

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Growth Management Strategies

Three major underlying aims of this land development plan are to balance: 1) individual property rights with the public interest, 2) the free market economic system with appropriate public intervention, and 3) economic development with environmental protection. If a totally unrestrained free market system and individual development choices were yielding the types of growth that Rockingham County has expressed a desire to attain, there would be little need for planning or land development regulation. This appears, however, not to be the case. A collection of individual decisions are gradually generating a land use pattern that, left unmanaged, will overtake the rural landscape, place additional burdens on public services, and erode the quality of life that originally attracted new residents and businesses to Rockingham County.

Therefore, the County needs to develop conscious strategies for proactively managing the type of growth that is consistent with the County's overall vision and goals. Stated another way, growth management strategies help to set the "tone" and give general direction in which the County should begin to head toward in order to mitigate an undesired future state. These strategies need not always rely on heavy-handed government regulation. For example, if protection of open space is a general goal for the County, then several approaches may be used to achieve this goal. One would be regulation through the zoning ordinance to essentially require reservation or dedication of open space as development occurs. An equally effective approach might be to structure a system of incentives that encourage a developer to reserve open space by coupling clustering techniques with density bonuses in the County's development regulations. Another alternative might be to educate landowners concerning the tax benefits of conservation easements. It may be advantageous to "think outside of the box" by assisting small farmers in gaining access to better technology, which would enable them to make a profit and thereby preserve working farms. Finally, the role of the County in extending infrastructure and creating development pressure on vacant land cannot be overlooked.

The growth management strategies listed below are recommended for Rockingham County's consideration and use. The strategies are organized into three broad categories: Area Specific (i.e., target defined geographic areas), Physical Development (i.e., apply regulatory standards to specific land uses), and Time Sensitive (i.e., determine cost vs. benefits over a period of time). It should be noted that several growth management strategies may overlap with one or more categories. It is the intent to simplify their organization for analysis purposes.

Area Specific Strategies

Strategy 1) Moderate the overall rate of population growth along the County's southern tier.

Description

Rockingham County has experienced slow to moderate overall population growth for the past several decades. The rate of population growth has generally been considerably higher in the southern sections of the County immediately adjacent to Guilford County. Moderation can best be accomplished not by erecting obstacles to growth, but instead by enacting policies to ensure that residential development that does occur within the County is of high quality and contributes to, rather than detracts from, the community. By setting a high standard for development, growth is less likely to occur at a pace that will outstrip the infrastructure and resources of the County.

An Adequate Public Facility Ordinance (APFO) is an option that Rockingham County may consider in mitigating uncontrolled growth. An APFO is primarily designed to require proof that adequate public facilities (e.g., schools, water mains, sanitary sewer mains, etc.) will be available concurrently with a development proposal. If an adequate public facility is not in place, a development permit can be denied until a reasonable, set date specified in a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for the provision of the facility. Unlike exactions (see *Strategy 6* below), APFOs are not designed as a financial tool to offset the costs of development. Rather, they are a tool for guiding development in areas that can best accommodate future growth, and tie together land use, capital improvement, and financial planning. APFOs do not typically require authorization from the General Assembly because enabling authority is granted through existing zoning and subdivision statutes.

Strategy 2) Establish and prioritize areas where water and other utilities should be upgraded or extended.

Description

The County should provide public services in select areas where sufficient demand exists and the costs are minimized in both the provision of those services and the impact upon the surrounding community. A water or utility extension policy should be established as a tool to help facilitate this process. The County may also benefit from assessing areas for poor water quality or quantity and determine if it is feasible to promote water extensions to those areas. Ultimately, the County should complete a master water plan or utility plan that provides policy and capital improvement guidance coinciding with the recommendations of this Plan.

The Dan River Water Authority is currently the main purveyor of water to rural areas of the County. It is encouraged that the County improve relations and build a partnership with Dan River to enhance this rural water system.

Strategy 3) Determine appropriate methods of preserving agricultural lands and other natural areas while respecting individual property and development rights.

Description

The preservation of open space is a consistently cited goal of Rockingham County. There are several avenues that the County should consider:

- Encouraging the preservation of working farms by assisting farmers in maintaining profitable operations and thereby maintaining open space. An example might be the provision of computer technology and training to farmers.
- Encouraging the maintenance of open space as development occurs through mechanisms such as clustering and use of conservation subdivisions.
- Educating property owners regarding the concept and value of conservation easements administered by land trusts.
- Public purchase of farmland and/or open space in limited and unique situations where there is no other alternative for the protection of highly-valued lands.
- Limiting development in sensitive areas such as watersheds and floodplains.
- Purchase of development rights or transfer of development rights (TDR) programs should be explored.
- Providing incentives in regulations. One such mechanism is a “density bonus”, in which a developer would be allowed to place a somewhat larger number of dwellings on a tract of land in exchange for concessions such as the provision of additional open space or other community amenities.

