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**FEATURES**

families. Community and connection are key for rural communities. Building out the high-speed fiber internet was instrumental in drawing and retaining our young families, and our Sandy Mush Community Center provides ample opportunities for community members to gather for events, volunteer opportunities and various activities to strengthen the community.”

— **Terri Wells,**  
*Buncombe County commissioner*

“I live in Woodfin and work in South Weaverville part time. The traffic is getting worse and worse by the minute. And there are so many wrecks.”

— **Allison Walker,**  
*auto mechanic*

“Our neighborhood is West Hendersonville. Several roundabouts are in process of being constructed on U.S. 64/Brevard Road; their usefulness will be more down the road. The Ecusta Trail project is already an economic driver for this area. All neighborhoods need more quality, affordable housing and neighbors willing to see the value of that housing.”

— **Joe Fishleigh,**  
*executive coach*

“As a resident of Weaverville, I’ve been excited to see the accessible playground arrive at Lake Louise and the Town of Weaverville’s police Mach-E. The greatest need I see for Weaverville is more access to sidewalks that access downtown and Weaverville Boulevard; I see more people walking across the interstate overpass with no shoulder.”

— **Sara Nichols,** *regional planner,*  
*Land of Sky Regional Council*

**What is the biggest issue facing your community entering 2024?**

“How to handle the many development proposals the town is receiving. We have so much undeveloped land in Woodfin that must be thoughtfully considered. Our council will not allow projects that would change the peaceful character of Woodfin. Together, we will figure it out.”

— **Jim McAllister**

“Weak land protection continues to haunt us as we enter the threshold of 2024. Allowing overdevelopment has consequences, including reduced water quality, fragmentation of ecosystems, raising the risks of dangerous landslides, loss of rural land and

farms, and the cultural history of our community. We can’t eat our smart-phones, drink McMansions or breathe in more roadways. We can protect what’s left so we, and the rest of the species that live here, can heal.”

— **David Weintraub**

“We are updating our long-range plan. This project, GenH, will guide growth and development for the next 20 years. We received over 4,000 surveys on how people would like Hendersonville to grow, from which we will develop a vision for the future. The challenge for the staff and members of City Council will be to adopt plans and ordinances to fulfill that vision. We expect to have this ready by the summer of 2024.”

— **Barbara Volk**

“Affordability. As mayor, I have come to terms that there’s no other force that is and will continue to change Canton and WNC more than affordability. The cost of living is affecting everything from early child care and health care to the decisions we make every day for our families. It is not lost on me that it’s easy to identify this problem but much more difficult to solve. Affordability is the issue which keeps me up at night.”

— **Zeb Smathers**

“The lack of affordable and workforce housing is the biggest issue we face. Prices for home purchase and rentals have skyrocketed, and availability is less than 1%. This issue is compounded by natural features [like mountains, flood plains, and national and state forests] that limit available land [in Brevard]. Dealing with this issue requires collaboration between local government, nonprofits, faith organizations and for-profit developers.”

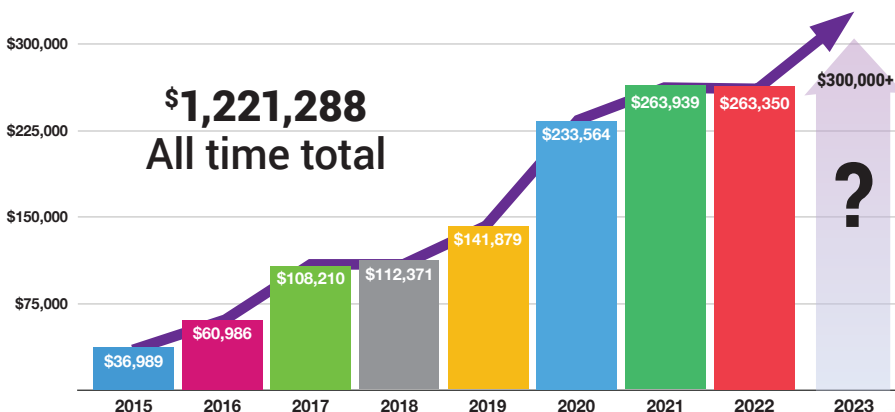
— **Maureen Copeloff**

“We have made significant progress on our Heart of Fletcher [Town Center] Project over the years. The town owns over 40 acres of land that we would like to transform into downtown Fletcher. The initial 5 acres along Hendersonville Road near Town Hall were under contract with a developer to create a mixed-use development but fell out of contract because of hurdles with NCDOT. Nevertheless, we will continue to try to cultivate a public-private partnership to continue to push forward this significant project that is key to Fletcher and important to residents.”

— **Preston Blakely**

*AROUND THE REGION: Do you live in a small town or city in Western North Carolina? We want to hear from you. What are the top issues facing your community? What stories aren’t being told? Contact Xpress reporter Justin McGuire at [jmcguire@mountainx.com](mailto:jmcguire@mountainx.com). X*

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