

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Challenge

The challenges that face every community are those of planning for the future and managing the process of change. While the physical manifestations of change vary from time to time and from place to place, perhaps the most dependable constant in life is that things will not remain as they are. Accordingly, the Code of Virginia mandates that jurisdictions prepare and regularly revise a Comprehensive Plan for the physical development of their communities.

As a rural jurisdiction on the ex-urban fringe of the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Area, Rappahannock County has been made acutely aware of the ever-changing dynamic of growth and development. The post-World War II era (particularly through the development of the Interstate and Primary Highway Systems) has seen enormous changes in the physical development of the Virginia countryside. From a primarily rural, agricultural economy, jurisdictions to our east have gradually and inexorably transformed themselves into bastions of middle-class flight from closer-in areas, evolved into bedroom communities, and culminated (for the moment) in low-density suburban enclaves integrating residential, commercial and light industrial components.

In the face of this trend that has been mirrored in many suburban areas all across our nation, Rappahannock County has not been idle. Elsewhere in this document is recounted Rappahannock County's long tradition of progressive planning and land use policy. Even though these policies have quite properly evolved over time, the trend both in the citizenry of Rappahannock County and its elected and appointed representatives has been remarkably consistent.

While this community may have much to learn from our neighbors to the east, and while the economic forces which shaped them have and will continue to be brought to bear upon us, we nevertheless feel that Rappahannock is unique, and that there is a natural beauty and order that command our respect. This document presents the underpinnings of this belief, through analysis of the manifold demographic, economic, and environmental conditions that affect future growth and development.

This document is the blueprint for all land use policy in Rappahannock County, which is typically implemented through legislation adopted by the Governing Body, which is the Board of Supervisors, but which may occasionally be set by policies implemented by the Rappahannock County Planning Commission, interpreted through the Board of Zoning Appeals, and enforced through the Board's agent, the Zoning Administrator. The process whereby such land use policy is crafted, adopted and implemented is known as planning.

The primary reason why a community should plan is to prepare for and to cope with change. As previously stated, change is inevitable and whether it is a positive or negative force in a community may depend upon the planning activities carried out in the community. By planning, a community attempts to deal with present realities and to provide for future needs, while still adhering to its goals and principles.

Essentially, planning involves:

- the collection and analysis of data,
- the development of goals and objectives,
- the formulation of planning and development policies,
- the consideration of alternative courses of action,
- the preparation of a plan, and
- the adoption of measures necessary to implement the plan.

Planning can be used to guide and coordinate the changes Rappahannock County is experiencing by providing for:

- the responsible use of land and natural resources,
- a satisfactory living environment for local residents,
- anticipated future public facility needs,
- acceptable development patterns, and
- a sound fiscal base.

The Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is a written document that sets forth the characteristics of Rappahannock County in general terms. The plan is Rappahannock County's statement of its aspirations and goals for future growth, or put another way, the plan is a tool by which County citizens in conjunction with the local governing body ask, "Where are we; where do we go from here; what do we become?"

In late 2002 and early 2003, the Rappahannock County Planning Commission sponsored a series of public forums throughout the County. These forums were instrumental in getting input from citizens on matters as diverse as housing, transportation, education, and local businesses including agriculture, open space, and a variety of other issues. The comments, opinions and concerns that were expressed at the forums made their way into the Goals, Objectives and Policies of Chapter 6, and indeed, are present throughout this document.

The content of the Rappahannock County Comprehensive Plan, and its technical preparation by the County Planning Commission, is guided by the Code of Virginia 1950 (as amended). The Code establishes the legislative purpose, the general context and scope, and the review and adoption procedures for a community to follow, and reads as follows:

Title 15.2-2223--Comprehensive Plan to be prepared and adopted; scope and purpose. The local planning commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing

body shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.

In the preparation of a comprehensive plan the commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and trends of growth, and of the probable future requirements of its territory and inhabitants. 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.

The Rappahannock County Comprehensive Plan specifically includes background materials, policies, and recommendations about various communities and areas within the County. Detailed information about the only incorporated town in Rappahannock County, the Town of Washington, is presented in the Town of Washington Comprehensive Plan, dated September 8, 1999.

