



# The Plan for Sylva | 2040 Land Use Plan

**Town of Sylva, North Carolina**  
**May 2020**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....2
- TABLE OF CONTENTS.....3
- OVERVIEW.....5
  - The Town of Sylva .....5
  - Need for a Land Use Plan .....6
  - What is a Land Use Plan?.....6
  - Who is Affected by this Comprehensive Plan?.....7
  - What Does the Plan Consist of?.....7
  - This Plan is Dynamic.....8
- COMMUNITY VISION .....9
  - Land Use Vision Statement .....10
  - Land Use Guiding Principals.....10
- COMMUNITY CONTEXT.....12
  - Historic Population .....13
  - Projected Population.....14
  - Selected Demographic Charts.....15
- KEY DRIVERS.....18
  - Driver 1: Reimagine Commercial Corridors .....19
  - Driver 2: Providing Diversity in Housing Choices .....20
  - Driver 3: Multimodal Mobility .....20
  - Driver 4: Zoning Code Modernization.....21
  - Existing Land Use.....22
  - Future Land Use Framework.....26
  - Existing Zoning & Foundation for Zoning Ordinance Rewrite .....28
  - Future Land Use Map.....28
  - Character Areas .....28
    - Urban Neighborhoods .....29
    - In-Fill Neighborhoods.....30
    - Rural Residential .....31

Community Corridors.....	32
Medical Node.....	33
Skyland Mixed Use Corridor.....	34
Workforce Nodes.....	35
Civic & Cultural Uses.....	36
Downtown Sylva & Downtown Sylva Expansion District.....	37
Planned Acreage by Land Use Type.....	38
The Future of the NC 107 Corridor.....	38
HOW TO USE THIS PLAN.....	41
GOALS & POLICIES.....	41
APPENDIX: MISCELLANEOUS MAPS.....	45



Since becoming the County seat in 1913, Sylva has been Jackson County's hub for social, government, service, and shopping activities. Image source: WCU Hunter Library Digital Collection, *"This 1913 photograph by an unknown photographer was taken from the site of the Jackson County Courthouse in the year before it was built. The view shows the main street of the town of Sylva during what appears to be a parade."*

## OVERVIEW

### The Town of Sylva

Located in Southwestern North Carolina, the Town of Sylva is near Western Carolina University, innumerable natural environment attractions, the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, many regional employment and shopping centers. Sylva is easily accessible via US Highway 23/74 and NC 107. The Town of Sylva is home to an historic downtown that is anchored by the iconic Jackson County Courthouse. Sylva is poised to take advantage of and build upon these assets by planning for and promoting growth while maintaining its small-town form and character. The Town is near the smaller towns of Dillsboro to the west and Webster to the south. Western Carolina University is six miles south of Downtown Sylva.

Incorporated in 1889, the Town of Sylva replaced Webster as the Jackson County seat in 1913. Since that time, Sylva has developed into the County's hub for social, government, service, and shopping



activities. Today, Sylva encompasses roughly 3.18 square miles (2,035 acres). It is the largest municipality in Jackson County and is the fifth largest in land area, and fourth largest in population of the Southwestern Commission’s municipality members.

## Need for a Land Use Plan

Due to a variety of changing circumstances within Sylva, Jackson County, the region and beyond, there is a renewed need for the Town of Sylva to find ways grow, diversify, and prosper. The Plan for Sylva is the town’s call to action to respond to these upcoming changes and challenges. With this plan, The Town of Sylva can guide public, private, and corporate stakeholders toward land development solutions and policies that shape the Town’s physical, environmental, social, and economic characteristics over the next 20-years.

Through previous planning efforts and from information gleaned during The Plan for Sylva development, the planning team identified Sylva’s key opportunities and challenges related to land use and development.

Table 1 – Development Challenges & Threats

CHALLENGES & THREATS	STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Flat housing growth &amp; limited housing choice</li> <li>▪ Homogeneous population &amp; income range</li> <li>▪ NC 107 and other transportation improvements</li> <li>▪ Outdated zoning code</li> <li>▪ Limited town staff capacity</li> <li>▪ History of low-density development</li> <li>▪ The lack of a connected transportation network</li> <li>▪ The lack of traditional neighborhood structure</li> <li>▪ The scale of initial investment needed to achieve vision</li> <li>▪ The complicated nature of financing, a somewhat limited market potential, and finding developers for mixed-use development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Downtown Sylva</li> <li>▪ Regional business and medical Hub</li> <li>▪ Younger population</li> <li>▪ Influence of WCU</li> <li>▪ Recent national media coverage</li> <li>▪ NC 107 and other transportation improvements</li> <li>▪ Business growth</li> <li>▪ Natural resources and scenic beauty</li> </ul>

## What is a Land Use Plan?

The Plan for Sylva will be used as a guide for making land use decisions, preparing and implementing ordinances, and influencing the rate and location of future growth. It outlines the vision of the community for addressing future land use. All land use decisions brought to the Town of Sylva will be guided by the vision, guiding principles, goals, and policies in this plan. Above all, the Comprehensive Plan outlines the Vision of how Sylva will evolve and change over the next twenty

years. The overall goal of the plan is to outline a roadmap that will maintain Sylva as a healthy, sustainable, and desirable place to live.

*It should be noted that a Land Use Plan differs from a Comprehensive Plan. This land use plan is limited to guidance for Sylva's future land use development pattern. In the future, town leaders may want to address topics typically addressed in a comprehensive plan. Such topics include economic development, housing, parks and recreation, natural resource enhancement and preservation, community character, community identity, and others.*

The Plan for Sylva guides and influences the following types of decisions:

- It provides a general and consistent framework for evaluating land development applications submitted to the Town on an ongoing basis.
- It serves as the basis for the Town's efforts to update land use ordinances and zoning map.
- It establishes the priorities for more detailed plans that Sylva may formulate for specific areas in the Tow and for specific topics (such as open space, trails, roads, and municipal infrastructure).

It assists with the prioritizing of funding for public improvement projects, such as roads, sewers, and water mains.

## Who is Affected by this Comprehensive Plan?

In North Carolina, land use plans are advisory – meaning that the maps, goals, policies and text included in this document do not constitute regulations. This document does not dictate the course of action of the Board of Commissioners, the Planning Board, or the Town staff. Relevant portions of this plan should be used to guide decisions regarding land use. Every landowner, developer, town or county staff, and appointed and/or elected official should recognize the significance of this plan and the implementation tools it contains to the future of Sylva.

While land use plans in North Carolina are not binding, state statues do require the planning board and town commissioners to consider the plan when land use decisions are. According to the UNC School of Government, "Both boards must document that they have done so. The commissioners may elect to make a rezoning decision that is contrary to the plan. State law sets procedural steps that the boards must follow. Any zoning amendment that is adopted without following those steps will be invalidated if challenged in court."<sup>1</sup>

**RESOURCE:** [PLAN CONSISTENCY STATEMENTS](#)

## What Does the Plan Consist of?

The plan consists of narrative, maps, charts, tables, and illustrations that describe the future of Sylva and identifies the set of tools needed to move the community toward achieving consistency with its vision. The plan is organized into the following parts:

1. **Overview** introduces the land use plan.

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<sup>1</sup> (Owens, 2018)

2. **Vision and Guiding Principles** summarizes the community's desires for the future and serves as the basis for the development of the remainder of the Plan.
3. **Land Use** describes the community's desired land use and development patterns and establishes related goals and public policy related to how land is used and how the community grows.
4. **Implementation/Action Steps** identifies how the Plan will be implemented to achieve the community's Vision by posing recommendations for public and private actions.

## **This Plan is Dynamic**

While intended to guide change, this plan must also remain flexible to respond to changing needs, conditions and emerging trends. Town officials must understand that they are responsible for the future of their community, and they must consider carefully the merits of adjustments to the plan. This is a critical step in the community development process; proposals need to be evaluated against the goals and vision laid out in this plan. Some proposals will fit well, while others may not. Regardless of their overall quality, any ideas that are good and worthy of further consideration could merit changes to the vision or the plan. These proposals will trigger the community planning process.





Members of the Planning Board developed a land use vision to guide Sylva's future growth and development.

## COMMUNITY VISION

In order to effectively plan, a community must define its aspirations for the future. The Vision Statement articulates a desired condition or state for Sylva and represents an aspirational or ideal view of the community in the future. In short, the vision is the foundation of the plan that informs policy and strategy decisions.

## Land Use Vision Statement

The Vision Statement describes how the Sylva community will look, feel, and function in 2040.

**Sylva in 2040 is a vibrant town with a built environment that complements the natural beauty of the surrounding mountains and streams. Residents and visitors are connected to high-quality housing, employment, shopping, and entertainment opportunities through a network of safe, multimodal transportation corridors.**

## Land Use Guiding Principals

Guiding principles support the vision and define the land use values and priorities of the community. They act as an ongoing measurement tool for evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of future land use changes and developments.

### **Coordinated and Efficient Growth Management**

Sylva will provide infrastructure and services for growth in an efficient manner that balances development with the conservation of the natural environment.

### **A Focus on Quality Design and Distinct Places**

Sylva will promote an improved standard of design for new development, renovations, and rehabilitations in order to provide enduring neighborhoods, public spaces, and commercial areas and to create unique destinations that will make Sylva a special and distinct place in Western North Carolina.

### **A Comprehensive and Multi-Modal Transportation System**

Sylva will embrace and partner with NCDOT to develop a safe and efficient transportation system that promotes a sense of community by connecting all areas of town, and accommodates various modes of travel, including walking, biking, and transit. The transportation system will efficiently connect Sylva to the rest of the Jackson County area and Western North Carolina.

### **Quality of Life in Neighborhoods and Gathering Places**

Sylva will encourage the creation of new and strengthening of existing neighborhoods, community destinations and gathering places (including Downtown Sylva, parks, and other civic spaces). It will promote and maintain the quality and character of established and new neighborhoods and ensure that residents have access to the full range of facilities and services that are needed for healthy, livable neighborhoods.

### **Stewardship of the Natural Environment**

Through responsible land development, Sylva will strive to be a clean, sustainable, and environmentally- friendly community that identifies and conserves natural, scenic, and

environmentally sensitive areas, including important, natural areas, waterways, visually sensitive areas, and historic and cultural resources.





Sylva's small businesses are essential to its community character. Image Credit: Quinten Ellison

# COMMUNITY CONTEXT

This section of the report serves as a snapshot of the community today, which in turn help the community. All data is from the 2018 America Community Survey (5 Year Estimates) unless otherwise noted. The following summarizes key takeaways:

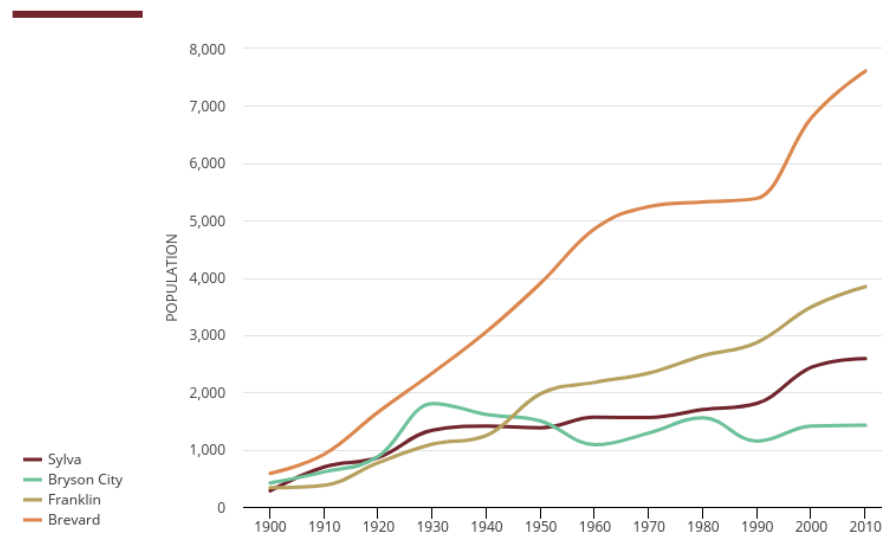
## Historic Population

Since its early days, Sylva's growth has been relatively steady, growing around 1.5% per year between 1910 and 2010. In recent years, 1990-2010, Sylva's population grew 4.7% per year, some of which is the result of annexation. The largest jump in population in recent years occurred between 1990 and 2000, when Sylva's population increased from 1,809 to 2,435, a 34% population increase.

**Between 2000 and 2010, Sylva's population grew by 6.28%. According to the NC State Data Center, 2,720 people lived in Sylva in 2017, which is a 5.1% increase from 2010.**

## Historic Population

Town of Sylva & Comparison Towns



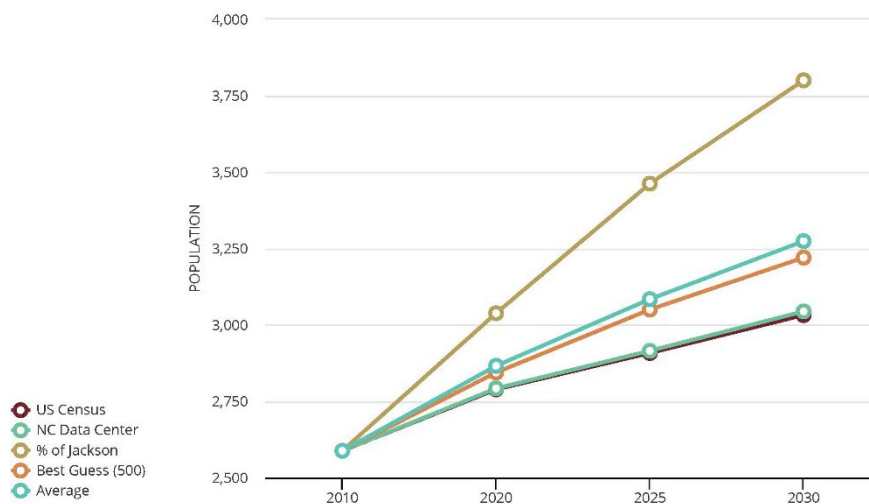
## Projected Population

The exercise of predicting the future population of a community is inevitably inexact. A community's actual future population depends on several factors, including local, regional, and global economic trends, changing attitudes about growth, leadership changes, and evolving community values. Yet, a community needs a population projection to plan for its long-term needs and services. For example, a town needs to know how much land it will need to accommodate new residents or how to budget for additional town services.

The Plan for Sylva explored projection scenarios, including past population and development trends, growth resulting from annexation, and a scan of future development opportunities. **Based on the evaluation, it is reasonable to expect a 1.0% - 1.5% annual growth rate between 2018 and 2030, this translates to a 2030 population between 3,096 (1% annual growth rate) and 3,301 (1.5% annual growth rate).**

## Projected Population

Town of Sylva



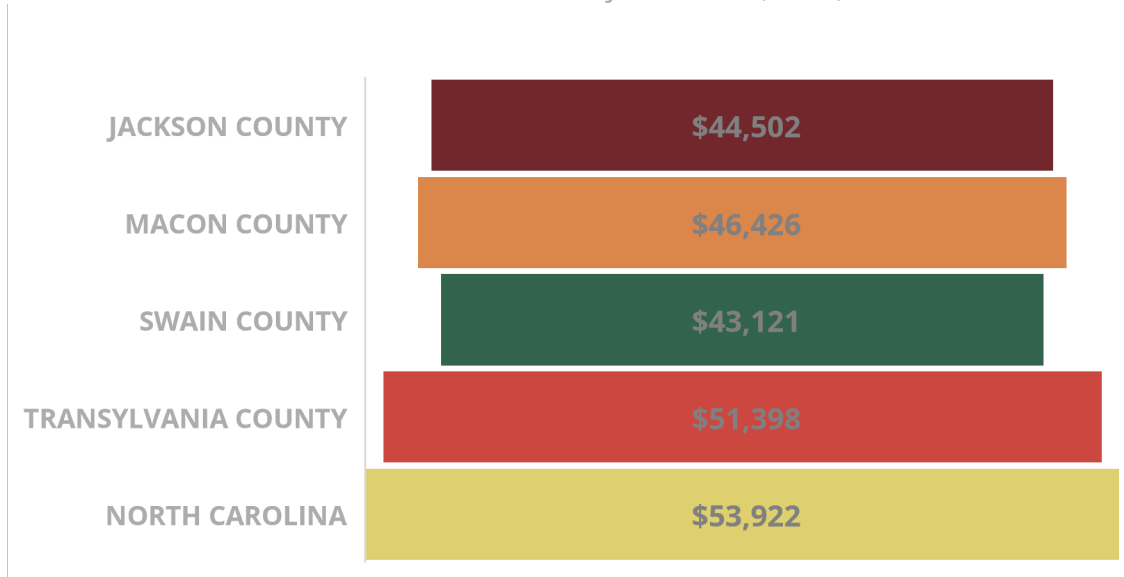


## Selected Demographic Charts

### Median Household Income

Jackson & Comparison Counties

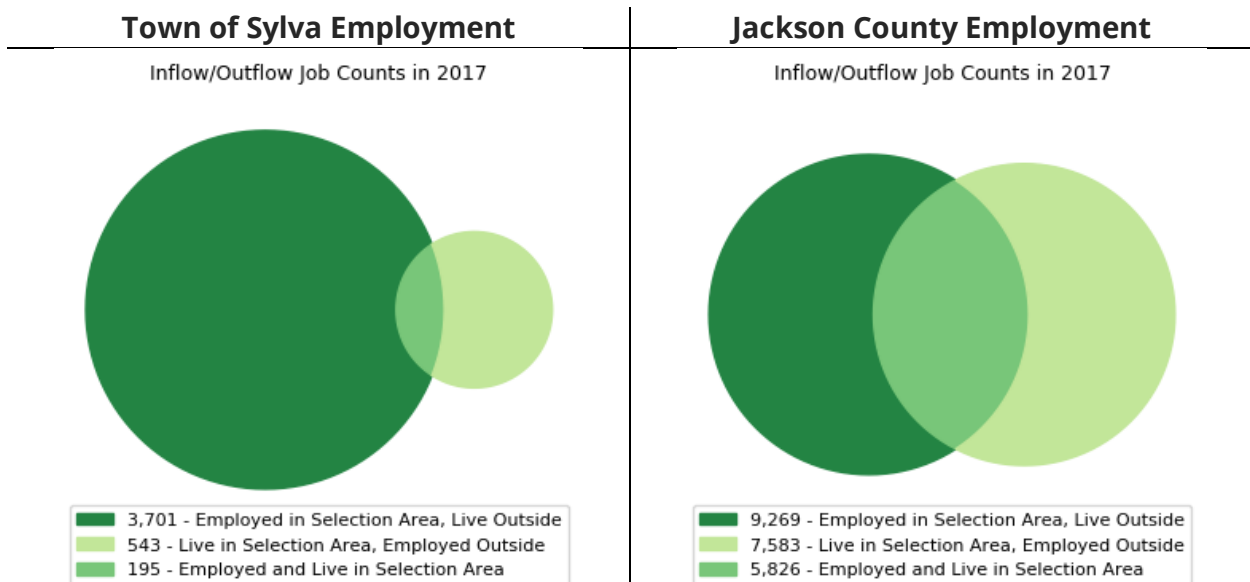
2018 US Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE)



### Employment Base

Town of Sylva & Jackson County

US Census, On the Map, 2017 Commuting Patterns



According to 2017 OnTheMap statistics, there are 3,896 jobs within the Town of Sylva. People living outside of Sylva occupy 3,701 of total jobs. 195

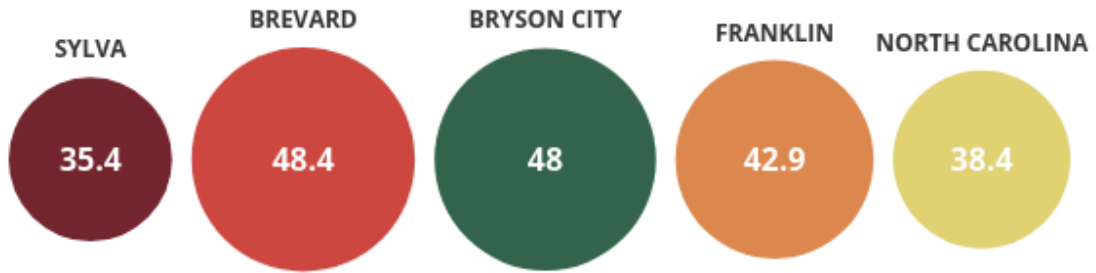
According to 2017 OnTheMap statistics, there are 15,095 jobs within Jackson County. People living outside of the County occupy 9,269 of total jobs.

people live and work in Sylva while another 543 people leave the area for employment.

