

UNC Asheville Millennial Campus Development Advisory Committee

Meeting 4: April 2026 | Summary Notes

In its fourth meeting, the Committee identified guiding principles and priority land uses for UNC Asheville's Millennial Campus properties. A principles-led approach allows the University to guide development over time while preserving flexibility to navigate unknowns. Principles were shaped by inputs such as institutional context, stakeholder and community feedback, and development norms.

As a critical first principle, any private use must maintain a programmatic relationship with UNC Asheville—connecting to the University's academic programs, campus community development and livability, and other institutional priorities. At the same time, the University alone cannot drive sufficient market outcomes; development must also tap into demand from the City of Asheville and the WNC region.

Development must be revenue-positive for the University—not merely revenue-neutral. Because UNC Asheville is not positioned to contribute capital, the strategy must attract private investment that delivers both a fair return to the developer and meaningful economic benefit to the University, through positive initial and ongoing direct cash flow and future enrollment growth. Uses should be evaluated against a revenue-per-square-foot threshold, allowing a mix of revenue-positive and revenue-negative uses so long as the overall development yields positive revenue. UNC Asheville should also explore UNC System co-investment as a catalyst for early phases; NC State's Centennial Campus is a relevant precedent for public investment catalyzing private development and University benefit.

These guiding principles translate to a land use strategy that prioritizes housing, community-serving amenities, and a central gathering space. These uses will generate multiple kinds of value for the University and deliver on the three objectives established at the outset of this process: increase enrollment at UNC Asheville, generate sources of new revenue for UNC Asheville, and establish a gathering place for the campus and broader community.

The optimal anchor for new development is an institutional partnership that creates momentum and amplifies the University's mission. Research and learning organizations—such as The North Carolina Arboretum, the American Chestnut Foundation, and potential planetarium or science museum collaborators—can activate the project while generating community value. The Asheville Botanical Garden, for example, is an existing, underappreciated asset with biodiversity exceeding that of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park on a per-acre basis. This resource should be celebrated as part of the development's identity.

Housing is the highest-impact commercial use and a cornerstone of the overall development strategy. Student housing should be the priority and should be operated by the University to ensure consistency with the current student residential experience. Faculty and staff housing, as well as senior and market-rate housing, may be feasible as well, but will require additional planning to ensure thoughtful placement and alignment with University needs.

Amenities are necessary to enhance the vibrancy and livability of campus, but should be revenue-neutral at a minimum. These would include:

- **Retail:** A “must-have” use, retail typologies and scale will likely depend on location.

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- **“Town square”:** A flexibly programmed community gathering hub with low capital and operating costs, creating meaningful community value without imposing excessive risk.
 - **Childcare:** A notable need, but space-intensive and typically unprofitable. Subsidies would likely be required to facilitate campus-oriented childcare; thus, this use warrants additional analysis.
 - **Recreation:** A use that will benefit the campus and the broader community. A partnership with organizations like the YMCA can deliver recreational and wellness programming to fill the gap in North Asheville’s recreation infrastructure.

Lastly, stewarded natural space can reduce development impacts while creating meaningful community connections. Active management will ensure these spaces deliver lasting value, and trail connections to existing greenways, as well as to other parts of the campus, will integrate the development into Asheville’s broader outdoor recreation network.

The Committee also discussed several uses that appear less aligned with the current vision for the Millennial Campus properties. While large-scale athletics facilities and a new performing arts venue could offer certain community benefits, both would require additional consideration given competing land-use priorities, existing and planned investments in comparable facilities, and the Committee's emphasis on uses that most directly advance UNC Asheville's institutional goals.

The Committee recommends mapping its recommended uses to each of the three viable Millennial Campus properties to maximize benefit to the University while ensuring compliance with pre-existing guidelines and agreements. The South Campus property likely offers the greatest potential for development. Its adjacency to the heart of UNC Asheville’s campus and landscape conditions support a mixed-use project that could include many of the recommended uses. The Broadway/Zillicoa property is separated from the main campus by a commercial thoroughfare, making it less suitable for student housing, campus-oriented amenities, and a gathering place. In addition, that site is defined by a perennial stream, greenway, and significant topography, likely making it more difficult to develop than the South Campus site. Lastly, the Rhoades property, while well-located on Merrimon Avenue for commercial access, was conveyed to UNC Asheville with development guidelines from the Rhoades family that limit/restrict commercial uses. This site is also somewhat removed from the main campus, which makes it a less-than-ideal location for student housing, campus amenities, and a gathering place.