The Rappahannock County Comprehensive Plan includes four major components. First, a series of background reports describe and analyze the County' s natural features such as soils, topography, water, forests, and so on. Additional supporting materials include population and its growth, economic and employment characteristics, land use characteristics, transportation, housing and others. Secondly, based upon these background reports, the County' s goals and objectives are established. This element describes the policies or principles for future County change. Thirdly, the background reports and goals and objectives are merged into a future land use plan, delineating in text and map form a visual idea of the future. Finally, a series of implementation measures are described indicating what the County' s citizens and governing bodies have at their disposal in order to achieve the Plan' s policies and objectives.

Previous Planning

Since it was created in 1962, the Rappahannock County Planning Commission has been active in planning. In 1962 the County' s first Subdivision Ordinance was adopted, followed in 1966 by the adoption of the County' s first Zoning Ordinance. Both documents were revised in 1973 with complete revisions to both the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances in 1986 and 1987, respectively. In 1975, the County adopted an Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinance, which has been revised on several occasions since then, most recently in 2000.

In addition to these efforts, a General Commercial Area Plan, encompassing Zoning Ordinance and Comprehensive Plan amendments, was prepared and adopted in 1993.

The Planning Commission appointed an Agricultural Advisory Committee in 1991, which was charged with exploring the concerns of producers in the local agricultural community. The Commission intended to use this group to provide a direct sounding board to assess local policies and planning' s impact on that vital sector of local life. The efforts of the Advisory Committee, discussed elsewhere in

this document, have included the preparation of a study to assess the Fiscal Impact of Agriculture on local governmental finance, and a survey of local farmers' attitudes regarding growth, development, local taxing and land use policies, and the relative health of local agriculture as an industry.

The Comprehensive Plan itself was first adopted in 1973, and was revised in 1980, 1985, 1992 and 1998.

Various specific planning efforts have been undertaken in the areas of water quality, public facilities planning and others; they are discussed elsewhere in this document.

County Government

Rappahannock County has the traditional County Board of Supervisors form of government. The County has five voting districts that are decennially revised based upon population: Hampton, Jackson, Piedmont, Stonewall-Hawthorne, and Wakefield. One supervisor is elected from each district. The Board of Supervisors is elected to serve four-year terms and is basically responsible for the legislative, administrative, and financial aspects of County government. The Board holds regular meetings at 2:00 PM for General Business and 7:00 PM for Public Hearings once a month at the County Courthouse located in the Town of Washington, and such other meetings as the pace of business may dictate.

Rappahannock County has a County Administrator who acts as the Zoning and Subdivision Administrator. The Rappahannock County Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals are administrative agents for the County and the Circuit Court, respectively. They direct the administration of the Zoning, Subdivision and Erosion and Sediment Control Ordinances. The County Planning Commission consists of seven members, one of whom is a member of the Board of Supervisors, another of whom is a representative of the Board of Zoning Appeals and the remaining five who are appointed to four-year terms of office by the Board of Supervisors by voting district. The Board of Zoning Appeals consists of five members all appointed at large by the Circuit Court for five-year terms of office.

Some of the local government organizations involved in local planning efforts include the Rappahannock County School Board, the Rappahannock County Water and Sewer Authority (RCWSA), and the Rappahannock County Recreational Facilities Authority (RCRFA). The Rappahannock County School Board, composed of five elected members representing the five magisterial districts of the County, are the stewards of the County's public educational facilities. As such, they administer programs that consume the majority of public spending in the County in their mission to provide the highest quality education available. The RCWSA was established in April 1968 pursuant to the Code of Virginia with the primary purpose of furnishing water and sewer facilities or both to residents and businesses in certain areas in Rappahannock County. It currently manages facilities providing sewer service to the village of Sperryville and to the County's two public schools, as well as water facilities in the Town of Washington. On November 2, 1978, the RCRFA was created. The establishment of this Authority enables the County to raise and solicit funds from various local, state, and federal agencies and to provide increased

recreational opportunities for the residents of Rappahannock County. The RCRFA currently owns and operates the Rappahannock County Park located near the Town of Washington on U.S. Rt. 211, and sponsors the annual Fodderstack 10-K Race.

Several agencies of the Commonwealth of Virginia provide services through local field offices, whose funding is provided, in part, by direct local appropriation. The relationship between these agencies, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Services, the Sheriff' s Office, the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI&SU) Extension Office, and the local government is one of partnership with the Board of Supervisors and County staff providing funding and support, respectively.