5,826 people live and work in Jackson County while another 7,583 people leave the area for employment.

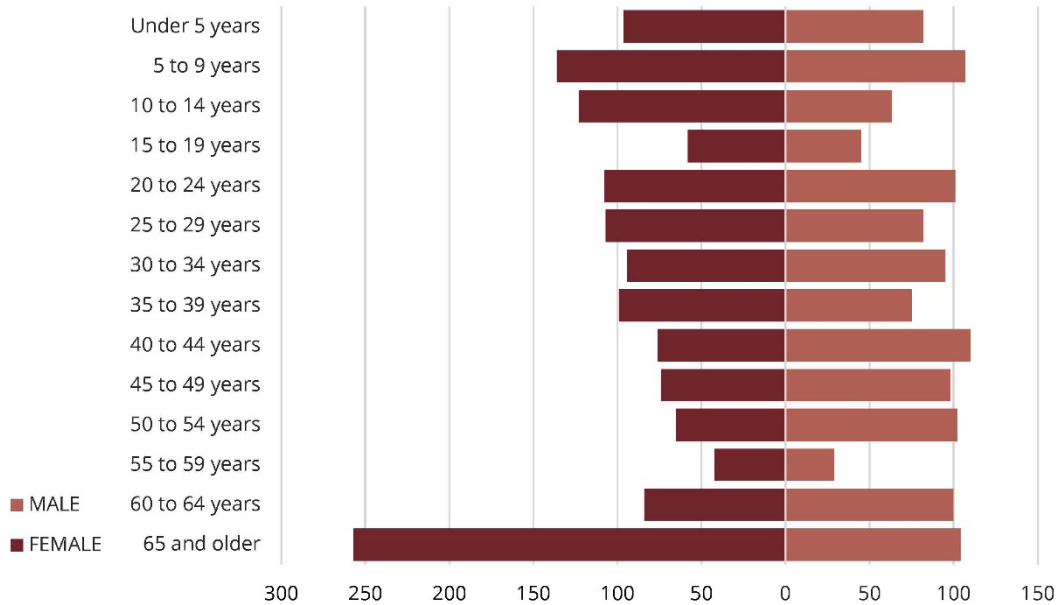
## Median Age

Town of Sylva & Comparison Towns  
 American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates 2014-2018



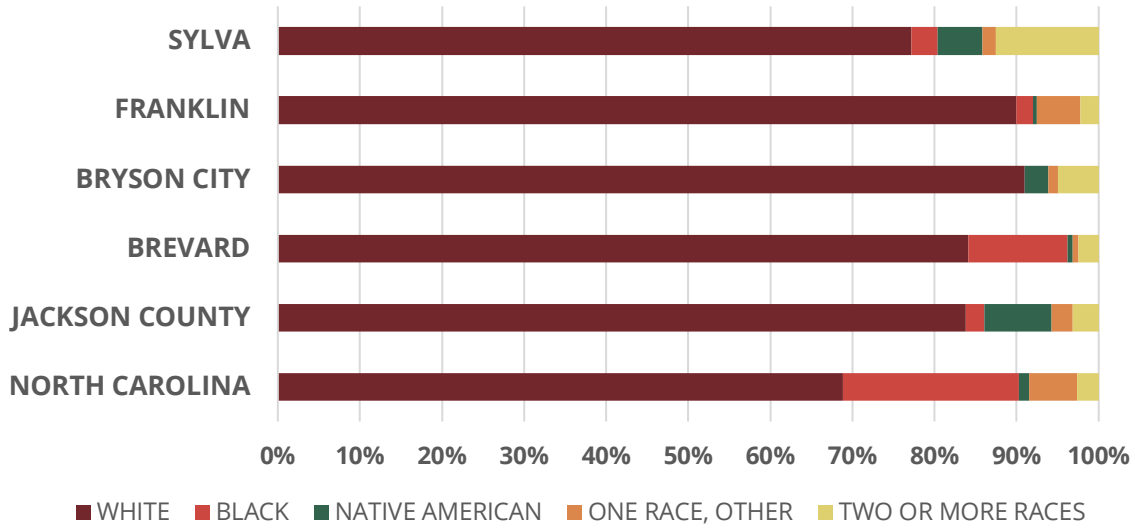
## Population Pyramid

Town of Sylva  
 American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates 2014-2018



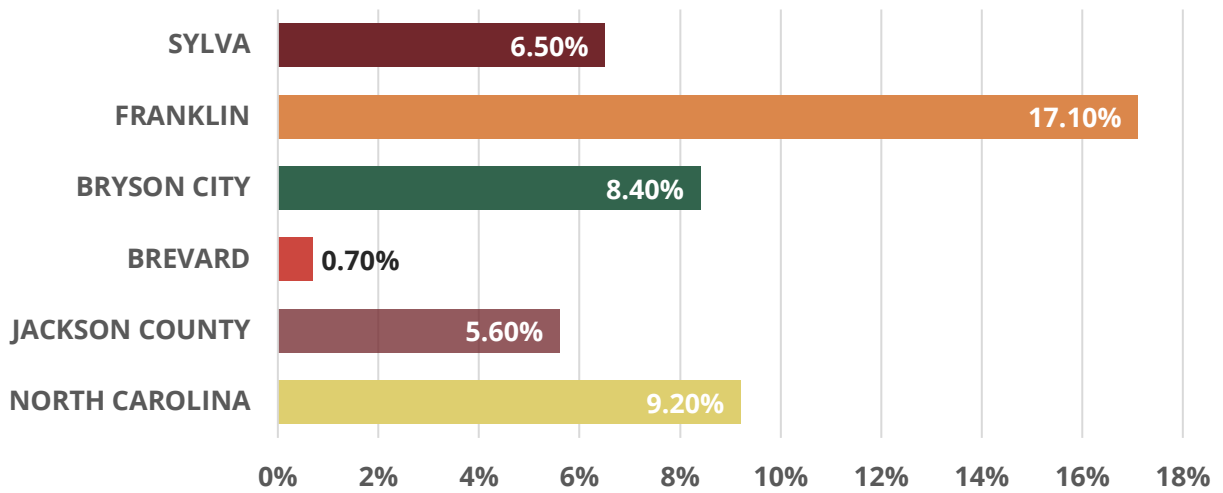
## Racial Composition

Town of Sylva & Comparison Towns  
 American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates 2014-2018



## Hispanic Population (% of Population)

Town of Sylva & Comparison Towns  
 American Community Survey, 5 Year Estimates 2014-2018



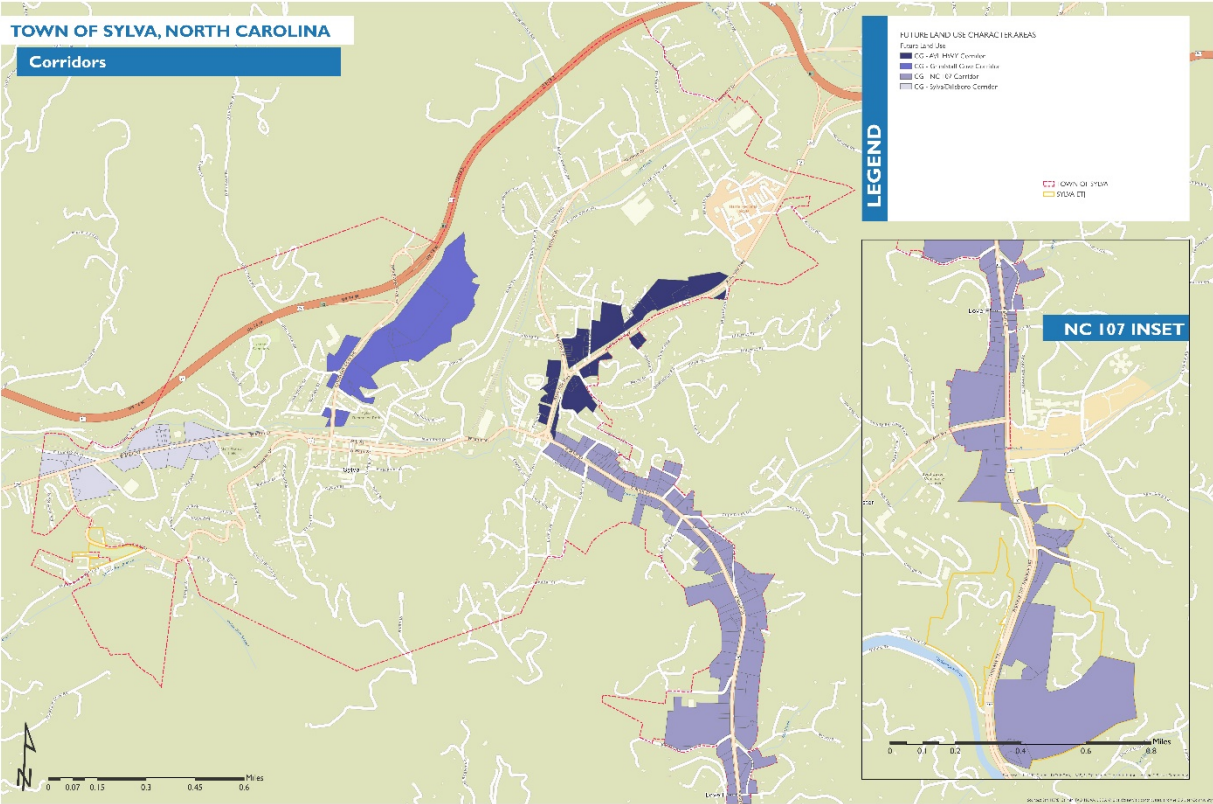


A high crash rate and congestion along NC 107 call for roadway changes. Image Source: The Sylva Herald.

## KEY DRIVERS

Based upon a review of existing conditions, an understanding of emerging trends, and input from the Planning Board and Town of Sylva staff, the planning team defined key drivers for The Plan for Sylva. The term driver refers to a top planning consideration that shapes The Plan for Sylva.

# Driver 1: Reimagine Commercial Corridors



Residents, students, commuting employees, and visitors to Sylva enter the town through one of four corridors which are primarily a mix of commercial, retail, and institutional land uses. The corridors include Asheville Highway, Grindstaff Cove, NC 107, and Sylva/Dillsboro (West Main Street). Combined, the corridors comprise 23% of land in The Plan for Sylva study area. While the supply of land should be adequate for near- and long-term needs, much can be done integrate the corridors with Sylva’s overall vision and improve conditions for the people who use these corridors. The corridors are characterized by the following:

- Asheville Highway and NC 107 are wide with multiple lanes, carry higher speed traffic, and have limited multimodal systems (bicycle and pedestrian facilities and transit access).
- An auto-oriented development pattern where the buildings are separated from the street by large parking lots.
- Utilities line the street and can make pedestrian navigation difficult, even when sidewalks are present.
- There is a lack of street trees and vegetation.
- With some exceptions, sidewalks are narrow, in poor condition, interrupted with driveway curb cuts, and are unbuffered from travel lanes.



These conditions affect people who live, work, and travel along and rely on commercial corridors for services and amenities to meet their daily needs. The corridors are also essential for local and regional trips, employment, and often serve as major connectors. As a result, the Town of Sylva needs a future development pattern that balances the corridor's role as places to meet daily needs with their role as regional connectors. The Town of Sylva can identify infrastructure improvements (both large and small), new development and redevelopment opportunities, and aesthetic enhancements to make positive difference to the conditions along these corridors.

## **Driver 2: Providing Diversity in Housing Choices**

Residential land uses account for 38% of the total acreage in The Plan for Sylva study area. Of that, 92% is single family residential. Sylva's residential density averages (the mean) one dwelling unit per 0.80 acres, whereas the median is one dwelling unit per 0.45 acres. However, given Sylva's wide-ranging topography and neighborhood development patterns, dwelling units per acre range from a high of 16 to a low of 0.07.

While there are some small lots and dense pockets of development throughout Sylva, the density is pattern is still relatively low. Many communities have a larger share of their acreage dedicated to higher density residential including apartments, condominiums, and townhomes. Members of Sylva's Planning Board and previous planning endeavors cite a lack of diversity in housing and development as a challenge facing the community.

In addition to lack of diversity in the type of housing available, Sylva is demographically homogenous.<sup>2</sup> Most people fall into a similar income and lifestyle profile, meaning they have similar resources and wants.<sup>3</sup> Sylva needs a diverse mix of housing by way of cost, unit types, and neighborhood settings if it wants to meet the needs and preferences of current residents and attract new people to the community.

To align with the vision, Sylva needs a wide range of housing options to attract the full range of employees necessary for existing and future employers and service providers. In addition, providing a wider range of housing provides more options for Sylva residents as they age over time, allowing residents to stay in their community as they age in place. Diversifying the mix of housing types in Sylva would offer more choices to the consumer. Finally, providing a mixture that includes higher density housing would allow the Town of Sylva and other providers such as TWSA to more efficiently and economically serve a growing population, from an infrastructure perspective.

## **Driver 3: Multimodal Mobility**

As Sylva plans for continued growth and change, the community wants expansion of multimodal facilities to serve people walking, biking and using transit. Rethinking Sylva's future land use pattern in tandem with a new zoning code provides the opportunity for Sylva to integrate multimodal strategies through development and redevelopment.

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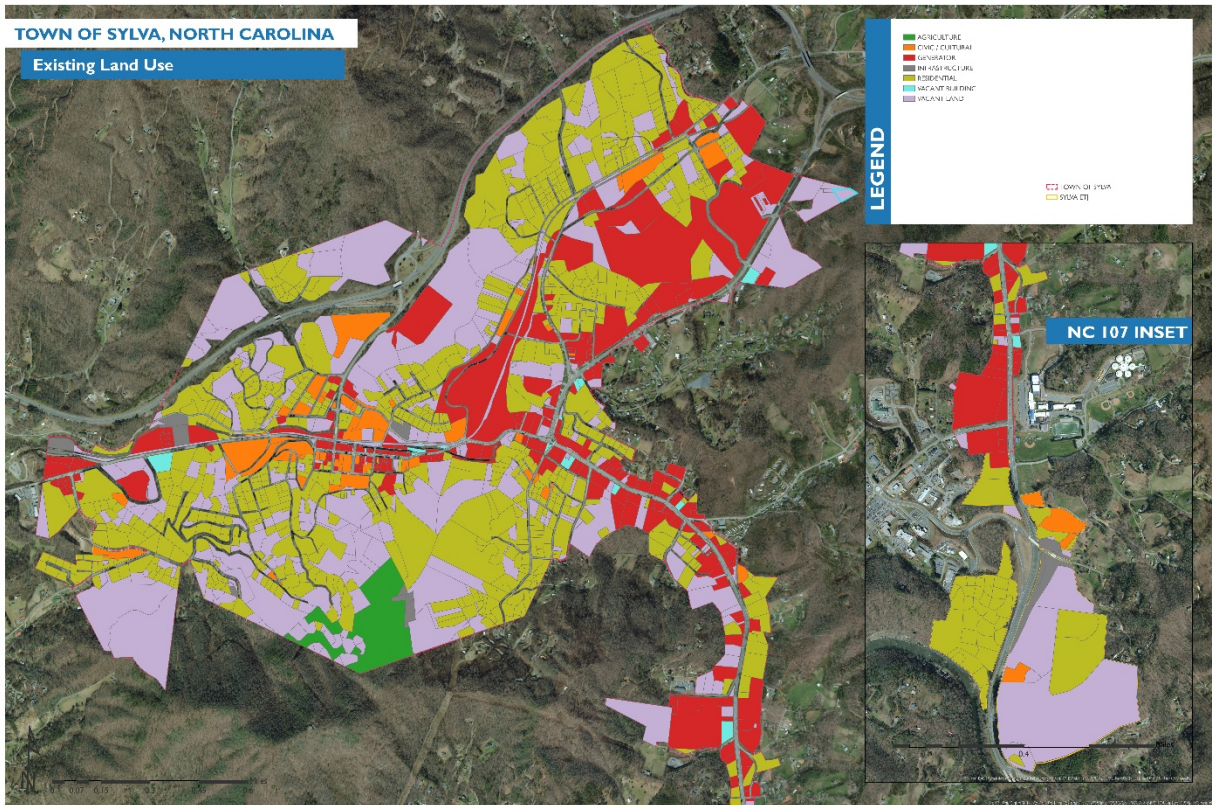
<sup>2</sup> This statement is based on Tapestry Segmentation Data from Esri Business Analyst. Learn more about Tapestry Segmentation at <https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/tapestry-segmentation/overview>

<sup>3</sup> See the attached Tapestry Segmentation data.



## **Driver 4: Zoning Code Modernization**

The Town of Sylva's Zoning Ordinance is (or soon will be) legally out of compliance and it is no longer the right tool to aid Sylva in achieving its vision. At the most basic level, the Zoning Ordinance needs to be brought into compliance with North Carolina's state statutes as outlined in the revamped section 160D. Given the extent of updating needed to bring Sylva's code into compliance, combined with steps needed to match the Ordinance with the future land use vision, it will be more efficient for the Town of Sylva to allocate funds for a complete Zoning Ordinance re-write. The Plan for Sylva is the foundation for the rewrite effort.



## LAND USE

The Land Use Plan provides the framework (or development pattern) for the Town of Sylva and its Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). It reinforces desirable land use patterns, identifies places where change is needed, and guides the location, form, and character of future growth.

