

CONCERNS OVER THE DRAFT PLANNING POLICY AREAS MAP MAP

Quick Figures:

Proposed Urban Service Area (USA): **41,000 acres (10% of plannable acres)**

Combined USA & Community Development Area (CDA): **18.5%** (anticipated to have some utilities)

Theoretical Population Build-out of Proposed USA: **419,840 people**

Projected Increase in Population: **17,700 people needing 6,900 dwelling units**

USA Acreage Needed to Support the Projected Growth (20 Years): about **1,400 acres**

Rural Conservation Area (RCA): 20.3% (42,614 acres)

Proposed Map Not Explained in the Plan

Where in the Draft Plan are the figures to go with the PPA and Future Land Use maps?

What principles and processes were used to update the map?

It is unclear how the Map designations serve the core Plan strategy of encouraging compact growth, in particular relating the population projections to the targets.

Difference between the Map and the Plan. The intent of the Plan is to encourage more compact growth. The targets look like good goals to accomplish that. However, greatly increasing the size of the PPA designated for dense growth means making room for significant growth to occur over a wider area. By definition, this is the opposite of concentrating growth. Hitting a target the size of a barn door does not mean your aim has improved. Without some relation to percent of land consumed, the growth targets are meaningless.

Community Focus. There could be tremendous benefits -- fiscal, environmental, and social -- to taking more of a community focus with the USAs and CDAs. Rather than spilling over wide areas and along corridors based on water and sewer lines, the USAs and CDAs could be focused tightly around communities, giving greater ability to plan utilities efficiently and with more certainty. The primary goal should be building good communities and doing so in a way that makes fiscal sense and meets the overall vision of the comp plan. Location of current utility and proposed services is a basic consideration. Utilities can be put nearly anywhere, given enough funding. Whether they SHOULD be extended everywhere is a planning decision, not a utility decision. Utilities provision will follow the Comp Plan; that is the guiding policy of the Augusta County Service Authority (ACSA).

The County and the ACSA could explore ways (such as no hook-up transmission zones along some corridors) to protect the viability of main utility lines and keep development concentrated in communities. Also worthy of support in the plan is the concept of small area plans and of rural communities. These tools could be better implemented if development areas were kept distinct and small enough to plan and serve.

Utilities vs Development on Well and Septic

Red (USA) areas on the map by policy can be developed only on public water and sewer (no well and septic allowed), which does have water quality benefits. However, large swaths of red and orange and yellow on the map do not protect agriculture from development. There was plenty of red on the Current ('94) map and still more than 50% of the lots created have been rural residential (p. 252). First, there is considerable farmland within the red and orange areas. They are put on notice that their farming time is limited. To the extent that the cost of developing on utilities may drive people to rural lots on well and septic, they will be driven even farther out by the large size of the red and orange areas.

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The orange designation is the worst for water and quality, since it enables development served by public water but on individual septic systems. In pure mathematical terms, if the entire 34,850 acres of CDA developed on 1 acre lots, that would be more than 34,000 septic systems! Likewise, the yellow (RCA) areas encourage residential development on wells and septic.

PPAs and Farming

The boundaries of the development PPAs – red, orange and yellow – should be evaluated for probable impact on loss of agricultural land. The complex interrelationships between ease of development and service availability need to be understood and applied to best advantage in coloring the map to meet the intent of the Plan. Particular concerns follow:

USA – include farmland and drive development farther out

CDA – include farmland and continue sprawl development pattern

RCA – these as drawn scatter residences far and wide deep within farming areas. There seems little purpose in this designation.

Long-Term View

It seems as if this map designates essentially all of the areas that could ever be served by water and sewer. But why designate them all for growth now? It would seem better in many ways to concentrate now on those that would be needed within the 5-year period before the plan is reviewed again. It will be easier to add later than to retract.

Two Scenarios – Neither Good

If the growth areas are in fact larger than needed, what could be expected as the development pattern? Likely it would be a version of these two scenarios:

Scenario A: Higher Than Expected Growth / Expected Density. If growth greatly exceed projections, or developers speculate that it will, growth at the expected density over the entire USA would bring far too much population growth and astronomical bills for utilities and other infrastructure. This is a particularly risky position. For example, the USA build out at a density of 4 dwelling per acre would be nearly 420,000 people.

Scenario B: Expected Growth / Lower Than Expected Density. If the demand does prove to be 6,900 dwellings spread over 20 years, having such a wide area to choose from gives no incentive to develop compactly (or even within the USA or CDA). The population that settles in the USA and CDA would be at a lower than desired density (costly and inefficient for utilities) and this difference might drive a disproportionate number to rural locations. The result would be unnecessary consumption of farmland and a closing off of options in the growth areas for accommodating future growth in an efficient way.

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