, Ruth Anderson *Councilmember*, and Gretchen Williams *Councilmember*

Dear Clayton Residents,

As the Mayor of the Town of Clayton, I am pleased to share with you the culmination of our collective efforts in developing our new Strategic Plan. This plan reflects our commitment to making Clayton a welcoming and engaged community, while preserving the charming local character that makes our town so special.

Over the past year, we have engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process that involved in-depth discussions with community members, stakeholders, and our dedicated town staff. We identified key focus areas and set strategic objectives that will guide our efforts in the coming years.

Our Strategic Plan is designed to enhance the delivery of services, address our fiduciary responsibilities, and improve the quality of life for all Clayton residents. It outlines our commitment to maintaining a vibrant downtown; providing desirable amenities and spaces; investing in sustainable infrastructure; improving mobility, transportation, and transit; promoting diversified economic development; fostering community outreach and engagement; and ensuring public safety.

Each department within the Town of Clayton will use this plan as a roadmap to channel their services and programming toward measurable outcomes and marked improvements in efficiency. We believe

these improvements will positively impact the daily lives of our residents and reflect our dedication to effective town management. I am excited about the journey ahead and the ongoing process of checking in with our administration as we work toward our goals. The Strategic Plan is not a static document; it is a living roadmap that will evolve as we face new opportunities and challenges. We will monitor our performance regularly and report on the results annually to ensure we stay on track.

I want to extend my gratitude to everyone who contributed to the development of this plan, including our dedicated staff, community members, and stakeholders. Your input has been invaluable in shaping a plan that reflects our shared vision for Clayton's future.

Together, we are creating a vibrant and thriving community where families can live, work, and play. I encourage you to stay engaged with us and follow the progress of our strategic initiatives. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to serve you.



Sincerely,

Mayor Jody McLeod
Town of Clayton



Strategic Plan Framework

Vision

A welcoming and engaged community that cherishes its charming local character and promotes economic vitality, environmental stewardship, safety, and opportunities for all.

Organizational Mission

Dedicated and responsive public servants who provide essential services that bring people together and promote quality of life in the Clayton community.

Organizational Values

Responsibility
Community
Commitment
Respect



Key Focus Areas



Vibrant Downtown

Clayton's attractive, historic, and vibrant downtown offers a variety of businesses, restaurants, and retail, that engage the community from morning to night.



Desirable Amenities and Spaces

Clayton provides an array of programs and services and harmonizes the need for indoor and outdoor gathering places that support community connections and enhance quality of life.



Sustainable Infrastructure Investment

Clayton invests in infrastructure to ensure modern utilities, facilities, and systems that provide the community with an affordable, sustainable, and positive experience.



Mobility, Transportation, and Transit

Clayton partners with other regional, state, and federal agencies to promote access to reliable and multi-modal transportation services.



Diversified Economic Development

Clayton actively works to increase light industrial, retail, restaurant, and other economic development opportunities.



Community Outreach and Engagement

Clayton builds civic engagement and involvement by sharing information and providing community-based events.



Public Safety

Clayton builds confidence and trust by collaborating with the community and providing responsive public safety services.

Strategies

- + Implement prioritized Downtown Master Plan recommendations.
- + Expand signage and wayfinding resources throughout the Town.
- + Increase downtown beautification efforts.
- + Leverage downtown opportunities for redevelopment, adaptive property reuse, and historic preservation.
- + Seek diverse opportunities to expand visual, literary, culinary, and other forms of art.

- + Assess needs and increase/enhance the Town's gathering spaces.
- + Develop a long-term plan to prioritize preservation of green space in Clayton, based on environmental stewardship principles.
- + Provide a wide variety of programs, resources, and amenities geared toward the diverse community of Clayton.
- + Implement prioritized recommendations of the Parks and Recreation Plan and the Pedestrian Master Plan.

- + Develop and implement master and capital improvement plans for utility, facility, road, and technology infrastructure systems.
- + Allocate and ensure sufficient staffing and other resources to proactively address current and future infrastructure needs.
- + Evaluate opportunities for partnering and collaboration.

- + Improve connectivity in the downtown area and between community destinations.
- + Implement prioritized recommendations of the Clayton on the Move Transportation Plan.
- + Partner with regional agencies to ensure fast, reliable transit within Clayton and to the surrounding areas.
- + Explore the feasibility of acquiring NCDOT roads.