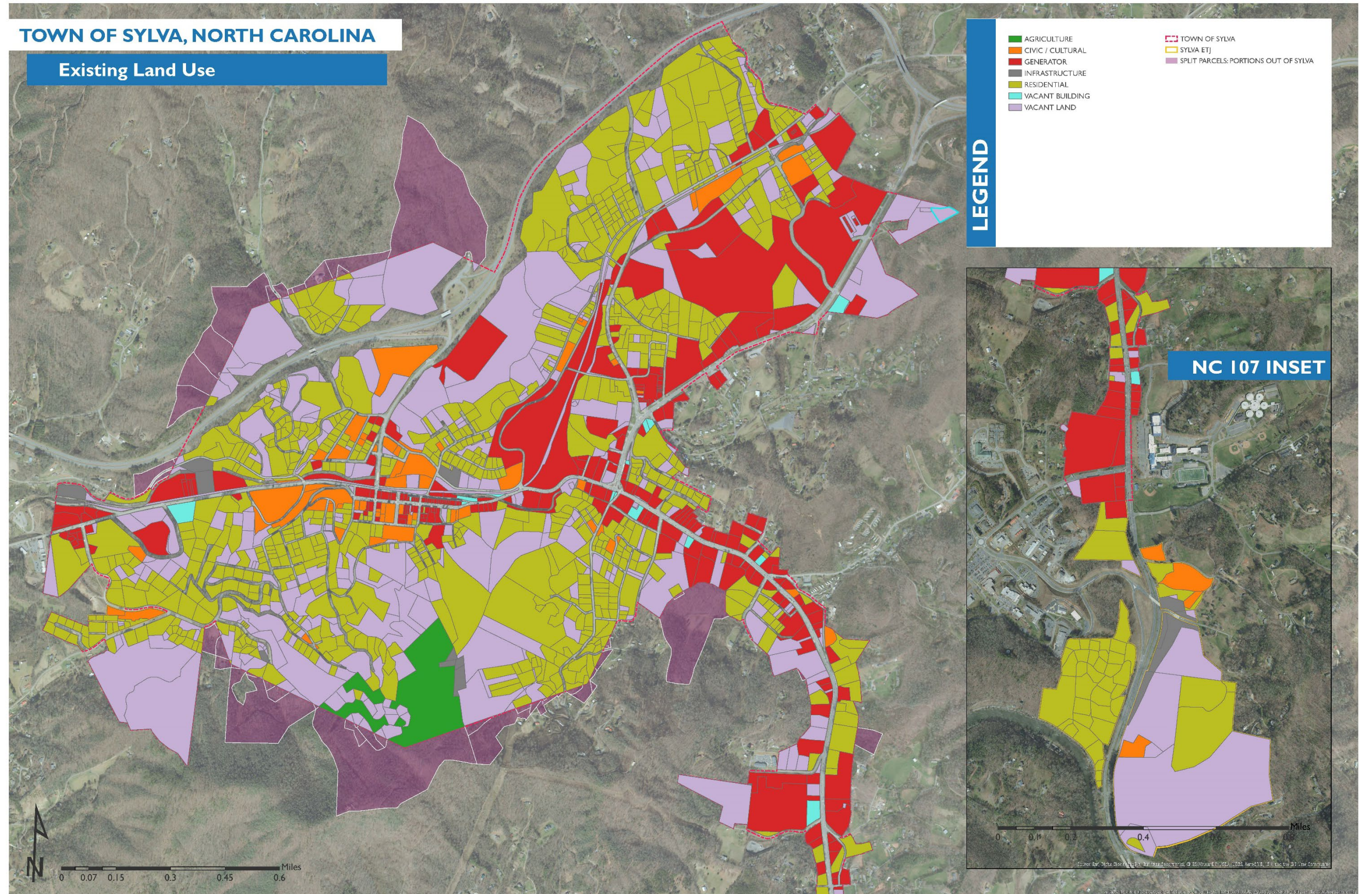
The Land Use Plan outlined in this chapter has a planning horizon of 2040. It was shaped by a number of factors, including the Vision and Guiding Principles, a survey of existing conditions throughout the Town Sylva, a base level of community input gathered throughout the planning process, input from town leaders, historical development trends and emerging trends, an understanding of real estate and market forces, and a careful examination and analysis of the physical landscape in and around Sylva.

### Existing Land Use

The analysis of existing land uses Figure 1 considers the present uses of the parcels within the town limits of Sylva, as well as the ETJ. Data from Jackson County’s GIS (Geographic Information System), supplemented with input from town staff and parcel research informed the classification of existing land uses in Sylva, as outlined in Table 2 and Table 3.



Figure 1: Existing Land Use Map





Among developed land uses, residential land use is the most prevalent land use in the town, with 38% of the total land area. The second most prevalent type of developed land is the Generator category. Generators are the land uses that generate some type of activity such as vehicle trips, economic activity, employment, or visitor destinations. Only a small percentage, 6.41%, of developed land falls into other land use categories. Sylva's undeveloped land supply comprises 35% of the study area. The following tables provide the broad land use categories and the detailed breakdown of existing land use.

Table 2 - Broad Land Use Classification

<b>BROAD LAND USE CLASSIFICATION</b>		
<b>LAND USE</b>	<b>ACRES</b>	<b>% OF AREA</b>
Agriculture	38.03	2.01%
Civic / Cultural	74.24	3.92%
Generator*	366.55	19.33%
Infrastructure	19.04	1.00%
Residential	717.15	37.83%
Vacant Building	9.16	0.48%
Vacant Land	671.70	35.43%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,895.87</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<i>*Generators are land uses that attract people for who are accessing the service and/or for employment purposes. **Infrastructure does not include all roadway ROW</i>		

Table 3 - Broad and Detailed Land Use Classification

<b>BROAD AND DETAILED LAND USE CLASSIFICATION</b>		
<b>LAND USE</b>	<b>ACRES</b>	<b>% OF AREA</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>38.04</b>	<b>2.01%</b>
Agriculture	38.04	100.00%
<b>Civic / Cultural</b>	<b>74.24</b>	<b>3.92%</b>
Cemetery	2.59	3.49%
Church	25.52	34.38%
Jackson County	29.47	39.69%
Non-Profit	5.34	7.20%
Other	0.22	0.29%
Public Parking Lot	0.73	0.98%
Town of Sylva	10.38	13.98%
<b>Generator</b>	<b>366.55</b>	<b>19.33%</b>
Accommodation & Food Services	21.34	5.82%
Admin, Support, Waste Mgt, Remediation Services	3.09	0.84%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	8.95	2.44%
Construction	0.30	0.08%
Educational Services	3.61	0.99%

<b>BROAD AND DETAILED LAND USE CLASSIFICATION</b>		
<b>LAND USE</b>	<b>ACRES</b>	<b>% OF AREA</b>
Finance & Insurance	8.49	2.32%
Health Care & Social Assistance	92.62	25.27%
Industrial & Manufacturing	64.71	17.65%
Information	0.14	0.04%
Mix of Businesses	48.39	13.20%
Other Services	15.40	4.20%
Professional Services	6.69	1.82%
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	1.79	0.49%
Retail	86.77	23.67%
Transportation & Warehousing	2.52	0.69%
Wholesale Trade	1.74	0.48%
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>19.04</b>	<b>1.00%</b>
Communications	3.66	19.21%
Tower	2.93	15.40%
Transportation	7.48	39.28%
Water & Sewer	4.97	26.10%
<b>Residential</b>	<b>717.15</b>	<b>37.83%</b>
Manuf. Housing	24.96	3.48%
Multi-Family	31.57	4.40%
Single Family	660.42	92.09%
Townhome	0.20	0.03%
<b>Vacant Building</b>	<b>9.16</b>	<b>0.48%</b>
Vacant Building	9.16	100.00%
<b>Vacant Land</b>	<b>671.70</b>	<b>35.43%</b>
Vacant Land	671.70	100.00%
<i>The items shaded in grey correspond with the Broad Land Use Classification. Each unshaded section equals 100% of the Broad Land Use Classification total, not the total of all land uses.</i>		

While a set standard or formula does not exist for determining the quantity of various land uses a town or city should contain, the percentage of each land use in individual communities is reflective of the type of place a Town wants to be. Communities typically consider the financial implications of each land use, as different land uses have different demands on town services, and therefore different costs to the town. Cities and towns also evaluate a variety of factors in determining the proper mix of land uses for the future, including fiscal issues and other issues such as environmental quality, housing affordability, the jobs-to-housing balance, and the overall quality of life. Sylva has not had the data or opportunity to evaluate its land uses in this manner; The Plan for Sylva is a step in this direction.

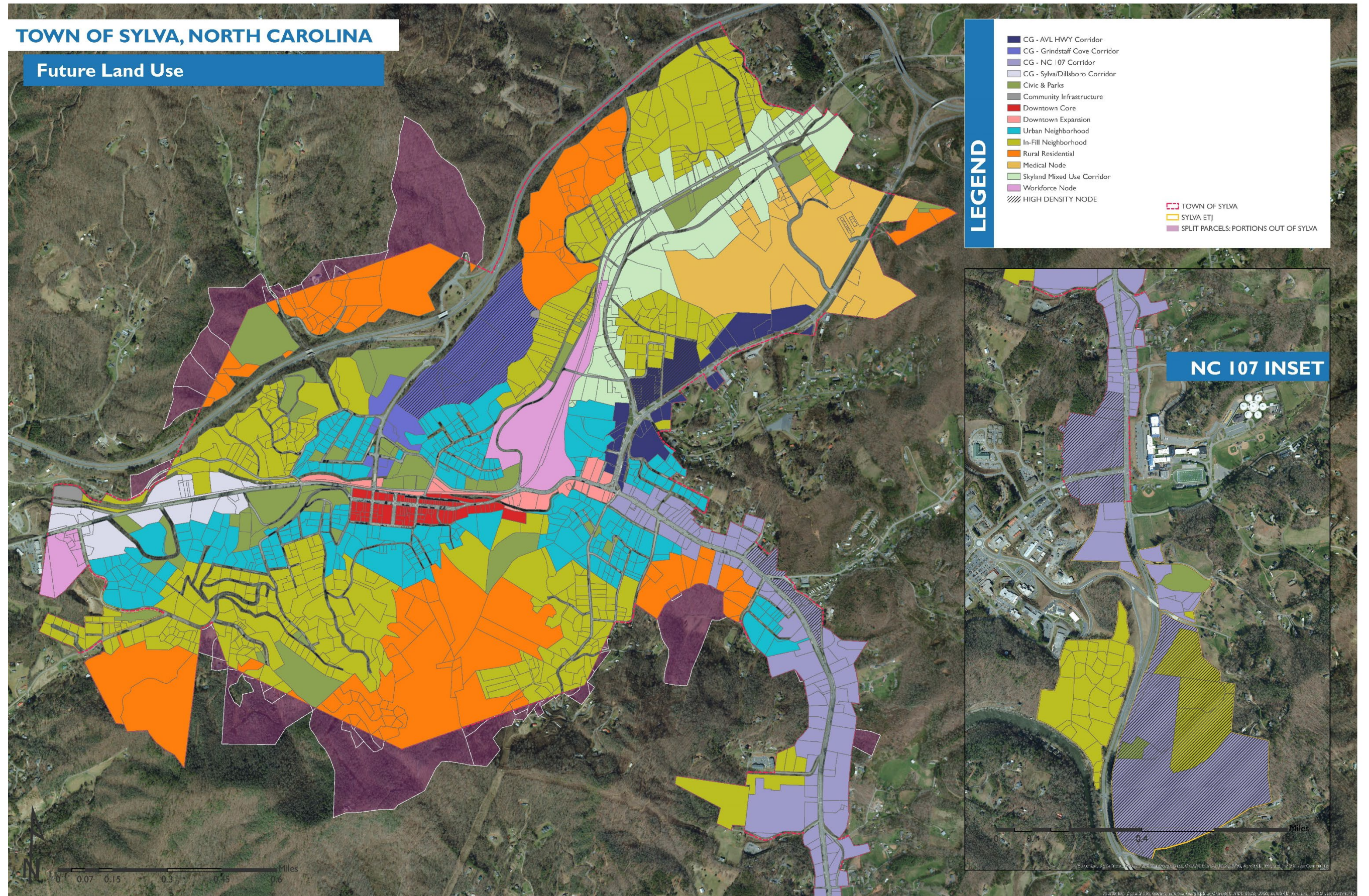
## Future Land Use Framework

The future land use framework, Figure 2, illustrates the land use concept the Town for Sylva is aiming for. The framework was developed with consideration of the key drivers detailed in The Plan for Sylva – Reimagine Commercial Corridors, Providing Diversity in Housing Choices, Multimodal Mobility, and Zoning Code Modernization. Additionally, the community recognizes Downtown Sylva as the heart of the community. Land use decisions should protect and promote this valuable community asset. With the key drivers as the foundation, the following assumptions shaped the future land use framework:

- There is a need to reimagine the town’s commercial corridors. Corridors should complement Downtown Sylva; the concept to communicate is “all things lead to downtown”.
- To achieve greater housing diversity and promote multimodal connectivity, the neighborhoods abutting the commercial corridors and downtown Sylva should be the town’s densest neighborhoods expressed as small lot sizes and allowance for multifamily, townhome, and condo developments.
- Sylva has key locations throughout town that are well-suited for higher density mix-use development (or redevelopment). While it may be some time before market conditions are ready for this mixed-use development, Sylva should be cautious about approving smaller, less impactful projects when the long-range vision will have a greater and more lasting impact.
- Some small area in town need greater study and community input to determine the ultimate land use pattern and needs.
- The NC 107 corridor widening project can be a catalyst for redevelopment and should therefore be the first corridor for which new standards are developed.



Figure 2: Future Land Use Framework





## **Existing Zoning & Foundation for Zoning Ordinance Rewrite**

The future land use plan is Sylva's opportunity to translate goals identified in the Plan for Sylva to a map and document that guides planning board advisory and Town Commissioner legislative zoning decisions. It will also help the planning board and town council develop their zoning statements of consistency as required by NC law. Finally, it is a tool to guide infrastructure, transportation, and municipal service investment.

A future land use plan is not the same as a zoning map. An area that is zoned R-1 today will remain R-1 even if the Future Land Use Plan identifies a different future use. The Future Land Use Plan offers policy guidance for land use decisions whereas a zoning ordinance and map delineates Sylva's legally binding districts and development standards. The zoning districts and standards cannot change without a formal rezoning or amendment process.

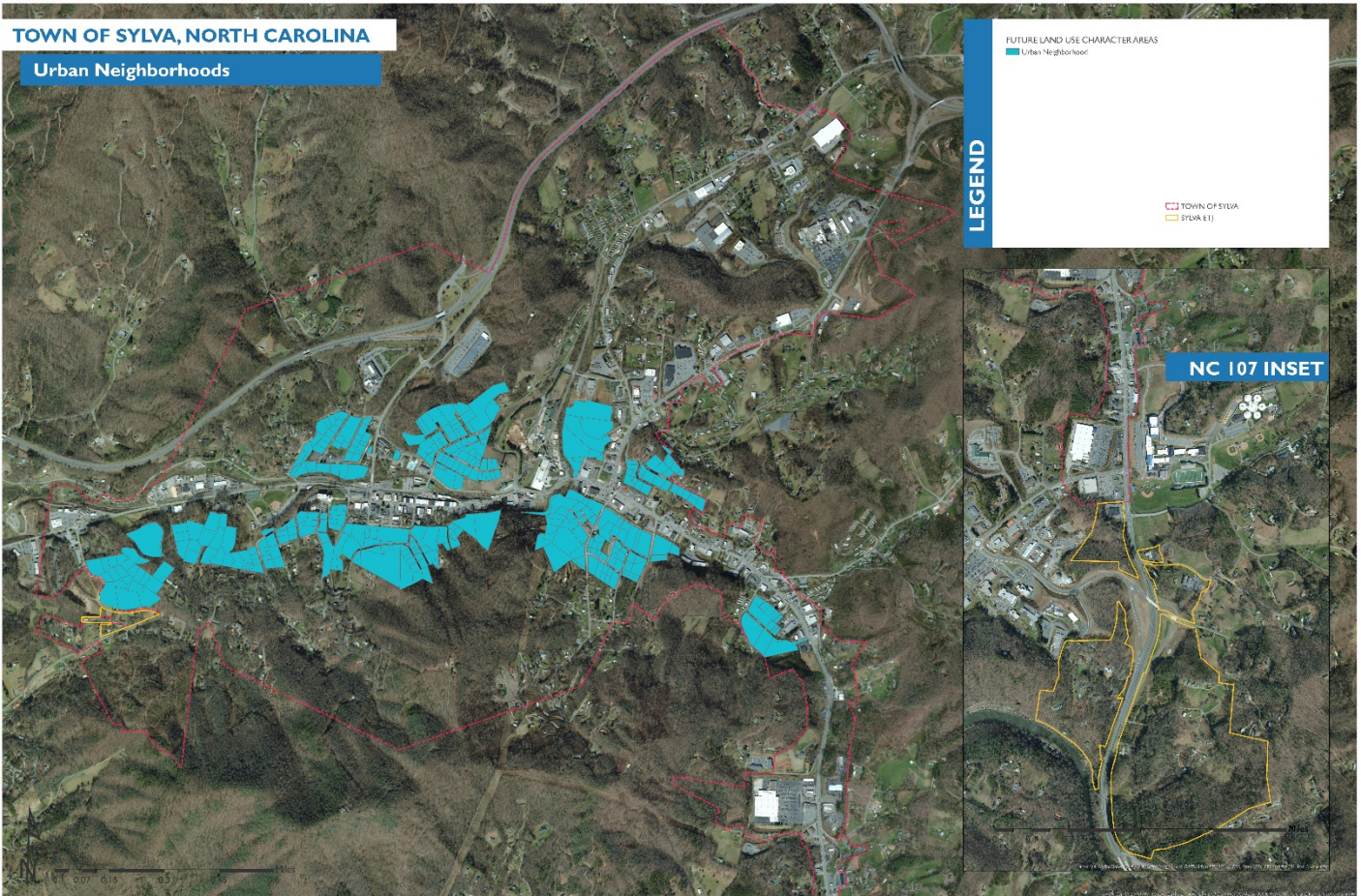
## **Future Land Use Map**

The Future Land Use Map serves as the future land use and development map for the Town of Sylva. It identifies specific geographical areas, known as character areas, across the town that have special or unifying characteristics, based on either existing conditions or the vision for the future, and which collectively will shape Sylva's distinctive character. The Future Land Use Map defines the location and boundaries of each identified character area. The Future Land Use Map is included as Figure 2.

The character areas identified on the map may already have identifiable characteristics such as Downtown Sylva, or they may have the potential to transform into an area with distinguishing characteristics based on future planning and decisions; the Skyland Road Corridor being an example. This section includes summary descriptions of each character area, including the general vision for each, appropriate land uses, and the implementation measures needed to fulfill the vision.

## **Character Areas**

The following section provides general descriptions of the character areas contained within The Plan for Sylva's Future Land Use Map. While the planning for specific land uses and projects within these categories may differ over time, these descriptions provide the general guidelines for land use planning by character in Sylva through 2040. The character areas provide guidance for the rewrite and application of the town's zoning and other ordinances that regulate land development.



