

The Ruth School Adaptive Reuse Plan

Rutherford County, North Carolina

This study is a project of Rutherford County, North Carolina in contract with Isothermal Planning and Development Commission. Funding for the work is provided through the North Carolina Department of Transportation. Primary planner for the project is Jessica Trotman with assistance from Amy Bridges and the Ruth School Adaptive Reuse Committee. The contents and opinions expressed are informative in nature to be provided to Rutherford County Board of Commissioners. A special thank you to the 268 community members who responded to the public survey, the Reuse Committee, and everyone who attended the public meetings.

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Executive Summary

The Ruth School is located in Rutherford County, North Carolina. It was built in 1926 and opened fall of 1928 and served students kindergarten through eighth grade. In its final years, the school served as an alternative school 2003.

The Ruth School is nearing 100 years old. Years of use and then abandonment have taken a toll on the physical integrity of some of the structures. In the best circumstance there will be many major repairs and upgrades needed to stabilize the structures for future viability, in either and to its service to the community or private investment.

This is an adaptive reuse plan created through a collaborative process. Adaptive reuse, for the purpose of discussion within this document is refers to the process of reusing an old site or building for a purpose other than which it was built or designed for. Along with brownfield reclamation, adaptive reuse is seen by many as a key factor in land conservation.

The purpose of this plan is established by NCDOT to “*identify and analyze the issues associated with reusing the structures and campus, develop alternatives for consideration and provide an adaptive reuse plan for the site.*” This is documented in a Memoradoun of Agreement between the County and NCDOT.

The Key Issues

A public survey was conducted in addition to working with the Ruth School Adaptive Reuse Committee. Two public meetings were held by IPDC. The following issues were most frequently raised. These issues are expanded in the prioritization and planning process.

- Does the community have interest in utilizing the Ruth School in a new way?
- Can multiple reuse opportunities be integrated in order to meet the most community needs?
- Is public funding likely? Will it compete for allocations with other Rutherford County projects? If not, what are alternative methods of financing the stabilization, and/or the rehabilitation of the Ruth School.

Public Engagement Process

Through the survey and committee process the plan established the following:

- The Ruth School is important to the community. The community is highly interested in having the school rehabilitated in order to serve a useful purpose in the community.
- The community believes Rutherford County government should take an active and leading role in the Ruth School project.
- The community is interested in supporting the rehabilitation process through tax dollars.

Vision of the Future of the Ruth School

When asked to describe their vision of the Ruth School Reuse Committee members provided several statements:

1. A desire for it to be an asset to the community that creates a gateway to the community and presents a variety of opportunities for economic development and resources for the citizens.
2. A strong vision for a space that is beautiful, and respectful of the historical character of the buildings and campus. The Ruth School should make a meaningful contribution to surrounding communities, as represented by survey results.
3. A vision to use the location to connect tourists with Main Street in Rutherfordton, as well as Spindale and Forest City. It could also serve as connector the Rail Trail, and possibly support a walking loop.
4. A desire for a safe and inviting environment that is respected and valued by the community and tourists alike. It should be an accessible facility, upgraded and rehabilitated in highly accurate and historical manner.

Identification of Reuse Concepts and Scenarios

Many concepts for reuse for the Ruth School were collected and reviewed through the public engagement process and worked through with the adaptive reuse committee. All suggestions submitted were collected and entered into a scoring rubric. Twelve qualifying factors were used to score each reuse suggestion. Each committee member assigned between zero and five quality points in each of the twelve areas of evaluation for each reuse possibility. The total score for each reuse possibility was the averaged and used to guide discussion and increase efficiency. The top scoring reuse scenarios are detailed below. All other reuse possibilities are summarized at the end of this section.

Summary of Concepts and Scenarios

Concept 1 – Divest Rutherford County from the Ruth School property

- Scenario 1A – Demolish the Ruth School and through proper mitigation, restore the site to pre-development conditions
- Scenario 1B – Sell the Ruth School and the land in its current condition

Concept 2 – Stabilize the Ruth School as a Future Asset

- Scenario 2A – Stabilize the Ruth School with a tenant
- Scenario 2B – Stabilize the Ruth School without a tenant

Concept 3 – Upgrade the Ruth School in its current location

- Scenario 3A – Stabilize and rehabilitate and address accessibility with the Ruth School and the building envelope
- Scenario 3B – Rehabilitate the original Ruth School and Gymnasium for a specific function.

Summary of Findings

The community engagement process found the community believes it will lose too much historic, social and economic development value if the County were to divest from the Ruth School property by demolishing it.

Stabilizing the building as a future asset would delay the decision on the ultimate demise or rehabilitation of the Ruth School until a future time. Repairs to stabilize the buildings would not improve the structure enough to allow for use by the County or an outside tenant, though it could provide alternate use options; although, delaying capital investment may be attractive, it could be costlier if ultimately if the county maintains ownership. If, however, the property is stabilized and maintained by the county while the economic conditions continue to improve, the county could see increased property values. The cost estimate must be considered by the Rutherford County Commissioners when considering stabilizing the property. Because the Ruth School property has been a topic of much interest in the past, and action was not taken by Rutherford County, continuing to leave the property in flux, even if stabilized, will likely be met with resistance.

The public engagement process showed most support for reuse of the Ruth School in its current location. It was also important that the architectural elements of the building's exterior be preserved. Upgrades will undoubtedly need to be completed through the interior of the building. If during the process a historic element of the exterior is replaced. Public display of the original piece should be considered.

The context of the Ruth School property will be impacted by relocation of U.S 221. The entrance and exit ramps for highway 64 will be located in front of the property making it highly visible to traffic. The committee believes it is in the best interest of the community to select a reuse scenario which presents Rutherfordton in a positive manner, and maximizing the economic opportunities associated with increased visibility to tourists.

Summary of the Action Plan

Implementation of the Reuse Plan begins with information gathering. Information is needed before a course of action, whether it is demolition, stabilization, or rehabilitation can occur by an owner. Elements of the action plan include, but are not limited to review and consideration by the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners, safety concerns, establishing mutual support, partnerships, hazardous material assessment, initiating a master plan, and financing options.

The Adaptive Reuse Plan

Initiation and Purpose

The end purpose of the Ruth School Adaptive Reuse Plan is to assist the Rutherford County Commissioners by gathering public opinions, data, and information for making an initial assessment Ruth School property. The reuse study is informed by NCDOT's Memorandum of Agreement:

“The Rutherford County Manager will establish a committee to oversee the development of an adaptive use plan for the campus and buildings of Ruth Elementary School within six months of filing this MOA. Members of the committee shall include representatives from the State Historic Preservation Office and the Historic Architecture Group of NCDOT along with municipal staff and local citizens with demonstrated interest in the school and its potential redevelopment. NCDOT will provide funds not to exceed \$10,000 for use by the committee to accomplish the following tasks: identify and analyze the issues associated with reusing the structures and campus, develop alternatives for consideration and provide an adaptive reuse plan for the site. If the Rutherford County Manager chooses not to establish the committee, no funds will be available for this study.”

This is accomplished by a process which gathers data and information, then defines and evaluates reuse options for presentation to the community. It is the responsibility of Rutherford County Board of Commissioners to decide which option best benefits the community.

The first step of the study was to determine the importance the historic value to the local community. The second step is to outline the opportunities for reuse most supported by the public. The third is to describe the scale, level or staging of restoration appropriate to the reuse. The fourth step is to describe specific approaches to finance the reuse and restoration; not only the first time costs, but also the on-going cost of operation and maintenance. It includes plausible sources of public funding to support Rutherford County while considering the County's other financial obligations.

The plan was developed through comprehensive study of the range of options, including the demolition of the Ruth School.

The Ruth School Reuse Preliminary Plan process included brainstorming, sharing of ideas, public survey, community meetings and research. The most compatible scenarios are explored in greater detail, but all suggestions provided during the public engagement process are recorded.