- + Improve Clayton's competitive position through real estate product and infrastructure development
- + Attract new industrial, commercial, and retail business to Clayton
- + Strengthen the economic base through Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) programs
- + Build Clayton's image and brand through marketing and communication
- + Increase opportunities through intergovernmental relations

- + Build community awareness of Town priorities, events, and activities through public education campaigns and solicit feedback from the community.
- + Execute collaborative events with internal and external partners.
- + Increase representation and participation in Town governance, events, and activities.

- + Increase the Town's investment in public safety facilities and staff capacity to meet desired service levels.
- + Implement the prioritized strategies included in the Police and Fire Strategic Plans.
- + Increase proactive community engagement to enhance public safety awareness and build community relationships.

Think Clayton

Nestled in the heart of Johnston County, the Town of Clayton is a vibrant and dynamic community with a blend of southern charm and modern vitality.



The Town's location along US70/I42 and proximity to Raleigh and the Research Triangle makes it well positioned to attract quality growth and development. With a population of over 30,000, residents, Clayton embodies a unique fusion of small-town warmth and metropolitan opportunity, making it the fastest growing town in Johnston County. With its lively downtown district, high-quality schools, robust recreational activities, strong community spirit, and business-friendly environment, Clayton is a place where residents flourish, businesses thrive, and visitors feel a sense of belonging.

Clayton is known for its historic charm and wonderful sense of community. The Town exhibits a continued focus on the arts, culture, and enjoyable amenities, which are reflected in a variety of activities and entertainment attractions for all to enjoy. Downtown Clayton is host to a variety of dining options, a farmer's market, and annual art and music events. The Clayton Center, a performing arts and conference center, which also houses Town Hall, is a popular destination that hosts more than 120,000 people per year for concerts and events.

The Town of Clayton has experienced a rapid rate of growth, with its population expanding by 333% when comparing US Census data from 2000 (6,973) to 2023 (30,216). People continue to move to Clayton for a variety of reasons, and the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management projects the population of the Town to continue to grow to exceed 50,000 by the year 2050. The boom in population in Clayton mirrors the same growth other regional communities have experienced as an appealing location due to its cost of living, high quality of life, and commuting distance to larger job centers like Raleigh. The growth and development of the Town warrants expanded infrastructure. Balancing growth with conservation and green space initiatives is important.

Continued growth in Clayton and the surrounding regions has resulted in rising housing costs and higher demand. Median home values in Clayton have continued to rise in recent years, increasing by 68% between 2020 and 2024, from \$200,700 to \$336,250, according to Realtor.com.



Due to its reputation for an enjoyable quality of life and relative affordability, Clayton's median home values have historically been higher than those in surrounding Johnston County. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development reports that households paying 30% of their income or more toward housing is the threshold for what is considered "affordable." As of 2022, 68% of residents in Clayton are considered to be living in "affordable" housing, which closely mirrors the national number of 67%.

Employment in Clayton is largely driven by retail trade, health care, and manufacturing industries, which employ more than a quarter of the Town's residents, per the 2021 American Community Survey. As of 2023, Johnston County had an unemployment rate of 3.2%, compared to the statewide rate of 3.5%. The median household income was \$71,698 as of 2022, and the number of Clayton residents living below the poverty line was reported at 7.8% - nearly five percentage points lower than the statewide number.

According to the Census, the median age of Americans was 35.3 years in 2000, compared to 38.5 years in 2022. However, in Clayton, trends around aging have differed from national trends, with the Town's median age decreasing over the years, from 34.4 in 2000 to 32.6 in 2022. Understanding the changing needs of the community, especially as it relates to younger generations as well as those aging in place, will be important for the Town to consider when planning for the future and preparing for continued growth.

As the Town's population has grown, so has its diversity – culturally, socioeconomically, and racially. This diversity enriches our town with new opportunities for connection and learning, as residents bring unique experiences and fresh perspectives. While these differences can occasionally highlight varying expectations, they also offer us the chance to build stronger bonds and a more inclusive community, bridging the gap between long-standing members and new residents.