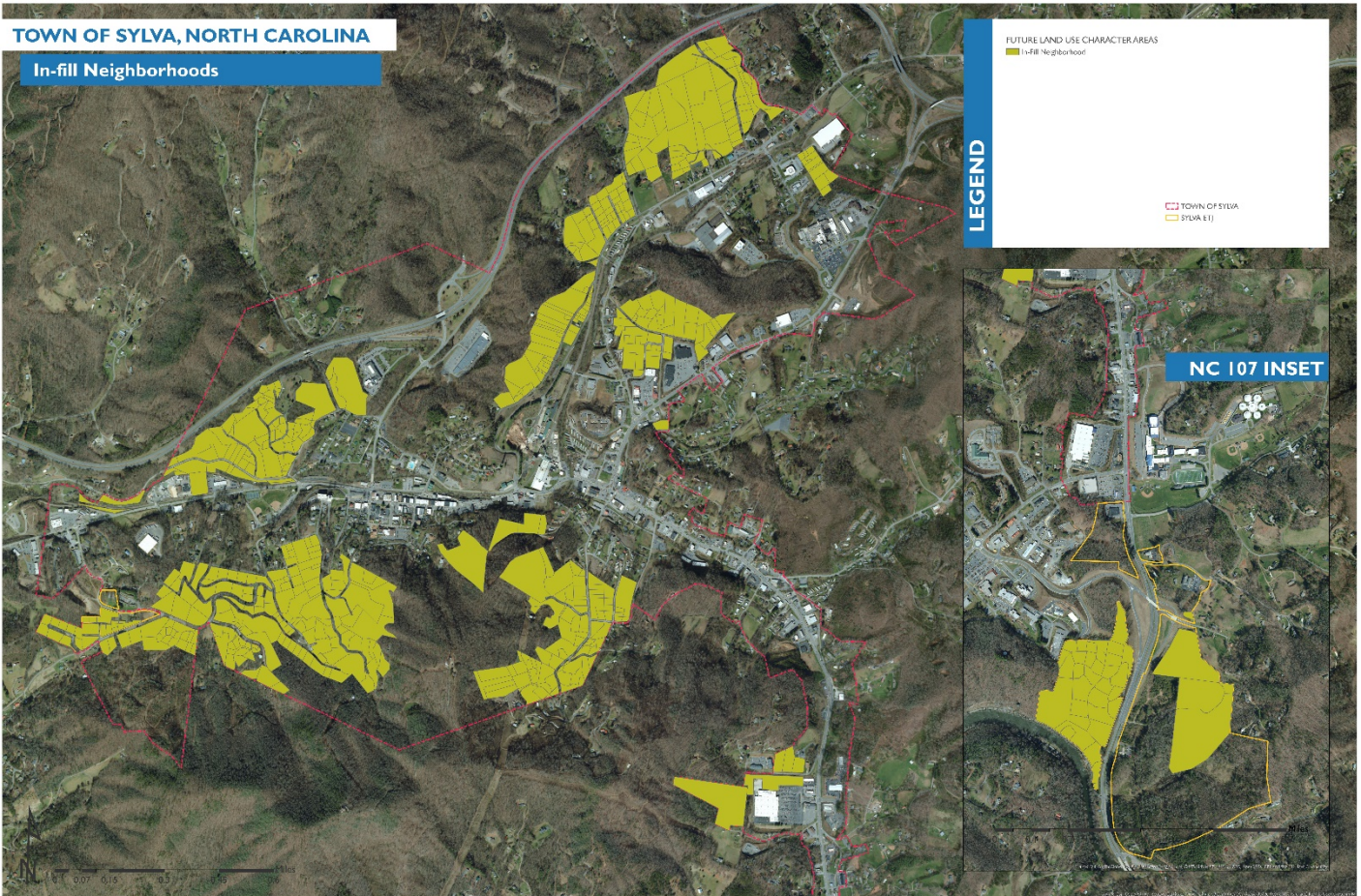
## Urban Neighborhoods

The Urban Neighborhood character area includes existing residential and new areas where it is envisioned that reinvestment in the community can and will occur, with a focus on providing a variety of housing options that are walkable to Downtown Sylva and the Town's other commercial areas. Higher-density residential uses (**greater than 12 units per acre**), including multifamily residential, small-lot single-family residential, higher-density townhomes, condominiums, and du-, tri-, and quadruplexes are appropriate for and encouraged within this character area. Building heights should fall into the 3 to 4 story range.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Primarily residential: small lot single family, townhome residential, two-, three- or four-family units, and multifamily
- Civic and educational uses that support community residents
- Live-work units
- Small scale in-home businesses
- Small scale public open space (e.g. active pocket parks, passive open space, greenways)
- Areas that currently allow manufacture housing will continue to allow for this land use





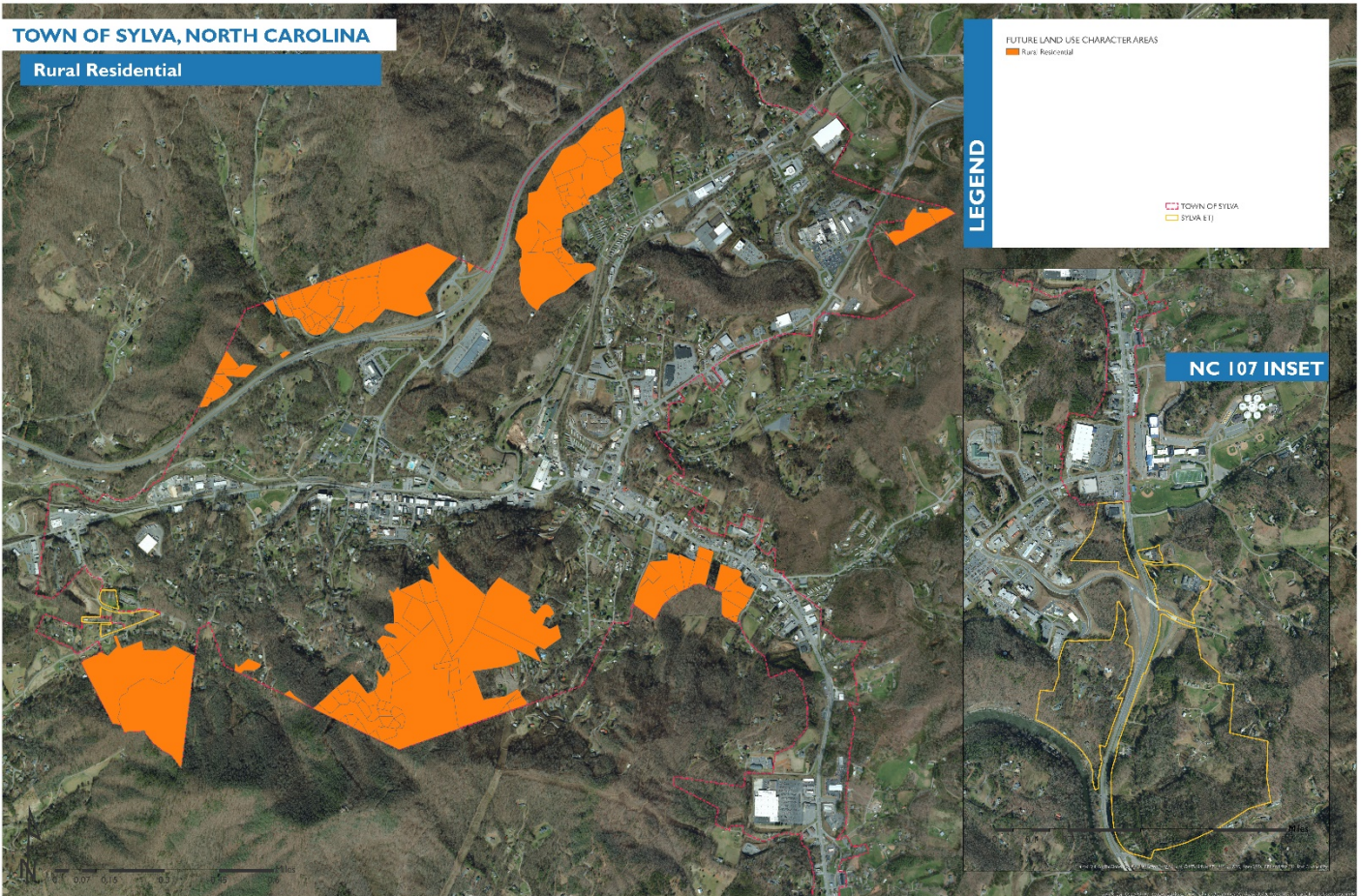
## In-Fill Neighborhoods

In-fill Neighborhoods are areas of existing low- **(2 to 4 units per acre)** to medium-density **(4 to 12 units per acre)** single-family residential uses. In the future, these stable neighborhoods will retain their existing land use pattern, as a denser development pattern conflicts with topography in most in-fill areas.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Primarily single-family, detached residential and related accessory uses
- Duplexes
- Civic and educational uses that support community residents
- Some single-family attached residential ownership (e.g. townhomes) is included in this character area to promote housing diversity
- Areas that currently allow manufacture housing will continue to allow for this land use





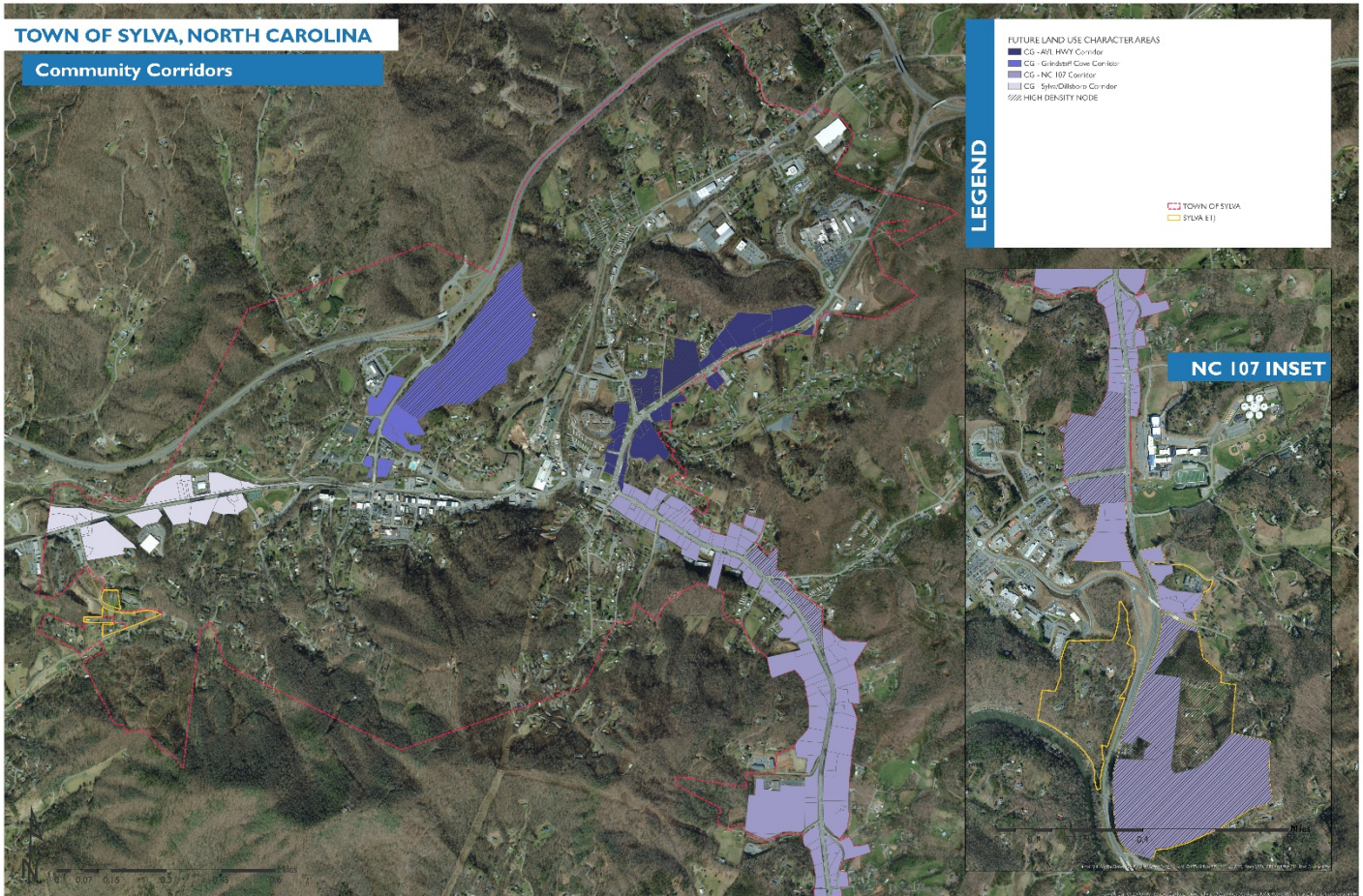
## Rural Residential

The Rural Residential character area preserves areas of very low-density (**1 unit per acre**) residential development on larger lots. Primarily found on the Town's periphery or in areas with steep slopes, this area is characterized by large lot single-family residences, agriculture, and a natural/wooded landscape.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Single-family detached dwellings
- Conservation areas, public open space
- Farms, agricultural uses, farmstands, or agritourism
- Event centers (e.g. wedding barn)
- Private recreation uses
- Areas that currently allow manufacture housing will continue to allow for this land use





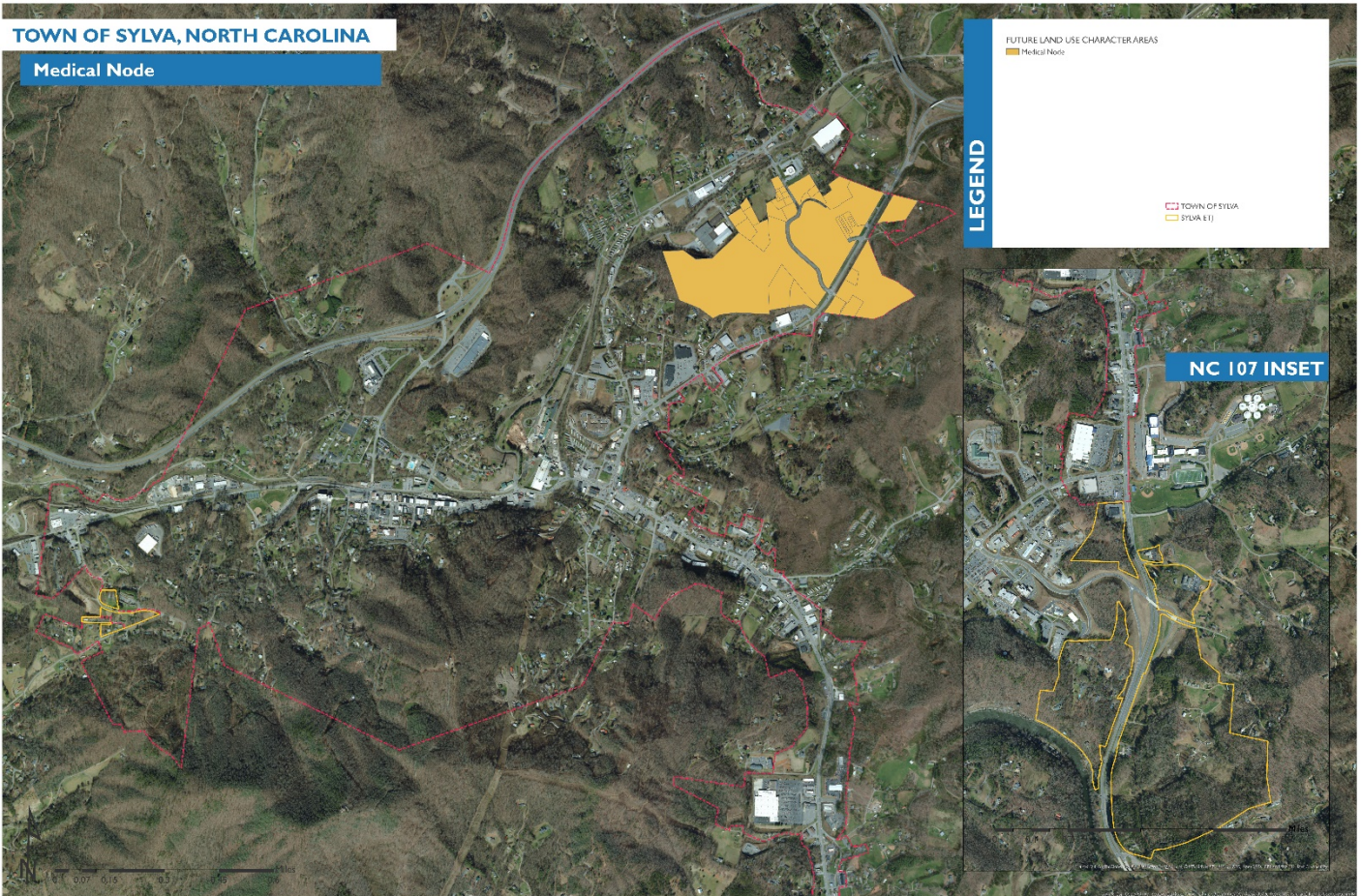
## Community Corridors

The intent of the Community Corridor character areas is to create an authentic “Sylva Look and Feel” for the town’s entryways. Community Corridors will be the town’s “workhorse” corridors – connecting commercial areas to residential neighborhoods while providing a major transportation link between job centers and areas outside of Sylva. The key to success is redevelopment that incorporates a mix of land uses in compact development patterns, links downtown and neighborhoods, and provides additional housing options, neighborhood amenities, and job opportunities. With some exceptions, the form the uses take is more important than land use. The corridors also include high-density nodes which are the points along the corridors that are most appropriate for high density mixed-use development.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Mixed use buildings and mixed-use projects (including residential, office and ground-floor retail/commercial)
- Institutional uses
- Commercial uses (see the list of Generator types in the Existing Land Use section)
  - Neighborhood commercial: retail, office, or personal services intended to serve surrounding neighborhoods, consume are 4-5 acres of land, should be walkable from nearby residential neighborhoods
  - Community commercial: Commercial uses with 125,000 to 400,000 leasable square feet, often with one or more anchor tenants, commercial uses serve a large portion of the community; focus on multimodal access
- Light industrial & Office / Business centers: with the right development standards in place, light industrial uses can be appropriate along the community corridors, particularly where the corridors are further away from Downtown Sylva.
- Community services
- Civic and educational uses that support community residents





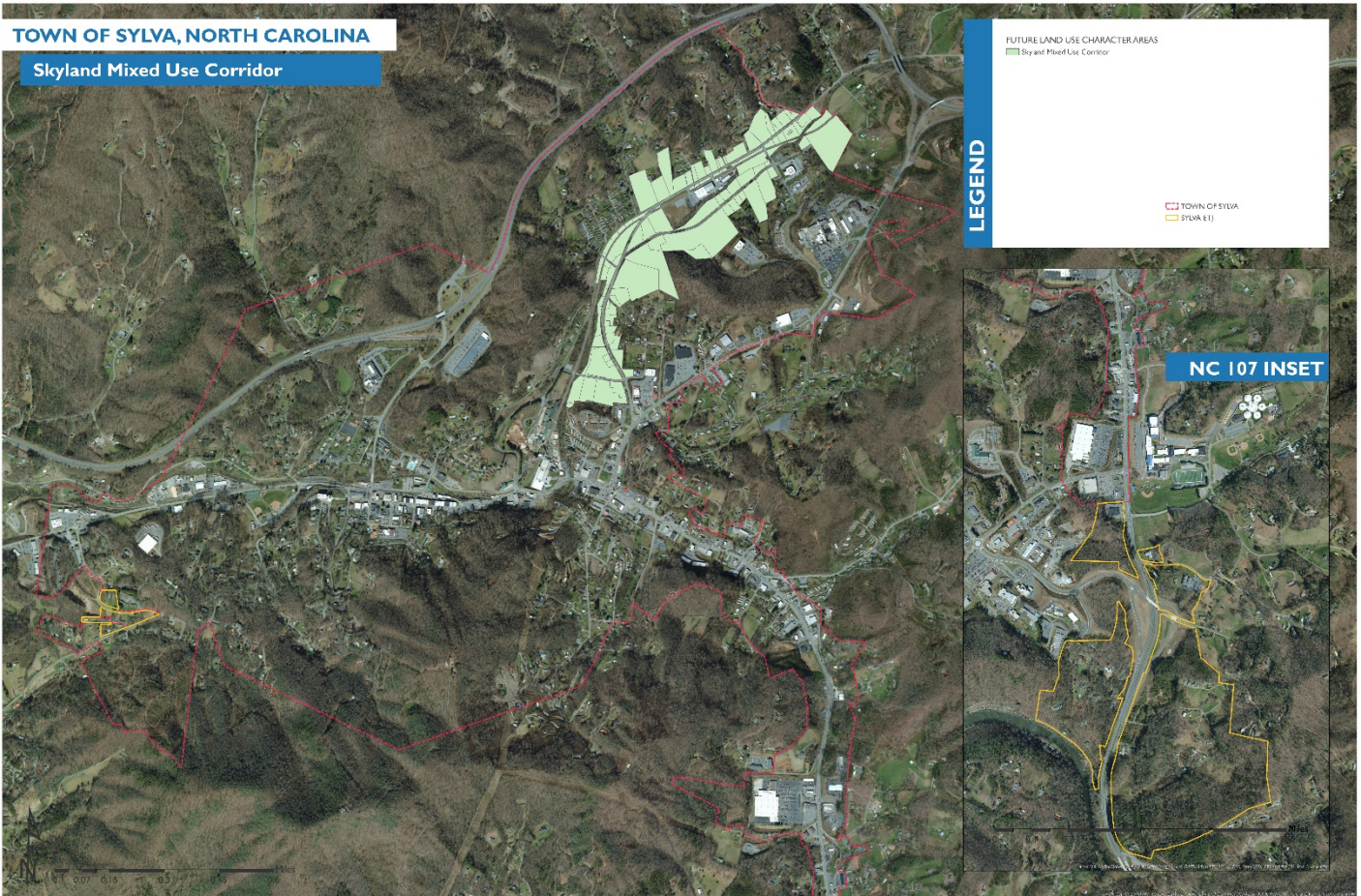
## Medical Node

The vision for this area, which is also a Workforce Node, includes maintaining an emphasis on medical-related land uses while integrating more residential uses—through higher-density mixed-use and multifamily residential development—to support the medical uses in the area by providing affordable opportunities for people to live closer to employment opportunities. Through future redevelopment, the area will become a more connected, multimodal district by integrating an expanded street network, walking and bicycle facilities, and improved connections to the medical facilities. The Town of Sylva could consider a Small Area Plan for the Medical Node.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Mixed use, oriented to first floor office
- Medical offices and other medical-related uses
- Residential (multifamily residential, townhomes); Single family development is discouraged
- Small scale retail (stand-alone or ground-floor as part of mixed-use development)
- Hotels / Medical Guest Houses
- Civic and educational uses that support community residents
- Public open space (e.g. active parks, passive open space, greenways)