This reuse study examines several opportunities, including divesting, stabilization, shared-use, public development, and private investment. The chief aim is provide County Commissioners with valuable data from public survey and to assist in the visioning process of how to best handle

the Ruth School property for all interested parties. Not beginning the reuse process will result in further deterioration, limiting the opportunities for reuse in the future.

The Adaptive Reuse Committee Members

Carl Classen	Rutherford County Manager
Danny Searcy	Rutherford County Public Works/Planning Director
Gene Booth	Appraiser – Business Owner
Doug Grohndahl	Business Owner
Lyn Padgett	Citizen
Frankie McWhorter	Citizen
Clark Poole	Executive Director of Chamber of Commerce
Jay McInnis	Project Manager US 221at NCDOT
Amy Hanaway	Town Clerk, Ruth
Karen Andrews	Town Manager, Rutherfordton
Mary Furr	NCDOT
Jennifer Cathey	SHPO
Doug McNeal	NCDOT
Tery McEntire	Ruth Alumni
Kitty McCammon	Business Owner
Jimmy Dancy	Mayor of Rutherfordton

Public Engagement and Meeting Guidelines

The process of brainstorming meetings and the review period allowed for the committee to:

- Consider options and respond to community needs
- Investigate specific issues of the property in greater detail
- Better understand the Ruth School property

Public meetings and community survey provided key data for the reuse plan. The data collection methods ensured public confidentiality and engagement, and promoted:

- Free discussion of sensitive community issues
- Candid discussion
- Openness to new ideas not previously considered
- Reevaluate of previously discussed reuse opportunities

Discussion of the reuse committee identified issues and options by these principles:

- Fair and objective evaluation of reuse possibilities
- All ideas are valuable for consideration and reflect a desire of the greater community
- A decision making process developed naturally through conversation through common findings and use of qualitative evaluation methods

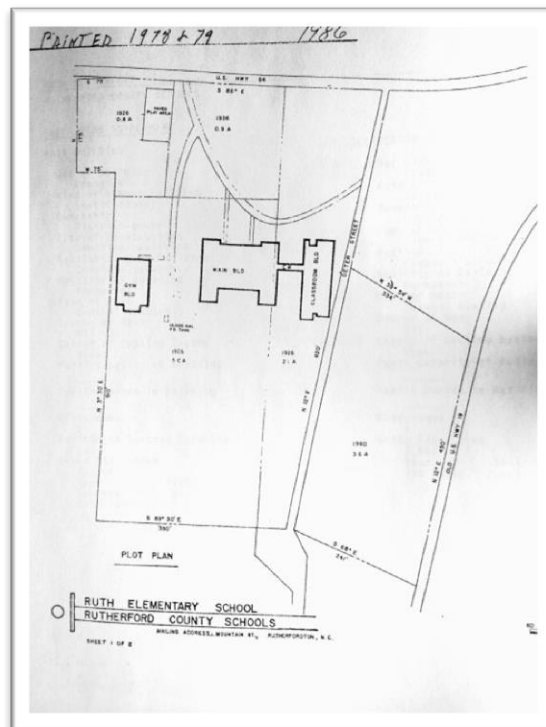
The reuse committee was involved in evaluating the compatibility of the suggested alternatives through open orientation toward action, guided by careful thought including:

- Outcomes are based on primarily on data and void of private value conflicts
- Solutions can evolve to accommodate change
- Outcomes should be meaningful, authentic, true and hold aesthetic value
- Means for financial support are plausible
- Financial support will come from multiple sources

The Ruth School Site Today

The Ruth School has great potential. The original school building and gym are easily seen from the road because it is situated on a gentle hill with large trees on the front of the property facing U.S 64. Behind the school building is a grassy area previously used as a baseball field. Behind the field is Trinity School, a private school.

The Ruth School location is situated on U.S 64 near the entrance and exit ramps to U.S 221 bypass, south to Main Street or North to Marion. Continuing on U.S 64 will lead to Lake Lure to the west, or Morganton to the north and east.



While in operation the Ruth School was a center for the community of Ruth, and the surrounding area. It holds significant sentimental value for the community.

The property is not currently on the National Historic Registry; however it does qualify for placement. The pros and cons of listing the property will have to be considered by County Commissioners and the community if or when the County moves forward with a master plan for the site. Guidance for making this decision is available through state agencies.

Strength of the Newly Impacted 221 Corridor Area

The impacts of the relocation of U.S 221 will create a highly visual context for the Ruth School site. It could provide an opportunity for the location to present Rutherfordton in a positive manner, and set a tone that makes tourists stop at the Ruth School site, but also explore the surrounding small towns including Rutherfordton, Spindale, and Forest City. The location provides connectivity to the community.

A map illustrating the exit ramps in relationship to property is located in the appendix of this document.

Site and Building Conditions

The Ruth School building was constructed in 1926, and began operating in the fall of 1928. The original building has 14,020 square feet of interior floor space with ten classrooms and a large auditorium. The building does not appear to have major renovations or additions.

The annex building, constructed in 1951 does not appear to have had major renovations or additions. It has of at least 7,667 square feet. A covered walkway was built to connect the annex to the original school building. It was used for a cafeteria and classroom building.

The Mayberry gym, built in 1960 is the newest building at the Ruth School site. It holds a boiler room in addition to the full gym, which has 5,332 square feet. The building has only been used for a traditional gymnasium.

Site Conditions

The area will be impacted by the new U.S 221 exchange with U.S 64. The land slopes up and away from the road, making it highly visible to drivers from both directions.

Building Conditions

Three buildings were used exclusively for public education until 2005 when the school was closed and released from Rutherford County Schools to Rutherford County. Since closing the school, the building and site not been maintained, and thus each building has suffered a different level of deterioration.

Exterior Envelope Conditions

Original School Building

The foundation appears to be in good condition with no remarkable cracks or indicators of settling.

The exterior walls are in good condition and are constructed with brick masonry. Generally the brick is in good condition. The foundation is constructed of concrete foundation walls.

The existing asphalt shingle roof is not in good condition, and needs to be replaced. There is evidence of leaks.

The entrance steps to the building are in stable condition in each location.

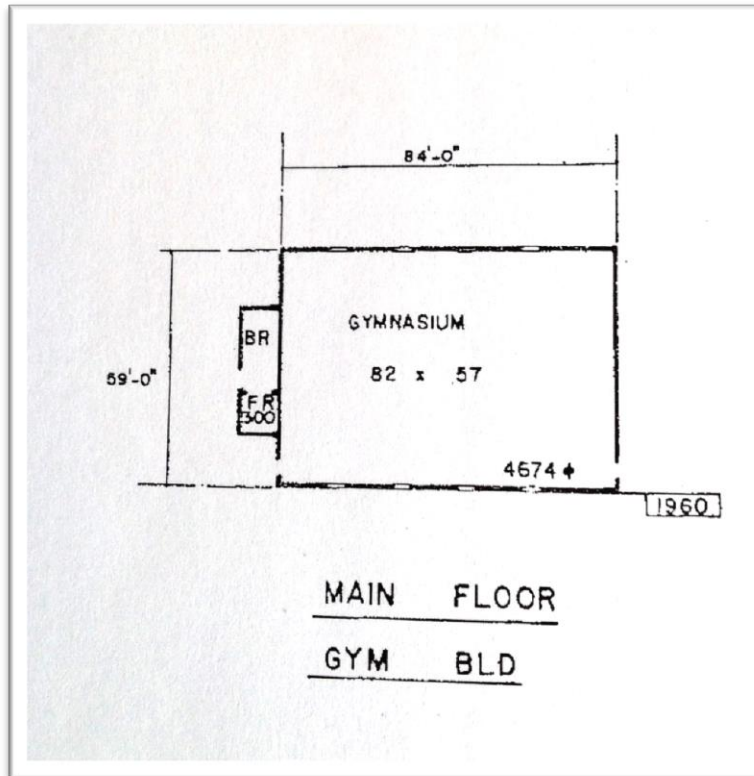
The original wood frame windows are in poor condition, and will need to be replaced and/or refurbished. Many of the windows have been broken by vandals. The damage to the windows is typical deterioration due to age and neglect.