It will also be important for open space to connect in a larger network so that its benefits are maximized. This can be achieved through walking trails, bike paths, and sidewalks. A key principle in this planning process will be to approach development decisions not as isolated, individual units, but as part of a larger framework of building sustainable communities. Rockingham County should also consider the formulation of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan that provides strategies for developing a parks and recreation system to meet the needs of new and future land development. This should also include the development of a countywide trails and bikeways plan.

Strategy 4) Identify key growth corridors and interchanges that require non-residential development sites be prioritized and planned.

Description

There is an urgent need to protect key transportation corridors and/or interchanges within Rockingham County from inappropriate development. Because high-intensity commercial and industrial development will be strongly

attracted to these corridors and interchanges, it is very important for the County to have development standards, guidelines, and priority site selection criteria in place that will promote sound development. In many communities, the rapid commercial/industrial growth in these locations quickly spirals out of hand creating congestion and adverse environmental impacts, as well as development that is aesthetically unattractive. Rockingham County is in a good position to establish precedents for good development that can prevent this situation from occurring. The County should also encourage a unified plan for beautification of these areas.

Strategy 5) Strengthen the municipal commercial centers to provide more in-County retail opportunities.

Description

There are currently three primary commercial centers within Rockingham County: the Cities of Eden and Reidsville as well as the Western Rockingham municipalities of Madison, Mayodan and Stoneville. Wentworth does not currently have a well-defined town center, but it is the County seat of government. Therefore, the municipalities need to be strengthened as the primary commercial centers of the County, and commercial development within the unincorporated sections of the County should take place in a more compact, well-organized fashion than is currently the case. Commercial sites should be subject to detailed design standards, which promote a positive community appearance, a safe and logical flow of traffic, support of overall economic development and quality of life goals, and compatibility with surrounding uses. The County should collaborate with the municipalities to identify key commercial sites, prioritize retail market needs, and develop incentives for growth in municipal areas. See *Strategy 6* below for targeted growth area development incentives.

Strategy 6) Promote growth in and around municipalities and other targeted growth areas.

Description

Recent trends have indicated Rockingham County's unincorporated areas (as a whole) have begun to increase at a higher rate than all municipal areas. Furthermore, since 2000 it is estimated that municipal population has only slightly grown at a net overall increase of 0.27%. If these trends continue unmanaged, loss of natural resources (e.g., forests, open space, agriculture, and wildlife habitat) and increased demand for public facilities/services in rural areas will likely result. It is key that the County develop incentives for targeting growth in areas that can best accommodate higher intensity land uses. For example, density or utility service bonuses could provide sufficient incentives for development to locate within/adjacent to a municipality or other targeted growth area. These areas should be identified and defined, and land use collaboration with the County's municipalities is vital for success. See Section 5.3 below.

Physical Development Strategies

Strategy 7) Develop and refine detailed design guidelines and standards for non-residential development to be applied countywide.

Description

As Rockingham County enters the 21st century, the focus of attention seems to be not so much “whether” the County will grow, but “how” it will grow. High quality, aesthetically-pleasing development will be especially important if the County is to compete for knowledge-based jobs in the information economy. Surveys have consistently demonstrated that the quality of the built environment and a positive community appearance are major determinants in the location decisions of individuals and businesses in the new economy.

Strategy 8) Develop residential design alternatives to limit suburban residential sprawl while providing opportunities for developers to choose patterns which are appropriate for their individual markets.

Description

Rockingham County has become somewhat of a bedroom community due in large part to the automobile, as its citizens sought employment in nearby communities such as Greensboro. Within the last two decades, however, the spillover from adjacent urban centers has created a tremendous demand for housing. Rockingham County is generally viewed by neighboring communities as having a quiet, rural atmosphere. However, the predominant pattern of residential development—low density, single-family, large lots—has simply been an *extension of* rather than an *alternative to* that found in neighboring communities. Conventional zoning has emphasized the separation of land uses that were deemed to be “incompatible.” The unintended consequence of this system has been the segregation of residential areas from convenient shopping and increased dependence on the automobile as a mode of travel. Indeed, the residential pattern within the rapidly growing southern section of the County has in many respects been a manifestation of this classic suburban pattern of low density land consumption. Some possible residential design tools for consideration include clustering techniques, mixed use developments, higher density zoning in appropriate areas, conservation subdivisions, and mandatory dedication of open space. Mixed use developments (such as neighborhood retail within a large residential development) also provide a means of reducing automobile dependent travel and promoting livability.

Strategy 9) Incorporate community design elements from more traditional forms known as “neo-traditional design” or “new urbanism.”