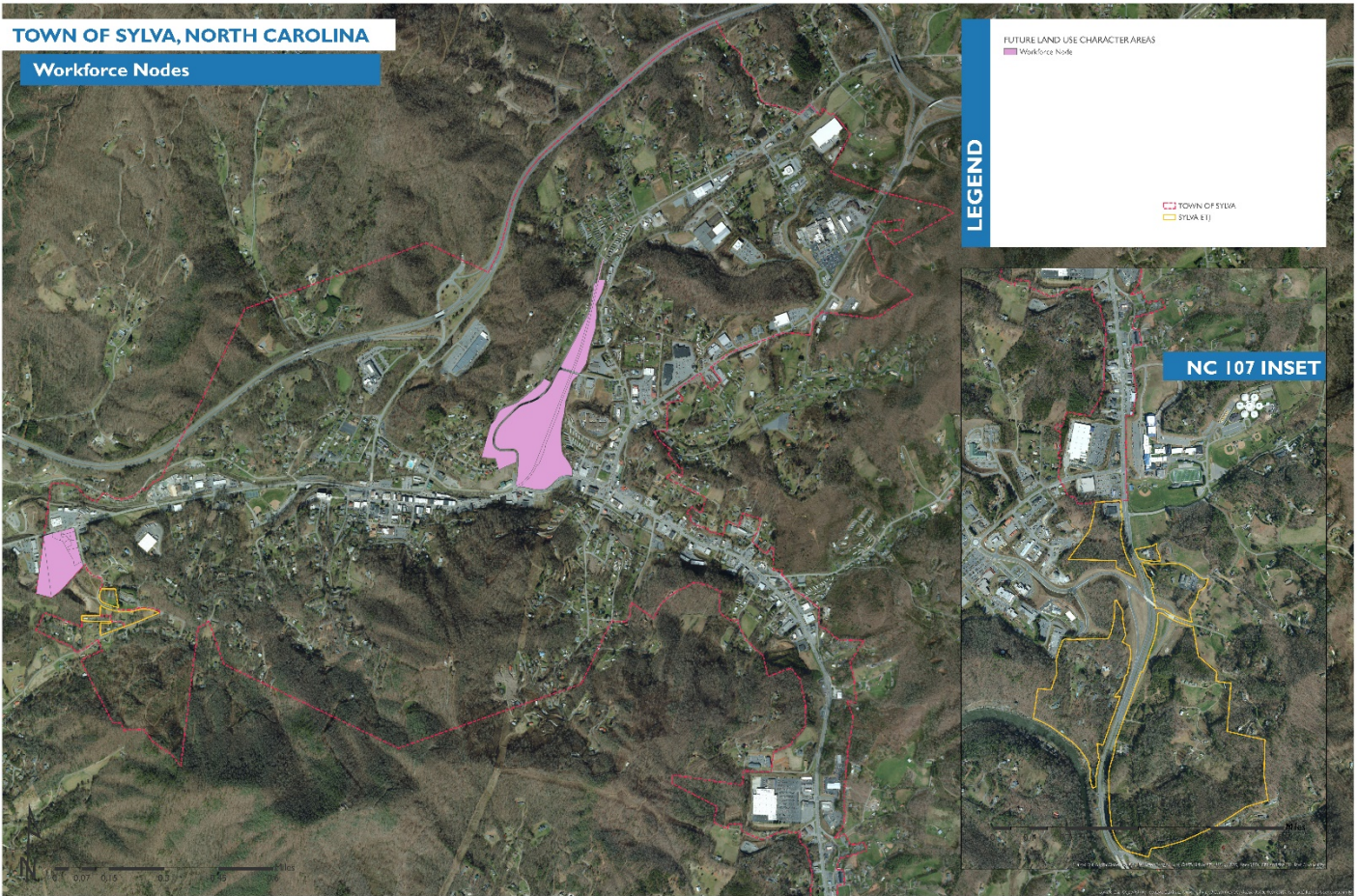
## Skyland Mixed Use Corridor

The future land use pattern for the area identifies as the Skyland Mixed Use Corridor will be determined through a small area planning process. The corridor is at risk of becoming a disconnected mix of uses. Additionally, the Corridor has distinguishing features that Sylva can maximize and protect. A small area plan will allow the community to determine a land use pattern that blends a mix of land uses and maximizes what the corridor has to offer.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Mixed use development (consider at least two stories)
- Residential (live/work, multifamily, townhomes, small-lot single family)
- Neighborhood commercial
- Small scale restaurants and breweries
- Small scale hotels
- Civic and educational uses that support community residents
- Open space



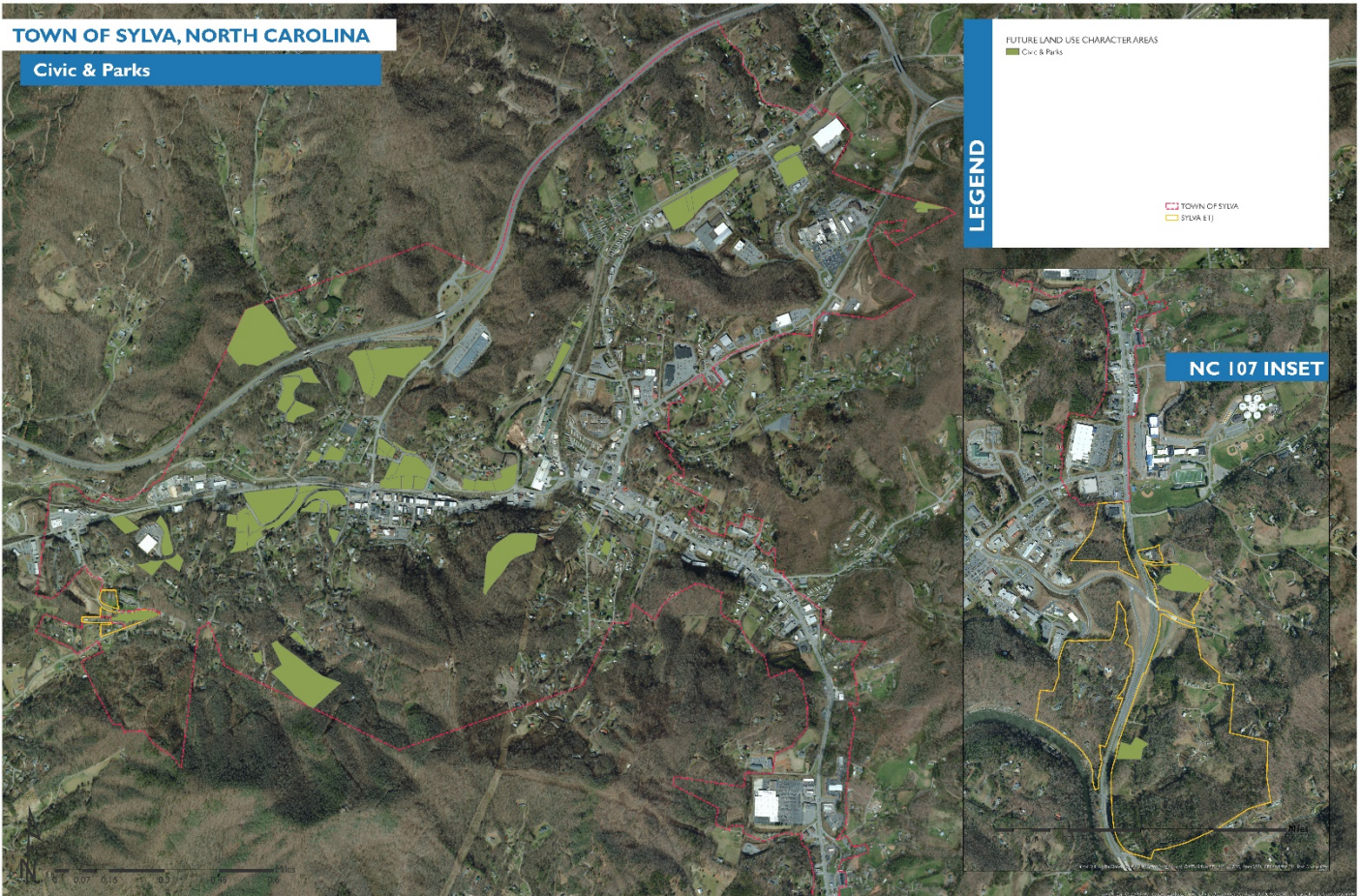


## Workforce Nodes

Having no particular development character, workforce nodes exist primarily to provide employment for Sylva residents and neighbors from across the region, including office and business parks, light industrial, transportation and warehousing, and other similar uses. Small scale retail and food that supports the workforce node is encouraged.

Workforce nodes may also be integrated with the high-density nodes identified along the Community Corridors.





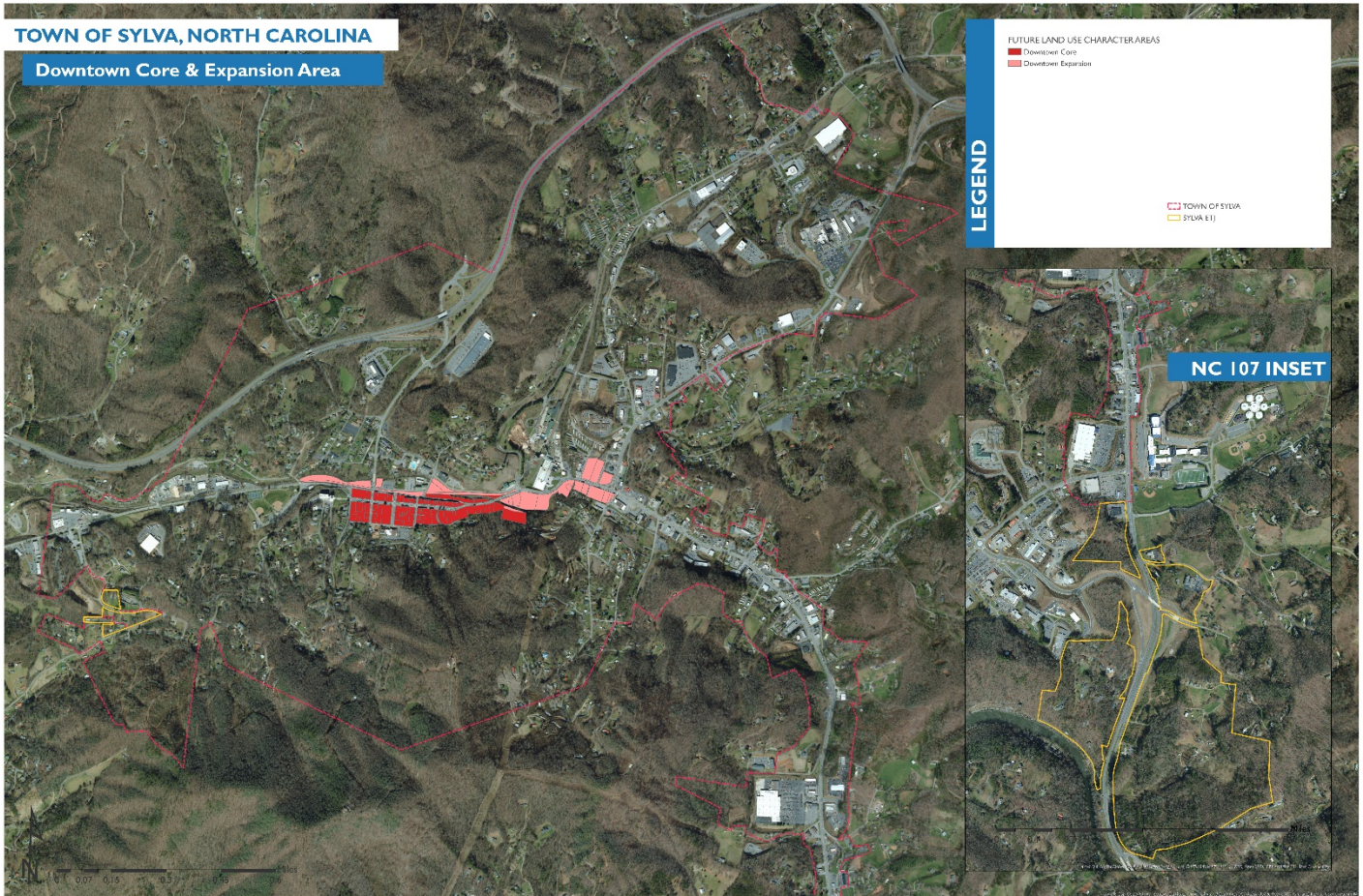
## Civic & Cultural Uses

These areas are considered important natural, civic, and recreation amenities. As such, land within this character area will be protected and maintained as it is. Buildings or structures that support parks and recreation uses (e.g., gazebos, pavilions, visitor centers, picnic facilities, etc.) are appropriate in these areas. In some limited instances, commercial uses that support and activate parks and recreation facilities (e.g., restaurants, snack bars, restrooms, etc.) may be appropriate in some locations, provided that the primary land use remains green space and recreation.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Public and private green space
- Recreation (passive or active)
- Forested land
- Buildings, structures and/or commercial uses that support or activate parks and recreation facilities
- Government and social service facilities, places of worship, educational facilities





## Downtown Sylva & Downtown Sylva Expansion District

The primary character and form of Downtown Sylva will remain similar to its existing pattern. However, there is a need to increase the number of residents living downtown, therefore residential development that is in character and scale with downtown's core is encouraged. Sylva should also consider expanding its Downtown core to ensure that areas bordering Downtown develop in a manner that is consistent with Downtown Sylva's image, this area is identified as the Downtown Sylva Expansion District. New construction in the downtown and downtown expansion districts should be at least two stories, building should front the street and should be accompanied by high quality pedestrian facilities, among other design standards that mimic Sylva's historic downtown.

### Encouraged Land Uses:

- Residential (multifamily, townhomes, small-lot single family)
- Mixed Use Buildings (at least two stories)
- Office (at least two stories)
- Hotel
- Civic and educational uses that support community residents
- Small scale open space

## Planned Acreage by Land Use Type

The Future Land Use Map allocates the anticipated locations and acreages of future land uses that Sylva will need in order to accommodate anticipated growth over the next twenty-plus years.

FUTURE LAND USE CLASSIFICATION		
CHARACTER AREA	ACRES	% OF AREA
Community Corridor: Asheville Highway	41.23	2.17%
Community Corridor: Grindstaff Cove Corridor	61.41	3.24%
Community Corridor: NC 107 Corridor	303.97	16.03%
Community Corridor: Sylva/Dillsboro Corridor	33.16	1.75%
Civic & Parks	120.99	6.38%
Community Infrastructure	2.78	0.15%
Downtown Core	18.07	0.95%
Downtown Expansion	15.91	0.84%
In-Fill Neighborhood	501.52	26.45%
Medical Node	116.73	6.16%
Infrastructure (e.g. TWSA)	0.93	0.05%
Rural Residential	317.13	16.73%
Skyland Mixed Use Corridor	102.00	5.38%
Urban Neighborhood	205.60	10.84%
Workforce Node	54.47	2.87%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,895.87</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## The Future of the NC 107 Corridor

Most people in Sylva know that NCDOT has plans to widen NC 107. This has been a long and contentious project. The Plan for Sylva does not rehash the need for or objection to the project. This Plan's purpose related to NC 107 is to provide principles and highlight opportunities to guide new development along the corridor.

- As the corridor changes, there is opportunity to develop more than auto-oriented commercial uses. For example, the corridor can include multi-family development or office and business uses.
- Access management along the NC 107 will greatly improve safety along and the usability of the corridor for motor vehicle users and multimodal users. The Town of Sylva should evaluate if additional access management standards (those that exceed NCDOT standards) are necessary, particularly as they relate to connectivity between parcels.

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According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Access Management (AM) is the “proactive management of vehicular access points to land parcels adjacent to all manner of roadways. Good access management promotes safe and efficient use of the transportation network. AM encompasses a set of techniques that state and local governments can use to control access to highways, major arterials, and other roadways.” AM is a way for maintaining mobility for a variety of user types (vehicular drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians) through providing safe ingress and egress to properties along a corridor.

The FHWA offers the following AM techniques. The Town of Sylva in coordination with NCDOT can consider incorporating the following techniques in its zoning ordinance and future roadway development projects:

**Access Spacing:** increasing the distance between traffic signals improves the flow of traffic on major arterials, reduces congestion, and improves air quality for heavily traveled corridors.

**Driveway Spacing:** Fewer driveways spaced further apart allows for more orderly merging of traffic and presents fewer challenges to drivers.

**Safe Turning Lanes:** dedicated left- and right-turn, indirect left-turns and U-turns, and roundabouts keep through-traffic flowing. Roundabouts represent an opportunity to reduce an intersection with many conflict points or a severe crash history (T-bone crashes) to one that operates with fewer conflict points and less severe crashes (sideswipes) if they occur.

**Median Treatments:** two-way left-turn lanes (TWLTL) and nontraversable, raised medians are examples of some of the most effective means to regulate access and reduce crashes.

**Right-of-Way Management:** as it pertains to R/W reservation for future widenings, good sight distance, access location, and other access-related issues.

- While the NC 107 project will improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities, the Town of Sylva is encouraged to develop multimodal standards that continue to improve the corridor’s multimodal usability. For example, the Town of Sylva can develop connectivity standards for internal sidewalks that may eventually connect parcels, or it could require easements for an off-road multiuse path.
- Sylva may want to require buildings and entrances to orient to the front of each parcel (facing NC 107), with parking areas located to the rear or side of buildings. Buildings at intersections should have facades that address both street frontages.
- The community should weigh the costs and benefits of following a consistent standard for an aesthetic quality and design along NC 107 in order to establish the corridor as a “high quality” area of development, given its status as one the key corridor linking to Sylva to WCU.

