

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY LAND USE PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plan Mission

To provide Rockingham County with a vision-driven, proactive guide for managing future physical growth and development over the next 20 years.

Plan Purpose

1. A source of information.
2. A proactive guide for making land use decisions.
3. Provides an overall vision for future growth.
4. Provides a framework for strategic and policy direction.
5. Provides an opportunity for community involvement.
6. Not intended as law or ordinance requirements.

Plan Organization

Chapter 1 Introduction: Summary of the plan's necessity, purpose, study area, and organization.

Chapter 2 Existing Regional Conditions: Overview and context of Piedmont Triad area growth and development trends.

Chapter 3 Existing Rockingham County Conditions: Detailed analysis of local factors affecting County growth.

Chapter 4 Key Issues To Be Addressed: Framework of key growth issues, goals, growth management options, and land use vision based on stakeholders committee and citizen input.

Chapter 5 Recommendations: Strategic and policy direction necessary to manage County growth and identification of future land use patterns.

Chapter 6 Implementation Tools: Recommendations for effectively using growth management strategies and policies.

Plan Process

1. Collect, Identify, and Analyze Facts: Existing conditions and key factors affecting growth that help to answer "where are we today?"
2. Identify and Develop Community Values: Citizen involvement in stakeholders' committee and community meetings that help to answer "where do we want to go in the future?"
3. Integrate Values and Facts: Draw conclusions, make recommendations, and inform citizens in order to answer "how do we get there?"

Plan Process Conclusions

1. Rockingham County is positioned well for future economic growth due to investments in local and regional businesses, highway and public infrastructure enhancements, new residential housing construction, and excess municipal water and sanitary sewer system capacities.
2. Community plans completed over the past 10 years have cited several common themes that include: facilitating a successful economic transition, increasing quality

development and quality of life, fostering regional economic connectivity, and improving community appearance.

3. A preferred growth management option for Rockingham County emphasized higher quality development, moderate population growth, and retooling and diversifying the economic base.
4. The County will aim to become denser within targeted growth areas, but not at the expense of unrestrained land and natural resource consumption.
5. We like who we are and what we already have. We want growth but not rampant growth at the expense of our rural character, open space, farmland, and outstanding water resources.

Land Use Vision Statement

The following describes the community we want to become 20 years into the future, and integrates key growth issues and desired community values:

In the year 2026, Rockingham County will be widely known throughout the Triad region as a stable and high-quality community in which to live, work, and recreate. Overall population will have risen approximately 35% to 125,000. The County's commitment to sound land development planning programs will have assisted in curbing patterns of unrestrained sprawl and unnecessary consumption of undeveloped land that characterized much of the region in the last quarter of the 20th century. Higher intensity development will occur in and adjacent to designated growth areas and municipalities. Residents will enjoy greater access to public open space, reserved natural areas, and recreation options that emphasize connectivity. Environmental protections will enhance the enjoyment of river corridors resulting in tourism and economic development opportunities. Less dependence on the automobile and greater access to alternative transportation will create a more pedestrian-friendly community. The County's prime farmland and other significant natural resources will have been identified and appropriate incentive measures taken to preserve such land for future generations while providing economic benefits for landowners.

The County will have provided a high level of public facilities at a reasonable cost by incorporating innovative provisions into its growth management policies. Such policies will have the effect of enabling new growth to better pay its way while reducing financial burdens on the public at large. Public water service, as well as limited sewer service, will be provided in strategic areas of the County. Public schools and other education and technology infrastructure will benefit from improved growth management practices and expanded funding sources.

The County will have capitalized on its strategic location within the Piedmont Triad by becoming a leading distribution center as well as by revitalizing its industrial base. The County's high quality of life will have attracted high-tech "knowledge-based" industries and workers, many of whom operate from their homes or telecommute to a vast range of activities throughout the world.

Realizing that not everyone in the County will have participated in a high level of economic progress, appropriate measures will be taken to ensure that such residents will have access to a wide-range of quality affordable housing.

PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

This Land Use Plan recommends the following three categories of “tools” that should be used in managing future land use development and growth in Rockingham County:

Growth Management Strategies

The following strategies are proactive steps for managing growth as articulated in the land use vision statement, and help direct the County toward mitigating undesired future land development outcomes:

Strategy 1: Moderate the overall rate of population growth along the County’s southern tier.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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.

Growth Management Policies

Policies serve as **guidelines** that the County can immediately use in making land development decisions (e.g., consideration of a request for rezoning property). The growth management policies are grouped in the following broad categories by function/land use:

1. Economic Development
2. Transportation
3. Water and Sewer Services
4. Industrial Development
5. Commercial Development
6. Office and Institutional Development
7. Residential Development
8. Agricultural and Rural Preservation
9. Open Space and Recreation
10. Historic and Cultural Preservation
11. Community Appearance
12. Environmental Quality
13. Town Centers
14. Planning Coordination
15. Affordable Housing

Land Use Classification

This plan designates five classes of land use that range from developed (i.e., high density) to rural (i.e., low density), and together with a land classification map depicting the location of each, help assist the County in making site-specific land development decisions. The land classification map serves as a framework for developing a local growth policy while allowing for flexibility in determining the suitability of a specific land use proposal. The land classification system is designed to achieve the following goals:

1. Encourage coordination between local land use policies and those of the state or region.
2. Provide a guide to public investment in land.
3. Aid in better coordination of regulatory policies and decisions.
4. Provide guidance for more equitable distribution of the local tax burden.
5. Be broad and flexible enough so that frequent changes in the land classification map are not necessary.
6. Provide a suitable residential density range measured in dwelling units per acre.

Plan Implementation

The primary implementers of this Plan will be the Rockingham County Commissioners who will be responsible for interpreting and acting on the recommendations of this Plan when considering development proposals and infrastructure investments, revising policies and ordinances, and establishing new programs and initiatives. As growth and development occur within the County over the next 20 years, it may be necessary to make periodic revisions to keep this Plan up-to-date. A periodic review of the document by Planning staff, Planning Board members, and the County Commissioners will insure that the document remains a valuable

reference and guide for growth in the community. A suggested minimum frequency for updating this Plan is every 5-7 years.