



July 5, 2022

**Henderson Mayor and City Council Members
City of Henderson
P.O. Box 1434
Henderson, North Carolina 27536**

Dear Honorable Mayor Ellington and Members of the Henderson City Council:

Goodwill and order in a community is achieved through the fair and consistent administration of laws and ordinances by elected leaders and appointed officials. When unlawful activities, behaviors, and violations of city codes are tolerated without penalty, and these violations overwhelm our current systems, the community suffers.

Thrive becomes Survive
Affordable becomes Deplorable
Contribution becomes Consumption
Appealing become Appalling

If we, the community of local citizens and businesses, have remained silent for too long, please forgive our absence. We believe that Henderson has earned an undesirable and unhealthy reputation of being an unsafe place to live or visit. If we continue to appear that we have tolerance of criminal and undesirable behavior, our city's future is somber. We can no longer afford to rely solely on the hope that things will just get better on their own. It is time for concerned citizens, business leaders, elected leaders, and appointed officials to align by acknowledging the following points:

- 1. Neighborhood and Business Code Enforcement** – The lack of enforcement of our written codes has led to the significant decline in the appeal and safety of neighborhoods and the central business district. These unsightly areas are now growing to become main focal points around the city, with the safety and quality of structures being extremely compromised. The vegetation overgrowth, substandard living conditions, junk that is being allowed to remain, abandoned homes that remain in deplorable condition, have all created an environment of oppressed poverty and crime.

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We believe it sends the wrong message that our city is content with status quo, and we do not care enough to make improvements.

- 2. Drugs and Crime** – The continuing violence and crime creates a perception that Henderson is not a safe place to move to or locate a business. To some outsiders, Henderson is now considered to be a business-friendly city, but unfortunately, to only one type business, and that type being the illegal drug dealer business.

Many neighborhoods are at a level of severe poverty and blight and the local justice system has proven itself to offer slow-to-no enforcement of penalties, thus creating a perfect illegal drug business culture. If this continues, we fear businesses and jobs will flee, or just stay away. This type of community will only take and consume from the next generation that has to survive within it. We must work together to stop this downward spiral of rampant drug use and criminal behavior within our community.

- 3. City Messaging** – It is important for city officials and law enforcement to take immediate action identifying the neighborhood streets with suspected drug houses, abandoned house hang-outs and gang activity, and then add a police presence to protect lawful citizens living there. Placing an immediate priority on, (1) holding the current property owners accountable for not meeting the housing codes and (2) taking immediate steps to condemning those houses where drug deals are being made, is the only fair and law-abiding action. Please research and use creative measures that allow you to take immediate action. Our community cannot tolerate a year-long wait to go through the long, red-tape processes of doing so, as it compromises accountability and promotes negligence. We encourage you to take a bold stance with a consistent message: “This activity will not be tolerated and those that act in this manner will face immediate consequences. Henderson will be a clean and safe community for all who live, work, visit and shop here!”
- 4. Business Friendly** – In order to grow our local economy, we need an efficient system in place for developers beginning the process of starting a business, renovating an existing building, or finding an appealing location to purchase property. Attracting employers, services, and goods to Henderson are integral to creating a vibrant and strong community where citizens can thrive. There are several issues of code, process, and communication hindering progress in this area. Those who want to invest need to know the city departments, city-required processes, and needed permitting up front. Having clear and concise city regulations as a guide, rather than a guard, is the best way to make sure we have a community open for solid, quality-of-life contributing businesses. Also, having a streamlined system in place ensuring equal enforcement of code and compliance standards for existing businesses and structures, and for new start-ups is essential.

- 5. Promoting Healthy Churches, Civic Organizations, and Non-Profits** – There are already many active organizations providing help and hope to Henderson citizens, above and beyond what government is doing. These organizations are local and made possible because of the generous, volunteer spirit of neighbors, caregivers, and people who love this city. These are resources that do not get put into a city budget because they are supported through the time and investments of their volunteers. This type of collective impact is a model of problem-solving which involves different entities (both governmental and non-governmental) working to address a specific social problem. Identifying and promoting these organizations are crucial to a healthy and growing community.

We are grateful to all city staff members for the quality work and service they provide daily. In order for a vibrant and thriving community to exist, we must rely on the City Manager and the City Department Heads to oversee the diligent enforcement of the established laws, codes, and ordinances, many at dangerous and critical levels. In this way, we are a contributing society rather than a consuming one.

We hope you receive this message with a renewed sense of purpose, urgency, and focus. We must address the violence along with the multitude of underlying factors to move from the mode of survive to thrive.

We want to work with you to transform our city into one that will effectively Thrive, Appeal, Afford, Contribute, and Educate. Together we can begin now with a renewed sense of action to address these challenges faced by our community. Please accept these requests willingly and with the knowledge that our community will respond with encouragement, support, and active participation.

Sincerely,

Concerned Business and Community Leaders in Henderson and Vance County