

Building a Resilient

Hendersonville

The Economic Case for a Community Resilience Assessment

Hendersonville Sustainability Board | 2026

Inspired by the global Transition Towns movement

The Transition Towns Movement

ORIGIN

Started in 2006 in Totnes, Devon UK by permaculturalist Rob Hopkins. Built on the insight that communities facing the end of cheap oil needed a positive, practical planning framework -- not just warnings. The first step: an honest accounting of what a community needs to survive and thrive, and how much of that it can currently provide for itself.

SCALE TODAY

992+ registered groups worldwide

50+ countries represented

21 regional hubs coordinating action

THE ENERGY DESCENT ACTION PLAN (EDAP) FRAMEWORK

AWARENESS

Map the community's oil dependency honestly -- food, energy, transport, healthcare, economics.

VISIONING

Community-wide process to define what a resilient local economy looks like in 15-20 years.

TRANSITION

Practical projects across every sector: food hubs, local energy, re-skilling, repair economies.

ACTION PLAN

A living document -- an EDAP -- that coordinates projects and tracks progress publicly.

Resilience Is Smart Economics

This is not an environmental program. It is a community investment strategy.

LOCAL MULTIPLIER

Money Stays Local

Every dollar spent at a local food producer or energy cooperative circulates 2-3x more within the county before leaving than a dollar spent at a chain retailer. Resilience investment is fundamentally anti-leakage economics.

2-3X

local multiplier effect

JOBS

Labor-Intensive by Design

Resilience sectors -- food production, weatherization, repair, care -- are labor-intensive and locally employed by definition. They cannot be offshored. A food hub or weatherization program creates jobs that stay here.

Local

jobs that cannot be offshored

DISASTER COSTS

Prevention vs. Recovery

FEMA estimates every \$1 spent on pre-disaster mitigation saves \$6 in recovery costs. Helene's economic impact on WNC will run into the billions. Resilience planning is the cheaper path -- by a wide margin.

\$6

saved per \$1 invested in mitigation

GRANT LEVERAGE

Funding Follows Planning

Communities with formal resilience assessments are dramatically more competitive for federal and state grants -- FEMA BRIC, USDA Rural Development, EPA Climate Pollution Reduction. Bloomington just won \$250K off the back of their plan.

\$250K

grant

Peer Communities Are Already Acting

Communities our size have done formal assessments -- and found it pays off.

Totnes, UK

Pop. ~9,000

What they did:

Birthplace of the Transition movement. Produced the world's first community Energy Descent Action Plan covering food, energy, transport, and health. Process engaged 500+ residents over 18 months.

Outcome: Launched a community energy company, local currency (the Totnes Pound), and inspired 992+ groups worldwide.

Bloomington, IN

Pop. ~80,000

What they did:

Published a formal Peak Oil Preparedness Plan and has built continuously on it. Their documented resilience framework made them highly competitive for federal funding.

Outcome: Won a \$250K federal grant in 2025 for community-wide energy resilience. Active sustainability department.

Montpelier, VT

Pop. ~8,000

What they did:

City Council adopted a Net Zero by 2030 goal tied explicitly to reducing fossil fuel dependency. Developed a full action plan and joined the national Transition Towns network.

Outcome: On track to become the first US state capital to eliminate fossil fuel use. National model for small cities.

Henderson County: A First Look

Initial observations only -- a formal assessment would replace these with rigorous data.

WHERE WE ARE EXPOSED

Healthcare & Elder Care

#1 employer | 27% of residents 65+

Retail Trade

#2 employer | long-haul supply chain dependent

Manufacturing

#3 employer | plastics, auto components

Agriculture

70% of NC apples | synthetic input exposure

Tourism

Car-dependent visitor model

SEEDS WE ALREADY HAVE

Apple Heritage

Strongest regional food asset in WNC

Farmers Markets

Heavily attended and diverse markets

Ecusta Trail

Low-oil tourism & active transport infrastructure

WNC Herbal Tradition

Local pharmaceutical capacity -- rare & valuable

Post-Helene Networks

Mutual aid infrastructure already partially built

Gen H Already Points This Way

Hendersonville's own 2024 Comprehensive Plan contains the foundation for this work.

GEN H VISION STATEMENT

"Hendersonville is known as a livable city with a strong sense of community created through commitments to -- and investments in -- quality neighborhoods, a strong local economy, sustainable infrastructure, accessible public facilities, context-appropriate amenities, and the conservation of historic, cultural, and environmental assets that define its character and identity."

RESILIENT COMMUNITY GOAL

Gen H Ch. IV, p. 96

Resilience Is Already a Core Value

Gen H explicitly identifies a "Resilient Community" as one of its ten vision goals -- calling for adaptation, readiness, and recovery from adverse events including extreme weather as a commitment to providing sufficient resources.

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIC PLAN

Gen H Ch. III, p. 58

30% GHG Reduction by 2035

The City adopted a Sustainability Strategic Plan in May 2024 with measurable goals to reduce municipal greenhouse gas emissions by 30% by 2035 -- covering energy, transportation, waste, water, and land management.

APPLE HERITAGE & NATURAL ASSETS

*Gen H Ch. III, p. 54
& Ch. IV, p. 94*

Local Food Economy Is Explicitly Valued

Gen H identifies Hendersonville's apple industry and agricultural landscape as assets "important to the city's future success" and calls for preservation of working landscapes and minimizing encroachment on orchards and managed forests.

ECUSTA TRAIL & MOBILITY

*Gen H Ch. I, p. 18 &
Ch. III, p. 56*

Low-Oil Infrastructure Already Funded

The Ecusta Trail -- a 19-mile shared-use trail connecting Hendersonville to Brevard -- is already under construction. Gen H identifies expanded bikeways and sidewalks as the #1 ranked community priority for walkability.

Starting the Conversation -- at Every Level

City Council is one part of this. Community engagement can begin now, in parallel.

CITY COUNCIL

Institutional Track

- 1 Board endorses assessment today
- 2 Request joint agenda item with Council
- 3 Seek council resolution of support
- 4 Use plan to anchor grant applications

WHY THIS MATTERS

Only Council can create policy, zoning, and procurement rules that lock in resilience gains -- and grant funding often requires a municipal resolution.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Grassroots Track

- 1 Host public open house / listening sessions
- 2 Partner with Curb Market, BRCC, local farms
- 3 Run neighborhood canvassing (like Gen H did)
- 4 Build a Community Advisory Committee

WHY THIS MATTERS

Resilience is built from the ground up. Gen H engaged 50+ pop-ups and round tables -- we can use the same model to build local ownership of this work.

WORKING GROUP

Organizing Track

- 1 Form cross-sector working group (4-8 people)
- 2 Map existing local initiatives and allies
- 3 Draft scope of formal resilience assessment
- 4 Present findings publicly -- Fall 2026

WHY THIS MATTERS

A small, committed working group is how Transition Towns starts everywhere. Totnes began with a handful of people. The working group catalyzes everything else.

The cost of not planning is higher than the cost of planning.

Helene showed us what unprepared looks like. Totnes, Bloomington, and Montpelier show us what prepared looks like. Henderson County has the agricultural roots, the community networks, and the institutional will to lead this conversation in WNC.

The ask is simple: let's start the conversation.

**TODAY: Board endorses authorizing
a Community Resilience Assessment**

**NEXT: Request a joint session with City Council
to introduce the Transition Towns framework**