Annex

The annex was built in 1951, and the construction quality is significantly lower than the original 1926 building. There is major water damage. It has caused mold, moss, and other plants to become well established. In parts of the building the ceiling has caved in from water, and the floor is decaying. The floor in at least one classroom sags dramatically. In another classroom there is evidence of someone living there, using a section of the room as a toilet. Many windows are broken, and vines are growing across into the rooms and across the ceiling. It does not appear to be financially feasible to rehab the building.

Gym

The Mayberry gym was constructed in 1950. It was named for the long-time, and beloved principal William V. Mayberry. Currently the structure is in better-than-expected condition. The exterior of the building has seen superficial vandalism.



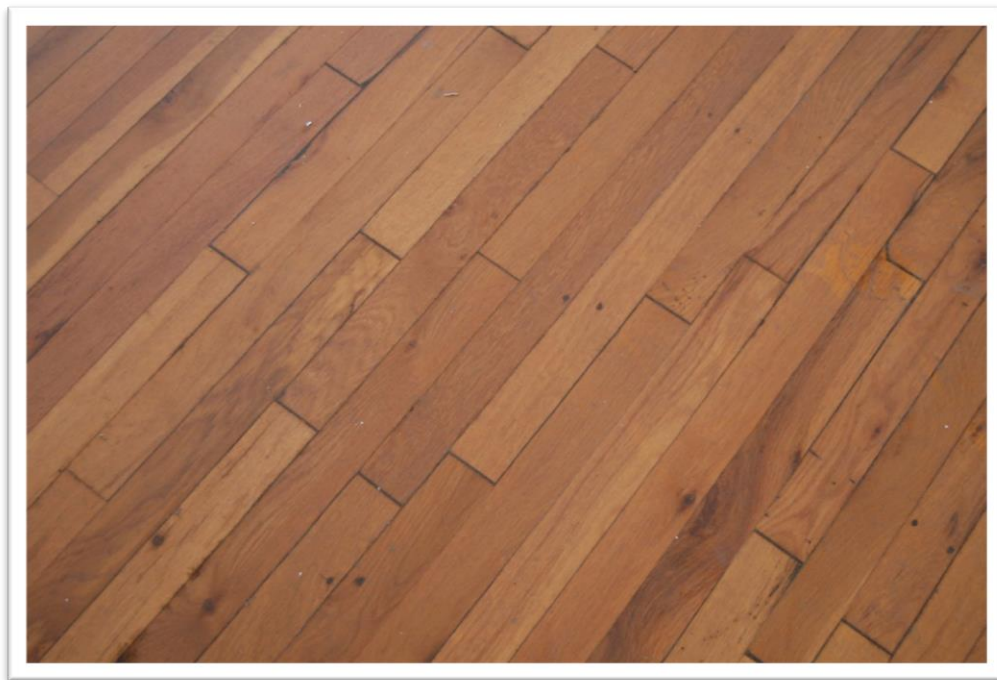
Interior Conditions

Original School Building

The interior of the original school building is largely intact and in fair to good condition. The original interior wall finish is plaster. Given the age of the building lead paint was certainly used, though eventually contained. While the walls are sound, the paint on the walls has major peeling throughout the building and will require lead paint mitigation in any rehabilitation process. There are large whiteboards in the classrooms which would need to be removed to assess the condition of the plaster behind them. The most significant damage to the walls is from individuals trespassing on the property stripping materials from the walls, such as copper pipes and wiring.

The condition of the electrical system could not be assessed because there is no power in the building, however it is likely the building will need to be fully rewired to bring it up to current standards.

With the exception of minor water damage from a limited number of ceiling leaks, the hardwood floor is even and in good condition, but needs to be refinished throughout the building. In the auditorium the floor has thin carpet over the hardwood floor which could easily be removed and refinished. The subfloor should be carefully evaluated and likely will require partial or full rehabilitation.

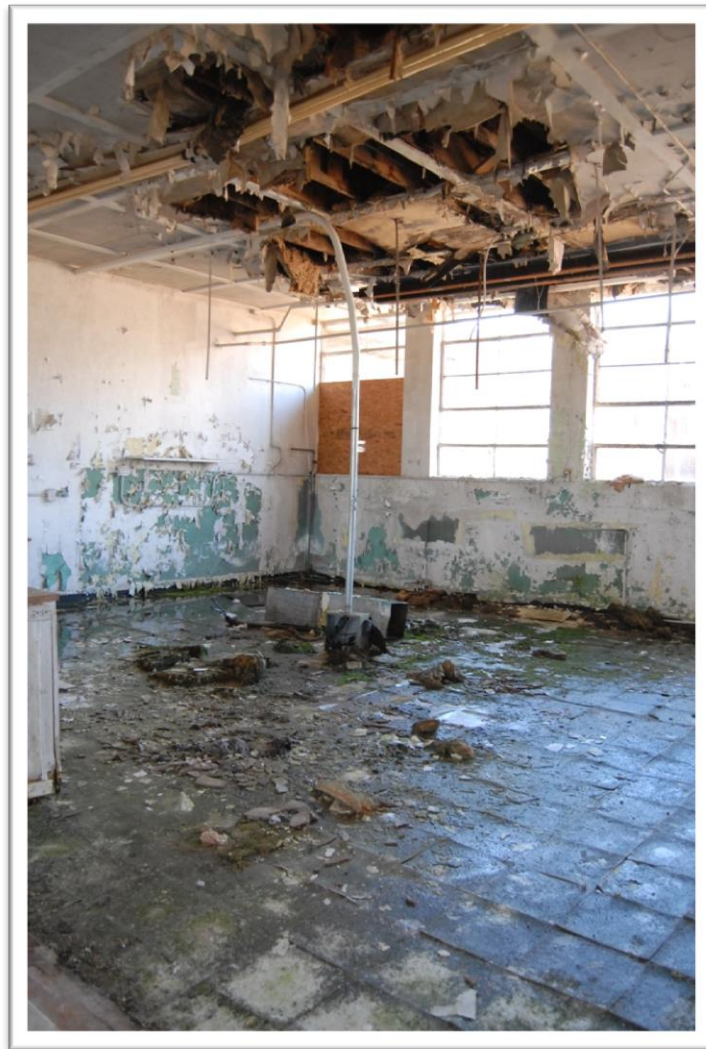


Annex

The annex is has catastrophic damage in multiple areas. The walls suffer the same level of superficial deterioration as the original building. In the larger room, which severed as cafeteria, there is major water damage. The ceiling has fallen in and there is standing water, mold, moss, and other plants.

One classroom appears to be used as a shelter for a person, evidenced by significant amounts of human waste. The floor in another classroom has sagged more than a for foot for the entire length of the room.

Vines are growing into the building through broken windows, and have climbed across the ceiling in one classroom.



Gym

The interior of the gym has 5,332 square feet and is in good condition. The walls are sound and need only superficial improvements. The tile floor is in good condition with few problems associated with lack of maintenance. The front of the building has a set of metal double doors and minor water damage has occurred on the floor where water has entered under the doors. Most of the bleachers have been removed, and there is evidence of human activity in the building (glass bottles, chairs and debris). The old boiler room has served as a shelter for someone, and there is a small fire pit that has been used, though it has caused limited damage thanks to concrete floor and block walls. The roof is single membrane. The concrete foundation walls and concrete slab appear to be in good condition.

Hazardous Materials on Site

Lead paint is likely present in each building.

In the main building, asbestos is likely to be present in the plaster, crawl space insulation, boiler, caulk, and roofing materials. The annex likely has asbestos in tile flooring material, crawl space insulation, wall materials, caulk, and roofing materials. In the gym, asbestos may be present in the tile flooring, boiler, and roofing materials.

