

I. Introduction and Summary

A. Summary of this Plan

The Augusta County Comprehensive Plan 2007-2027 is an update of the county's existing Comprehensive Plan which was adopted in 1994. Upon adoption this new Plan replaces and supersedes the 1994 document. The Comprehensive Plan consists of formal goals, objectives, and policies which will guide the land use decision-making of county officials during the next 20 years. The Plan will be reviewed at least every five years and modified or updated as deemed appropriate by the Board of Supervisors.

The Comprehensive Plan is not a law or ordinance. It is a guide for land use decision making. It establishes the long term goals which the county seeks to achieve, and it establishes the policy guidelines for when, where, and how to provide public facilities, change zoning designations, and otherwise facilitate, coordinate, and regulate development. Some of the Plan's policies are implemented upon adoption of the Plan. Other policies are not implemented directly by the Plan, but rather will be implemented through future changes to the county's development regulations after adoption of the Plan.

Included in the Plan is an implementation strategy, which outlines the tasks that need to be completed in order to implement the policy recommendations, the timeframe for completion of these tasks, and the parties responsible. Also included is an annual scorecard designed to aid elected and appointed officials, as well as staff, in determining whether the vision of this Plan is being implemented. Finally, this Plan includes a capital improvements plan to provide baseline estimates of the cost of implementing the Plan.

1. The Planning Process

This Comprehensive Plan is the result of almost two years of work by county citizens, elected and appointed officials, staff, and consultants. At the outset of the planning process a Steering Committee comprised of 15 people (13 citizens and 2 Board members, later revised to just the 13 citizens) was appointed to represent the county and guide staff and consultants through the process, serving as a liaison to the citizens. The Steering Committee has held almost 30 meetings since May 2005. Additionally, three worksessions were held to bring the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission together with the Steering Committee to discuss the Plan's vision, goals, and policies. The public was invited to attend all of these meetings.

The county has also held six public input meetings; one in October 2005 and five in January 2006. There was greater than anticipated public participation at each of these meetings, with a total of more than 1300 citizens in attendance. Three additional public meetings are planned for January 2007. A great deal of research and data collection by consultants and staff took place along the way, including a

citizen survey on development issues that was distributed in the Summer of 2005 and received more than 1500 responses.

All of the information collected during this process was reviewed in detail by the Steering Committee, providing valuable insight into the state of the county and the desires of the citizens for its future. A great many of the suggestions received at the public input meetings made it into the Plan itself.

2. Scope and Organization – How to Read this Plan

Although this Plan is a lengthy and complex document, it is organized in a logical and orderly fashion, as follows:

Section I: Introduction and Summary

This section contains a brief summary of the Plan's recommendations, as well as an explanation of the purpose and legal foundation of the Comprehensive Plan in Virginia.

Section II: Existing Conditions Analysis

The Existing Conditions Analysis provides a snapshot of the current conditions of the county from a planning perspective. Demographics, socioeconomics, housing, employment and economy, transportation, community facilities, natural resources, and land use elements have all been analyzed. This section also includes a buildout analysis that depicts what residential growth will occur under current zoning conditions and future land use policies, information which can be used to assess the effectiveness of the current land use regulations.

Section III: Future Conditions Scenarios

The Future Conditions Scenarios are intended to provide an opportunity to evaluate and compare different growth scenarios. Two scenarios were developed; density based controls and revised Planning Policy Areas. Each scenario assumes that growth will occur in the county at the same rate. The scenarios are designed to influence the location, concentration, and type of future growth.

Section IV: Population Estimates

This section contains updated population estimates that were produced for the county following completion of the Existing Conditions Analysis and the Future Conditions Scenarios. These estimates were used as the official estimates for the remaining sections of the Plan but were not incorporated into the prior Plan documents.

Section V: Thoroughfare Plan

The Thoroughfare Plan makes recommendations on ways in which the county can mitigate the transportation problems that are anticipated in the next twenty years. These recommendations include spot enhancements to existing roadways as well as proposed connections that may be needed to respond to specific failing road segments.

