



Strategic Plan: Making Holly Springs a Blue Zone Community

Introduction and Vision

Holly Springs envisions becoming a Blue Zone Community – a town where healthy choices are the easy choices, and residents enjoy longer, healthier lives. This strategic plan outlines a 5–10 year campaign to achieve that vision through evidence-based initiatives in transportation, healthcare access, and family support. By aligning local policies with Blue Zone principles, Holly Springs can foster better health outcomes, stronger community bonds, and sustainable economic growth. The plan is organized into clear focus areas with actionable steps, expected benefits backed by data, funding strategies rooted in the town’s budget reality, and a phased roadmap to guide implementation.

What is a Blue Zone Community?

A **Blue Zone** refers to regions of the world where people live measurably longer and healthier lives. Researchers like Dan Buettner identified common lifestyle habits in these areas – often called the *Power 9* principles – such as natural daily movement, a sense of purpose, stress reduction, healthy eating (primarily plant-based diets in moderate portions), strong family ties, and active social networks [bchd.org](https://www.bchd.org). A Blue Zone Community applies these habits at the local level by shaping policies and environments to make well-being a default. In practice, this means optimizing the “Life Radius” – the places where residents spend 90% of their lives (homes, streets, schools, workplaces, markets, parks, faith centers) – so that healthy choices are accessible and automatic med.jax.ufl.edu. Core Blue Zone principles include:

- **Move Naturally:** Design neighborhoods and public spaces for walking, biking, and active living rather than car dependence [bchd.org](https://www.bchd.org). Small daily activities – walking to shops or parks, taking stairs – add up to better fitness.
- **Right Outlook (Purpose & Relaxation):** Encourage a sense of purpose (“why I wake up in the morning”) and provide opportunities to unwind. Communities benefit from places and programs that help people connect, de-stress, and find meaning in civic life [bchd.org](https://www.bchd.org).
- **Eat Wisely:** Support access to healthy foods and social eating. Blue Zone living emphasizes more fruits and vegetables, local produce, and moderation (like Okinawans’ 80% full rule). Town policies can promote farmers markets, community gardens, and healthy food options in public facilities.
- **Connect (Social & Family):** Prioritize family-friendly policies and social engagement. In Blue Zones, families remain close-knit and neighbors form tight circles that support



healthy behaviors. Communities flourish when people of all ages can gather, volunteer, and participate in civic life.

By adopting these principles, Holly Springs will join other forward-thinking towns that have launched Blue Zone initiatives to improve quality of life. The following sections detail strategic local initiatives in three key areas – traffic flow, healthcare access, and support for working families – aligned with Blue Zone goals.

Strategic Initiatives Aligned with Blue Zone Goals

1. Better Traffic Flow: Walkability and Microtransit

Goal: Transform Holly Springs' transportation infrastructure to make walking, biking, and transit safe and convenient, thereby reducing car traffic and encouraging natural daily movement.

- **Improve Walkability:** Invest in pedestrian-friendly street design, sidewalks, greenways, and bike lanes. We will accelerate implementation of the Town's pedestrian and greenway plans (e.g. completing sidewalk gaps on Avent Ferry Road and other key corridors). A "Complete Streets" or "Living Streets" policy will be adopted to ensure every new road project includes bike/pedestrian accommodations. Notably, Blue Zone communities have seen success by doing this – for example, California's Beach Cities secured \$8.1 million in grants for bike paths and walkability improvements info.bluezonesproject.com, contributing to a *25% drop in overweight adults* over seven years info.bluezonesproject.com. Holly Springs can pursue state and federal grants (e.g. NCDOT pedestrian grants, Safe Routes to School funding) to finance sidewalk and crosswalk projects. An early target is to add at least 5 miles of new sidewalks and greenways in the first 5 years, focusing on connections to schools, parks, and shopping areas. Enhancing walkability will not only improve health but also traffic flow – fewer short car trips means less congestion. It will also boost local businesses by increasing foot traffic in a more vibrant, walkable downtown.
- **Expand Microtransit Services:** Building on plans already underway, the Town will launch and gradually expand an on-demand microtransit shuttle system to provide an alternative to driving. Holly Springs is slated to introduce a new app-based microtransit service by early 2026 as part of the Wake County transit plan hollyspringsupdate.com. This service will operate small shuttles that residents can request via smartphone or phone call, similar to Uber/Lyft but publicly operated. In a December 2024 Town Council workshop, members embraced a "crawl, walk, run" phased approach – starting small and scaling up based on demand – to ensure microtransit is cost-effective and tailored to community needs hollyspringsupdate.com. We will follow this model: Phase 1 (Year 1-2) will launch microtransit in high-need zones (e.g. senior communities, dense neighborhoods) during peak hours. Phase 2 (Year 3-5) will expand coverage town-wide, increase hours to evenings/weekends, and integrate with regional transit (connections to



Apex/Cary transit routes and park-and-ride lots). Microtransit will improve traffic flow by reducing single-passenger car trips, and it will serve residents who lack easy access to a car (teens, elderly, those with disabilities). By Year 5, success will be measured by ridership and satisfaction targets (e.g. >10,000 rides in year 1, 90%+ rider satisfaction). As seen elsewhere, on-demand transit fills the gaps between fixed bus routes and ride-hailing, making public transport more flexible n-catt.org. With microtransit, commuters can reach workplaces (including the emerging biotech park), students can get to school or the library, and seniors can travel to appointments – all without adding to road traffic.