Based on when the main building and annex were constructed, the light fixtures likely contain mercury tubes and PCB ballasts.

Detailed inspection and assessment will be required to fully understand all the risks associated with the hazardous materials located at the Ruth School buildings and campus.



This level of peeling is typical throughout the building, including wall and door surfaces.

Accessibility

The Ruth School has a few accessibility issues, and it is understood that accessibility would need to be incorporated into any rehabilitation and remodeling project.

Energy Efficiency

The building envelopes for each of the three buildings at the site are typical for the period in which they were constructed. The windows and doors are in poor condition due to age, lack of upkeep, and vandalism. Historic windows of the original building need to be refurbished or replaced in any rehabilitation scenario. Adding storm windows to these windows will improve energy efficiency of the building.

If the annex were to be part of a rehabilitation effort, many windows would need to be replaced due to vandalism, and likely replaced for modern windows for increased energy efficiency.

There are few windows to be concerned about in the gym; however, it is likely the few existing windows will need to be replaced due to age and vandalism.

Mechanical Systems and Initial Recommendations

In any rehabilitation scenario for all three buildings, the bathrooms will need to be remodeled because of both age and general disrepair. Any remodeling effort would need to meet ADA accessibility standards.

The existing system is assumed to be out dated and replacing it will need to be part of a rehabilitation process. Updated and new drain, waste and vent should be installed to best serve the public with ADA accessible restrooms, faucets, and chilled water drinking fountains with locations and size determined by an architect to best suit the needs of the selected reuse option.

The heating system for the original building was accomplished with a steam radiator system, and was never updated. The heating system has not been used since the building as closed, and was not in operation for formal review. The original school building does not have air conditioning. It is assumed based on age and deterioration that all mechanical systems will need to be replaced in a rehabilitation process.

Electrical Systems and Lighting

The electrical system of the Ruth School buildings is not intact due to disrepair, age, and vandalism. The site currently does not have power to allow for a full inspection of the existing electrical system.

The interior lighting buildings likely has mercury tube and PCB ballasts. Exterior lighting is limited to lights near the entrances. For increases safety and energy efficiency the electrical system and lighting would need to be upgraded in a rehabilitation process to use modern

technology. Lighting system upgrades boost one of the highest returns on investment in a rehabilitation process. Installing light control devices such as occupancy sensors, Energy Star rated fixtures, and timers are highly recommended.

Communications

The telephone and data services for the buildings are damaged and outdated. Vandalism in the buildings has damaged the data infrastructure. A rehabilitation process will include the need to remove remaining telephone and data services and infrastructure, and new services installed.

Security communications for the building will need to be evaluated based on the reuse scenario selected.

Utility Use

There are no current utility bills for review for the property. The historical electrical data is provided in the appendix of this document for informational purpose. Rate increases with Duke Energy and typical requirements of modern lighting and mechanical systems should be considered when reviewing this data.

While operated as public school, the facility averaged \$6,700 per year in water and sewer services. This is historic information and the current rates and type of use after rehabilitation will need to be considered when evaluating water and sewer services.

Embodied Energy

All buildings, including the three buildings located on the Ruth School property have embodied energy. This is the total energy spent in the production of the building including manufacturing of materials, delivery to the site. In the 1970s energy engineers determined it cost approximately 15 gallons of gasoline per square foot to construct for a typical building. (*National Trust for Historic Preservation, Preservation magazine, January/February 2008.*)

It is not an exact science, but embodied energy calculation can provide an idea of how much energy is contained within a structure. There are many variables that can influence a precise figure, but using the 15 gallons per square foot guideline, the following calculation can be made for the Ruth School property.

The Ruth School buildings in total represent 25,696 of square feet, which would be equivalent to about 385,440 of gallons of gas.

In this situation, the Ruth School property represents a financial investment already made by earlier generations of Rutherford County residents. It also represents the loss of the resources used to create the building if the buildings are demolished or allowed to further deteriorate through lack of maintenance or stabilization effort. Reusing the buildings increase the embodied energy savings the longer the structures remain functional.

Site and Building Conditions Summary

In general the original building and gym are in fair to good condition. With some repairs, upgrades, and maintenance as mentioned the building could provide another century of service to the community. The annex building however is likely too badly damaged to warrant rehabilitation.

Reuse Issues

The Ruth School site and three buildings do not have an existing use. The buildings have been empty for eight years.

Questions and issues that relate to the preservation and reuse opportunities of the Ruth School property can be placed in the categories of design, community, and economics.

Design Notes

- The original Ruth School building's foundation, exterior walls, floor, and interior walls are in good condition.
- The architecture is unique in the area, and provides historical and cultural values.
- The school sits on a pretty piece of land that slopes up and away from the road, and is highly visible to traffic.
- The Ruth School qualifies to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Community Issues

Positives

- Interest in historic preservation
- Interest in the cultural value associated with the Ruth School property

Negatives

- Although there have been efforts to preserve, protect and reuse the Ruth School property at various times in the past, Rutherford County does not have a clearly established relationship with community groups interested in preserving the site.
- Tension exists between the community and Rutherford County commissioners in issues concerning the Ruth School property.
- The current state of neglect is not supportive of preservation of historic properties.

Economic Issues

Positives

- Based on the building size and location, the local market for leased property in Rutherfordton the current or future owner might expect a commercial lease value of approximately \$9.00 per square foot
- Based on the building size and location and in its current state, if Rutherford County were to divest from the property, it could be sold for approximately \$883,600..

Negatives

- There is concern the Ruth School property will not compete favorably with other Rutherford County projects and the property will remain in limbo.
- It is difficult to place a dollar amount on opportunities generated by arts, culture and youth activities (such as basketball).

Reuse Options for the Ruth School

Community Survey

Because the Ruth School is owned by Rutherford County obtaining community input was a high priority for the reuse committee. To obtain public comment the committee developed a survey. The survey was conducted electronically through Survey Monkey. Information on how to go about accessing the survey was included in a newspaper article in the *Daily Courier*, and the committee also worked to share the survey. Paper copies of the survey were provided at two public community meetings, five public libraries, as well as at the Isothermal Planning and Development office.

A summary of the survey results indicate the Ruth buildings and campus are valued by the community.

How important is the Ruth School building to the community?

Very Important	35.98% 95
Important	31.82% 84
Neutral	17.42% 46
Not Important	7.20% 19
Really Not Important	7.58% 20

How important is it for the Ruth School building to have a more useful purpose in the community?

Very Important	64.15% 170
Important	21.51% 57
Neutral	5.66% 15
Not Important	4.53% 12
Really Not Important	4.15% 11

Participants were able to make comments at the end of the survey. The word cloud below illustrates most commonly occurring words in the comments section. Words occurring most often are represented with larger text, and words mentioned less often are represented in smaller text. The words reflect value, reuse opportunities, and values.

Ages Benefit Campus Center County Dilapidated
 Funds Generations Grants Historic Landmark Park Place
 Property School Torn Trinity Upkeep
 Way to Save

This information reflects the highlights two of the most commonly asked questions, and the word cloud is helped to facilitate conversation. The full survey result details are found in the appendix of this document.

The reuse committee carefully considered all concepts and scenarios based on its compatibility with the site, cultural benefit, economic development, and values of historic preservation.

Compatibility as a Point of View

Compatibility evaluates and considers scale, height, location of services, cultural context, materials, and site suitability. In looking at usability of a concept or scenario, the reuse committee considered the effectiveness of the option. Some of the concepts discussed considered

accessibility, efficiency, site selection, amenities, and relationship to highway 221, and proximity to Trinity School.

Cultural Benefit as a Point of View

Some of the aspects considered under the cultural benefits included place-making, local history, and stability in knowing and continuing a sense of history, and establishing a foundation through common collective community memory and experience.