Section VI: Goals, Objectives, and Policies

This section contains the goals, objectives, and policies as well as the vision for each of the four Planning Policy Areas established by the Plan. The goals spell out the vision for Augusta County in 2027. Each goal represents an ideal, desired end-state for a particular community resource. Within the goals are numerous objectives and policies. The objectives are specific subsections of the goals, while the policies are recommended actions that the county should take toward the realization of the goals.

Section VII: Planning Policy Area and Future Land Use Maps

This set of maps tie directly with the recommendations found in the Goals, Objectives, and Policies. The Planning Policy Area map divides the county into four Policy Areas, Urban Service Areas, Community Development Areas, Rural Conservation Areas, and Agricultural Conservation Areas. These Policy Areas divide the county geographically into areas of different intensity of development, from the more-developed Urban Service Areas to the more rural Agricultural Conservation Areas. The Future Land Use Map designates specific land uses for parcels in the Urban Service and Community Development Areas.

Section VIII: Implementation Strategy

This section outlines the tasks that need to be completed in order to implement the policy recommendations, the timeframe for completion of these tasks, and the parties responsible for completing them. These tasks include policy changes, ordinance changes, and further planning and technical study efforts for particular community resources or geographical areas.

Section IX: Annual Scorecard

The Annual Scorecard is designed to aid elected and appointed officials, as well as staff, in determining whether the vision of this Plan is being implemented by presenting a multitude of county data that can be tracked annually to determine what trends are present.

Section X: Capital Improvements Plan

The Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) sets the framework for linking capital improvements with land use decisions. The CIP provides a systematic approach to planning and financing the capital improvements that will be necessary to implement the policies of the Plan.

Section XI: Appendices

This section includes a variety of background information collected during the Comprehensive Plan Update process. Background data collected for the Existing Conditions Analysis, survey results, records of contact, and other information is included here.

3. The Plan's Major Recommendations

Policy Areas

Planning Policy Areas are geographic areas designated in the Plan as appropriate for a particular range of future land uses and public facilities. The location and

extent of these areas are based primarily upon the existing land use pattern, the location of public facilities and natural resources, and the expected demand for development. The Planning Policy Area map shows the locations of these Policy Areas.

The general purpose of designating geographic Planning Policy Areas is to provide a logical and predictable framework for implementing zoning and subdivision regulations and making cost-effective investments in public facilities and services. Additionally, the Policy Areas serve as an implementation tool for many of the policies identified in the Goals, Objectives, and Policies.

Key objectives of the Policy Areas are to:

- Help set priorities for the location of public utilities so as to minimize public costs.
- Designate appropriate areas for various types and densities of land uses so as to minimize conflicts between neighboring residents.
- Ensure that an adequate total amount of land is designated for the full range of land uses needed to meet expected market demand.

Policy Areas are not zoning districts, but are areas which will be eligible for different zoning districts, depending on the suitability of the area for a specific purpose. Policy Areas are somewhat flexible and may be modified by the county as development and fiscal needs change. However, they will be most effective in achieving county goals if they are closely followed in making land use and capital decisions.

Definitions of Policy Areas

Urban Service Areas: Urban Service Areas are defined as areas which are appropriate locations for development of a full range of public and private land uses of an urban character on public water and sewer, in either the immediate or long term future. They include the areas of Fishersville, Stuarts Draft, Verona, Mt. Sidney, Weyers Cave, Jolivue, and Craigsville, among other locations.

Urban Service Areas are priority locations for:

- Significant amounts of urban residential and employment growth
- Expansions of public water and sewer service
- Local and regional public facilities
- Most “one-of-a-kind” public facilities such as hospitals
- Most industrial development – light, medium, and heavy, with adequate facilities and buffers
- Larger scale urban residential and business developments

- Larger scale mixed use developments, where different combinations of residential, business, and industrial uses will be found within a development

Community Development Areas: Community Development Areas are local community settlements which have existing public water or public sewer systems in place or which have relatively good potential for extensions of either of those utilities. These areas are appropriate locations for future low density, rural land uses based upon road access, the existing land use pattern, and proximity to existing public facilities and services, although they are planned to remain predominantly residential in character.