Description

One of the most important trends in community planning in recent years has been the return to a more traditional form of community design, similar to that which was widely practiced in this country before World War II. This trend has

been referred to as “neo-traditional design” or “new urbanism.” The basic objective of this movement is to build communities that are more cohesive, less dependent on the automobile, and less wasteful of land resources. The general principles of neo-traditional design include encouraging a mix of land uses to facilitate pedestrian travel; reducing lot sizes and setbacks; providing narrower streets and sidewalks; eliminating abundant parking; discouraging cul-de-sacs and other dead end streets; and providing inter-connectivity between neighboring developments (see *Appendix A4 Neo-Traditional Design Principles*). These community design elements are most appropriate in areas of existing higher density and adjacent to municipalities.

Strategy 10) Establish access management standards to facilitate the safe flow of traffic and the efficient use of major transportation investments.

Description

As development occurs, it will be important for the various transportation systems that are built to connect with each other to promote a smoother flow of traffic as well as increased transportation choices. An example would be to ensure that subdivision streets, rather than terminating in cul-de-sacs or channeling traffic to one major exit/entrance, instead be interconnected and provide multiple points of ingress and egress. Such an arrangement will more effectively distribute traffic and prevent overloading and congestion. Additionally, new development that proliferates curb cuts and strip development causes traffic safety problems and often incur reinvestment of public funds to mitigate the problem. A mitigating land use example would be mixed use developments:

- Per capita automobile travel tends to decline with increased land use mix, such as when commercial and public services are located within or adjacent to residential areas (*Land Use Impacts on Transport*, Victoria Transport Policy Institute, November 16, 2005).

The County should prepare and update a countywide comprehensive transportation plan (CTP) to mitigate undesired future transportation system outcomes. Collaboration with state and regional transportation agencies (i.e., North Carolina and Virginia Department of Transportation, Piedmont Triad Council of Governments, and Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation) would facilitate sound plan goals, enhance regional cooperation, and improve the identification/prioritization of key plan elements for implementation.

Strategy 11) Incorporate land use policies that diversify the economy while also strengthening or retooling existing industrial base.

Description

Rockingham County’s economy has for many years been driven by traditional industries such as furniture, textiles, tobacco as well as agriculture. The County is, however, poised to emerge as a distribution center due to its strategic location. In order to thrive in the new global economy, the County should also

begin laying the groundwork for an economy based more on new technology and service industries as well as alternative forms of work such as home-based occupations and telecommuting. The County's land use policies will need to reflect this shift in economic base. If, for example, a high tech industrial corridor were to develop along the future I-73/74 corridor, such industries generally favor campus-like locations where there are adequate design standards to protect their investments and to present a "cutting edge" image. Traditional infrastructure such as water, sewer, natural gas, and rail is relatively less important to such industries than is a quality living and working environment and a strong supply of well-educated, knowledge-based workers. Such workers also tend to favor livable communities that provide convenient access to work, schools, libraries, and other amenities (such as bicycle paths). A parallel shift in the economy is reflected in the growth of home-based occupations as well as telecommuting. The County's land use policies should also accommodate these activities while protecting the investments of nearby property owners. It is equally important, however, that the County continues to strengthen its existing traditional industries in order to retain employment and promote business expansion and re-investment.

Strategy 12) Provide housing opportunities that meet a wide range of affordability.

Description

As Rockingham County continues to grow and prosper, there will continue to be a demand for quality affordable housing. Meeting this demand will be a challenge. Current new residential development patterns tend to consist of relatively expensive (\$250,000 or more) "high end" stick-built homes, typical stick-built homes (\$150,000-\$180,000), or relatively inexpensive (\$80,000 or less) manufactured units. A lack of new homes in the \$100,000-\$140,000 range creates a significant void in the housing market for prospective moderate income purchasers who wish to invest in an appreciating asset. A wider range of housing choices (e.g., condominiums, town homes, single-bedroom homes, and apartments) will become more vital as an aging population of baby-boomers and empty nesters reach retirement. The affordable housing policies contained in *Section 5.2.15* provide some potential solutions to this dilemma.

Time Sensitive Strategies

Strategy 13) Evaluate the long term relationships between residential development and the associated costs of maintaining or expanding adequate levels of quality public services, and develop additional funding sources to meet those demands.

Description

Traditionally, increases in the property tax base created by commercial and industrial development have offset, somewhat, the demands created by residential development. Population increases create a demand for public

services and, therefore, a seemingly direct relationship is created between more people and higher public costs. These costs include schools, recreation, public safety, administration, public buildings, social and health services, animal control, elections, etc. Other costs created by development are initially paid-for by the developer such as public streets and utilities.