Economic Development Benefit as a Point of View

Economic development presents a wide spectrum of objective and subjective values. From an objective standpoint one can easily establish capital costs, operations and maintenance costs and potential revenue. The more difficult task is to establish the economic benefit to a community's image, tourism, quality of life, or revitalization.

A community's image is directly related to its economic well-being and future. Every day through the county people and companies make decisions about where to live, where to invest, where to vacation, and where to retire.

The top 20 cities as cited by economic development professionals, 15 were among cities with the most historic rehabilitation activity in the country. Of the largest cities with the most dismal records in attracting and maintain investments and jobs also had dismal records on historic preservation – Donovan Rypkema, *"The Economics of Historic Preservation"*

Historical character is an important element in attracting tourists, and creating a deeper sense of place among citizens.

Tourism makes up an important part of the economy, and the travel to Lake Lure via highway 64 and highway 221 is significant. In 2012 Rutherford County saw 149.7 million dollars in tourism expenditures and 227,671 visitors attended Chimney State Park in 2012. This is level of tourism could inform the plan forward for the Ruth School campus and buildings. Tourism will continue to be important to Rutherford County, and Ruth School's place in the future should not be disregarded given its unique context.

Historic Preservation Point of View

The reuse committee considered each concept and scenario from the standpoint of historic value of the original Ruth School building and campus. The preservation of historic structures adds to the sense of place for a community and assist visitors in understanding and valuing the history of not only the Ruth School campus, but also the surrounding community.

Preservation is about saving the essence of any community, which is importance for economic and social well-being as well as place-making.

Potential Uses for the Ruth School Site

The location and condition of the original Ruth School building and the Mayberry Gymnasium make it a valuable asset to Rutherford County. There has been organized effort to pursue reuse options; however these efforts have lost steam over time. Energy and interest from the previous efforts to revitalize the Ruth School property certainly influenced the current community interest. The most recent survey and new committee, however, are organized by Rutherford County through funding made available by North Carolina Department of Transportation. The potential uses for the property detailed below reflect the current interest as established by a community engagement effort and committee process.

All of the ideas suggested by the committee and community were entered into a scoring rubric with twelve qualifying factors. The adaptive reuse committee rated each reuse options against these twelve elements, and the scores were totaled and then averaged. The top scoring reuse options were then discussed further by the committee and the more detailed vision for the top scoring options are detailed below. Consideration and evaluation of survey data and comments largely impacted Committee discussion.

Some of the most prominent ideas are using the Ruth School original building was a mixed use facility containing a welcome center, retail, community resource (youth sports, activities, and outdoor amenities) and a veteran's memorial. This could be achieved through divestment or by entering into long term leases with tenants. There is a desire to see the property remain in the hands of Rutherford County and a belief that if it managed by the County the best decision can be made for the community, however, the community understands there are significant financial limitations facing a local government. If the County decides to divest from the property and sells it part or in whole to a private developer there is a strong desire from the community for the County to be selective and find a developer who has a positive and compatible vision for the property. In the course of casual conversation, many community members have specifically said they do not want to see the property turned into a Dollar General or other big box discount store.

To preserve the original building and the Mayberry gymnasium in the best sustainable solution is one where there are at least as many perceived benefits from the building as there are obligations in the form of expenses for operation and maintenance. Perceived benefits can be in the form of monetary benefits such as lease agreements or providing community services to support the County's mission, or a social and cultural need. It is difficult to place value on non-monetary benefits because they are subject to individual value system. From the perspective of obligations to preserve the buildings we would look at payment of utilities, covering a recurring maintenance program and funding capital improvements needed for a fully rehabilitated historic structure.

The survey presented to the community help to gauge the level of interest in a series of typical reuse options:

Public Toilets / Rest Area	18.44% 45
Arts / Performing Arts	48.77% 119
Education	49.18% 120
Community Sports	41.39% 101
Green Space / Community Garden	34.84% 85
Playground	40.57% 99
Conference Room Facilitates	31.97% 78
Youth Activities	57.79% 141
Senior Citizen Activities	43.03% 105
Senior Housing	13.11% 32
Doctors Office / Healthcare	8.20% 20
Shelter / Resource Center	27.46% 67
Residential	6.15% 15
Retail Development	10.66% 26
Restaurant	13.11% 32
Mix Use	34.84% 85

Total Respondents: 244

Through a series of meetings, discussion, evaluation, and consideration of the public survey data, the Adaptive Reuse Committee did not isolate a single reuse option for the school. The Committee supports the demolition of the Annex building located on the Ruth campus due to the severe deterioration found on the interior and the failing foundation. The condition of the original school building and gym, in addition to the cultural and historical value voiced by the community engagement process leads the Committee to believe these two buildings and the campus present an opportunity for economic and community development.

Given the valuable location and relationship to US 221, and the considerable amount of space that is available the Committee saw a significant opportunity. These recommendations come with some specific comments and considerations. The most sensitive element evaluated by the Committee is the construction of a fuel station because of the proximity of the property to existing fuel station business and environmental concerns associated with polluted water runoff near Cathey's Creek. Additionally, committee expressed concerns with the aesthetics of a fuel station at a location designated to be a Gateway to the community. If a fuel station is constructed on the site to primarily service travelers, the visual design and a low impact construction practices should be very important in the planning process.

The committee recommends a specific mixed-use combination to meet a variety of needs for the community including:

- Rest area for Tourists and Visitor Center
- Broadband Wi-Fi Hot Spot
- Commercial Food
- Green Space Element
 - Open Space
 - Veteran's Memorial or Garden
 - Dog Run (in the back field area)
 - Playground
 - Picnic / Shelter Area
- Fuel Station
- Opportunities for the Art Community
 - Artist Workspace
 - Gallery and/or Retail Space

In the event stabilization is selected, interim use for the building recommended by the Committee to generate revenue to offset the financial expenses. Revenue generated by a combination of interim uses can be applied to the ongoing maintenance effort. For interim uses, the Committee recommends the following:

- Auditorium and Stage
- Office Space
- Dog Park
- Playground

The Committee recognizes the value unique to the Mayberry Gym as a recreation and economic development resource to the community. The Committee recommends the gym be utilized for:

Youth Sports

- Basketball
- Volleyball
- Indoor Soccer

Adult and Senior Sports and Activities

- Basketball
- Volleyball
- Indoor Soccer
- Exercise Classes
- Yoga Classes
- Walking

The adaptive reuse committee looked at three concepts for reuse. It should be noted that in all instances of rehabilitation or reuse the concepts and scenarios assume the demolition of the annex due to its poor condition and lack of historical value. These concepts included; (1) divest the County from the property, (2) stabilize the structure for the future, (3) update the structure.

Depending on the use of the building, insurance for the campus is estimated to be \$12,000 each year. Utility and communication systems required in the rehabilitation progress and ongoing operation of the building will be dependent on the selected use of the building.

These basic concepts are presented in seven scenarios as follows:

Concept 1 – Divest Rutherford County from the Ruth School property

- Scenario 1A – Demolish the Ruth School and through proper mitigation, restore the site to pre-development conditions.
- Scenario 1B – Sell the Ruth School and the land in its current condition

Concept 2 – Stabilized the Ruth School as a Future Asset

- Scenario 2A – Stabilize the Ruth School with a tenant
- Scenario 2B – Stabilize the Ruth School without a tenant

Concept 3 – Upgrade the Ruth School in its current location

- Scenario 3A – Stabilize and address accessibility with the Ruth School and the building envelope
- Scenario 3B – Rehabilitate the original Ruth School and gymnasium to a community supported reuse purpose.

Please note that the purpose of these sketches within this section is to convey an idea or vision. They are not based on detailed cost analysis or feasibility studies. The estimates are for only the

known elements required and cannot fully reflect what may be needed to rehabilitate the original building and gym. That step would be required prior to the creation of a master plan for any given solution selected by the Board of Commissioners.