- **Traffic Calming & Safety:** Alongside promoting walking and transit, the Town will implement traffic-calming measures to improve safety and encourage slower, steadier traffic flow. This includes adding crosswalks and pedestrian signals, lowering speed limits in residential and downtown areas, and redesigning dangerous intersections. A “Vision Zero” approach (aiming for zero traffic fatalities) will be pursued. Safe streets encourage more walking and biking, creating a virtuous cycle: as more people opt to walk or shuttle, congestion eases for those who do need to drive. In Blue Zone cities, such safety-focused improvements have had dramatic effects – *Hermosa Beach, CA’s “Living Streets” policy* earned national recognition for prioritizing pedestrians and cyclists info.bluezonesproject.com. We expect that by making key corridors pedestrian-friendly (e.g. Main Street, Holly Springs Rd, NC-55 crossings), the town will see fewer car accidents and an uptick in active commuting (walking or cycling to work and school).

Community Example: *Albert Lea, MN (a Blue Zone pilot city) added 10+ miles of sidewalks/bike lanes and saw a 38% increase in trail usage, revitalizing its downtown with more foot traffic* info.bluezonesproject.com. Holly Springs can mirror this success – envision a lively, walkable downtown where festivals, farmers markets, and everyday errands bring people together without always needing a car.

Students participating in a “Walking School Bus” – a parent-supervised group walk to school – in a Blue Zones community. Encouraging children to walk or bike to school improves fitness and reduces traffic congestion. In California’s Beach Cities, initiatives like this contributed to a 68% reduction in childhood obesity over a decade info.bluezonesproject.com. Holly Springs will partner with local schools to launch walking school bus programs and safe routes that allow kids to get to school actively and safely.

2. Better Access to Care: Town-Wide Direct Primary Care System

Goal: Ensure all residents have access to affordable, preventive healthcare by establishing a Direct Primary Care (DPC) network in Holly Springs, inspired by Union County’s successful model. Better access to care aligns with Blue Zone principles of preventative health and lower stress, by making medical care more personal, convenient, and cost-effective.



- **Learn from Union County's Success:** In 2015, Union County, NC became the first county in the state to offer a DPC option for its employees. Under DPC, patients pay a flat monthly membership fee for unlimited primary care visits, with no insurance bureaucracy, allowing doctors to focus on preventive care and longer visitsjohnlocke.orgjohnlocke.org. The results have been impressive. Union County saved about \$1 million in healthcare costs in the first year of DPC by dramatically reducing expensive ER visits, specialist referrals, and hospitalizationscarolinajournal.com. On a per-person basis, employees on the DPC plan cost 26% less per month than those on a traditional insurance planjohnlocke.org. Quality of care improved too: 99% of participants reported a positive experience and easier access to their doctor, and 79% said their health improved after switching to DPCjohnlocke.orgjohnlocke.org. These statistics highlight DPC's potential to improve health outcomes while cutting costs – a win-win that Holly Springs aims to replicate town-wide.
- **Implement a Holly Springs DPC Network:** The strategic plan proposes a phased implementation of direct primary care for the Holly Springs community:
 - **Phase 1 (Years 1-2):** Partner with a DPC provider or local physician group to establish a flagship DPC clinic in Holly Springs. We can start by offering this benefit to Town of Holly Springs employees and their families as a pilot group (as Union County did). This immediately benefits roughly 200–300 families and demonstrates the model's value. The town's HR department can negotiate a group rate (e.g. ~\$60 per member per month) with a DPC provider. Based on Union County's experience, we anticipate substantial savings on the town's employee insurance costs, which can offset the membership feescarolinajournal.comjohnlocke.org. During this phase, the Town will also facilitate community information sessions about DPC – educating residents and local businesses on how it works and its benefits.
 - **Phase 2 (Years 3-5):** Expand the DPC network to all residents who wish to join. This could involve recruiting additional primary care physicians to open DPC practices in town or partnering with an existing DPC company to scale up capacity. One approach is a public-private partnership: for example, the town could provide a small seed subsidy or no-cost lease for clinic space to encourage new practices to open, while local employers (our growing biotech firms, schools, etc.) are invited to include the DPC option for their employees. By Year 5, our target is to have at least one DPC clinic per 10,000 residents (approximately 4–5 clinics serving the town and immediate area) and 20% of Holly Springs households enrolled in a DPC program either through their employer or individually. We will measure success by tracking reductions in preventable ER visits, improvements in management of chronic conditions, and patient satisfaction surveys.



- **Phase 3 (Years 6-10):** Integrate the DPC system into a broader “Healthy Holly Springs” initiative. This could include telehealth services for DPC members, a referral network with local specialists at discounted rates, and even exploring a municipal direct-care program for uninsured residents. For instance, Union County already offers community health services for uninsured adults unioncountync.gov – Holly Springs can partner with county public health or a nonprofit to extend free/low-cost DPC to vulnerable populations (perhaps funded by grants). By the end of decade, Holly Springs would essentially have a town-wide healthcare network focusing on prevention: easy access to primary care, health coaching, and early intervention. This aligns perfectly with Blue Zone values of preventative healthcare and stress reduction (residents won’t have to worry as much about affording basic care).
- **Expected Outcomes:** A town-wide DPC system will yield healthier and happier residents and could make Holly Springs a model for healthcare innovation in North Carolina. Union County’s data suggests we can expect lower healthcare costs for families and employers (20–30% reductions), better control of chronic diseases (since patients can see their doctor more often without extra cost), and higher patient satisfaction johnlocke.org johnlocke.org. In fact, after Union County adopted DPC, 77% of their employees said their opinion of their employer improved johnlocke.org – indicating that offering such a benefit is a boon to morale and could help attract top talent to live and work in Holly Springs. By keeping our population healthier, we also reduce strain on emergency services and potentially lower insurance premiums town-wide. In the long run, a healthier community is more productive and civically engaged. This initiative complements the Blue Zone emphasis on preventative care, ensuring that residents not only live longer but enjoy more years of healthy, active life.