As a general rule, residential development does not generate sufficient public revenues to cover the costs of required public services such as those previously mentioned. To ensure that development pays its required share of the cost of capital facilities, local governments have instituted requirements known as exactions. Exactions may include dedication of lands (either on-site or at the perimeter of a development), money paid in-lieu of dedication, impact fees, linkage fees, and special facility benefit assessments. These types of fees are generally collected when development occurs (at the time of subdivision), but may also be collected at the time of building activity (which can occur over an extended period following the initial construction of the subdivision). Types of exactions are listed below:

- **Dedication** may occur where suitable land is given to the public on the site of the development or at the perimeter of the development for public facilities (recreation, schools, and public buildings), roadways, storm drainage systems, water and sewer lines, and park and school facilities.
- **Money in-lieu of dedication** is used primarily where a development is small and there is insufficient land on-site for a needed facility, where the land available is not suited for the facility, or the facility is needed in a location other than the development. Money in-lieu of dedication is particularly valuable for parks, recreation, and school sites.
- **Impact fees** are similar to in-lieu fees in that both are used for off-site capital improvements. Impact fees are charges levied by local governments against developers for their pro rata share of capital funding for facilities necessitated by the new development. Impact fees have been used for mostly schools, but are not limited to only schools. In North Carolina, authority must be granted by the General Assembly before impact fees may be imposed on development.
- **Linkage fees** are a type of impact fees originally prompted by reduced federal funding for housing programs. A linkage fee may be charged to residential and nonresidential development so long as a nexus, or direct relationship, is created between the development and the need for affordable housing. Housing programs are found more often in cities or urbanized areas, while counties tend to rely on federal or state programs.
- **Facility benefit assessments** are also a fee in the nature of an impact fee, which seeks to create a relationship between property within a designated area and the ability to pay for public facilities serving the needs of those residing in the area. The FBA is

calculated based on the "net equivalent dwelling units" attributable to a parcel of land at the highest potential development under current zoning. FBA funds are collected when specific public facilities are projected to commence according to a capital improvement program. Funds are deposited in a designated account and may be adjusted depending upon increases or decreases of costs, availability of other funds, and the scope of the facility. FBA can be considered an improvement over traditional impact fees by allowing retroactivity and lien features of special assessments while limiting the exaction to only new development.

It is important that the County take the lead in addressing how to improve adequate funding sources for area schools. Maintaining adequate funding levels for future education facilities and per capita expenditures will help facilitate a more competitively educated local workforce and improve economic development efforts. See *Section 6.3* below for related Land Use Plan Implementation Action Steps.

5.2 Growth Management Policy Guidelines

The following Growth Management Policies serve as **guidelines** for making land development decisions that help the County achieve its vision for the future. These policies may assist in the review and approval process for specific land use development proposals, site plans, or rezonings; and/or selectively incorporating them into County ordinances, policies, and other plans (e.g., strategic, budgetary, economic, etc.).

5.2.1 Economic Development

1. Encourage new and expanding industries and businesses that: (1) diversify the local economy, (2) utilize a more highly skilled labor force, and (3) increase area residents' incomes.
2. Protect, enhance and encourage a high quality of life, image and cultural amenities as an effective approach to economic development.
3. Balance the benefits of continued economic development against the possible detrimental effects such development may have on the quality of life enjoyed by area residents.
4. Encourage the continued growth of the area's tourism and retirement industries.
5. Focus economic development efforts on the revitalization and reuse of currently unused or underutilized structures and sites in appropriately located commercial and industrial areas.
6. Support coordination of economic development resources with various local agencies and seek regional coordination and interaction with a shared economic interest.
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5.2.2 Transportation

1. Prioritize transportation improvements to maximize the use of existing roadways as a cost-effective and environmentally sound means of meeting area transportation needs.
2. Protect the safety and usefulness of area thoroughfares by encouraging service roads, common access points, and avoiding frequent driveway cuts.
3. Support pedestrian, bikeway, and other similar facilities as energy-efficient and environmentally sound transportation alternatives.
4. Interconnect roads and streets to facilitate an efficient flow of traffic and people.
5. Preserve the integrity of established residential and commercial areas, to the extent possible, from environmental and traffic impacts associated with new or improved transportation facilities.
6. Support transit services that: (1) provide mobility to population groups lacking personal transportation, (2) reduce the level of in-town and peak-hour auto traffic, and (3) reduce the demand for parking.
7. Improve and appropriately expand the County's airport facilities. Such expansion shall be carefully planned to minimize potential land use conflicts and hazardous conditions.
8. Collaborate with local NCDOT officials for long range planning efforts and improved project coordination (e.g., subdivision impact analysis).

5.2.3 Water and Sewer Services

1. Concentrate water and sewer services within the limits of a geographically defined urban growth area consisting of the Developed, Urban Transition, and Economic Development classes (see *Section 5.3* below). However, water or sewer system improvements may be necessary in rural areas to maintain adequate service to existing customers.
2. Support the highest level of participation in the costs of providing water and sewer to properties within the Developed, Urban Transition, and Economic Development classes to enhance appropriate urban-level development.
3. The Rural Transition class shall receive a lesser level of County participation in the cost of providing water and sewer services to properties within this area.
4. Do not encourage or participate in the extension of water and sewer services to properties within the Rural and Conservation Overlay classes. Exceptions to this policy may include the provision of services to other local governments, cooperative agreements on major economic development projects, and extension of lines needed to improve pressure in growth areas but which must run through rural areas.

