

CHAPTER SIX

COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN GOALS, PRINCIPLES, AND POLICIES

This comprehensive land use plan ("the Plan") is an attempt to shape the future physical development of the County by the adoption of goals, principles and policies rather than by the setting forth of requirements that would impose a rigid image for the future. The exercise of the police power of local government to regulate land use development is of course a vital set of tools whose periodic amendment and evolution over time have direct consequences for the physical development of a community. These Goals, Principles and Policies are offered to help guide the decision-making that goes into their formulation

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Central to Rappahannock County's definition of itself are the Blue Ridge Mountains and foothills, among the oldest on earth, and its largely pristine and intact ecosystem. Rappahannock's agricultural, forestry and tourism industries are critically dependent upon the careful nurturing of these natural resources and landscapes.

To acknowledge this unique status, we the people of Rappahannock declare it to be a "scenic county" and all goals, principles, and policies will reflect and devolve from this fundamental recognition.

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These are the cornerstones upon which all of Rappahannock County's land use planning shall stand.

A scenic county shall mean:

- One in which preservation and enhancement of the natural and historic beauty and cultural value of the countryside shall be respected as being of foremost importance; and,
- One in which conditions for a sustainable agricultural and tourism economy not be dependent upon traditionally defined growth patterns as have developed in jurisdictions to the east as a consequence of the growth of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area

Goals

1. To preserve the overall viewshed of the county in its unspoiled, natural setting, which gives it its special character and identity.
2. To preserve and protect the mountains with special concern for scenic ridgetops.
3. To preserve and enhance rural and open spaces.

4. To protect the natural, scenic, and historic resources, thus ensuring a high quality of life for our citizens.
5. To encourage and maintain a viable rural agricultural and tourism-based economy compatible with the county's size and character.
6. To provide for the economical delivery of necessary public services consistent with these goals.
7. To acknowledge and maintain our sense of community and encourage the spirit of volunteerism whenever possible.
8. To discourage the continuing conversion of land from agricultural uses to other uses that challenges our ability to stabilize and balance our local tax base.
9. To define the future boundaries of growth in village and commercial areas necessary to preserve our community character and to maintain the balance that exists today.
10. To provide for the strongest possible employment base for the residents of Rappahannock, with a diversified economy compatible with the County's current base of agriculture and tourism.

Principles

Principle 1

To encourage agricultural operations and ensure the preservation of the productivity, availability, and use of agricultural lands for continued production of agricultural products

Policies

1. Promote and protect agriculture as the primary use of land in rural areas and inform the public of the benefits of this policy.
2. Encourage renewal and diversification of horticultural and viticultural activities, including Agri-Tourism efforts such as wineries, while mitigating their impacts on adjacent agricultural and residential activities,

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3. Support the development of markets for Rappahannock County agricultural products, and cooperate with individual agricultural interests within the county, and establish partnerships with counties in the area that have similar development programs.
4. Encourage traditional and innovative soil and water conservation practices among the county's farmers in order to preserve productive soils, to control erosion and siltation and to protect water resources.
5. Make land use decisions and plans that approve conversion of important farmland to non-farm use only if overriding public need exists to change that land use, existing development areas cannot accommodate a proposed new use, or extenuating circumstances can be shown to exist.
6. To the maximum extent possible, separate or buffer incompatible land uses from agricultural lands and operations.
7. Discourage expansion of public utilities and other growth-inducing public facilities into agricultural areas to minimize development pressures on those areas.
8. Encourage all government agencies (at local, state and federal levels) to consider the impacts that their programs and projects may have on maintaining the availability and use of agricultural land to eliminate or minimize adverse impacts.
9. Approve the creation of voluntary agricultural and forestal districts that meet the provisions and procedures of the Code of Virginia 1950 (as amended), approve the renewal of agricultural and forestal districts created, and establish a means for the continuing addition of lands to them. Continue the Agricultural and Forestal Districts Advisory Committee for this purpose.
10. Encourage and facilitate the donations of open-space easements on land that is identified as having important scenic, historic, open-space, conservation, agricultural, woodland and wildlife-habitat qualities.
11. Maintain the Farmland Protection Program a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program to facilitate the preservation of important agricultural lands that cannot be preserved through other means.
12. Upon requests for rezoning land for more intensive use, encourage the placement of open-space easements on important scenic, recreational, historic, open-space, conservation, wooded, water resource, agricultural, and wildlife-habitat lands as a reciprocal benefit.

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13. Support use-value taxation and other fiscal programs that help to alleviate economic burdens on owners of agricultural, horticultural and forested land and continue land use planning to protect agricultural land from escalating assessments.