3. Better Support for Working Families: Family-Friendly Policies and Community Engagement

Goal: Make Holly Springs one of the most family-friendly towns in North Carolina by adopting policies and programs that help working parents balance work and life, provide enriching opportunities for youth, and build strong social connections. Supporting families aligns with Blue Zone principles of “Loved Ones First” and community belonging – when families thrive, the whole community thrives.

- **Promote Family-Friendly Workplace Policies:** The Town Council will lead by example, implementing progressive workplace policies for municipal employees and encouraging local businesses to do the same. This includes exploring options like flexible work hours, remote work opportunities, extended paid family leave, sick leave usable for family care, and childcare assistance. Research shows that such family-friendly workplace practices lead to better health and well-being outcomes for children and their parents ednc.org. For instance, allowing parents to adjust schedules can reduce stress (a Blue Zone goal of



down-shifting stress) and enable healthier routines at home. Holly Springs will participate in initiatives like Family Forward NC, a statewide program certifying employers with family-friendly benefits. (Notably, Greensboro is on track to become the first Family Forward NC certified community by 2025, with over a dozen employers already certified [ednc.org](https://www.familyforwardnc.org). Holly Springs can set a similar goal to certify local employers.) By Year 3, we aim for the Town of Holly Springs to be a Family Forward certified employer, and to launch a “Holly Springs Family-Friendly Business” recognition program that spotlights private employers who offer flex schedules, onsite or subsidized childcare, wellness programs, and generous leave. We will partner with the Holly Springs Chamber of Commerce to provide a toolkit and possibly local incentives (such as a modest business tax rebate or public awards) for companies that adopt these practices. The payoff is substantial: family-friendly companies have more productive employees, lower turnover, and contribute to a healthier community [ednc.org](https://www.familyforwardnc.org).

- **Expand Access to Childcare and Early Education:** A Blue Zone community values children and supports parents. Holly Springs will work to increase the availability of quality, affordable childcare and preschool options. This could involve incentivizing new childcare centers through fast-track permitting or public-private partnerships, and expanding Town-run programs. For example, we might partner with Wake County Public Schools or local nonprofits to create an affordable after-school program in every elementary school and a summer “Camp Blue Zones” that combines physical activity, healthy snacks, and learning. If space is an issue, the Town can use community centers or parks facilities for after-school care and seek grant funding to subsidize costs for families in need. By alleviating the childcare crunch, we reduce stress on working parents (aligning with Blue Zone stress reduction) and ensure kids have safe, active environments (aligning with Blue Zone active lifestyles).
- **Community Engagement & Social Networks:** To foster the strong social connections that Blue Zones are known for, Holly Springs will invest in community-building events and infrastructure:
 - **Regular Community Events:** Organize monthly family-friendly events such as outdoor concerts, street festivals, “open streets” days where a downtown street closes to cars for walking and biking, and volunteer service days. These events encourage neighbors to meet and mingle, reducing isolation. Blue Zones emphasize the importance of social circles (“Right Tribe”) – people with strong social networks are happier and live longer. Thus, part of our plan is to facilitate the formation of interest-based community groups or “Moais” (a Blue Zone term for a group of friends with common interests). For example, we’ll support walking groups, biking clubs, parent meet-up groups, and senior hobby clubs through the Parks & Recreation department. By Year 2, we’ll launch a “Holly Springs Walking” program that organizes weekly group walks on our greenways for anyone to join, promoting exercise and socializing.



- **Volunteerism and Civic Participation:** Create more opportunities for families to engage together in civic life. This includes family-oriented volunteer projects (tree plantings, park clean-ups where parents and kids can volunteer together) and intergenerational programs (pairing youth with seniors for mentorship, for example). We will establish a Blue Zone Community Advisory Council of citizen volunteers (including parents, teens, seniors, local business and faith leaders) to guide and champion these initiatives. This council will host quarterly “town hall walks” – literally walking meetings open to all residents to discuss community issues while strolling through a park or neighborhood. Such innovative engagement not only gathers feedback but also models the active lifestyle we want to promote.
- **Support Networks for Families:** Partner with local organizations to support families in times of need, reducing the kind of chronic stress that harms health. For instance, work with churches and nonprofits to strengthen the neighbor-to-neighbor support system – perhaps a program where volunteers deliver meals or run errands for families with a new baby or a medical issue. Also, explore creating a “Holly Springs Time Bank” or skill exchange where residents can swap services (e.g., tutoring, minor home repairs, childcare), building community reciprocity and trust. These efforts resonate with Blue Zone practices of social support and altruism which have been linked to better well-being.