Concept 1 – Divest the County of the Ruth School Property

Scenario 1A – Demolish the Ruth School and through proper mitigation, restore the site to pre-development conditions and maintain ownership of the site by the County.

Scenario Description Scenario 1A would be to demolish the three buildings on the Ruth School and restore the site to previously undeveloped state.

Mission To eliminate the buildings from the site

Budget Estimates (removal estimates do not reflect removal of hazardous materials)

- Remove asbestos from the original building \$300,000
- Demolish original building \$50,000
- Remove asbestos from annex \$130,000
- Demolish annex \$40,000
- Remove asbestos from gym \$40,000
- Demolish gym \$25,000
- Total \$585,000

Options None considered for the demolition scenario

Planning Scenario 1A requires careful planning which is outside of the scope of the Ruth Adaptive Reuse Plan

Scenario 1B – Sell the Ruth School and the land in its current condition without requiring the buyer to return the land to redeveloped conditions.

Scenario Description The Ruth School buildings and the associated land have value. It is very close to where the new exit ramps for U.S 221 and U.S 64 cross making it highly visible to locals as well as tourist traffic en route to Lake Lure. The new exit ramps could pose a public safety issue, but it is assumed NCDOT will take all typical measures to reduce risk to the public. Scenario 1B would consist of selling the property to a private or public entity. This scenario would respond to the segment of the community who believe there is little relationship between the Ruth School and the community or believe it is cost prohibitive to rehabilitate the buildings.

Mission To preserve, rehabilitate, report, or reconstruct the Ruth School property through another source and avoid associated costs of ownership.

- Current tax value of the Ruth School property as assessed by the Rutherford County Revenue Department is \$883,600. This estimate may change in the future, and there is an assumption the value will increase when U.S 221 work is complete.

Planning Hazardous material survey and abatement needs to be accomplished. A property appraisal should be done to provide a realistic expectation on possible return.
Report the site to pre-development conditions.

Concept 2 – Stabilized the Ruth School as a Future Asset

Scenario 2A – Stabilize the Ruth School with a tenant

Scenario Description The concept of Scenario 2 stabilizes and preserves the structure for the future by performing required rehabilitation. It is an investment by Rutherford County who by selecting this scenario would make a commitment to ongoing maintenance, but also reap the benefit of ongoing revenues from tenants. This scenario explores the minimum required to stabilize the building, correct deferred maintenance, and interior safety hazards primarily associated with lead paint, water damage, and general damage from neglect. It will also stabilize the property for future opportunities including selling the property, or full rehabilitation work by the County.

Mission Preserve the original Ruth School and Mayberry gym for the future. At some point in the future there will be a community support for further investment for fully rehabilitate the property and expand use possibilities.

Budget Estimates

- The follow rehabilitation is required to stabilize the building. Additional work will be required to make the building safe and useable by a tenant. This work will need to be evaluated in the development of a master plan.
 - Removal of asbestos
 - Roof structure is unstable and unsafe
 - Roof is not weather tight
 - Floor requires repair
 - Replace windows
 - >\$300,000 (2/3's less if asbestos is not found in plaster)
- Gym
 - Removal of asbestos
 - General maintenance improvements
 - Replace mechanical systems

- Underground storage tank needs to be addressed
- >\$40,000

Options This scenario allows for the possibility of temporary fixes/upgrades in the electrical and mechanical systems if deemed safe to do so by a qualified engineer.

Planning Hazardous material survey and abatement needs to be accomplished. Grant applications could be considered to cover the cost of this work.

Scenario 2B Stabilize the original Ruth School and Mayberry gym without a Tenant

Scenario Description The concept of Scenario 2 is to stabilize and preserve the structure for the future without upgrading the building, but rather to stabilize or “mothball” the buildings. The scenario recognizes the value of the building to the community balance against the limited financing possibilities by the County. A likely combination is to secure the building’s exterior, doors, and roof.

Mission Preserve the original Ruth School building and Mayberry gym for the future, with hope at some point the decision will be made to invest in full rehabilitation to fully utilize the property.

Budget Estimate

- Most of the asbestos can remain as-is/undisturbed
- Roof needs to be stabilized or replaced
- Floor structure needs to be reinforced in the original building
- Windows must be boarded
- Doors must be secured on both buildings
- Underground storage tank needs to be addressed

Options Hazardous material survey and abatement needs to be accomplished.

Planning Grant applications could be submitted to cover development costs.

Concept 3 – Upgrade the Ruth School and Gymnasium

Scenario 3A – Stabilize and address accessibility with the Ruth School and the building envelope

Scenario Description In addition the previous stabilization scenario which preserves the building for the future, Scenario 3A includes major upgrades to building systems as part of a major rehabilitation of the original Ruth School building and Mayberry Gymnasium.

Mission To provide a fully operating facilitate to last at least 20 years available in the market place, where the property will continue to be owned by Rutherford

County, and the facilities utilized either by long term lease agreements or development/use by the County.

Budget Estimates

- Rehabilitate Original Building
 - Asbestos removal \$300,000 (reduce by 2/3 if none is found in plaster)
 - Partial renovations > \$1,000,000
- Gymnasium
 - Asbestos removal \$40,000
 - Underground storage tank needs to be addressed
 - More information and inspection is required to full estimate rehabilitation costs beyond removal of hazardous materials

Options No options for Scenario 3A are considered in this scenario.

Planning Hazardous material survey and abatement needs to be accomplished. Grant applications can be submitted to cover development costs.

Scenario 3B – Rehabilitate the original Ruth School and gymnasium to a community supported reuse effort.

Scenario Description In addition the previous stabilization scenario which preserves the building for the future, Scenario 3B includes major upgrades to building systems and major rehabilitation and specific remodeling needs of the original Ruth School building and Mayberry Gymnasium.

Mission To provide a fully operating facilitating to last at least 20 years available in the market place, where the property will continue to be owned by Rutherford County, and the facilities utilized either by long term lease agreements or development/use by the County.

Budget

- Rehabilitate Original Building
 - Asbestos removal \$300,000 (reduce by 2/3 if none is found in plaster)
 - Full renovations \$2,000,000
- Gymnasium
 - Asbestos removal \$40,000
 - More information and inspection is required to full estimate rehabilitation costs beyond removal of hazardous materials

Options	No options for Scenario 3A are considered in this scenario.
Planning	Hazardous material survey and abatement needs to be accomplished. Grant applications can be submitted to cover development costs.

Reuse Considerations and Community Interest

Through the community engagement process and previous organized reuse discussions, many options have been offered. The following list is a complete list of input from all survey responses, meeting records, discussion, and public comment. Many of the options suggested by the community are reflected in the mixed use recommendations from the Reuse Committee. This list is to serve both as record of the community's input as well as a resource for reviewing mixed use scenarios in the future. There are no assigned values or statements of support for this list and it not arranged in any particular order.

- Trailhead for Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail, Rails-to-Trails, Gilbert Town, Rutherford Trails
- Rutherford County Visitor Center (Multi-use, TDA, OVT, etc.)
- Affordable Meeting and Event Space
- Conference Center
- Art Gallery and Exhibit Space
- Small Retail Shops and Services including biking and hiking supply and service
- Restaurant/Snack bar
- Senior Housing and Activities
- Condominiums
- Heritage Center
- OVTA Interpretive Center
- Theatre
- Mixed-use center including retail and office space for rent
- Commercial kitchen
- Community gardens
- Rutherford County Cooperative Extension including 4-H, Home Demonstration, Master Gardeners, Farmer's Market could include Soil and Water Conservation, USDA, etc.
- YMCA
- Rutherford County Visual Artists Guild
- Rehearsal and Performance Space for Rutherford Symphony
- Visitor Information Center
- Genealogical Society Research Center
- Emergency Services Satellite location
- Rutherford County Offices
- Rutherford Chamber Office
- Norris Public Library and/or County Library
- Community Center
- Medical Center

- Veterans Center and Memorial
- Youth Activities
- Youth Educational Opportunities
- Museum and Historical Displays
- Preschool Education Center
- American Legion Post
- Community Soccer/Football Field with Parking
- After School Care/Activities
- Farmer's Market
- Micro Brewery Adjoining Brew Pub
- Shelter for Families with Children
- Cinema
- Low Income Assistance with focus on a free medical clinic
- Animal Shelter
- Dog Park
- Industrial/Manufacturing
- Business incubator
- Upward Bound Basketball and other Basketball Leagues in the Mayberry Gym

Funding Opportunities

Below is an initial list of possible funding opportunities to explore to fund depending on the type of reuse project.