Principle 2

Preserve the natural, historic, recreational and scenic values, along with the healthy economy of the forested land and resource preservation districts so as to ensure that development in those areas is in conformance with their natural beauty and environmental limitations.

Policies

1. Promote multiple uses of forested land and land not in productive agricultural use, including outdoor recreation, wildlife habitats, educational uses, watershed protection, low-density residential areas, and timber harvesting.
2. Ensure that development on forestland, on ridgetops and in resource preservation districts are compatible with the environmental features of that land and does not diminish natural and scenic values.
3. Ensure that timber harvesting and road construction is conducted such that sedimentation of streams and other environment impacts are minimized.
4. Promote the placement of conservation easements on land adjoining or visible from Shenandoah National Park and the Rappahannock River and other designated scenic rivers and roads and seek to protect the scenic value of those lands when land use decisions and plans are made.

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Principle 3

Protect natural resources, including soil, water, air, viewsheds, scenery, and fragile ecosystems.

Policies

1. Require that environmental impacts of activities directly or indirectly related to new construction, including removal of vegetation, cutting of trees, altering of water sources and courses for existing users, drainageways, grading, and filling, are minimized.

2. Prohibit land uses if they have significant adverse environmental impacts that cannot be eliminated or minimized.
3. Continue to implement the County's Erosion and Sedimentation Control Ordinance including Responsible Land Disturber (RLD) certification requirements. The County should consider allowing Low Impact Development (LID) or other alternate E&S measures, where appropriate.
4. Promote the best management and prevention measures for potential groundwater pollution sources, including septic tanks, wells, and underground petroleum storage tanks.
5. Participate where appropriate and cooperate with federal and state groundwater protection programs.
6. In flood hazard areas without public sewage disposal systems, encourage low-density growth, to minimize loss of life and property damage.
7. Enforce floodplain management regulations so that property owners continue to be eligible for inexpensive flood insurance under the National Flood Insurance Program.
8. Support the conduct of an inventory to identify environmentally significant lands, and the establishment of a countywide groundwater-monitoring network.
9. Recognize the County's rivers as one of the most significant environmental resources and provide for their protection by:
 - a) Encouraging greenbelts along the rivers.
 - b) Informing the public of the benefits and values of preserving the river corridor.
 - c) Controlling development in areas adjacent to the rivers that may include development restrictions such as setbacks, buffers, or other means, or limitations on water withdrawals and/or effluent discharges.
 - d.) Manage stormwater flows to both protect the public health and safety but also to preserve existing stream channels
10. Consider carefully the impact of experimental agricultural practices that could negatively impact natural resources.

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Principle 4

Encourage residential development in designated growth areas.

Policies

1. To encourage residential development within the designated village areas, infill development to be preferred; to allow for the broadest possible range of housing opportunities, styles, and configurations, within the context of a rural, agricultural community.
2. To discourage residential strip development along public roadways that may create traffic hazards and detract from the overall scenic value of the County.
3. Encourage and foster the sense of community within designated village areas through support of community events, carnivals, festivals, etc.

Principle 5

Preserve and protect the historic character and features of the County.

Policies

1. Where supported by local residents, support the establishment of historic districts to protect recognized properties of historic value and to retain the integrity of historic neighborhoods.
2. Where supported by local residents, support the establishment of rural historic districts to protect recognized properties of historic value that are located outside village and town settings that include historic buildings and the extensive surrounding historic landscapes and estate grounds.
3. Ensure that proposed development is compatible with the architectural attributes of nearby or adjoining historic properties, neighborhoods, and districts.

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4. Promote the placement of scenic easements particularly (but not limited to) on lands associated with historic buildings and sites and those on the National Register of Historic Places, and seek to protect the scenic value of those lands when land use decisions and plans are made.
5. Promote the placement of scenic easements on lands adjoining (but not limited to) roads designated as Scenic Highways or Virginia Byways and seek to protect the scenic and recreational value of those lands when land use decisions and plans are made.
6. Provide design incentives and land use controls for new development along gateways to historic areas so that such new development will be compatible and harmonious with the historic area.
7. Support signage and other recognition of important historical sites.
8. Encourage property owners to, whenever possible, protect and preserve the stone walls and rock fences of the County

Principle 6

Ensure that the provision of capital improvements including schools, parks, roads, and sewer and water service enhances the quality and character of rural and open-space environments.