Policy Alignment: To cement these changes, the Town Council can pass a resolution or incorporate into the Town’s comprehensive plan a commitment to “Family-Friendly Blue Zone Principles.” This might formalize goals like accessible childcare, flexible work, and community health in town policy. By doing so, Holly Springs sends a clear message: we value families and community connections. In turn, this makes the town more attractive for families considering moving here and for employers who depend on a stable, happy workforce. Mayor Nancy Vaughan of Greensboro noted that being a family-forward city helps *“attract talent... and lead the way in recruitment and retention of employees.”*[ednc.org](https://www.ednc.org) Likewise, Holly Springs will leverage its family-friendly reputation to draw in businesses (particularly those in the knowledge and biotech sectors that prioritize quality of life for employees).

Expected Benefits for Holly Springs

By pursuing these Blue Zone-aligned initiatives, Holly Springs can expect a range of health, economic, and social benefits – many of which have been demonstrated in other communities that undertook similar journeys. Below is a summary of key expected outcomes, supported by data and examples:

- **Improved Health Outcomes:** Residents will enjoy longer lives with less chronic disease. Blue Zones Projects elsewhere have yielded *double-digit reductions* in major



health risk factors. For example, in Beach Cities, CA, the overweight rate dropped by 25% and smoking by 36% after several years of community wellness initiativesinfo.bluezonesproject.com. Fort Worth, TX saw smoking decrease by 31%, along with notable declines in high cholesterol and blood pressure, in just four years of its Blue Zones Projectinfo.bluezonesproject.com. We anticipate similar trends in Holly Springs over time: lower obesity and smoking rates, and improvements in metrics like physical activity and fruit/vegetable consumption. As a tangible goal, the town can aim to increase its overall health index ranking into the top tier in North Carolina. (Fort Worth's well-being index ranking leapt from near the bottom of U.S. metro areas to the top third after its Blue Zone effortinfo.bluezonesproject.com, showing what's possibleinfo.bluezonesproject.com.) One especially inspiring case is Albert Lea, MN – the pilot Blue Zone city – which reportedly *added 3 years to its residents' life expectancy* through community-wide changes, and cut city worker healthcare costs by 40%med.jax.ufl.edu. While individual longevity is hard to measure in the short term, we can track proxies like reduced Medicare costs, lower prevalence of diabetes and heart disease, etc., expecting positive movement within 5–10 years.

- **Economic Development and Cost Savings:** A healthier community is also a more prosperous one. Health-related cost savings will accrue to both families and the local government:
 - **Healthcare Savings:** As noted, the direct primary care initiative could save the town and local employers significantly on healthcare expenditures (Union County saved \$1M in year onecarolinajournal.com). Additionally, healthier residents mean lower healthcare utilization overall; these savings often translate into more disposable income and productivity. For employers, including the Town itself, reduced sick days and higher employee wellness can improve output. Fort Worth employers, for instance, reported a “healthier, less costly workforce” – one large employer saw a 16% drop in medical claims and 26% drop in pharmacy claims after engaging with the Blue Zones programinfo.bluezonesproject.com.
 - **Attracting Investment and Talent:** Holly Springs is already attracting biotech companies and jobs; being a Blue Zone community will amplify this effect. Companies are drawn to locations with a high quality of life for employees. A community known for its health amenities (parks, trails, events) and progressive policies will stand out in the Triangle region. We anticipate higher talent retention and recruitment success for local businesses as Holly Springs gains a reputation as “the healthiest town in NC.” The civic pride generated can be huge – Fort Worth recorded an ~9% increase in civic pride and a 14% increase in residents who consider themselves “thriving” during its Blue Zones projectinfo.bluezonesproject.cominfo.bluezonesproject.com. Thriving, proud residents become city ambassadors, further attracting visitors and new residents.



- **Downtown Revitalization and Tourism:** Walkability and community events will bring more people downtown, boosting local shops and restaurants. As seen in Albert Lea, creating a bikeable, walkable environment revitalized the downtown area info.bluezonesproject.com – storefront vacancies fell and new businesses opened to cater to increased foot traffic. Holly Springs can expect similar outcomes: more patrons for local businesses, higher property values in pedestrian-friendly districts, and possibly an uptick in health tourism (other towns' leaders visiting to learn from our model, etc.). Blue Zones communities often receive national media attention for their successes, which in turn can spur tourism and external investment. (Beach Cities, CA and Fort Worth were featured in hundreds of media stories, raising their profile info.bluezonesproject.com info.bluezonesproject.com.)
- **Reduced Traffic Costs:** By mitigating traffic congestion (through microtransit and walking), we also reduce the economic losses associated with traffic (wasted time, fuel, accidents). There is also an environmental and cost benefit: fewer car trips mean lower emissions and potentially lower infrastructure strain (less need for expensive road widenings in the long run).
- **Community Cohesion and Quality of Life:** The ultimate goal is a tighter-knit, more **cohesive community**. As families engage in the initiatives – walking groups, volunteering, attending events – social capital will grow. We expect increases in measures of community connectedness (survey items like “Do you have someone to count on?” or voter participation rates). In Albert Lea, community pride rose 12% and *40% of citizens got involved* in the Blue Zones Project activities info.bluezonesproject.com info.bluezonesproject.com, indicating broad engagement. We anticipate Holly Springs residents will likewise take ownership of this Blue Zone transformation. This collective efficacy can have spillover effects: lower crime rates (as neighbors look out for each other), higher volunteerism, and an inclusive atmosphere where newcomers feel welcome. A specific benefit for families will be the support networks formed – parents meeting through school walking groups, neighbors starting community gardens, etc., all of which contribute to that sense of “we’re in this together.” As one Jacksonville Blue Zones partner put it, these initiatives “*make [the city] a better place to live, work, and play*” for everyone med.jax.ufl.edu. In Holly Springs, success will mean that in 10 years residents report greater happiness and satisfaction living here, and children growing up in town will inherit a culture of health and community.