The share of residents identifying as white alone dropped from 69% in 2010 to 58% in 2020. During that same period, the percentage of Clayton residents identifying as two or more races increased from 2%-10%. Additionally, the number of individuals who report having Hispanic or Latino origins increased from 11% of the population in 2010 to 14% in 2020.

Input from Stakeholders

During the strategic planning process, the Town of Clayton's elected officials, staff, and residents were asked to share what they believe to be the Town's most significant strengths, as well as key future opportunities for the Town to leverage. Themes from the responses are captured below.

Strengths of the Town

- + Quality of life
- + Welcoming community
- + Affordability
- + Small-town lifestyle
- + Town staff
- + Safe place to live

Future Opportunities for the Town

- + Economic development
- + Infrastructure management
- + Housing options
- + Green spaces

Consensus in the Community

As the strategic planning process progressed, a draft vision and key focus areas were developed. Residents were asked whether they believed that these key focus areas were what the Town should be focused on. The information below shows the percentage of survey respondents who agreed with the Town's draft vision statement and key focus areas.*

- 87% - Vision
- 88% - Vibrant Downtown
- 89% - Desirable Amenities and Spaces
- 83% - Sustainable Infrastructure Investment
- 75% - Mobility, Transportation, and Transit
- 86% - Diversified Economic Development
- 85% - Community Outreach and Engagement

**The key focus area of Public Safety was not yet developed at the time the survey was distributed.*

“ People want to live in Clayton because of the community feel.

” - Staff survey respondent

Clayton by the Numbers



30,216

Population



15.24

Square Miles



1869

Year of Incorporation



32.6

Median Age



\$71,698

Median Household Income



\$336,250

Median Home Value





The Strategic Planning Process

“ Strategic planning is the cornerstone of our Town’s progress, allowing us to anticipate challenges, seize opportunities, and build a vibrant, inclusive community for generations to come.”

– Mayor Jody McLeod

The Town of Clayton embarked on a strategic planning process to create a vision and roadmap for achieving long-term success. Identifying a clear strategic direction is important for any organization, as it serves as a guiding framework to align efforts and resources with long-term goals. A well-defined strategic plan establishes a collective sense of purpose and unity among team members, creating a shared vision and aligning the efforts of every part of the organization toward a unified objective. Through strategic planning, the Town is positioned to address current challenges, seize emerging opportunities, and build a sustainable future for all.

The Town recognizes the pivotal role that community input and engagement play in creating a vibrant and inclusive future, with each voice carrying unique perspectives, insights, and aspirations. The strategic planning process included involvement from internal and external contributors to ensure that the plan reflects the diverse needs and desires of those who call Clayton home. Utilizing this collaborative approach not only fosters a sense of ownership among community members, but also cultivates a strategic vision that is both comprehensive and forward-thinking. Together, we are charting a course toward a brighter tomorrow, rooted in shared values and collective aspirations.

The Strategic Plan Framework presented in this document will guide decision-making, inform resource allocation, and allow the Town to track progress within the key focus areas.



Steps in the strategic planning process included:

Kickoff Meeting

The strategic planning team met to discuss the overall goals, schedule, and communication and engagement strategies for the project. Clarifying objectives and establishing roles and responsibilities for the project lays a strong foundation for collaboration and provides purpose and clarity.

Stakeholder Engagement

Input was obtained from internal and external contributors, including individual interviews with Council members, a workshop with the Town’s leadership team, and an online survey distributed to Town staff that generated 117 responses. The purpose of these engagements was to gather feedback on the Town’s purpose, strengths, opportunities, and critical issues to inform the strategic planning process and understand the current state of the Town.

The Town sought input from members of the community through an online survey using the Zencity™ software platform, resulting in feedback from 632 respondents. Community members shared their vision for the future of Clayton, thoughts on the proposed key focus areas, and any projects or initiatives that would help support the Town in achieving success. The Town invited members of the Town’s Advisory Boards and key individuals from the Clayton community to participate in two in-person meetings to share their thoughts as well. Engaging various stakeholders in the strategic planning process yields valuable insight and feedback, ensuring the strategic plan is well-informed and impactful.

Stakeholder Engagement Numbers

117

Staff Survey Respondents

632

Community Survey Respondents

34

Community Meeting Attendees

6

Interviews with members of Town Leadership



Developing the Framework

Drawing from the stakeholder input, Council members and Town staff convened to craft a vision statement and finalize the key focus areas. Articulating a long-term vision and developing key focus areas that reflect community priorities establishes a framework to manage the evolving needs of the organization and community.

