



## **Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA**

*Regulatory Order/Family: Traditional/Middle America*

### *Summary*

Metropolitan Charlotte appears ripe for more thorough growth management. It has a jurisdictional matrix with strong counties and a few large cities that could adopt a coordinated system of growth and development. But the regulatory environment that currently exists is one that encourages low density growth at the fringe while discouraging higher densities in developing areas. Residential density ceilings are not low enough to exclude low-cost housing, but neither are they universally high enough to accommodate significant areas of multi-family density in at least some areas of the region's largest jurisdictions. The region has few jurisdictions that require growth to pay its own way, nor are there many that deliberately contain the spread of growth. This neglect undoubtedly contributes to the intense growth pressures in the region.

### *Governance Framework and Growth Trends*

North Carolina's largest city, Charlotte, anchors an MSA of about 1.5 million residents. Its population grew 29 percent in the 1990s, adding 337,000 new residents. There are 59 cities and seven counties in the metro area; 50 cities and six counties are in North Carolina, with the balance in South Carolina. About 70 percent of the residents live in incorporated areas. Three cities have more than 50,000 residents, as do six of the seven counties in their unincorporated areas. Another nine cities and one county have between 10,000 and 50,000 residents, leaving 47 jurisdictions with fewer than 10,000 residents to account for about 5 percent of the metro area's population. Only about 3 percent of the land was owned by some level of government in 2000.

The Charlotte region has few rivals in terms of low density, dispersed development. Its density ranking placed it 49<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in 1982, and it slipped to last place in 1997 when its density dropped 17 percent to 2.3 people per urban acre.

### *Regulatory Environment*

We received responses to our survey from seven municipalities (14 percent of the total) and six counties. Although this is a small number of municipalities, it includes 733,000 of the 1 million municipal residents and about one-third of the municipal land area. The counties that responded account for another 300,000 residents. In all, 75 percent of the metro area population and 77 percent of its land area are represented in the respondents to the survey.

Based on these responses and from results elsewhere in North Carolina, we estimate that all the cities and counties have zoning. About 17 percent of them have low-density-only zoning, and only 2 percent would not allow the prototype apartment development. Two or three of the counties (about 15 percent) have low-density-only zoning, but none would bar our hypothetical apartment complex. All in all, 13 percent of the population lives in jurisdictions with low-density-only zoning; accounting for about 15 percent of the land. Only 2 percent live in jurisdictions that would ban our hypothetical



apartment building completely. Over half the municipalities have residential density maximums exceeding 15 dwellings per acre, as do half the counties. These jurisdictions are home to about 45 percent of the region's population and account for 38 percent of its land area.

All the counties in the Charlotte MSA have comprehensive plans, but an estimated 14 percent of cities (about 7 percent of the population) do not. About 35 percent of cities and one of the seven counties have impact fees. Together, these account for about 15 percent of the population and 23 percent of the land area. APFOs are somewhat less popular, in place in about 17 percent of cities and two counties, and again apply to about 15 percent of the population and 21 percent of the land area. About 30 percent of the cities claim an urban containment program of some kind, as do two counties. Even so, only 15 percent of the land area and 12 percent of residents are in contained jurisdictions.

A quarter of the cities and perhaps two counties have incentive based affordable housing programs, most of which are density bonuses in exchange for affordability commitments. Half the population lives in these jurisdictions.