To summarize these expected benefits in context, consider Table 1 below which compares a few Blue Zone project results with our goals for Holly Springs:

Community (Program)	Population	Key Outcomes Achieved	Relevance to Holly Springs
<i>Beach Cities, CA (Blue Zones)</i>	126,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overweight adults down 25%info.bluezonesproject.com - Smoking rate down 36%info.bluezonesproject.com - Childhood obesity down 68% in schoolsinfo.bluezonesproject.com 	Sets health improvement benchmarks (20–30% drops in risk factors) for HS; highlights importance of school wellness programs.
<i>Fort Worth, TX (Blue Zones)</i>	874,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smoking rate down 31%info.bluezonesproject.com - High blood pressure down 7%info.bluezonesproject.com - “Thriving” residents up 14%info.bluezonesproject.com - Civic pride up 8.8%info.bluezonesproject.com 	Shows that even larger cities achieved major health shifts in ~5 years. HS can similarly reduce smoking/heart risk and boost civic pride by engaging thousands of residents (Fort Worth had 88k participants) info.bluezonesproject.com .
<i>Albert Lea, MN (Blue Zones)</i>	18,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life expectancy +3 yearsmed.jax.ufl.edu - Smoking down 35%info.bluezonesproject.com - Community pride up 12%info.bluezonesproject.com - 10 miles of new sidewalks/trails builtinfo.bluezonesproject.com 	Demonstrates the impact of built environment changes on health and downtown economy. HS can replicate by expanding trails/sidewalks and expecting healthier, more active citizens.
Holly Springs, NC (Goal)	46,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measurable drops in obesity, smoking, and chronic disease rates (target: 20%+ decline in 5–8 yrs) - Higher well-being index ranking in NC (top 10%) - Majority of residents engaged in at least one wellness program or event annually - Recognized as a model healthy community in NC (Blue Zone certified or equivalent) 	With strong implementation, HS can achieve similar outcomes adjusted for our size. Success means longer healthy lifespan for residents, a vibrant downtown, lower healthcare costs, and a community widely regarded as the healthiest family-friendly town in the state.



Table 1: Comparative outcomes from Blue Zone communities and projected goals for Holly Springs. These examples show that significant health and social improvements are achievable through a comprehensive well-being initiative. info.bluezonesproject.cominfo.bluezonesproject.commed.jax.ufl.edu

Funding Mechanisms and Budget Considerations

Making Holly Springs a Blue Zone community is a worthwhile investment, but it must be financed realistically. This plan emphasizes **fiscally responsible strategies**, leveraging existing resources, grants, and partnerships to minimize the burden on local taxpayers. Below we outline how each major initiative can be funded, in alignment with Holly Springs' budget and spending patterns:

- **Municipal Budget Reallocation:** Holly Springs' FY 2025–26 budget is \$117.7 million (with a \$65.1M General Fund for core services) hollyspringsupdate.com. The town has a history of prudent fiscal management – keeping one of the lowest property tax rates in Wake County hollyspringsupdate.com – so any new program must be efficient and evidence-backed. Fortunately, many Blue Zone initiatives are as much about *reallocating priorities* as new spending. For example, the microtransit service is already in the capital plan and will operate on weekdays with a modest fleet – it can be funded through the existing Wake Transit tax revenues and a small allocation in the transportation budget (the Wake County Transit Work Plan has earmarked funding for new microtransit programs in Holly Springs starting 2026 waketransit.org). Similarly, building more sidewalks and bike lanes can be integrated into the town's capital improvement program for roads – e.g., when Holly Springs Road is widened, include sidepaths at marginal additional cost. The town can also repurpose positions or funds from lower-impact areas to higher-impact health initiatives: the recent budget already repurposed 4 vacant positions to critical needs hollyspringsupdate.com, showing a willingness to redirect resources. Over the next 5 years, we propose dedicating a small percentage (e.g. 1–2%) of the General Fund annually to Blue Zone programs – that's roughly \$600k–\$1.2M per year at current budget size. This can support staffing for a Wellness Coordinator, matching funds for grants, and seed funding for pilot programs. By doing so within the existing growth of the budget (which increased ~10% last year due to growth) hollyspringsupdate.com, we can avoid tax rate increases while still funding these priorities.
- **Grants and External Funding:** There are numerous state and federal grants available that align with Blue Zone initiatives:
 - *Transportation Grants:* Pursue NCDOT's Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning grants, federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grants for greenways, and Safe Routes to School grants (federal highway safety funds) to build sidewalks near schools. For example, Fort Worth obtained \$6.2M in Safe Routes to School infrastructure funding around schools as part of its Blue Zone



workinfo.bluezonesproject.com. Holly Springs can similarly target school zones for safety improvements with grant support. Additionally, as we plan to introduce electric shuttles for microtransit in later phases, we can seek funds from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) LoNo Emission Vehicle program or VW settlement grants for electric vehicles; Fort Worth secured over \$4M for electric buses for their transit fleetinfo.bluezonesproject.com.