5.2.4 Industrial Development

1. Encourage a public service and regulatory environment conducive to industrial development, tempered by environmental quality considerations, design standards, and the availability of public financial resources.
2. Discourage industrial development to locate in areas which would diminish the desirability of existing and planned non-industrial uses, nor shall non-industrial uses be allowed to encroach upon existing or planned industrial sites.
3. Locate Industrial development on land, which is physically suitable and has unique locational advantages for industry. Advanced planning for the identification of such land shall be encouraged for sites with high priority for industrial development. For example, industrial development within the Economic Development land class areas (see the Land Classification Map *Section 5.3* below) should be identified, properly zoned, and “fast-tracked” for review and approvals in order to increase site selection competitiveness.
4. Separate heavy industrial sites from non-industrial areas by natural features, green belts, buffering, major transportation facilities, and/or other suitable means.
5. Locate light industry in urbanized areas to take advantage of available services and to minimize home-to-work distances. Careful design and/or landscaping shall be required to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas.
6. Warehousing, storage and distribution facilities shall have direct access to appropriate thoroughfares.
7. Facilitate new industrial development to locate in existing and planned industrial parks where practical.
8. Access to industries (via air, rail, highway, etc.) shall be safe and efficient; industries should be located near or along interstates or major arterials in order to reduce traffic congestion on local roads. Connecting streets to existing lesser capacity streets should be encouraged to effectively disperse traffic during peak periods.
9. Discourage noxious industries that are extremely noisy or destructive to the physical environment. Where necessary, landscaping and man-made structures can reduce noise from airports and industry.
10. Industrial uses shall be compatible with surrounding land uses and should make an effort to blend (both visually and environmentally) harmoniously with the community.
11. Discourage environmentally fragile areas for use as industrial sites.

5.2.5 Commercial Development

1. Encourage commercial development to occur in clusters or planned shopping centers to minimize the proliferation of “retail strip” locations.
2. Locate regional commercial centers adjacent to interstates, major arterials or mass transit routes; they shall contain or be adjacent to existing or planned concentrations of employment and housing.

3. Locate community commercial centers adjacent to arterial highways or mass transit routes, and contain or be adjacent to other community facilities such as schools, offices, or places of public activity.
4. Locate neighborhood commercial centers adjacent to collector streets or local streets and near other neighborhood facilities such as schools and parks, and integrated into the design and circulation of the residential neighborhoods they serve.
5. Cluster highway oriented commercial uses along segments of arterial and collector streets, and contain land uses which are mutually compatible and reinforcing in use and design; they should be designed in such a way as to minimize signage, access points and excessive lengths of commercial strip development.
6. Limit rural area commercial development to local convenience stores, farm supply stores, and generally accepted rural retailing establishments and should be clustered near intersections.
7. Facilitate commercial uses to develop by consolidation and deepening of existing commercially zoned property, only when such consolidation and deepening is compatible with adjacent land uses.
8. Prohibit strip development along through streets. Commercial strip development shall be reduced and/or zoning should be made more restrictive when redevelopment opportunities permit.
9. Provide effective landscaping where commercial development adjoins existing or planned residential uses.
10. Encourage mixed-use commercial development where appropriate and where compatible with surrounding residential uses.
11. Encourage new commercial development to locate within existing areas of commercial activity.
12. Emphasize compact development in order to reduce the costs of public services.
13. The appearance and location of parking should emphasize the development and de-emphasize the parking area.
14. Serve businesses by roads and streets of a capacity sufficient for safe traffic flow; large businesses should locate at major intersections.
15. Commercial areas shall promote pedestrian traffic and should be planned with the objective of minimizing travel time between businesses. Sidewalks should be required between existing and planned commercial developments.
16. Plans and regulations for commercial areas should include design and appearance criteria in order to make commercial areas economically viable over the long-term.
17. Integrate “big box” retailers” into commercial developments to avoid disproportionate scale.

5.2.6 Office and Institutional Development

1. Encourage office and institutional development to locate as a transitional land use between activities of higher intensity and those of lower intensity.

2. Discourage linear stripping of offices along thoroughfares in favor of planned office parks or clusters of offices with common access and parking.
3. Encourage office development to locate in town/urbanized centers.
4. In order to achieve maximum efficiency and utilization of facilities, public/semi-public uses such as postal facilities or libraries shall locate centrally to the populations, which they serve.
5. Protect the natural environment to enhance the function of public/semi-public uses. The preservation of natural areas on the site creates better buffers.
6. Land required for the expansion of public/semi-public activities should be anticipated and reserved if possible; sites should be reserved for schools, utilities, transport, and other related facilities before the lands become prematurely developed.
7. Encourage the multiple use of public/semi-public facilities; schools could serve as recreational facilities or community centers in addition to serving as educational facilities.