- Building heights should step down in height as it transitions away from NC 107 in order to buffer neighborhoods from more intensive development. This pattern will allow for better transitions between commercial uses along NC 107 and residential neighborhoods in the surrounding area (many of which are in Jackson County's jurisdiction and have no land use regulation).
- The town should establish sign, lighting, and landscaping design guidelines for developments along NC 107.
- Town leadership should dedicate planning staff resources to increase its capacity to work with property owners and explore options to integrate land uses and design standards along NC 107. The mixed-use orientation for the NC 107 corridor (and the other corridors) does not mandate the development of mixed-use projects but envisions the corridor changing over time from a highway commercial orientation to one that integrates a wider variety of land uses and becomes more pedestrian in pattern and orientation. It will take dedicated staff time to accomplish this objective.

# HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

The Plan for Sylva is intended to be used on a regular basis as Sylva’s stakeholders, such as the Board of Commissioners, Planning Board, and staff, make public and private development, redevelopment, capital improvement, and other decisions that affect the Town. The following points summarize how and when the town can align decisions with the goals and strategies in the Plan for Sylva.

**Guide to Update the Town of Sylva Zoning Ordinance:** The Town of Sylva’s existing zoning ordinance no longer meets the Town’s future development needs and therefore needs to be updated. The Plan for Sylva is the foundation for developing the new ordinance.

**Development Approvals:** Review of development proposals and decisions by the Planning Board and the Sylva’s Board of Commissioners should reference the vision and relevant recommendations in the Plan for Sylva. Where future development proposals conflict with the recommendations in this Plan, proposals should be amended to align with the intent of the Plan.

**Capital Project Planning:** As the Town thinks about capital improvement projects, the Plan for Sylva should be used as a tool to support the capital investments. For example, the desire for multimodal connectivity expressed may lead the Town for Sylva to develop capital projects such as sidewalks and greenways. Likewise, the Town of Sylva may coordinate adequate water and sewer access for areas planned for a denser development pattern.

**Private Development Decisions:** Property owners and developers should consider the goals and strategies in the Plan for Sylva when making land planning and investment decisions.

**Consistent Interpretation:** The Town of Sylva’s Planning Board and Board of Commissioners should use the Plan for Sylva to ensure clear and consistent interpretation of the Plan as it relates to development decisions.

**Be Flexible:** Policies and recommendations in the Plan are intended to serve as a guide to help Town staff, the development community, and residents plan for the development and redevelopment of the Town. The Plan is intended to be flexible and fluid, and it should be updated and amended as appropriate. As projects, policies, and programs develop over time they may not look exactly like the images in the document, but they should address the intent of the Plan.

# GOALS & POLICIES

Goals, policies, and actions provide the direction to help implement the Land Use Plan. The following goals, policies, and actions are not in any particular order of priority but instead are meant to cover the full spectrum of land use related topics.



## **Goal 1: Maintain Downtown Sylva as a unique, historic, vibrant, and attractive local and regional destination.**

**Policy 1.1:** Promote the development of properties in the Downtown and Downtown Expansion District as mixed use, in order to strengthen retail and commercial uses in the district and to integrate new households and employment into the area.

**Policy 1.2:** Ensure redevelopment projects in the Downtown and Downtown Expansion District maintain a scale consistent with Downtown surrounding buildings (two-story minimum).

**Policy 1.3:** Architectural features should enhance the quality and enduring character of downtown buildings and the public realm

*Sylva's public realm are the streets, sidewalks, parks, green spaces, landscaping, public art, and other publicly-accessible spaces that add to Sylva's livability, safety, connectivity, walkability and health. A vibrant public realm contributes to the Town's competitiveness and the image of the Town, attracting people to live in, work in, and visit.*

**Policy 1.4:** Public and private improvements in the Downtown area should provide amenities for bicyclists and pedestrians, including sidewalks, paths, and enhanced streetscape elements.

**Policy 1.5:** Redevelopment projects should take into consideration the public spaces and gathering places that serve as important community event and place making characteristics of the district.

**Action 1.1:** Develop new and strengthen existing zoning standards and design guidelines during Sylva's Zoning Ordinance update. *[When Sylva develops its new Zoning Ordinance, this item should be a key focus of the community engagement efforts.]*

**Action 1.2:** Work with the Downtown community and other stakeholders to identify future public and private redevelopment investments.

## **Goal 2: Establish the NC 107 Corridor as a model corridor in Southwestern North Carolina.**

**Policy 2.1:** Ensure that development projects along NC 107 use appropriate design strategies to provide for a high-quality public realm.

**Action 2.1:** Develop zoning standards and design guidelines during Sylva's Zoning Ordinance update. *[When Sylva develops its new Zoning Ordinance, this item should be a key focus of the community engagement effort.]*

## **Goal 3: Maintain a healthy balance in land uses between residential, generators, workforce nodes, and park / open space.**

**Policy 3.1:** Promote and guide land for a diverse range of generators and office development to support a balanced and resilient tax base in Sylva.

**Policy 3.2:** Preserve open space to protect Sylva's natural assets through the use of open space standards in Sylva's Zoning Ordinance. *[When Sylva develops its new Zoning Ordinance, this item should be a key focus of the community engagement effort.]*

**Policy 3.3:** Support the expansion of institutional uses, especially when designed to enhance neighborhood connections, uses, and services.

**Policy 3.4:** Encourage the diversification of Sylva's housing options to meet the community's housing needs. This will enable residents to remain in the community as their housing needs change and will attract a more diverse range of new residents from a wider range of ages to move to Sylva.

**Action 3.1:** Begin to monitor and report to the community on development activity, land subdivision and building / land inventory, and building permit data (commercial square footage, new residential construction, etc.).

**Goal 4: Future development in Sylva incorporates appropriate levels of density and design to support increased housing options, the viability of neighborhood, commercial, and overall long-term neighborhood sustainability.**

**POLICY 4.1:** Encourage higher densities in mixed use designated areas.

**POLICY 4.2:** Ensure that the density / intensity of development will be compatible with the general characteristics of the surrounding area in which development is located. Changes in density / intensity may be supported when they enhance the viability, character and livability of the area. *[When Sylva develops its new Zoning Ordinance, this item should be a key focus of the community engagement effort.]*

**POLICY 4.3:** Support higher density and intensity in areas appropriate for intensive activities (designated as high-density nodes). The design and execution of such development must be of high quality and integrate with surrounding areas.

**ACTION 4.1:** Prepare design standards that demonstrate support for enhanced pedestrian/bike connectivity and healthy living. These guidelines can be used through the general development review process.

**Goal 5: The physical character and identity of Sylva is maintained through a high degree of aesthetics and quality development.**

**POLICY 5.1:** Promote a stronger tax base by encouraging property maintenance, strengthening and enforcing town ordinances, and regularly reviewing development and standards.

**POLICY 5.2:** Guide development to achieve appropriate transitions between different types of land uses and different levels of densities to ensure that new development is compatible with existing areas.

**POLICY 5.3:** Support the use of streetscape and other public improvement projects to create, reinforce, or improve unique commercial and residential areas in Sylva.

**POLICY 5.4:** Encourage the preservation and enhancement of natural, recreational, historical, and cultural landmarks that are unique and essential to the identity of Sylva.

**POLICY 5.5:** Require that the location, size, number, and appearance of signage throughout the community is appropriately regulated.

**ACTION 5.1:** Update the zoning code to ensure sufficient design standards, landscaping, buffers/screening, and development amenities are addressed in all development projects.

**Goal 6: New development and redevelopment projects incorporate creative site design.**

**POLICY 6.1:** Promote and encourage a mix of residential unit styles, values, and densities within the same development.

**POLICY 6.3:** Promote and encourage Jackson County Transit access, pedestrian and bike connectivity to parks, employment areas, businesses and services, and neighborhoods.