- *Health and Wellness Grants:* The Town (or partners) should apply for grants focused on community health improvement. The Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC Foundation offers grants for healthy communities and could be a natural ally – notably, Blue Cross foundations in other states have funded Blue Zone projects (e.g., Blue Cross of Texas gave \$5M to support Fort Worth’s Blue Zones Project)philanthropynewsdigest.org. We will engage Blue Cross NC, UNC Health, and WakeMed about sponsoring aspects of our plan (for instance, funding a farmers market expansion or a community garden initiative). The American Heart Association in NC also provides mini-grants for healthy food access and active livingheart.org/mediacenter/bcbsnc.com, which could support our farmers market, “walking school bus,” or park programs. On the healthcare front, if we expand DPC to uninsured residents, NC DHHS Community Health Grants (which fund access to preventive primary care) could help subsidize those membershipsncdhhs.gov.
- *Parks and Recreation Grants:* To bolster our family and social initiatives, we can seek grants like the National Park Service’s “Healthy Parks Healthy People” grants, state recreation trail grants, or private grants from foundations interested in youth wellness. Also, since Holly Springs voters approved a Parks bond in 2023 (for Eagles Landing Park)hollyspringsupdate.com, any future bond referendums could include Blue Zone-related projects (like new greenways, recreation facilities) – with voter support likely high for quality-of-life improvements.
- *Blue Zones Project Support:* We will explore formally partnering with the Blue Zones Project organization (the consultancy that helped Fort Worth, Albert Lea, etc.). Often, Blue Zones Project efforts are co-funded by local sponsors (e.g., hospitals, insurers) and provide expert guidance. For instance, Jacksonville’s Blue Zones launch was funded by a coalition of area hospitals and nonprofits, with Baptist Health financing the initial assessmentmed.jax.ufl.edu. If needed, we will gather a similar coalition here: UNC Rex Holly Springs Hospital, WakeMed, and big employers (Amgen, Seqirus, etc.) could collectively sponsor a Blue Zones Project contract for Holly Springs. This would bring in expert staff to help implement policies and measure progress, at a cost that could be shared. Given our burgeoning biotech sector investing \$500M+ in the areahollyspringsupdate.com, there’s an opportunity to ask those companies to reinvest in the community’s well-being (e.g., through



corporate social responsibility funds or a health foundation they may endow).

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Many parts of this plan can be executed via partnerships that reduce direct public spending:
 - *Employer Partnerships:* Encourage large employers (including the Town, Wake County Public Schools, and private companies in Holly Springs) to share costs on certain programs. For instance, the Town might negotiate a deal with a fitness center for discounted family memberships for all town residents or employees (the company gains business, residents get healthier). Or partner with local farms and grocery stores to create a “Blue Zones Restaurant/Grocery” program, where participating businesses agree to offer healthier options – the town’s role could simply be promotional. In return, these businesses might sponsor community events or contribute to a wellness fund.
 - *Healthcare Partnerships:* Work with providers like UNC Rex (which has a campus in Holly Springs) to support the direct care model. Perhaps UNC or another health system could operate the DPC clinic or provide staff, with the town subsidizing only the membership fee for certain populations. In Jacksonville’s Blue Zones coalition, GuideWell (Florida Blue) and Brooks Rehabilitation joined forces with the city for broad health goals [med.jax.ufl.edu](https://med.jax.ufl.edu/med.jax.ufl.edu). We can replicate this by having key health organizations represented on our Blue Zone Advisory Council, each contributing expertise or funding to initiatives within their sphere (e.g., a hospital might fund an annual health fair or free screenings program).
 - *Community Organizations:* Leverage civic groups (Rotary, PTA, churches) to adopt pieces of the plan. For example, PTA groups can coordinate walking school buses (with minimal funding, mostly volunteer time), and faith communities might host “purpose workshops” or support groups that align with Blue Zone outlook principles. By spreading ownership, we lighten the load on the town budget and build grassroots support.
- **Maintain Budgetary Discipline:** Throughout implementation, we will monitor ROI (return on investment) for each initiative. Some actions (like policy changes for work flexibility) cost little but have high impact. Other investments (like infrastructure) are capital-intensive but one-time. We will prioritize “low-hanging fruit” first – things like starting a weekly walking group or launching a pilot DPC for employees have nominal costs but can show quick wins. As outcomes improve (healthcare savings, lower emergency calls, etc.), we can justify scaling up investment. Importantly, by improving public health, the town may save money in other departments long-term (for example, fewer medical emergencies and strain on EMS). Should additional funding be needed, we would pursue it via grants or community fundraising before considering any tax changes. The plan is designed to be sustainable: many components become



self-sufficient or cost-saving over time (e.g., DPC lowers insurance costs, microtransit can eventually replace the need for more road expansions, etc.).

In summary, funding this Blue Zone initiative is feasible through smart use of current resources and aggressive pursuit of outside funds. Just as other Blue Zone communities have attracted grants and private dollars (they have reported millions in grant funding awards to support health policies med.jax.ufl.edu), Holly Springs will position itself as a worthy candidate for investment. Careful financial planning ensures that the health of our community can improve hand-in-hand with the health of our town budget.