5.2.7 Residential Development

1. Support the protection and rehabilitation of viable neighborhoods to insure their continued existence as a major housing source and as a reflection of the long term quality of life in Rockingham County.
2. Permit residential neighborhoods that have become infused or surrounded by non-residential uses to undergo an orderly conversion from residential uses to higher density residential uses or other compatible alternative land uses.
3. Prohibit residential development that would expose residents to the harmful effects of environmental hazards.
4. Support the continued viability of single-family homes as a major housing source while allowing and encouraging alternate forms of housing.
5. Utilize innovative and flexible land planning techniques, for example cluster development, as a means of encouraging development configurations which are more desirable and which may better safeguard existing natural land and water resources.
6. Factors in determining preferred locations for high density residential development shall include: close proximity to employment and shopping centers, access to major arterials and transit systems, and the availability of public services and facilities.
7. Consider the housing needs of the elderly, handicapped, and low to moderate income households in the County's policies and actions regarding residential development. *(Please see also Section 5.2.15)*
8. Serve high density residential development with both public/community water and public/community sewer facilities.
9. Locate residential development that does not have access to either public/community water or public/community sewerage facilities in areas where soil and geological characteristics are conducive to the long-term support of on-site systems such as wells and/or septic tanks.
10. Discourage residential development activities in the 100 year floodplain (see 5.2.12.2).

11. Serve residences with a safe and efficient transportation network; the physical size and design of roads and streets should be scaled to accommodate the traffic volumes and population that they serve. Multiple entrances to residential subdivision developments shall be encouraged.
12. Use buffer areas (e.g. open space or public/semi-public uses), where appropriate, to separate incompatible uses of land.
13. Centrally locate places of work, shopping, and recreation to residential areas in order to promote efficient access and reduce vehicular trip lengths.
14. Encourage residential areas, in order to promote efficiencies in the delivery of urban services, to develop in a manner that minimizes “leap frog” development (i.e. leaving large vacant areas between developments).
15. Protect natural resources in residential development and minimize adverse impact upon the natural environment (e.g. stream pollution, soil erosion, destruction of wildlife habitat).
16. Incorporate residential development incentives (e.g., density bonus) to promote higher design standards that include reservation of environmentally sensitive areas, landscaped berms, masonry walls along entranceways, curb and gutter streets, sidewalks, and traffic calming islands.

5.2.8 Agricultural and Rural Preservation

1. Forestry, agriculture and low density residential development shall be the preferred land uses in the rural areas of the County, as identified on the Land Classification Map. Urban level development shall not be encouraged in the rural areas.
2. Conserve rural area lands having a high productive potential, to the extent possible, for appropriate forestry and agricultural use.
3. Farms, woodlands, and floodplains shall be recognized as an integral part of the County’s open space system.

5.2.9 Open Space and Recreation

1. Encourage the provision of open space and recreation facilities in private development to complement the demand for publicly financed facilities.
2. Identify and develop an appropriate recreational system of open space greenways within the County. The use of natural corridors, such as floodplains, and secondarily, man-made corridors, such as utility and transportation rights of way and easements, shall be emphasized.
3. Facilitate land acquisition for new recreation sites in advance of need to achieve desirable locations at cost effective levels.

5.2.10 Historic and Cultural Preservation

1. The identification, restoration and active use of structures, buildings, monuments, and neighborhoods of historic or architectural significance shall be encouraged as a means of enhancing their economic and cultural value

to the County. National registration and designation of local historic areas shall be encouraged, when appropriate.

2. Encourage multiple and appropriate adaptive reuse of the County's historic resources.
3. Develop the tourism potential of the area's architectural and historic resources.
4. Prohibit the destruction of architectural, historic, and archaeological resources in the County.

5.2.11 Community Appearance

1. Recognize the significance of major roadway entrances into the County as measures of community image and quality through landscape, signage, and other visual improvements.
2. Jointly improve with private property owners and developers the appearance and design of major street corridors through improved landscaping and sign control.
3. Periodically update sign policies and standards to enhance community identity and create a high quality business image.
4. Develop measures to improve the effectiveness of landscaping and buffering standards for new and existing developments.
5. Provide and maintain street trees for visual relief, summer cooling, improved air quality and livability through public policies and actions to encourage planting and maintenance.
6. Infill development, redevelopment, and rehabilitation of structures and sites should occur in a manner that is consistent and supportive of the neighborhood and architectural context of the surrounding area.
7. Encourage development that preserves the natural features of the site, including existing hydrography and topography, and significant existing vegetation.
8. Require the placement of wires underground in all public and private developments where possible.
9. Prioritize the clean-up and removal of junk vehicles, abandoned manufactured homes, and dilapidated homes from private property. Improve ordinances and develop programs to facilitate junk removal and enforcement.