**POLICY 6.4:** Create neighborhood identity and / or unique features that are representative of Sylva.

**ACTION 6.1:** Update the Sylva's Zoning Ordinance to incorporate these standards and flexibility.

# APPENDIX: MISCELLANEOUS MAPS



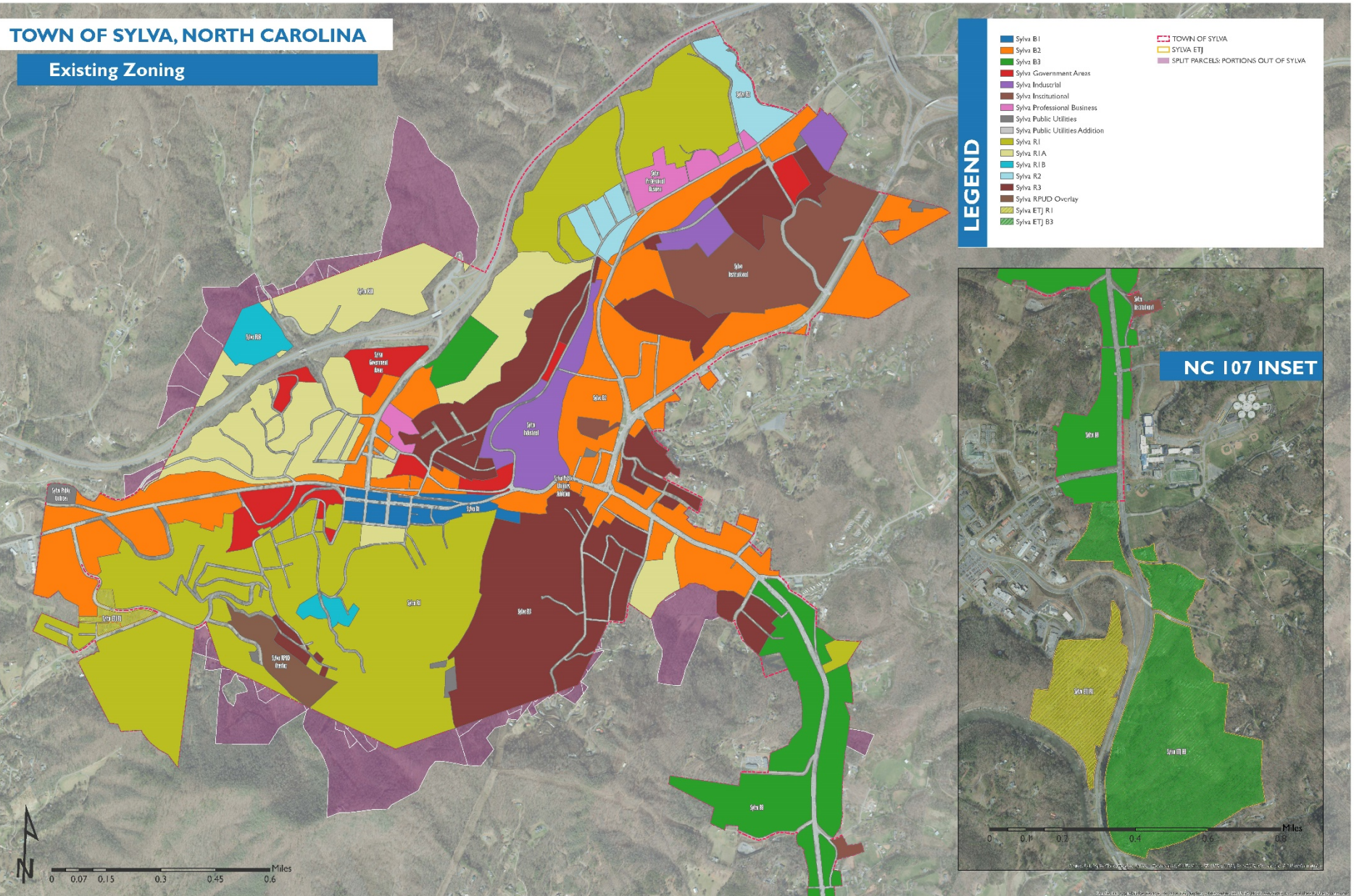


Figure 3: Existing Zoning



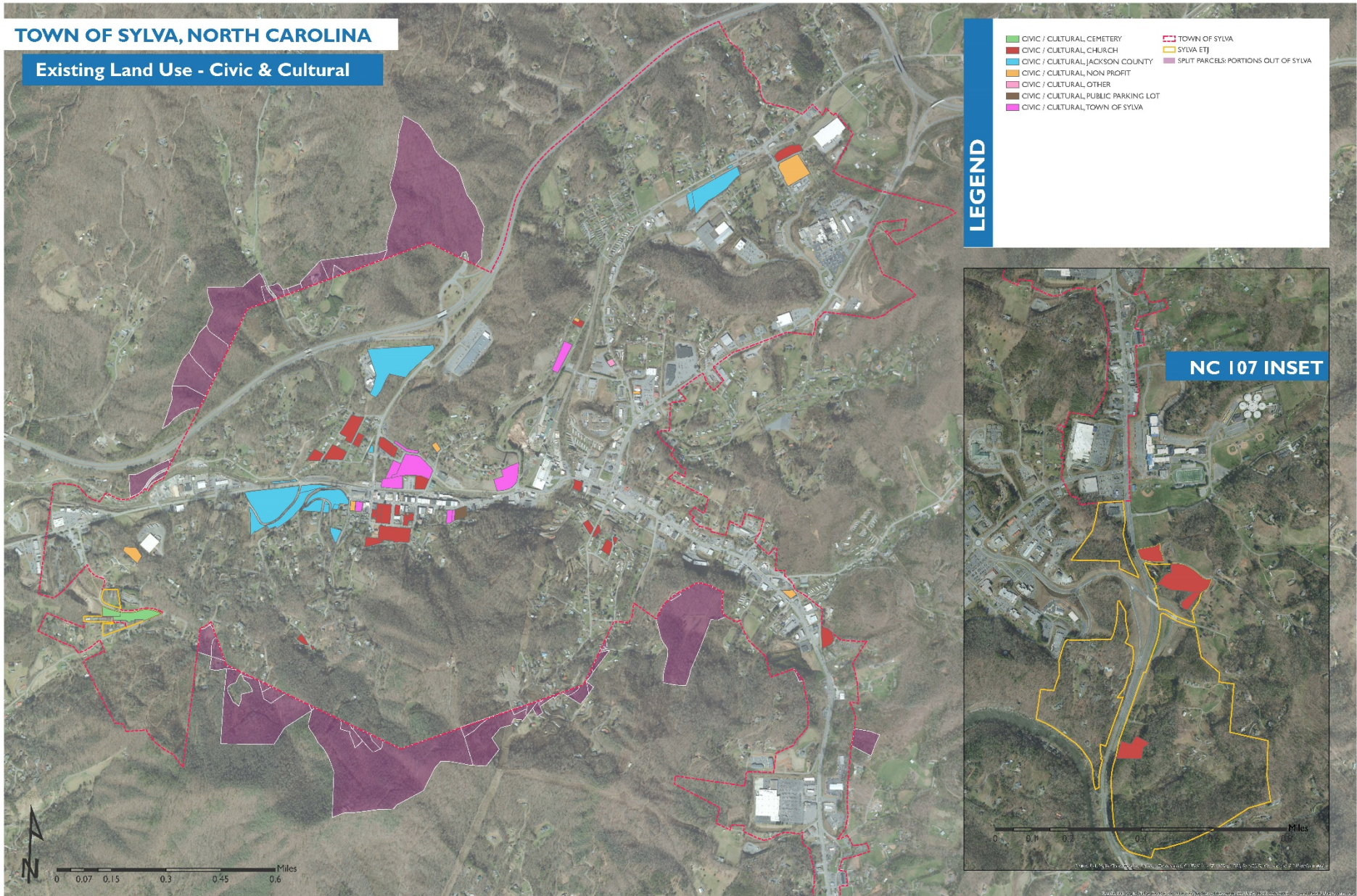


Figure 4: Existing Civic & Cultural Land Uses



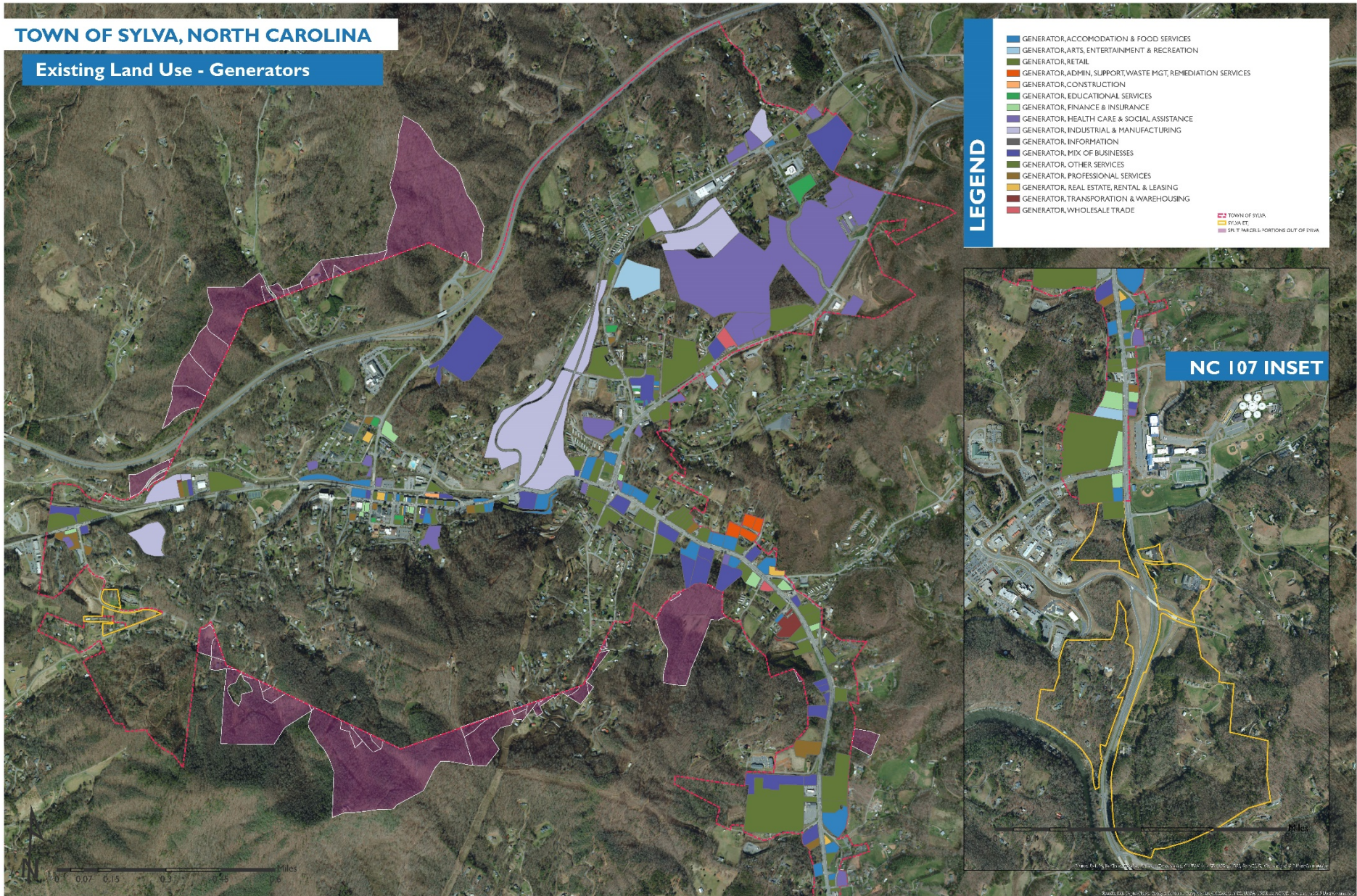


Figure 5: Existing Generator Land Uses



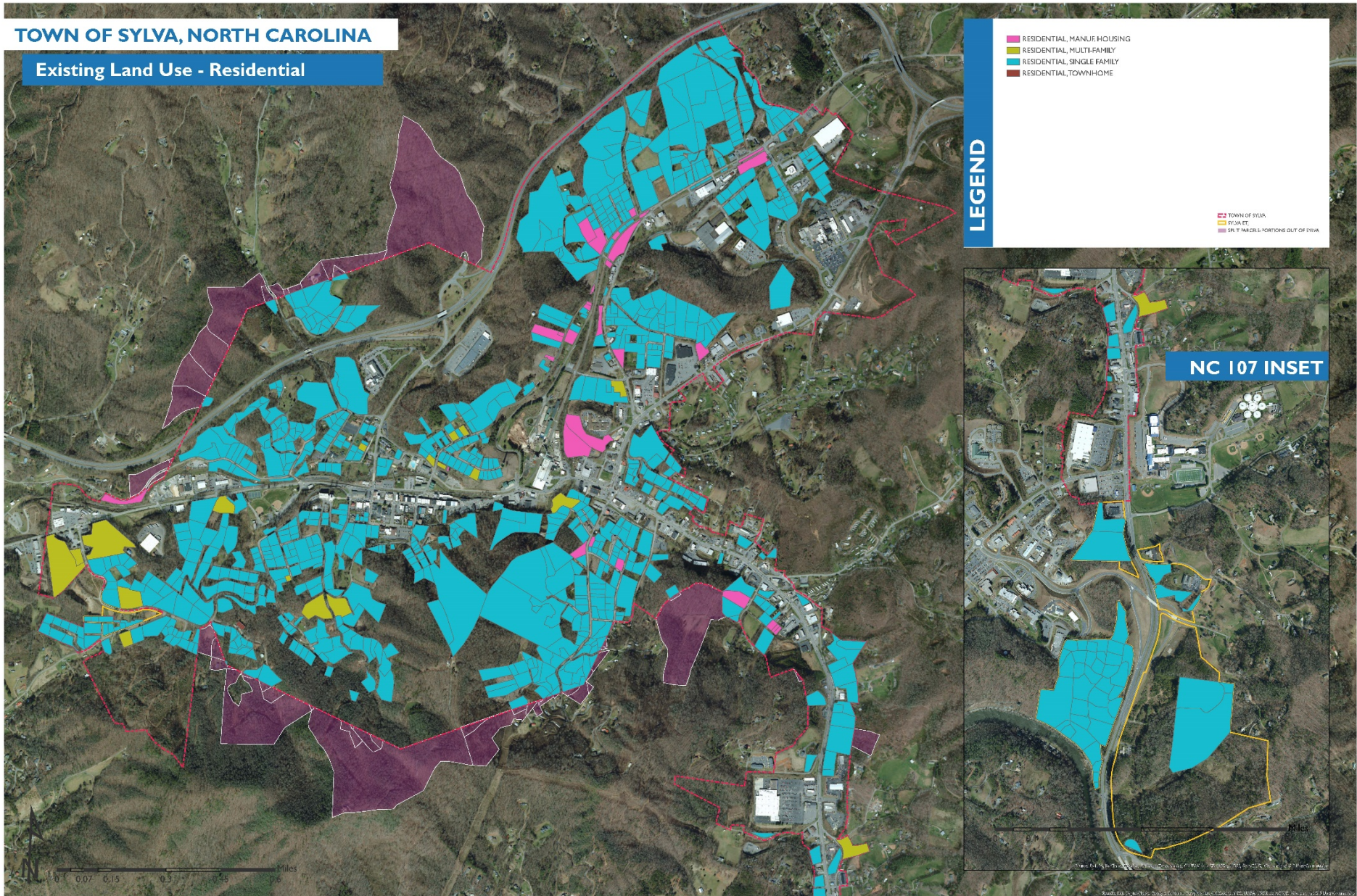


Figure 6: Existing Residential Land Uses



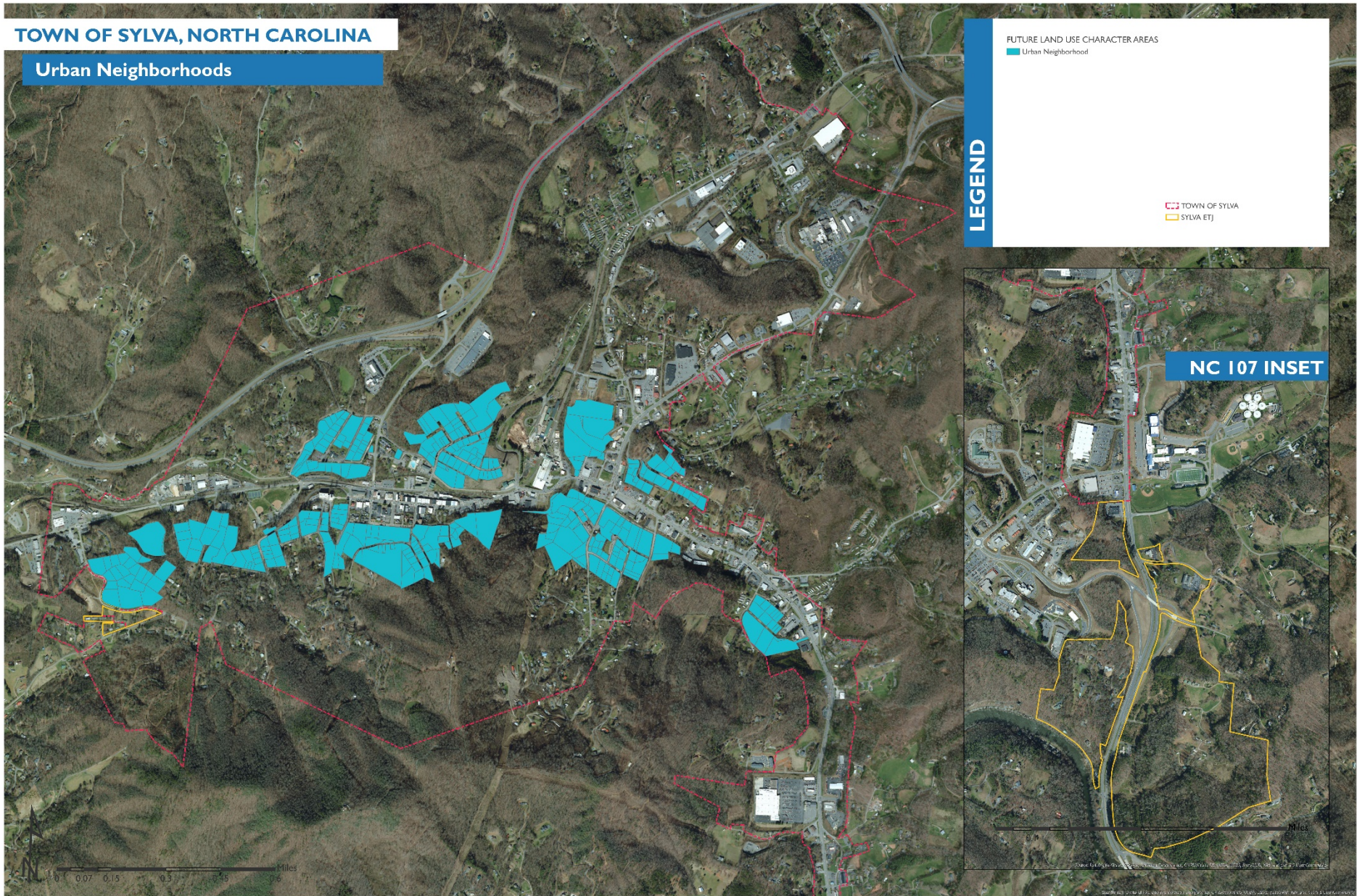


Figure 7: Future Urban Neighborhoods