Community Development Areas are priority locations for:

- Moderate amounts of small scale residential and employment growth at marginally higher densities than in the Rural Conservation Areas
- Limited expansions of public water or sewer service
- Local public facilities
- Small scale, low-intensity commercial and/or light industrial developments

Rural Conservation Areas: Rural Conservation Areas are areas which are substantially subdivided and/or developed with residential uses, which have no public water or sewer service and which have few existing intensive agricultural operations. They are therefore priority locations for moderate amounts of future rural residential development. Ideally, any development would be in the form of incremental additions to existing settlements.

Rural Conservation Areas are priority locations for:

- Moderate amounts of low density rural residential development on individual wells and septic fields, including clustered development (although there are concerns about groundwater protection)
- Non-intensive agricultural and forestry activities

Agricultural Conservation Areas: Agricultural Conservation Areas are areas which have mainly farm or forest uses and have generally the lowest overall density of residential uses, have no public water or sewer service, and have most of the county's intensive agricultural operations. These areas are planned to remain in predominantly agricultural and forestal uses with very little additional residential development.

Agricultural Conservation Areas are priority locations for:

- Minimal, incremental amounts of very low density rural residential development on individual wells and septic fields

- A full range of long term agricultural, forestry and natural resource industry activities, including intensive agricultural operations.

Rural Communities: The designated Rural Communities include many of those existing local community settlements which function as cultural, historic, social or economic focal points for surrounding rural areas. While most do not have public water or sewer service, and are therefore located in the Rural Conservation or Agricultural Conservation Areas, a few do have public services and are located in a Community Development Area. These areas are designated Rural Community on the future land use map as well.

4. Summary of General Land Use Policies

The four Planning Policy Areas are each allocated a portion of the total future residential growth:

- The Urban Service Areas are planned to accommodate at least 80% of the total future residential growth.
- The Community Development Areas are planned to accommodate up to 10% of the total future residential growth.
- The Rural Conservation Areas are planned to accommodate up to 5% of the total future residential growth.
- The Agricultural Conservation Areas are planned to accommodate up to 5% of the total future residential growth.

Population estimates produced for this Plan indicate that approximately 17,700 new residents can be expected in the county by 2027. Given that the 2000 Census estimates that there are 2.56 persons per household in Augusta County that means that the county will need to provide approximately 6,900 new housing units to accommodate those new residents. Should the persons per household rate continue to fall, even more housing units would be required.

If the recommendations of this Plan are fully implemented, the Urban Service and Community Development Areas should easily be able to accommodate 90% or more of those new housing units in developments of moderate to high density. Additional land has been placed in those categories in order to ensure that enough land is available for development at any one time, helping to make sure that land located in the Rural and Agricultural Conservation Areas remains affordable for residents interested in keeping their land in agricultural production.

The Plan balances the land designated for potential development by designating the remaining land areas to remain primarily in agricultural, forestal, and low density rural uses for the foreseeable future. The Plan's policies are aimed at increasing the efficiency of providing both public and private services, thereby minimizing the local tax burden and maximizing the economic base of the county.

The future land use categories function within the geographic areas defined by the Urban Service and Community Development Areas. They serve to identify the specific use and density that is proposed for a parcel. There are ten future land use categories identified by the Future Land Use map. Those areas include:

- Industrial
- Business
- Public Use
- Mixed Use (may include industrial, business, and/or a variety of residential uses at generally higher densities)
- Multi-Family Residential (between nine and sixteen dwelling units per acre)
- Single-Family Attached Residential (between four and eight dwelling units per acre)
- Medium Density Residential (between three and six dwelling units per acre)
- Low Density Residential (between one-half and one dwelling unit per acre)
- Rural Community
- Flood Plain

Like the Planning Policy Areas, the future land use categories are not zoning classifications. Instead they act to inform the decision making process on rezoning and development applications. Since the land located in the Rural and Agricultural Conservation Areas is expected to remain rural in character, those Policy Areas do not have designated future land uses.