Strategy Workshop

Town Council and staff met to develop success statements associated with each key focus area, articulating what success looks like for Clayton. Additionally, the team drafted specific strategic priorities to incorporate in the strategic plan framework. These strategic priorities began to operationalize the plan, propelling its advancement and guiding the community toward its vision and overarching objectives. This resulted in a comprehensive and robust strategic framework that enhances buy-in across all levels of the organization and ensures alignment across departments.

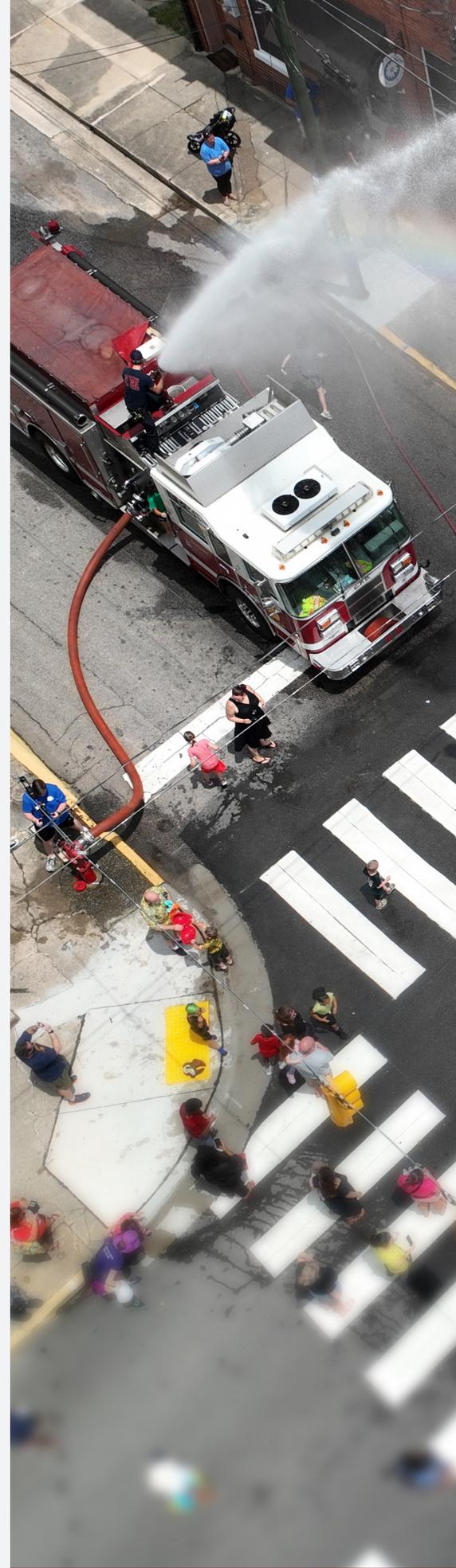
Town Council Review

The final strategic framework was presented to Town Council for approval and adoption.

Implementation Work Session

Town staff participated in an implementation work session to review the strategic planning framework and determine which strategic priorities should advance during the first year of the plan. Participants collaborated to identify ongoing, planned, and new activities that will contribute to moving the strategic priority forward, as well as timelines for completion and anticipated resource needs.

Creating an implementation plan is crucial for translating a strategic plan into concrete actions, providing a clear roadmap for the Town to foster accountability and track progress.

