

Sparta

Additional Opportunities

After completing each phase of the research portion of the project, Atlas identified a variety of strategic opportunities for Sparta to consider. Although the scope of work has been identified for this specific project, Atlas recommends Sparta review the results and recommendations below for future community and economic development projects in order to address some of the challenges identified along the way.

ADUs/Tiny Home Development: This concept is not new and has been implemented in communities all over the [U.S.](#), including [North Carolina](#). Tiny homes could be a solution to providing affordable housing within an increasingly unaffordable housing market. These homes could cater to Sparta's young adults who are looking to buy their first home, or the aging population who might want to downsize. Sparta has already taken the first step of approving and adopting an ordinance to allow for this type of housing. Atlas recommends that Sparta further explore this initiative in hopes of increasing housing affordability and availability for current and future residents.

Central Database for Rental Units: Many people mentioned that finding available rental units was a challenge when moving to Sparta, especially if you were new to the area. It seemed that many were only able to find available rentals through Facebook groups or word of mouth. It might be in Sparta's best interest to create a centralized location that is more accessible for current and future residents. Here is an example in [Iola, KS](#) that has implemented this idea.

Business Development Entrepreneurship Program: Public survey results indicated a need for support among entrepreneurs. When asked about incentives Sparta could offer to current and future residents, respondents named "Start-up capital for a new business" and "Business development advising" as their top two. It's clear that an entrepreneurial spirit exists in Sparta, but to continue to foster that is crucial to sustaining a lively downtown and increasing tourism. The [Blue Ridge Business Development Center](#) could look at additional models and programs around the country that could expand services to help local entrepreneurs.

continued on the next page >

Overnight Accommodations: Sparta residents expressed the need for additional overnight accommodations, as there are very limited options for out-of-towners to stay. With the desire to increase tourism, it would be in Sparta's best interest to diversify the accommodation options for visitors. A more feasible option to start with is to identify potential Airbnb opportunities, especially since the U.S. saw such an [influx to rural areas](#) during COVID. A larger project idea could be the development of a boutique hotel. Both options provide variety for visitors and can meet the needs of a wider range of individuals.

Daycare: Daycare was mentioned in almost all of the focus groups conducted during Site Visit #1 and identified as a top amenity in the public survey results. It is no surprise that many rural areas struggle to provide adequate daycare services while keeping it at an affordable rate. Sparta should determine whether it would be more efficient and effective to increase capacity for existing daycare providers or develop a plan to support an entirely new facility, or both. There are a number of unique models that have worked for other communities, such as a [mobile childcare facility](#), [crowdsourcing childcare](#), or even an intergenerational model like [Generations Ashe](#), which is located just "down the road" in West Jefferson, NC.

Indoor/Outdoor Facility: Due to the demand for additional family-friendly amenities, an indoor/outdoor facility was also identified as a top priority for Sparta residents. Residents suggested a pool, recreational center, or dog park to be added to the community. Sparta could separate this concept into two phases: a short-term phase that identifies lower-cost opportunities that could be implemented quickly such as a dog park, and a long-term phase that could focus on development plans and funding for a recreational center.