B. The Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

1. The Comprehensive Plan in Virginia

There are several fundamental reasons for a locality to prepare and implement a Comprehensive Plan. These include:

- To forecast and prepare for future changes in the community. These may include changes such as population size, employment base, environmental quality, and the demand for public services and facilities.
- To identify the concerns, needs, and aspirations of local citizens for the quality of life in the community and use these to set clear goals for the future.
- To establish policies, or courses of action, needed to achieve those goals and protect the public health, safety, and welfare.
- In Virginia and many other states, to conform with state requirements that every local government adopt and maintain a Comprehensive Plan.

Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia requires that every locality in the Commonwealth adopt a Comprehensive Plan. Section 15.2-2230 requires the

local Planning Commission to review that Plan at least once every five years. Section 15.2-2223 specifically states that *“the comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants, including the elderly and persons with disabilities.”*

It further states that the Comprehensive Plan shall be general in nature and that it shall:

- Designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of each feature, including any road improvement, and any transportation improvement, shown on the plan, including where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned or changed in use.
- Develop a transportation plan that designates a system of transportation infrastructure needs and recommendations that may include the designation of new and expanded transportation facilities and that support the planned development of the territory covered by the plan.
- Show the long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory and may include such items as the designation of areas for different kinds of public and private land use, a system of community service facilities, historical areas, and areas for the implementation of groundwater protection measures.

In Virginia, the local Comprehensive Plan is a guide for the governing body to follow in making both long range and day-to-day decisions regarding all aspects of community development. The governing body can exercise discretion in how strictly it interprets and follows the Plan.

However, the Code provides that the construction, extension, or change in use of streets or other public facilities be subject to review and approval by the Planning Commission as to whether the general location, character, and extent of the proposed facility is in substantial accord with the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Plan therefore, has great control over the construction of public facilities and utilities, as well as private land uses.

2. Comprehensive Planning in Augusta County

Past Comprehensive Plans for Augusta County

Augusta County’s first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1970. Only the land use portion was actually adopted by the Board of Supervisors. The basic goal of this Plan was to achieve a balanced pattern of land use throughout the county by defining areas best suited for agriculture, conservation, and urban development, and then encouraging urban development to take place inside defined service

areas for public facilities and utilities in order to keep public facility and service costs to a minimum.

This strategy was aimed at preventing a fragmented, inharmonious, and disorderly pattern of urban development. However, the Plan was prepared with relatively little public input, and therefore did not enjoy a sense of “ownership” on the part of citizens or local officials. Thus it was not strongly relied upon by the county to provide guidance over its land use decision-making.

Another Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1987. The basic strategy of this Plan was to scatter new development in a dispersed pattern throughout the county in response to requests from property owners. This Plan also had relatively little public involvement in its creation. In addition, the relative lack of comprehensiveness and clarity in the policies contributed to an undermining of its effectiveness in providing consistent guidance for the day to day decision making of the Board of Supervisors on land use matters. Further, the strategy of promoting scattered development raised concerns.

The most recent Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1994. A significant amount of growth had occurred since the adoption of the 1987 Plan and the impacts of that growth produced concerns about a variety of issues including the cost and quality of public facilities and services, environmental quality, and agricultural land uses, to name only a few. This Plan focused on establishing clearly-identified geographic areas for the different types of development that were anticipated, specifically aimed at concentrating development where services were available. The development of this Plan included a great deal of public input and it has been generally well received by the public. A significant number of the recommendations of the 1994 Plan have since been implemented by the county.

1999 Comprehensive Plan Update

In accordance with the Virginia Code requirements that a comprehensive plan be reviewed every five years, the county in 1999 undertook a review of the 1994 Plan. The 1999 review considered the entire 1994 Plan, but the consensus of the county officials and citizens was that the Plan remained a good one and that further efforts to implement it were needed. Following the 1999 review, a number of changes were made to the county’s development regulations to bring them more in line with the goals of the 1994 Plan. The Plan itself remained largely unchanged.