North Carolina Department of Commerce

North Carolina Department of Transportation

North Carolina Cultural Resource Commission

Community Development Block Grants

Tourism Development Authority

Overmountain Victory Trail Association

Preservation North Carolina

National Trust

Private Partners

Private Individual

Commercial Development Group

Real Estate Development Group

Other Considerations

Leases and Utilities

If the County required a lease payment from a tenant that included utilities and paid the utilities were paid by the County as opposed to the tenant, there would be more incentive and potentially more resources available to develop and implement energy efficiency measures.

Re-Occurring Maintenance Program

If Rutherford County elects to retain ownership of the Ruth School buildings and campus, a strong re-occurring maintenance program would likely result in better use of County resources. If maintenance items are not taken care of early, they often result in more extensive and costly repairs or equipment failures.

Tax Funding or Bond

Rutherford County Board of Commissioners could explore the use of a one-half cent sale tax, or other tax-funded initiative to finance the stabilization, rehabilitation, and/or on-going maintenance effort. The public survey conducted as part of this plan indicated the community is willing to invest tax dollars into the Ruth School campus and buildings. The public survey showed that 74.49% of respondents were willing to support reuse options with county tax dollars. The survey requested respondents to indicate a percentage or dollar amount that they were willing to support. This information, however, does not seem to be useful data and reflects that the residents do not fully understand the complicated matter of taxing authority held by the county. Responses ranged from specific dollar amounts, such as \$5.00 to \$10.00 and percentages, of .10% to 5%.

Preservation Funding

There are a number of funding opportunities for the preservation of historic rehabilitation. Eligibility varies depending on the status of the building on the National Historic Registry. The Commissioners and/or Reuse Committee with consultation from Jennifer Cathy, who currently sits on the Reuse Committee, will have to decide whether or not it is in the best interest of the reuse process to pursue listing the original Ruth School building on the National Historic Registry.

Considerations and Action Planning

Implementation for any reuse effort begins with a sequence of actions and tasks which provided the needed information, so actual planning for redevelopment can occur. These are the proposed steps.

1. Issue the preliminary reuse study. Rutherford County Board of Commissioners will review the plan.
2. Immediate Action for Safety Concerns. The three buildings on the Ruth School property are not secure, posing a liability to the County.
3. Review and discussion of the reuse plan. Rutherford County will consider and discuss the data and findings of this study through internal review and work with the community to select a reuse plan that best meets the needs of the community while considering all extenuating circumstances.
4. Hazardous Material Assessment. Engage an environmental contractor to survey, sample, and test materials suspected of containing hazardous component such as lead, mercury, and asbestos for the purpose of properly estimating cost of abatement, disposal, stabilization or rehabilitation.
5. If Rutherford County elects to maintain ownership of the building and selects a scenario, it should trigger the initiation of a Master Plan for the site. The development of an interpretive Master Plan would be formulated by Rutherford County with assistance from partnering organizations.
6. Funding Plan. If Rutherford County elected to maintain ownership of the Ruth School property, all funding opportunities should be explored to relieve as much of the burden as possible from the tax payers, options may include tax credits, grants, partnerships, and fundraising.

Conclusion

The Ruth School has significant sentimental, historic, and economic development value to the community; however, it can only be an asset to residents if it is sees new life either through divestment to a private developer or stabilization and/or rehabilitation through public-private partnerships. The public engagement and Committee consideration of options shows the most support for a specific combination of mix-use. This supported option reflects Concept 3, Scenario 3B.

This Preliminary Adaptive Reuse Plan provides data and information from many sources and has been compiled for the Rutherford County Board of Commissioners to assist them in deciding how to best utilize the Ruth School campus, with special understanding and consideration of the exit ramp that will drive traffic to the location. Committee members are a valuable resource and should be consultant, when in the future; there is a further step in this process. The Committee understands that any future Committee will reflect the goals at that time.

Additional Resources

Previous Preservation Effort 2006-2009

The preservation and potential reuse of the Ruth School property and its eligibility for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places has been explored for several years.

These discussions about preservation and potential reuse of the property and structures began as early as 2006. At that time the property was held by the Rutherford County Board of Education. In 2006 Rutherford County and the town of Rutherfordton were approached about the potential reuse of the property for senior housing. It was noted that if the property was designed a historic property and a 30% historic tax credit was thought possible and thus a strong incentive for a potential private developer. Jeanne Price, the executive director of Western North Carolina Housing Project discussed with the Facilities Director of Rutherford County Schools, Linwood Crawford to consider using the property for senior housing. The project, however, did not move forward.

At different points representatives from Trinity School was interested in purchasing at least a portion of the campus property to expand their campus or parking facilities. Trinity School is located on Deter Street and is located directly behind the Ruth School property.

In December 2007, after three years of being empty, Rutherford County Schools with the support of the Rutherford County Heritage Council, the Rutherford County Historical Society and the Genealogical Society, Rutherford County pursued reversion of the Ruth School to County management.

During this time, at the requests of community members interested in preserving the Ruth School, the original school building was assessed by Rebecca Johnson, Preservation Specialist with the Western Office of Archives and History, a division of the North Carolina Department of Historic Places.

In 2008, following the completion of the Rutherford County Cultural Plan, and funded by the NC Arts Council Grass Roots Program, a Culture and Arts Center Facility/Ruth School Exploration Group was formed. The group identified the property as suitable for art classes and exhibits or history displays, programs and organizations; theatre, music, dance and other performances and meeting and event space for up to 225 people. Several meetings of the group were held and planned developed for organizing community and government support, fundraising, and other strategies for preservation. The group proposed to present information to the County Commissioners and the community as well as to gather support for the project and a subsequent development and submission of an RFP for potential reuses of the property. The County planning office would, with the commissioner approval, develop the RFP with a proposed release proposed date in 2009. For reasons that are not clear, the RFP was never issued.

In 2009, the Rutherford County Heritage Council asked about the status of the Ruth School and learned that roof was in need of repair, and that the annex had severe problems. Heritage Councils members along with Rutherfordton citizen Sallie Cowan met with County Maintenance Director Barry Jones and Planner Jerry Stensland to assess the condition of the property and seek ways to collaboratively take stabilizing actions.

Actions proposed included chaining and locking all buildings, repairing doors, making sure the nighttime security lighting was operating, exploring additional security measures including camera, and requesting information from Preservation NC about crew to do building clean up, the potential of using prisoners to assist with clean up, exploring a request to the Town of Rutherfordton's Historic Commission to name the property a Landmark, prosecuting those committing vandalism, and requesting that part of those convicted of vandalism be required to clean up the damage and seek monetary compensation for the damage to the building.

Several other issues were discussed including who would do the roof repair, if labor could be donated, the best way to protect the windows, how the shrubs and trees near the building should be maintained and would the necessary landscape clean up leaving the holly in the front of the building.

The Heritage Council learned in early 2011 the roof had been repaired or stabilized and doors secure. At a meeting in 2011 the council learned the County found funding for the windows to be boarded by June 2011.