Policies

1. Prohibit the extension of capital improvements into agricultural areas when such improvements would lead to increased development pressures.
2. Maintain the existing character of the primary and secondary road system and upgrade it only for safety purposes or traffic increases planned by County authorities. “White line” lane delineation on secondary roads should be avoided where it would tend to increase travel speeds to the detriment of public safety
3. Discourage package sewage treatment plants for residential uses except for existing dwelling units when septic systems fail and the Health Department establishes that repair of the existing system or installation of a conventional septic system is not possible.

4. As technologies evolve, the County should investigate alternatives to conventional sewage treatment systems, both to service existing development and to serve such growth as may occur. Such alternate technologies should be “low-technology” in nature, and appropriate to a rural environment where monitoring, testing and operational costs are minimal.
5. Take into account the fiscal impacts of necessary capital improvements such as roads, schools, and water and sewer service when land use decisions and plans are made.
6. The Comprehensive Land Use Plan shall be considered by all County governmental agencies, commissions, boards, and authorities in their policy deliberations when related to physical development activities.
7. In consideration of all planned transportation projects, consideration should be given towards accommodation of agricultural use lanes and alternative means of transportation including bicycles and horses.
8. Ensure that recreational opportunities are considered in capital projects, whenever appropriate.

Principle 7

Promote only economic growth that assists in maintaining our existing balance and is compatible with the environmental quality and rural character and does not adversely affect active farm operations, forestry operations, residential neighborhoods, the tourist industry, and the county's fiscal stability.

Policies

1. To maintain an agricultural employment base necessary to ensure the continued role of agriculture as an important economic activity in the county.
2. To support a modest diversification of employment opportunities in Rappahannock County. Such opportunities should reflect employment base needs within the county.

3. Direct commercial and non-agricultural industry and business into existing commercial centers or designated growth areas.
4. Allow certain commercial development that by its nature must be located in sparsely populated areas, near agricultural operations, near existing neighborhoods or on specific sites to be so located if:
 - a) The development enhances the agricultural and tourist industries of the county.
 - b) The development does not impede traffic flow on roads and at intersections.
 - c) The development is not and does not initiate strip development which creates traffic hazards and inefficient land use, but can be clustered now or in the future with other development served by the controlled access and frontage roads.
 - d) The development does not overburden the County's water resources, and does not require the transfer of water resources from other jurisdictions to sustain the development.
5. Approve requests for redevelopment of existing commercial and industrial facilities only if it causes minimal detrimental effects to the area subject to the provisions of the County Zoning Ordinance.
6. Ensure that standards for site plans and planned development of business and industry include landscaping requirements and require conditional zoning proffers for such development to include landscaping plans and minimize outdoor light pollution.
7. Investigate and initiate ways of promoting tourism as a suitable and appropriate form of economic development and ensure that tourism-oriented development is compatible with the rural and agricultural character of the county.
8. Consider the planning goals, principles, and policies of the Town of Washington and, where feasible, undertake joint or coordinated action with the town government and independent county authorities.
9. Wireless and Wired Broadband communications and electronic service delivery technologies are essential components of the 21st century economy and the means to provide for their expansion to serve all of the county's residents should be encouraged, in concert with the Principles articulated and policies enumerated herein

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Principle 8

Protect the county's fiscal capabilities.

Policies

1. Evaluate all private proposals and public utility land use plans to ensure that associated public service costs are minimized.
2. Develop a means of consistent, objective, and accurate fiscal impact analysis for use in such evaluations.
3. Ensure that new development pay for the maximum amount allowed under state law of the public service costs created by that development.

Principle 9

Encourage citizen involvement in the planning process.

Policies

1. Require that all meetings involving preparing, revising, or amending the Comprehensive Plan be publicly advertised and open to the public.
2. Provide opportunity for citizens to participate in all phases of the planning process.
3. Ensure that information pertaining to the Plan and the planning process are available to citizens in an understandable form.
4. Encourage all interested parties to review and comment on the Comprehensive Plan and implementing ordinances such as Zoning and Subdivision regulations.

Principle 10

Promote the philosophy that land is a finite resource and not a commodity, that all citizens are stewards of the land, and that the use and quality of the land are of prime importance to each present and future citizen as well as to the Commonwealth, the Country and indeed, the world.

Policies

1. Promote government and private organization sponsored forums, seminars and workshops to provide information and education about land, its uses and preservation.
2. Encourage public and private schools to include offerings on environmental subjects in the respective curriculum
3. Encourage the use of services provided by government agencies and private organizations for proper land use and water resource preservation.
4. Recognize landowners' practices that protect and preserve the land.
5. Be mindful of adjacent jurisdictions' land use planning efforts and work to collaboratively manage common resources, such as river valleys, mountain ranges, migratory patterns and other elements of the "Green Infrastructure"

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