Implementation Roadmap (5–10 Year Plan)

Achieving Blue Zone Community status is a long-term endeavor. Below is a phased roadmap breaking down the plan into milestones across 5, 7, and 10-year horizons, along with strategies for keeping the community engaged at every step. This roadmap is designed to be adaptive – we will review progress annually and adjust as needed, learning from what works best in Holly Springs.

Phase 1: Foundation Building (Years 1–2)

Milestones:

- **Official Commitment:** In Year 1, pass a Town Council resolution declaring the goal of becoming a Blue Zone Community and establishing a *Blue Zone Task Force* to oversee the effort. This task force (or advisory council) will include town staff, health professionals, business and school representatives, and citizen advocates. It will meet monthly to coordinate initiatives.
- **Baseline Assessment:** Conduct a community well-being assessment (possibly using Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index or similar) to get baseline health metrics (rates of obesity, smoking, etc.), walkability scores, transit usage, and feedback from residents on needs. This provides a yardstick to measure future progress. If partnering with the Blue Zones Project organization, Year 1 would include their “Blue Zones Activate” assessment (as Jacksonville did, funded by Baptist Health med.jax.ufl.edu).
- **Launch Pilot Programs:** Implement several *quick wins*:
 - Start a weekly “Walk with the Mayor” program to immediately encourage physical activity and visibility (leadership walking side by side with residents).
 - Pilot a microtransit service on a limited basis (e.g., one shuttle, limited hours) to test ridership and work out logistics before the full 2026 launch hollyspringsupdate.com.



- Kick off the Town Employee DPC health plan – enroll employees in direct primary care by the end of Year 1.
- Introduce a Walking School Bus at one elementary school as a demonstration (recruit parent volunteers and measure participation).
- **Policy Changes:** By the end of Year 2, adopt key policies: a Complete Streets policy for new transportation projects, a flexible work policy for town employees, and integration of Blue Zone goals into the Town's Comprehensive Plan update (if one is scheduled) or a new Health and Wellness Master Plan. Also, ensure the forthcoming Unified Development Ordinance revisions include requirements for sidewalks, bike facilities, and green space in new developments (to lock in "move naturally" design).
- **Community Engagement:** Host a high-profile "Blue Zone Kickoff Festival" in Year 1 – a community event with healthy food, activities, and talks introducing the Blue Zone concept (perhaps with a guest speaker from another Blue Zone city or Dan Buettner's team if possible). Throughout Phase 1, maintain public excitement via social media updates, a dedicated page on the town website tracking progress, and a suggestion portal for residents. Form workgroups under the Task Force for each focus area (transportation, health care, family/youth), which will include interested citizens and subject matter experts who can volunteer to drive specific projects. Engagement is crucial at this stage to build momentum and trust – we want residents to feel this is *their* plan.

Phase 2: Expansion and Integration (Years 3–5)

Milestones:

- **Infrastructure & Programs Scale-Up:** Using early successes to build support, significantly expand initiatives by Year 5:
 - Complete **all priority sidewalk gaps** within 1 mile of schools and in key downtown areas. Aim to have every Holly Springs student living within walking distance of a school (where feasible) have a safe route by Year 5.
 - Grow the microtransit system to full capacity: multiple vehicles covering the entire town during weekdays (and explore a Saturday service pilot). Ridership goal: provide **50,000+ rides annually by Year 5**.
 - Roll out the **DPC program to the broader community** (as planned in Phase 2 of healthcare initiative). By Year 5, have at least 1,000 residents (beyond town employees) signed up in a direct primary care membership, possibly through their employers or individually. Monitor health outcomes of those in DPC vs. not to quantify benefits.



- Implement more Blue Zone programs: e.g., a “Moai” social groups program (facilitating formation of groups that might walk, garden, or dine healthy together), nutrition/cooking classes through Parks & Rec, and a purpose workshop for retirees and young adults to find meaningful community roles (volunteering, mentoring).
- **Midpoint Evaluation:** At the end of Year 5, conduct a comprehensive evaluation of progress. Update the health metrics (compare to baseline – we expect to see positive trends like lower BMI averages, etc.). Survey residents on changes in lifestyle and satisfaction with town quality of life. Publish a “State of the Blue Zone” report to share outcomes transparently with the public (e.g., “Smoking down 10% since 2025” or “90% of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park”). Use this data to celebrate wins and identify areas needing more effort.
- **Community Recognition:** By Year 5, Holly Springs should seek formal recognition for its efforts. This could mean applying to be a certified Blue Zones Community if the official program deems we meet criteria (certification often requires hitting certain participation rates and policy adoption checklist info.bluezonesproject.com/med.jax.ufl.edu). Alternatively, aim to win a Healthy Communities Award from organizations like NC League of Municipalities or national groups. Positive recognition will validate the work and keep the community engaged and proud.
- **Community Engagement:** Deepen community ownership by establishing annual traditions. For example, an annual “Holly Springs Health Summit” each year around Blue Zones anniversary to report progress and crowdsource new ideas. Continue quarterly town hall meetings in informal settings (walking meetings, park picnics). Expand partnerships – by now, have all major employers and civic groups actively participating. Possibly create a “Blue Zone Junior Ambassadors” program through high schools, where students champion health projects (like planting gardens or running peer fitness challenges). By Year 5, we want a self-sustaining network of volunteers and partner organizations so that these initiatives are woven into the fabric of daily life in Holly Springs.