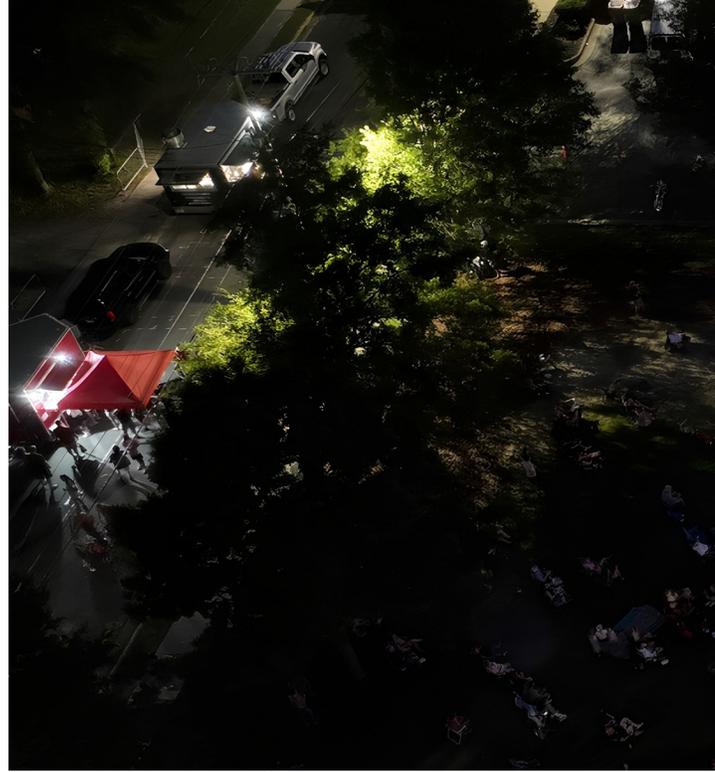




Giving
back to our
community
is a reward in
and of itself.

- Staff survey
respondent





Clayton's Strategic Framework

Vision - A vision is an aspirational statement, intended to reflect what the Town hopes to achieve in the future. It captures the desires of the community and provides a forward-looking perspective on where the Town aims to be in the long term.

Organizational Mission - While the vision statement provides a forward-looking perspective on where the community aims to be in the future, an organizational mission statement grounds the organization in its purpose, guiding day-to-day operations and decision-making to achieve the vision.

Organizational Values - A Town's values embody its core principles and guide the way that the Town operates and serves the community.



Vision

A welcoming and engaged community that cherishes its charming local character and promotes economic vitality, environmental stewardship, safety, and opportunities for all.

Organizational Mission

Dedicated and responsive public servants who provide essential services that bring people together and promote quality of life in the Clayton community.

Organizational Values

- ✦ **Responsibility** – Acting with integrity and taking responsibility for our actions.
- ✦ **Community** – Creating a vibrant and welcoming community, now and in the future.
- ✦ **Commitment** – Demonstrating pride and commitment to our community, work, and colleagues.
- ✦ **Respect** – Treating everyone with respect and courtesy.



Key Focus Areas and Strategic Priorities

Key Focus Areas represent the essential components to realizing the community’s envisioned future. These areas serve as a structured framework for defining, pursuing, and evaluating objectives, ensuring that efforts and resources are concentrated on specific goals. Providing clarity and direction surrounding these areas guides the Town towards its desired outcomes and facilitates effective measurement of progress.



Vibrant Downtown

Clayton’s attractive, historic, and vibrant downtown offers a variety of businesses, restaurants, and retail, that engage the community from morning to night.

- Implement prioritized Downtown Master Plan recommendations.
- Expand signage and wayfinding resources throughout the Town.
- Increase downtown beautification efforts.
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Mobility, Transportation, and Transit

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- Improve connectivity in the downtown area and between community destinations.
- Implement prioritized recommendations of the Clayton on the Move Transportation Plan.
- Partner with regional agencies to ensure fast, reliable transit within Clayton and to the surrounding areas.
- Explore the feasibility of acquiring NCDOT roads.



Diversified Economic Development

Clayton actively works to increase light industrial, retail, restaurant, and other economic development opportunities.

- Develop a plan to identify and seek opportunities for investment in Clayton.
- Explore opportunities to redevelop underutilized properties throughout the Town.
- Encourage collaborative efforts between the Town and business community.



Community Outreach and Engagement

Clayton builds civic engagement and involvement by sharing information and providing community-based events.

- Build community awareness of Town priorities, events, and activities through public education campaigns and solicit feedback from the community.
- Execute collaborative events with internal and external partners.
- Increase representation and participation in Town governance, events, and activities.



Public Safety

Clayton builds confidence and trust by collaborating with the community and providing responsive public safety services.

- Increase the Town's investment in public safety facilities and staff capacity to meet desired service levels.
- Implement the prioritized strategies included in the Police and Fire Strategic Plans.
- Increase proactive community engagement to enhance public safety awareness and build community relationships.





“ Employees are driven by a desire to have a community where people are safe and happy. ” - Staff survey respondent





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Facilitated by