5.2.12 Environmental Quality

1. Support continued improvements to public sewage collection and treatment facilities, with priority to servicing existing or planned densely developed areas where environmental and economic benefits can be realized.
2. Prohibit higher intensity development in the 100-year floodplain. If development must occur, low intensity uses such as open space, recreation, and agricultural activities shall be preferred.
3. Discourage higher intensity development in the critical water supply watershed areas.

4. Improve the management and reuse of storm water run-off and drainage resulting from higher intensity development.
5. Discourage industries producing excessive noise, odor, air and water pollution, or other harmful impacts, unless such adverse impacts can be clearly overcome through effective mitigation.
6. Anticipate local area requirements for solid waste disposal facilities through advanced planning; facilities shall be located and designed to not adversely impact significant natural or man-made resources.
7. The location of hazardous waste storage and disposal facilities within the County shall not be supported.
8. Support the education and use of land conservation efforts.
9. Foster the implementation of management measures to control nonpoint source pollution from forestry and agriculture.
10. Encourage programs to reduce, reuse, and recycle residential, commercial, and industrial waste.
11. Develop incentives for reduction in waste stream.
12. Develop plans to implement curbside pickup of recyclable materials by trash haulers.
13. Encourage education and incentives for developing alternate wastewater disposal technologies that minimize harm to the natural environment.

5.2.13 Town Centers

1. Support public policies and actions that encourage the maintenance and revitalization of the County's town centers and adjoining neighborhoods as historic and cultural centers of the community.
2. Support and reinforce an appropriate design character for town centers to put forth a quality image and sense of place.
3. Encourage high density residential development and redevelopment opportunities in the town centers as a viable and productive living environment and to support downtown areas' retail businesses. This should include developing incentives or programs for adaptive reuse of existing buildings.
4. Support jointly with downtown property owners and merchants public and private efforts to develop and publicize adequate and appropriately designed on and off- street parking lots in the town centers.
5. Encourage a variety of mutually compatible and supportive mixed uses in the town centers.
6. Encourage a transitional area between the intensive commercial uses of the town centers and surrounding residential areas.

5.2.14 Planning Coordination

1. Facilitate coordinated local and regional intergovernmental planning for land use, transportation, water and sewer, tourism promotion, historic preservation, greenway and trail planning, parks and recreation, open space preservation, and economic development.

2. Encourage public involvement in decisions on land use and development by making the public aware of proposed developments at the earliest opportunity, as well as fostering communication between developers and the public.
3. Encourage neighborhood and special area planning, where feasible and appropriate, to foster public involvement in the production of closely tailored, action-oriented neighborhood plans and programs.

5.2.15 Affordable Housing

1. Encourage a wide range of housing choices, but continue to emphasize quality at all levels.
2. Provide more apartments, condominiums, and town homes to meet market demand, especially for the elderly and young.
3. Encourage condominiums as an alternative to apartments, due to “pride in ownership” factors.
4. Encourage small condominium projects as infill development to avoid overwhelming adjoining uses.
5. Provide incentives for developers to build more affordable, but non-manufactured housing, in the \$100,000-\$140,000 range (1,000 to 1,400 square feet units).
6. Encourage higher-density, infill development where public water and sewer service are currently present.
7. Provide alternate wastewater disposal technologies to facilitate higher densities in areas where public sewer service is not currently present.
8. Provide incentives for more affordable housing, but set high standards for its development.
9. Provide developers with alternatives to single-family units on relatively large lots, which tend to increase the cost of housing (e.g., density bonuses).
10. Use affordable housing as a buffer between mixed housing types.
11. Encourage broader public acceptance of multi-family housing by designing such units (such as duplexes) to have the appearance of higher-end single-family housing.
12. Encourage the development of duplexes as an alternative to manufactured housing where land costs are relatively low.
13. Permit zero lot-line development as a means of reducing development costs.
14. Provide incentives for the development of relatively small-scale manufactured home communities (as opposed to very large-scale ones that often generate public opposition).

5.3 LAND CLASSIFICATION

A modified version of the North Carolina Land Classification System was used as the basis for determining Rockingham County’s growth strategy over the 20 year planning period. The system contains five broad classes of land described below (A more detailed system containing seven classes of land is

found in *Appendix A5*, and is an option for use by the County at some point in the future.):

- Developed – Lands where existing population density is moderate to high and where there are a variety of land uses that have the necessary public services to accommodate growth and economic development.
- Urban Transition - Lands where local government plans to accommodate moderate to high density development during the following twenty year period and where necessary public services will likely be provided to accommodate growth and economic development.
- Economic Development – Lands outside of Developed and Urban Transition areas where local government supports substantial investments in water, sewer, and transportation systems to accommodate and prioritize industrial and commercial uses.
- Rural Transition – Lands where low to moderate density development is grouped in existing neighborhoods and cross-road community settlements and where it will occur in similar neighborhoods and settlements during the following twenty year period and which may require extensive public services now or in the future.
- Rural – Lands where very low to low density residential uses are integrated into the rural landscape dominated by agricultural and forestry uses and where local governments will provide minimal public services.

