

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Rockingham County, North Carolina stands at a unique crossroads in its history. The County has experienced considerable growth over the last several decades, yet remains relatively undeveloped and is therefore capable of shaping itself in a positive way. Despite the fact that much of the County is still largely rural, Rockingham is well ahead of many counties in terms of its development policies. Countywide zoning was established in March 17, 1988, far ahead of most other rural counties in North Carolina. Development regulations and policies have continued to evolve, including forward-thinking policies related to manufactured housing that was enacted in 1999.

As Rockingham County enters a new millennium, there is growing concern that the County is without a relevant plan to guide its growth. In addition, the development regulations that have benefited the County over the past 20+ years are somewhat outdated and in need of revision to reflect new political and economic realities and new planning practices. For example, much of the growth currently occurring in the southwestern quadrant of the County could benefit from a more comprehensive approach to growth management. The challenges associated with transitioning from a largely agricultural and low-skilled manufacturing economy to one that is centered on knowledge-based industries and an information-based economy are also immense and have many implications for land use policy.

In response to these and other factors, the Rockingham County Board of Commissioners requested in mid-2005 that a new land development plan be prepared for the County. A task force committee was subsequently formed and began working with professional staff from the Rockingham County Planning Department, Piedmont Triad Council of Governments and David Long Consulting in Summer 2005. This report represents the collective efforts of staff and the committee.

1.2 Plan Purpose

This Plan shall officially be known and cited as the “Rockingham County Land Use Plan,” except as referred herein as “this Land Use Plan” or “this Plan.” The overall mission of this Plan is **to provide Rockingham County with a vision-driven, proactive guide for managing future physical growth and development over the next 20 years.**

The main area of focus pertains to land use because uses of land (e.g., agricultural, commercial, industrial, public/institutional, and residential) create tangible impacts upon surrounding communities that can be both positive and

negative. These impacts can affect a community's visual environment, population density, traffic patterns, quality of life, tax base, and public services. Planning and managing for Rockingham County's future land use will both help to facilitate desired land use goals, and to mitigate undesired outcomes.

In order to be an effective guide for managing future growth, it is vital that this Plan maintains a policy orientation. This means that an overall vision for growth is articulated, and goals and policies are formulated in order to achieve the vision. It is not sufficient, nor practical, for this Plan to merely emphasize descriptive information and data. This typically leads to the "planner's dilemma" of a plan slowly spiraling out of touch with political feasibility. This can result in a plan not being adopted, or becoming part of the perennial bookshelf archives with little or no value. As part of this policy orientation, this Plan attempts a proactive planning approach that recognizes the current need to implement key policies to successfully accomplish desired future outcomes. Ultimately, this approach minimizes the need for reactive (or reactionary) planning and gives Rockingham County some control over its future. It is crucial, therefore, that this Plan is reviewed and updated on a regular interval of approximately five years in order to remain proactive and relevant toward managing future growth and land use.

Finally, this Plan provides a foundation for further detailed studies and land use ordinance revisions. With regard to the former, this Plan does not achieve a high level of detail that is necessary for an effective area or corridor plan. However, it does provide a solid groundwork from which to conduct future detailed studies that would address specific growth management issues in such Rockingham County areas as the US 220 and US 158 corridors. With regard to the latter, this Plan does not become enforceable laws or regulations once adopted. Rather, it remains as a policy guide that provides greater justification for making informed land use and zoning decisions. The primary method for implementing and enforcing this Plan's policies and recommendations is through text amendments to the Rockingham County Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). However, this Plan may also be used to assist in implementing policy in conjunction with other plans including economic development plans, strategic plans, emergency management and hazard mitigation plans, and budgetary plans.

It is important to briefly note that this Plan is not a comprehensive plan addressing a wide scope of study. Comprehensive plans typically include a broad array of elements such as population and demographics, housing, economic development, public infrastructure, transportation, natural resources, historic preservation, and quality of life. Staffing and time constraints have made it essential to pare down this Plan to a more manageable scope. The reduction in scope, however, does not correlate with a reduction in this Land Use Plan's quality or usefulness. In fact, the core element of any traditional comprehensive

plan is land use. This Plan does include analysis of several other key elements typically found in comprehensive plans (other than land use).

1.3 Plan Study Area

Map 1 below shows this Plan’s “official” area of study that includes the entire County with the exception of the municipalities of Eden, Madison, Mayodan, Reidsville, Stoneville and Wentworth and their extraterritorial jurisdictions (ETJs). Planning recommendations from this study focus primarily on the areas outside of the six municipal jurisdictions. However, municipal ETJs were considered for planning analysis purposes in several Plan sections that include existing County land uses and urban service growth areas. Table 1 below indicates Rockingham County contains approximately 572 square miles within its borders. The entire study area for this Plan is approximately 481 square miles in size. This study area also mirrors the planning and zoning jurisdiction of Rockingham County.