Updating the 1994 Comprehensive Plan

While the 1994 Plan was very well received and has proven to be a valuable tool for guiding development and providing government services, by 2004 it was clear that portions of it needed to be updated to reflect the changing conditions that had emerged in the last decade. A study, conducted by the Chandler Planning Group, was initiated in early 2004 to determine what aspects of the 1994 Plan needed the most attention in an update process. The results of this assessment showed that

the general goals and objectives of the Plan were strongly supported but there were significant concerns about the continued scattered development taking place in the county, the lack of a strong transportation or utilities component in the Plan, the need for more effective agricultural preservation programs, the lack of a strategy for financing new growth, and the lack of a clearly defined strategy for implementing the recommendations of the Plan.

Following receipt of the results of this assessment, the Board of Supervisors determined to move forward with the Comprehensive Plan Update. There were several elements to the update process, each of which was overseen by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee:

Existing Conditions (May, 2005 through November, 2005)

The first phase of the update process focused on determining the existing conditions of Augusta County. The existing conditions element began with another assessment of the desires of county officials for the updated Plan. This time, the county's consultant – Kimley Horn and Associates – interviewed each member of the Board of Supervisors as well as department and agency heads in the county. This process proceeded concurrently with the data collection process, as well as the distribution and collection of a citizen survey on development issues. The existing conditions element culminated with the delivery of the Existing Conditions Analysis document and a public meeting at the Government Center in October 2005 to present its findings. A number of revisions were made to the Existing Conditions Analysis based on the public input received at the meeting.

Future Conditions (November, 2005 through February, 2006)

Once the Existing Conditions Analysis was complete the process moved forward to the Future Conditions Scenarios. These scenarios were intended to evaluate a handful of different planning strategies that could be employed by the updated Plan. After Steering Committee consideration of several different scenarios, two were ultimately selected and presented to the public at five heavily-attended meetings in January 2006. These meetings, held at each of the five county high schools, resulted in significant public input that led the Steering Committee to move forward with the second of the two scenarios, which supported the continued use of the Planning Policy Areas concept from the 1994 Plan.

Updating the Land Use Maps (March through November, 2006)

Following the completion of the Future Conditions Scenarios, the Steering Committee moved forward with updating the Planning Policy Area and Future Land Use maps. The process began with the development of a new Planning Policy Area Map. This map was initially developed by county staff using Geographic Information System (GIS) software to match the boundaries of the different Policy Areas to the locations of specific resources, such as public utility lines, intensive agricultural sites, and conservation easements. The Steering Committee then worked to refine the Policy Area boundaries, reviewing

individual map change requests and evaluating the overall need for different intensities of development. The process ultimately resulted in a set of four Planning Policy Areas – reduced from the six found in the 1994 Plan – that the Committee felt would be appropriate to guide future development of the county.

The Future Land Use Map was developed following completion of the Planning Policy Area Map. This map was also developed initially by staff using GIS software, matching the boundaries of the future land use categories to existing and proposed land uses. The Steering Committee again worked to refine these boundaries, resulting in a map with ten separate future land use categories, including several new categories intended to encourage the mixing of uses in development areas like Fishersville and Stuarts Draft as well as maintaining the rural character of communities like Churchville and New Hope.

Updating the Goals, Objectives and Policies (June through December, 2006)

At the same time they were considering the Planning Policy Area and Future Land Use maps, the Committee was working to update the Goals, Objectives, and Policies. A consulting team from Renaissance Planning Group, with assistance from the Center for Watershed Protection, was hired to develop the transportation and natural resources sections of the Plan, including the Goals, Objectives, and Policies (as well as to develop the Thoroughfare Plan and update the existing and future conditions information for those sections). County staff was responsible for updating the remaining sections, which remained generally similar in content, if not format, to those that were found in the 1994 Plan. The Steering Committee was intensively involved in this process, meeting two to three times each month between June and December. Those meetings included two joint worksessions with the Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission that confirmed the overall vision for the Plan. The updated Goals, Objectives, and Policies were completed in December.

Draft Plan (December, 2006 through February, 2007)

After completing their work on the different elements of the updated Plan in December, 2006 the Steering Committee moved to complete the Draft Plan and present it to the public. As staff put the finishing touches on the Plan, its main points were presented to the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission in a Policy Maker Briefing with the Steering Committee in early January, 2007. Following that step, a series of three meetings will be held around the county at the end of January to present the Draft Plan to the public.