As the Town of Rutherfordton continues to work with NCDOT on U.S 221 Bypass, Mark Teague, a former NCDOT district engineer, has been retained as a consultant to work with the Town. On April 21, 2011 Karen Andrews, John McWhorter, Frankie McWhorter, Chivous Bradley and Jerry Stensland met with Teague to discuss the Ruth School and Overmountain Victory Trail connections through Town of Rutherfordton.

At this meeting Teague reported that NCDOT has identified the U.S 221 bypass project, section B which includes Charlotte Road to Roper Loop Road, would negatively impact the historic integrity of the Ruth School property and some funding for the purpose of reducing this negative impact on the property would be provided. Specific details about this assistance were not detailed by NCDOT at that time. Rutherfordton Town Council invited guests with interest in the preservation of the Ruth School property to meet with NC 221 Project Engineer Jay Swain May 24, 2011.

With the potential for NCDOT to provide funding to mitigate the negative impacts of construction of U.S 221, Rutherfordton Town Manager Andrew suggestion a broader-based group of those person with demonstrated interest in preservation and reuse be arranged. This meeting was held on May 5, 2011 at the Rutherford County offices.

Present at this meeting were:

Karen Andrews	Rutherfordton Town Manager
Lydia Clontz	Bostic Lincoln Center and Rutherford Heritage Council Member
Michelle Whitaker	Executive Director, Rutherford Tourism Development Authority
Frankie McWhorter	Retired NC Department of Commerce, Division of Tourism Development and Heritage Council Member
Lynn Padgett	Rutherford Council Visual Artist Guild Board Member
Keith Price	Bostic Lincoln Center, Historical Society Board Member and Rutherford Heritage Council Member
Edith Edwards	DAR and Colonial Dames Member and Overmountain Victory Trail Association Member
Chivous Bradley	Rutherfordton Historic Preservation Commission Secretary and Rutherford Heritage Council Member
John McWhorter	Rutherfordton Historic Preservation Commission Secretary and Rutherford Heritage Council Member
Rebecca Driscoll	Experience Historic Building Electrician
Jerry Stensland	Rutherford County Recreation, Heritage, Culture Planner
Mark Teague	Transportation Consultant

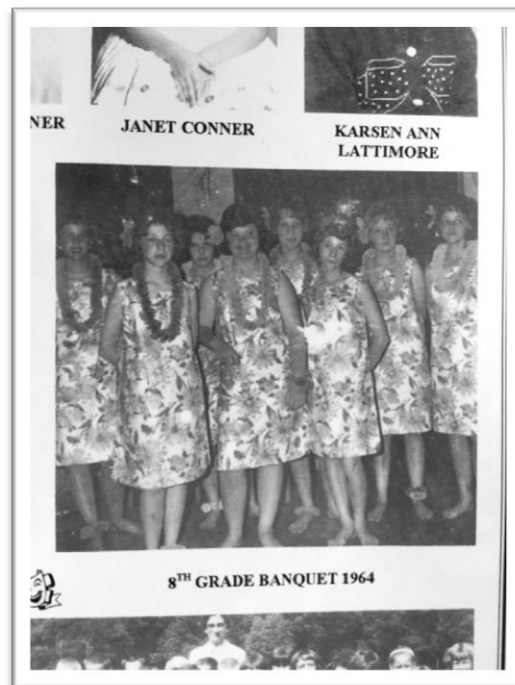
The stabilization and potential reuse of the Ruth School was the consensus of this group, due to its historical significance as well as the strategic location in relationship to the development of the section B of the U.S 221 bypass. Two main issues were discussed:

1. The need for an assessment team and list of potential uses of the buildings and property. Rebecca Driscoll of Lake Lure volunteered to lead an assessment team. She is affiliated with William Conner, a General Contractor, to assist in the effort.
2. Ideas for sustainable reuse options to be explored and collected by Karen Andrew, John McWhorter, and Frankie McWhorter.

The effort to stabilize, or reuse the Ruth School has been going on for several years, and several of the same people who have invested time and energy in the past have served as a resource in the development of this plan, and revitalizing the effort to move forward on a decision for the property.

The Ruth School Building and Relationship to the Community

Background



Unfortunately there are not a lot of photographs available of the Ruth School to fully illustrate the architectural value and relationship to the community. Here are a few photos gleaned from a yearbook published in 2001, help to illustrate the community and social history of the school. There are more photos featured in the appendix of this document.

History of Ruth School

The following history was provided by North Carolina Gazetteer, Rutherford County 1979: A People's Bicentennial History, The Heritage of Rutherford County Vol.1 1984, The North Carolina Atlas 2000, and was compiled by James M. Walker and Louis Freeman

A Brief History of the Mt. Vernon / Ruth Elementary Schools

The history of Mt. Vernon and Ruth Elementary Schools goes back to the first decade of the last century. This was an era of "Field School," described by the historian Clarence Griffin in "Essays on North Carolina History," as a "Little teacher in a little school on a little hill with little equipment trying to teach little things to little children."

All this changed with the election of Charles Brantley Aycock as governor of North Carolina in 1901. During his four year term, Aycock became known as the Education Governor. He pressed the General Assembly for taxes to support education, arguing that educated children meant a

better economy in the long run. In 1905 the General Assembly guaranteed to each school district a four-month school term and set up the first \$1,000,000 to supplement the financially strapped counties.

On April 29, 1906 a presbyter was held to organize and constitute the South Baptist Church location on Church Street and the southern Railway in Town of Hampton (the town changed its name to Ruth officially in 1939). In the basement of the church, Miss Hattie Hampton taught school of all grades from 1906-1909. A wood frame school of two rooms named Hampton School, was built on what is now Heffner Street in 1910.

The funding was made possible the first Mt. Vernon School, which was built in 1906. The new school was located about hundred yards from the Mt. Hebron Methodist Church. The new school was a wood frame structure. This school, named Ruth in 1925, grew and was enlarged, and consolidated with the Watkins School in 1927, and finally moved to the present building on Mountain Street in 1926.

Following the First World War, the United States was the world's most powerful and affluent nation. The decade of the Roaring Twenties saw a flurry of new school construction. The new schools were the physical symbols of a proud, rich, and expansionist's nation. These new schools with their columns and cupolas, parapet walls and high ceiling were more like churches or museums than the old type of schools.

The new Mt. Vernon School was construction in 1923. The new high school served its crossroads community and graduated its first class in 1926. Mt. Vernon continues as a high school until 1962 when it was consolidated with Rutherford-Spindale High School. Additions were made in 1941-1942 by the Works Project Administration. These included three new classroom buildings and a gymnasium. Mt. Vernon School had a teachage for the principal. This was a two room wood frame house. Later it was enlarged to five rooms, three of which were used as classrooms. A wood frame agriculture building was adjacent to the main building.

Ruth Elementary School was dedicated on October 18, 1928. Construction a lovely wooded rise, the one story brick structure has several details of architectural interest. A new cafeteria was built in 1951, and ten years later a gymnasium was deed. The gymnasium was later named in honor of long-time principal William V. Mayberry.

The school year beginning 2001-2002 saw the consolidation of both schools into a new Mt. Vernon Ruth Elementary School. This new school will serve 450 students, \$6,400,000, state-of-the-art, K-5 school. The old school will no longer be active, but memories will remain. The future awaits.

Several schools constructed during this period of time have seen new life through reuse projects.

The Historic Cowee School, located in Macon County was built in 1943, and was closed in 2012. A strong community visioning process has been used to produce a business plan. Because of this effort it has secured funding to operate for at least one year as a Heritage Center. The building was not in the same state of deterioration as the Ruth School, however, the community organization, engagement, and common vision show what can be done with cooperation and commitment to a reuse effort of a historic school.

Other common reuse options for historic school buildings include housing, charter school development. While neither of these options scored strongly for the Ruth School site, due to its proximity to US 221, the partnerships and engagement required to develop a historic school site serve to provide insight to the possible rehabilitation and development of the Ruth School buildings and campus. Articles and information about these historic schools can be found in the appendix of this document.