Map 1 – Land Use Plan Study Area

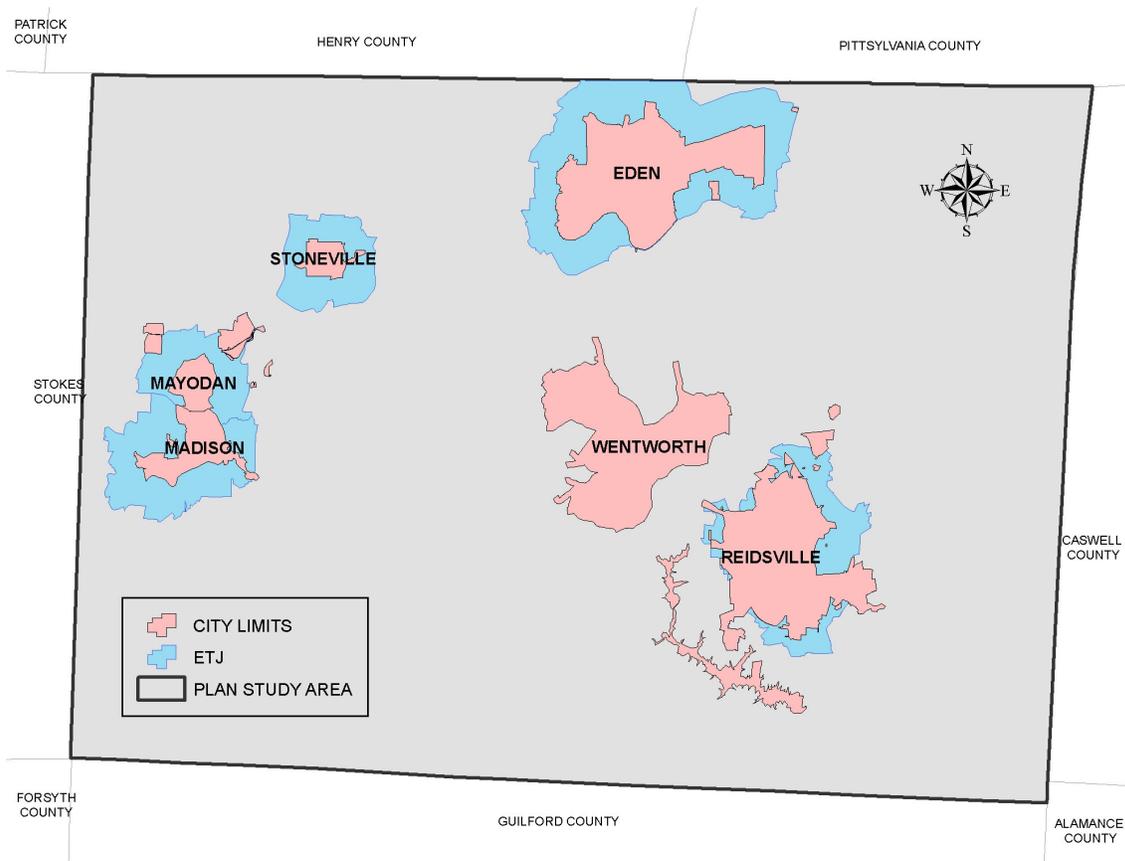


Table 1 – Physical Size of the Plan Study Area

Area	Square Miles	Acres
Municipal Planning Jurisdictions (City Limits & ETJ)	90.3	57,803
Plan Study Area	481.2	308,249
Total County Area	572.0	366,052

Source: Rockingham County GIS & Tax Departments, 2005

1.4 Plan Organization

This Plan consists of two major components: facts and values. Facts help to inform the decision-making process while values reflect the views of the citizens of Rockingham County. The first sections of this Plan describe facts while the latter sections incorporate values. More specifically, this Plan is organized in a broad-to-narrow focus of study. For example, this Plan begins analyzing the regional perspective of the Piedmont Triad’s growth and development trends. This Plan then shifts to exploring the existing state of land development related conditions occurring specifically in Rockingham County. Together, these two sections help to answer the question of “where are we today?” The focus narrows further as this Plan articulates key growth management issues and challenges that help address the issue of “where do we want to go in the future?” Finally, this Plan provides the answer to “how we get there” by recommending growth management strategies and guidelines.