Phase 3: Refinement and Sustainability (Years 6–10)

Milestones:

- **Long-Term Policy Embedment:** In the latter half of the decade, focus on making the changes permanent and self-perpetuating. This may involve regulatory changes (e.g., updating building codes to require bike parking and sidewalks in all new developments by default, so the environment remains activity-friendly), and securing recurring funding streams (perhaps establishing a dedicated “Health and Wellness” line item in the budget or a small portion of local sales tax devoted to parks and greenways, subject to voter approval).



- **New Innovative Initiatives:** The health landscape will evolve; we should be open to new ideas that emerge. For example, by Year 7–8, we might introduce a town-wide wellness challenge (friendly competition among neighborhoods on steps walked or healthy acts), or integrate technology like a Holly Springs wellness app that connects residents to events and tracks community health goals. If not already achieved, strive to have universal access to primary care for all residents by Year 10 – meaning through a combination of DPC, clinics, telehealth kiosks, etc., no one goes without basic medical advice when needed. Explore adding mental health resources into the Blue Zone strategy (perhaps a community counseling center or training citizens in mental health first aid).
- **Measure Ultimate Outcomes:** By Year 10, we expect to see solid evidence of impact: lower rates of heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses; higher life expectancy at the community level (we can use county data as a proxy – aim for Wake County’s health rankings to improve with Holly Springs contributing to that improvement). We also expect to see population growth because people are attracted to live here – an indication that our quality of life is a magnet.
- **Community Engagement:** After a decade, the Blue Zone ethos should be part of Holly Springs’ identity. Community engagement at this stage will be about maintaining enthusiasm and renewing leadership. Likely many original Task Force members will rotate out – bring in new champions to keep things fresh. Possibly by Year 10 host a regional Blue Zones conference in Holly Springs, inviting other towns to learn from us, which both celebrates our success and reinvigorates locals to not slide back. Plan for leadership succession: e.g., if an elected champion (Town Council member) moves on, ensure others are ready to step up. Keep the youth involved – those who were children when this started will be young adults in 10 years, and their values will have been shaped by growing up in a Blue Zone town.

Continuous Community Engagement Strategies: Throughout all phases, some engagement tactics will be ongoing:

- **Transparent Communication:** Maintain a public dashboard (on the town website or in Town Hall lobby) with key metrics (e.g., “Miles of new sidewalk built: X”, “Residents enrolled in DPC: Y”, “Community volunteer hours: Z”). Regularly publish human-interest stories (e.g., a senior who found new purpose leading a walking group, a family who benefited from the DPC program) – these personalize the impact.
- **Feedback Loops:** Solicit feedback through annual surveys and public forums. Let the community vote on small initiatives (for instance, use participatory budgeting for a portion of funds – let residents choose whether to spend on a new playground vs. a trail extension, etc., ensuring they feel investment in outcomes).



- **Equity Focus:** Ensure engagement reaches all demographics – translate materials for non-English speakers, schedule events at various times to include different work schedules, and involve traditionally underrepresented groups in planning. A Blue Zone community benefits everyone, so we'll use engagement to hear diverse voices (e.g., involve teenagers, seniors, minority communities in shaping programs that meet their unique needs).

By phasing the implementation over a decade, Holly Springs can steadily progress without overextending resources, all while bringing the community along on the journey. Accountability will be maintained via yearly progress reports to the Town Council and the public. Key milestones such as “microtransit launched,” “first Blue Zone certification achieved,” or “X% drop in smokers” will be celebrated publicly to reinforce momentum.

Conclusion

This strategic plan provides a comprehensive, campaign-ready roadmap to transform Holly Springs into a certified Blue Zone Community within 5–10 years. By clearly defining the Blue Zone vision and systematically addressing critical areas – traffic flow, healthcare access, and support for families – the plan aligns local action with proven principles of longevity and well-being. The initiatives are backed by data from successful examples and tailored to Holly Springs’ unique context (growing population, strong economy yet small-town feel).

Most importantly, this plan is grounded in reality: it leverages existing budgets, seeks grants and partnerships, and phases changes to ensure feasibility. The expected results are compelling – healthier citizens, a more vibrant community, and an even stronger local economy. Holly Springs voters and civic stakeholders can rally around this positive vision knowing that the benefits are multi-faceted: from a child walking safely to school, to a young family saving on medical bills thanks to direct care, to an entrepreneur choosing Holly Springs because of its quality of life. Each step of the way, community engagement is at the heart of the process, because *a Blue Zone community is not created by government decree but by the collective efforts of its people.*

By adopting this strategic plan, Holly Springs has the opportunity to lead North Carolina, and indeed the nation, in demonstrating how a town can intentionally engineer a healthier, happier future. Together – through smart planning, broad collaboration, and an unwavering commitment to well-being – we will make Holly Springs a place where healthy living is woven into everyday life, and in doing so, set a powerful example for communities everywhere.

**Why It Matters to Me**

As a doctor, mom, and resident of Holly Springs, I believe we all deserve a town where the healthy choice is the easy choice. I've seen firsthand how our current systems fall short—too many families struggling with healthcare access, rising stress, and disconnected neighborhoods. I'm running for Town Council to change that. My vision is to make Holly Springs a certified Blue Zone community—a place designed for long, healthy, connected lives. This isn't a far-off dream. It's already working in other towns, and we can do it here, too.