A sixth land class, Conservation Overlay, should be considered after the completion of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan in order to prioritize environmentally sensitive areas and define strategies for developing a parks and recreation system to meet the needs of new and future land development. *Map 13 – Rockingham County Development Constraints* and *Map 13 A – Natural Heritage and Historic Sites* should be used in the interim to analyze potential impacts of future development on environmentally sensitive areas. The definition of Conservation Overlay is listed below for reference:

- Conservation Overlay – Environmentally sensitive lands where very low-intensity open space, recreational or greenway uses are preserved in perpetuity to enhance quality of life and promote recreational and tourism opportunities.

By taking this approach, the County should be able to anticipate and prepare for future development with a reasonable degree of success. The Land Classification Map (see *Map 16* below) can serve as a framework for developing a local growth policy while allowing for flexibility at the local level in guiding specific land use decisions (subject to the limitations set forth within each of the five broad classification definitions). For example, commercial development should be encouraged within the Developed, Urban Transition, and Economic Development classes but should not be encouraged within Rural lands.

The Land Classification System is designed to achieve the following goals:

- Encourage coordination between local land use policies and those of the state or region. By virtue of using a uniform system of classification, plans prepared at various levels of government and by different agencies are more easily understood and integrated with one another.
- Provide a guide to public investment in land. For example, State and local agencies can anticipate the need for early acquisition of lands and easements for schools, recreation areas, transportation, and other public facilities within the Transition class.
- Aid in better coordination of regulatory policies and decisions. Rural lands will help to focus the attention of state and local agencies and interests on valuable natural resources. Transition and Economic Development lands will be of concern to those agencies and interests working for high quality development through local land use controls.
- Provide guidance for more equitable distribution of the local tax burden. Private lands in the Rural classes should have lower taxes to reflect the policy that few if any public services will be provided. In contrast, lands in the Transition class should be taxed to pay for the costs of providing public services required to support the relatively high density of growth anticipated.
- Be broad and flexible enough so that frequent changes in the Land Classification Map are not necessary. The map should be updated periodically in order to compensate for unforeseen changes such as the establishment of large scale public facilities or industries.
- Provide a suitable residential density range measured in dwelling units per acre. This density estimate should be balanced against other development factors that include the provision of public water or public sewer, clustering techniques, and density bonuses.

1.3.1 Land Classes And Descriptions

Land Classes	Purposes	Characteristics	Services	Residential Density
Developed/ Municipal Jurisdiction	To provide for continued intensive urban and economic development and redevelopment of existing cities.	Lands currently developed for urban purposes with urban services available.	Typical municipal or public services including water, sewer, police and fire protection, and recreation facilities.	Existing moderate to high density. Within Municipal jurisdictions
Urban Transition	To provide for future intensive urban and economic development on lands that are most likely to be scheduled for provision of necessary public utilities and services.	Lands being developed for urban purposes but which do not yet have usual urban services, lands necessary to accommodate population growth over the next 20 year period, lands which can be readily serviced with usual urban services, lands generally free from severe physical limitations for development.	Typical municipal or public services currently available or to be made available at the time of development or soon thereafter.	Moderate to high density land uses. 3-5 units/acre
Economic Development	To accommodate and encourage new industrial and commercial uses in areas where local government supports substantial investments in water, sewer and transportation systems.	Lands outside of Developed and Urban Transition areas where substantial capital investments are strongly encouraged to create new jobs and build the County tax base.	Access to major transportation facilities and supported by public water and sewer.	Moderate to high density land uses. 2-3 units/acre
Rural Transition	To accommodate existing residential neighborhoods and to balance the need to retain the area's rural character and beauty with the strong demand for continued residential development.	Lands where residential development is grouped in existing neighborhoods and cross-road community settlements and where it will occur in similar neighborhoods and settlements during the following 20 year period, lands with limited commercial development with an emphasis on mixed-use.	Limited public services available now or in the future, with no anticipation of public sewer services being provided.	Low to moderate density with a strong emphasis on cluster development to help retain rural character. 1 unit/acre
Rural	To provide for farm and forest management, and various other low intensity uses including residences where urban services are not required and natural resources will not be unduly impaired.	Lands with high potential for agriculture and forestry uses, and commercial uses associated with natural resources, agri-business and agri-tourism.	Limited public services such as police and fire protection and private septic tanks and wells.	Very low to low density single-family residences. 1 unit/2 acres