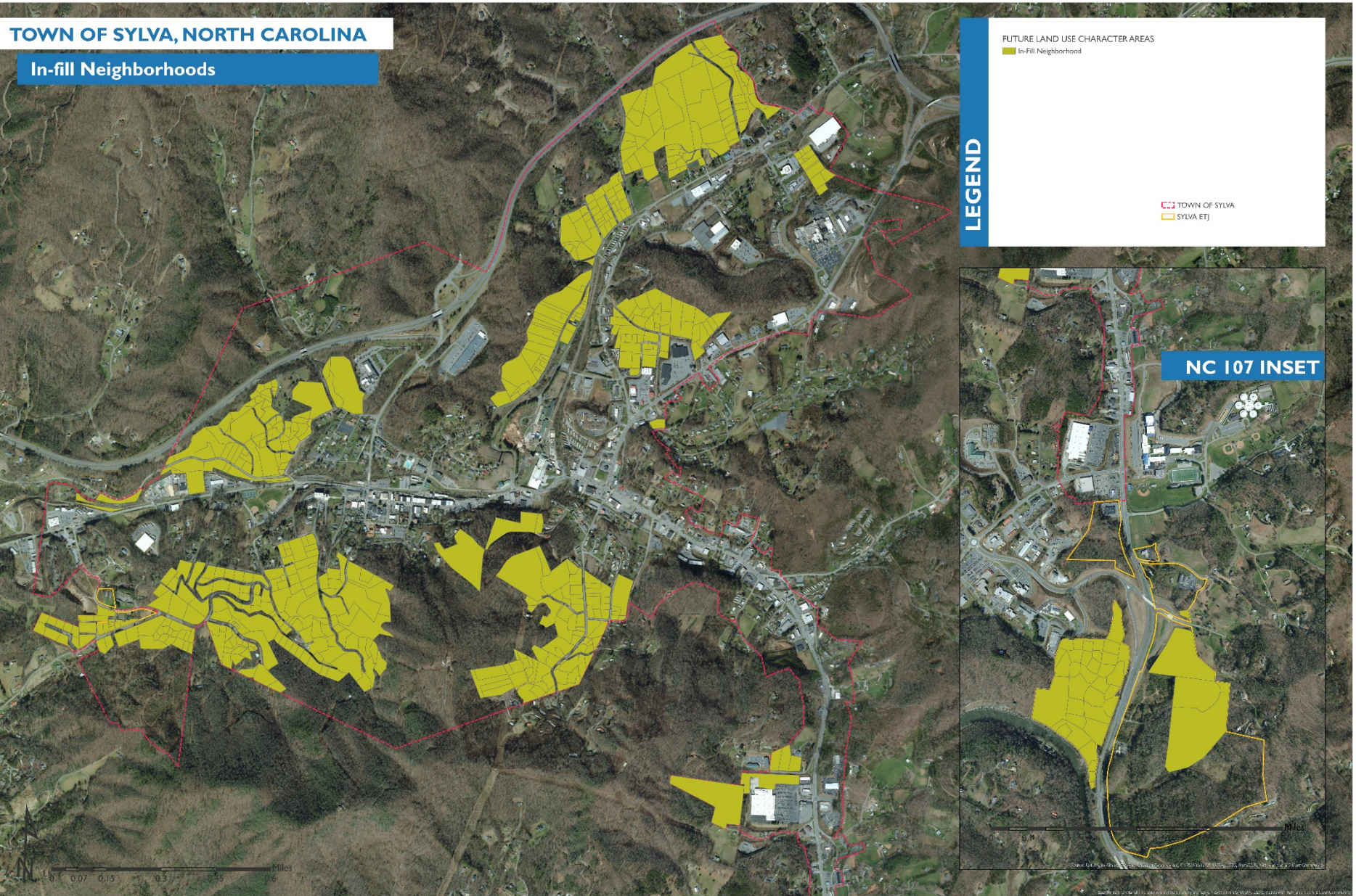


Figure 8: Future In-Fill Neighborhoods



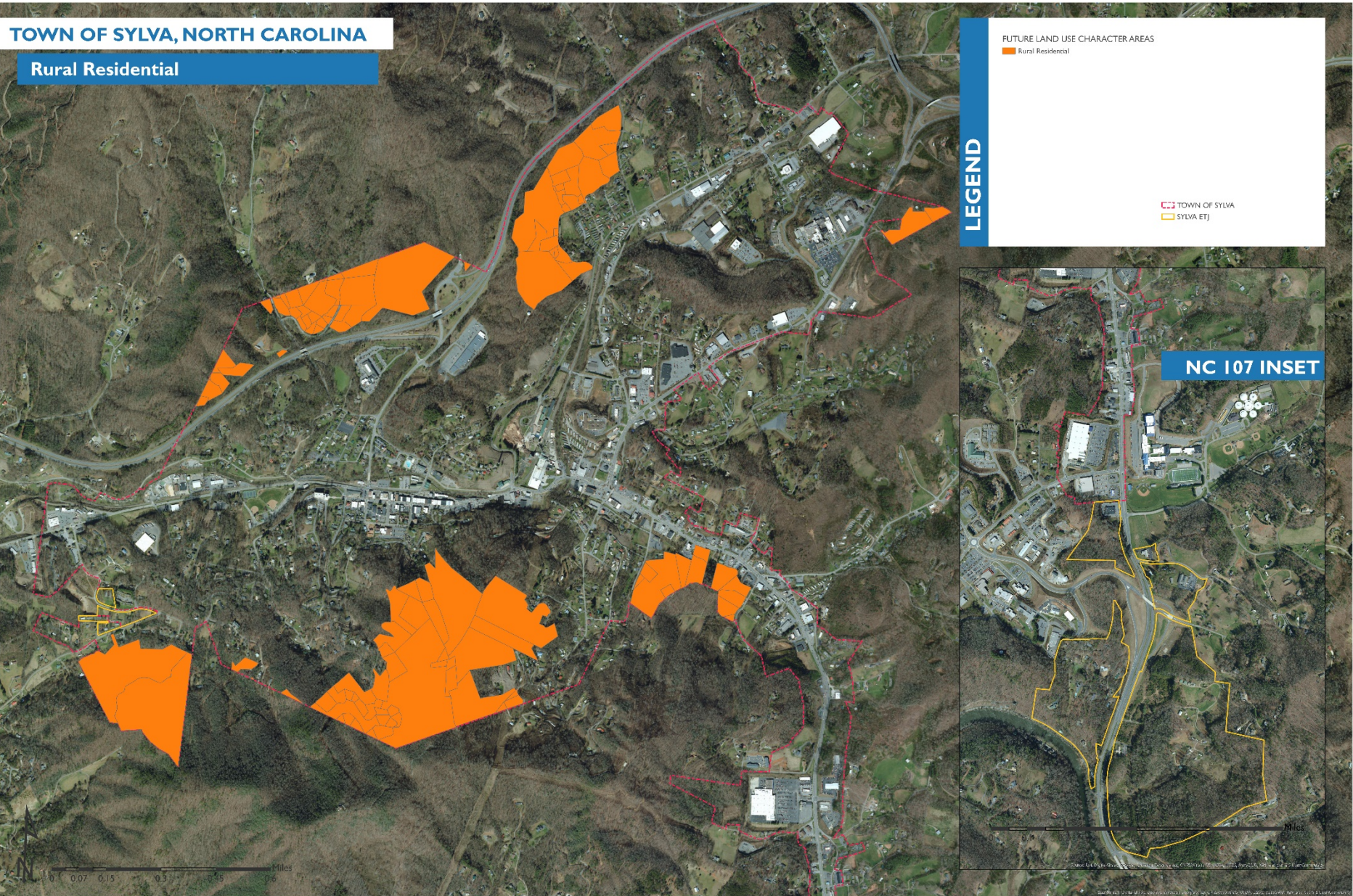


Figure 9: Future Rural Residential



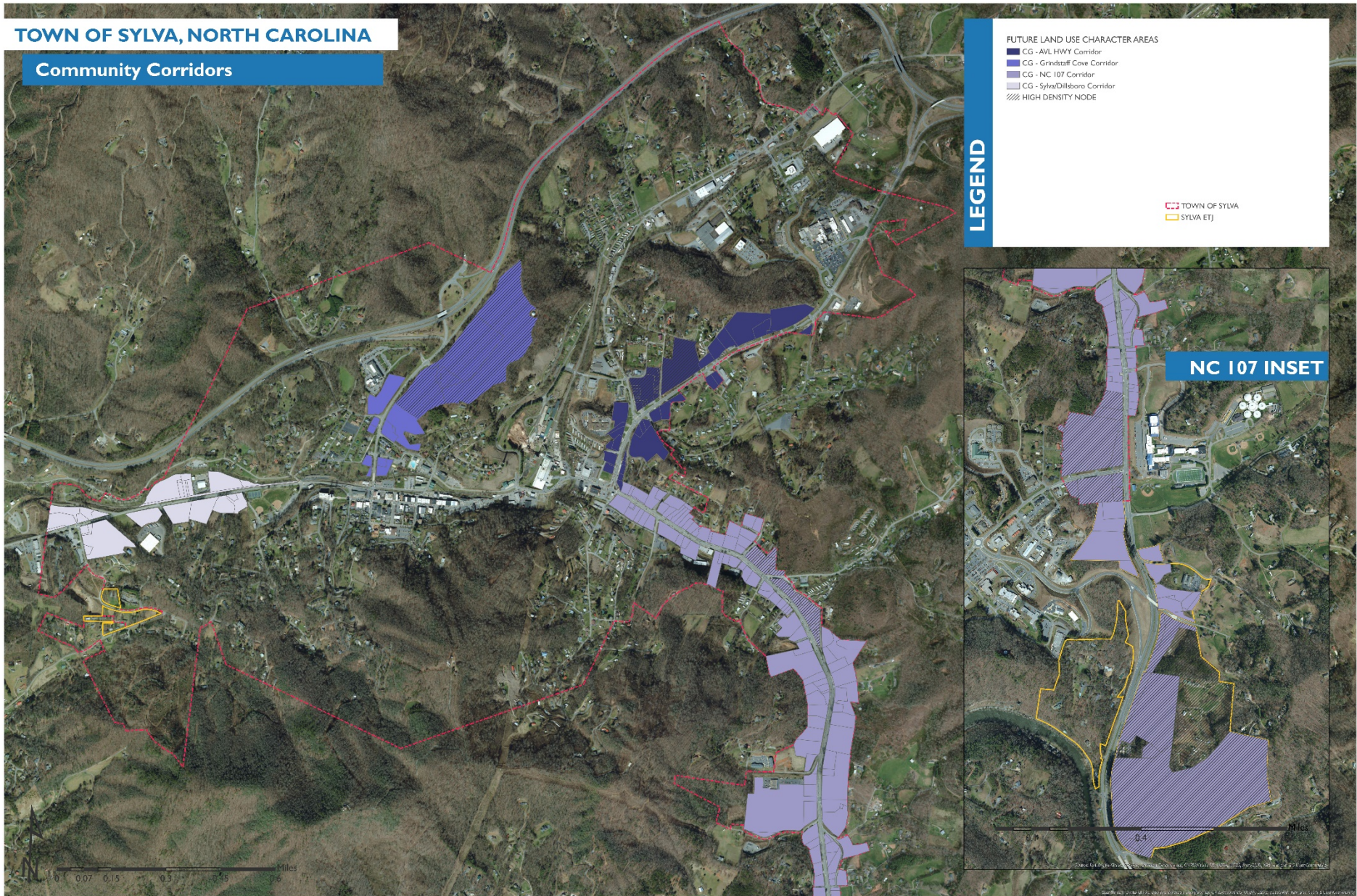


Figure 10: Future Community Corridors



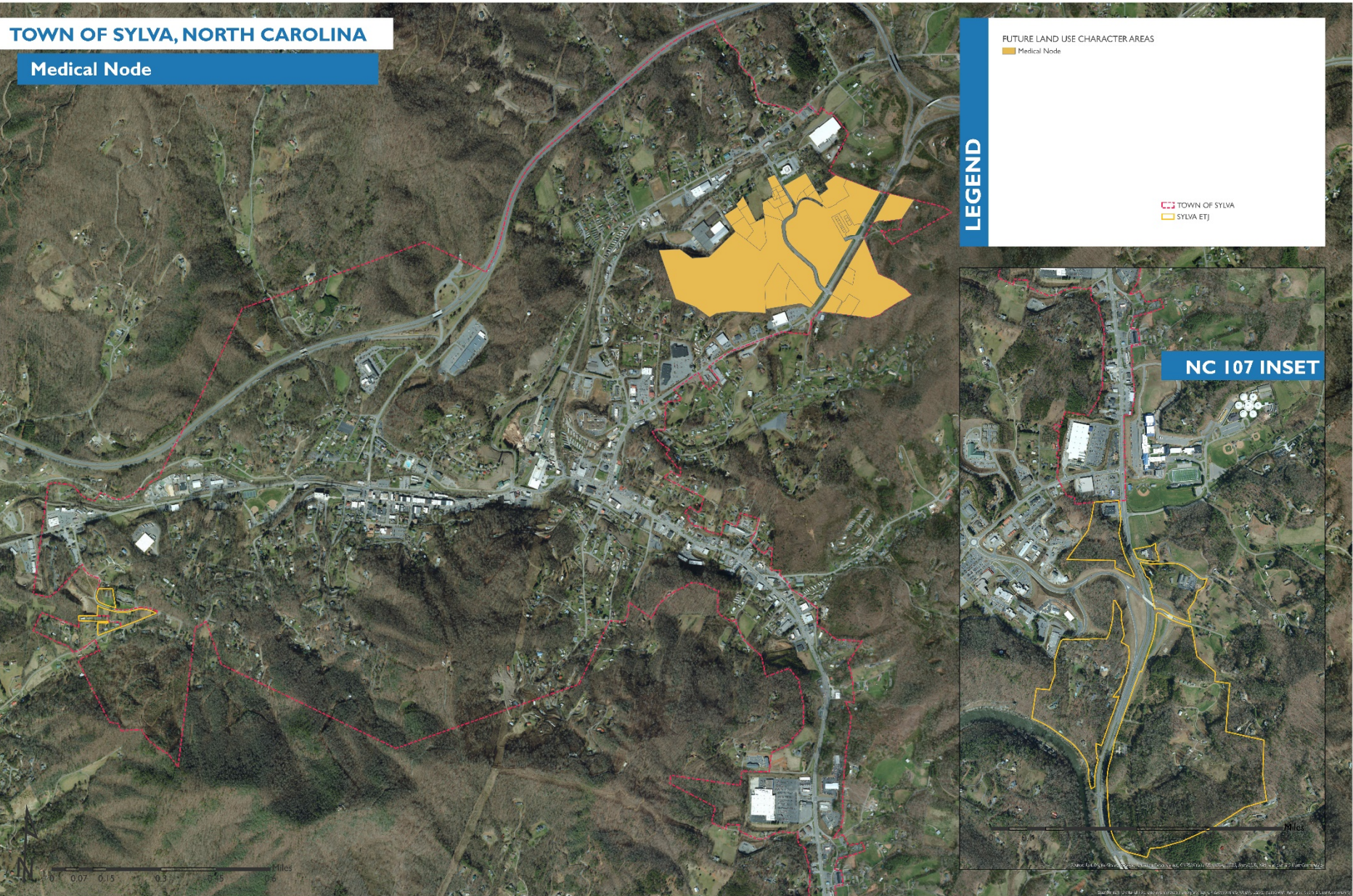


Figure 11: Future Medical Node



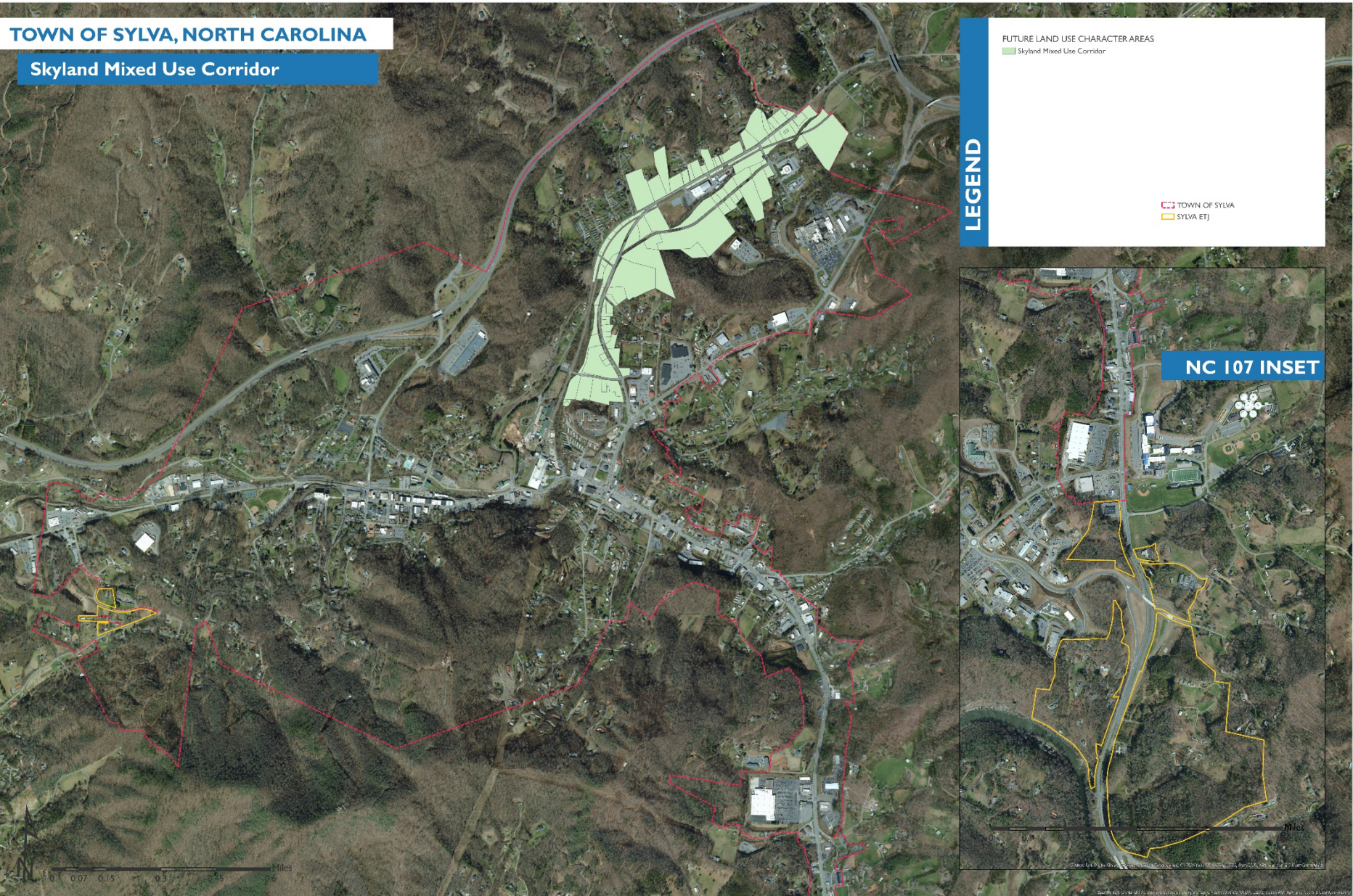


Figure 12: Future Skyland Mixed Use Corridor



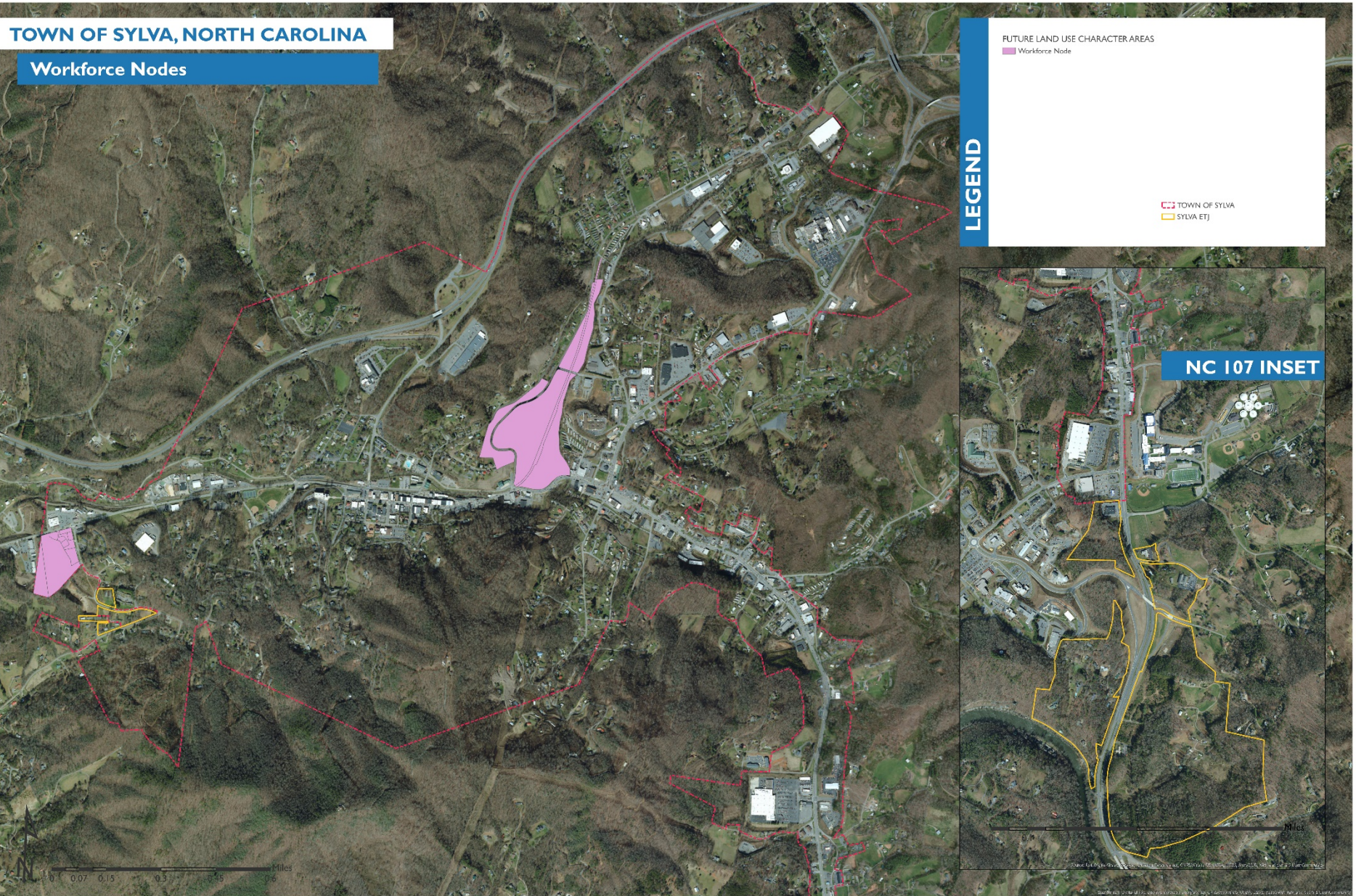


Figure 13: Future Workforce Nodes



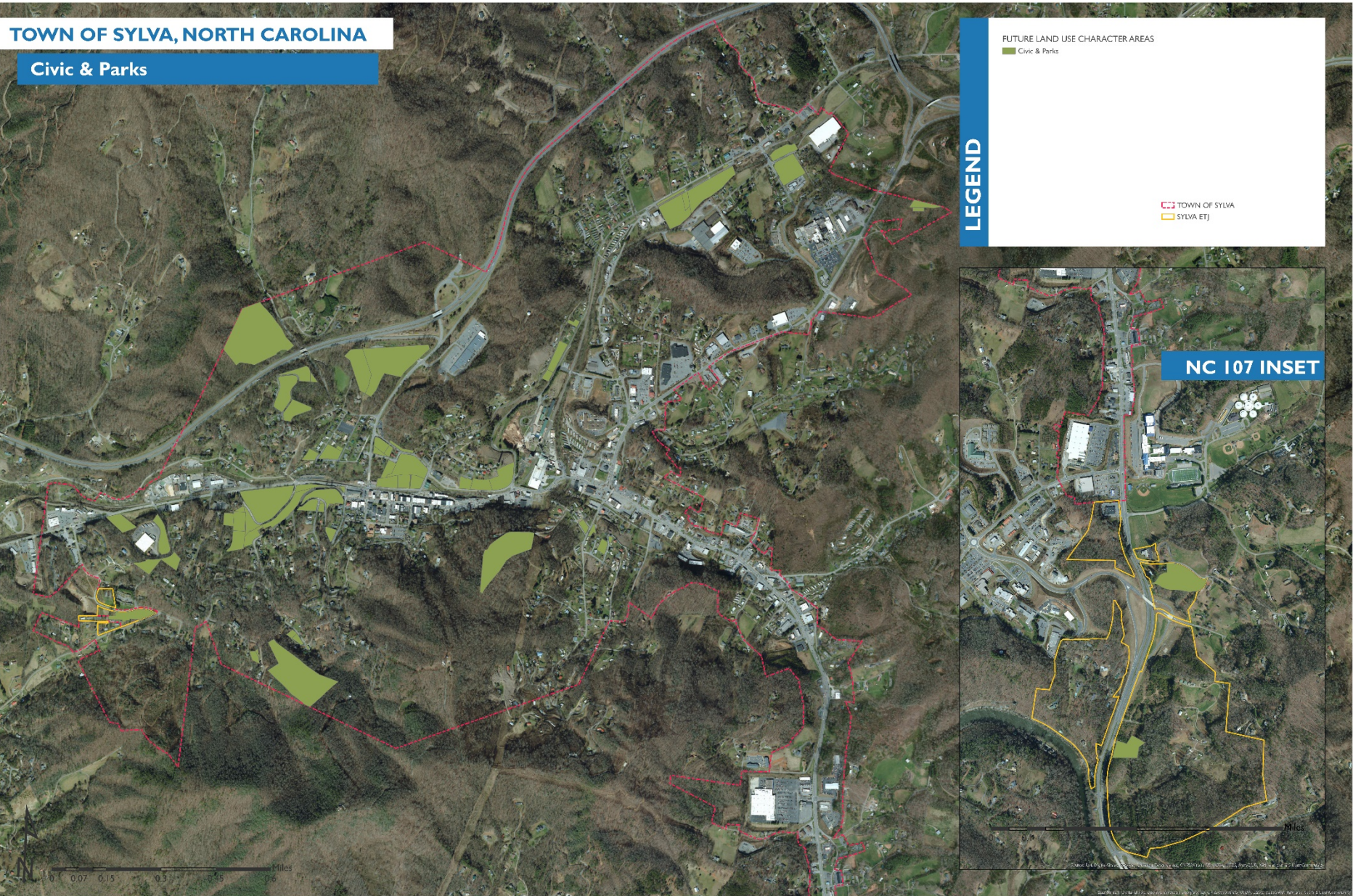


Figure 14: Future Civic and Parks



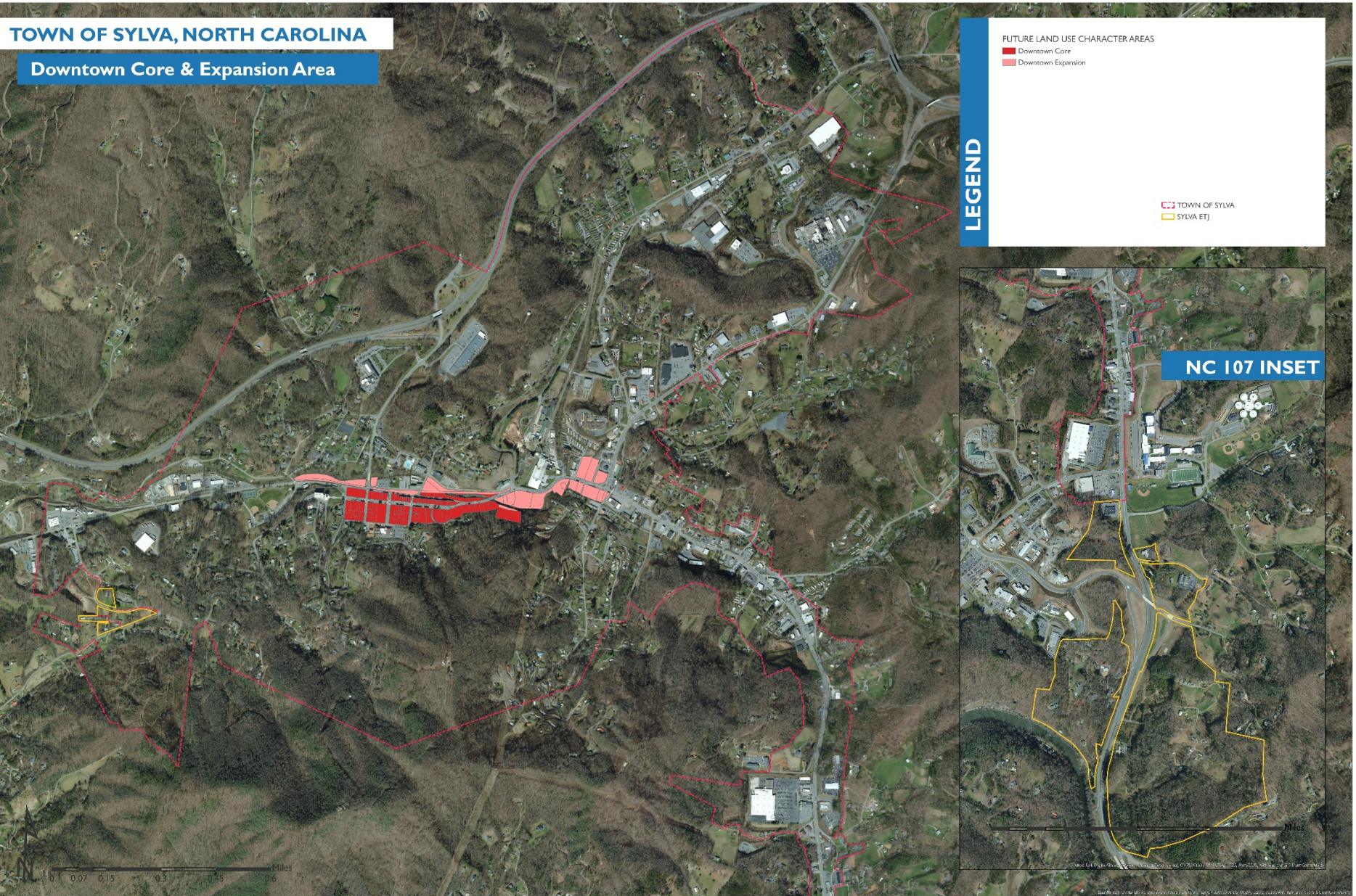


Figure 15: Future Downtown / Downtown Expansion District