

Section I Introduction and Overview

As described in Section III, C., the Comprehensive Plan will undergo an annual review to evaluate the Plan's growth assumptions, critique the conceptual land use maps, and determine progress on implementing the Action Plan. The first annual review occurred from January through May of 2005 and October and November of 2006.

A. The Purpose and Meaning of the Comprehensive Plan

The Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

Legal Basis of the Plan

The comprehensive plan is an official public document that serves as the community's guide for future decisions regarding development, preservation, public facilities and other key components of community life.

Section 15.2-2223 of the Code of Virginia requires that every governing body in the Commonwealth adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the territory under its jurisdiction. Section 15.2-2230 requires the local Planning Commission to review the plan at least every five years.

Section 15.2-2223 of the Code establishes the purpose and scope of the plan, stating 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."

This Section of the Code further states that the comprehensive plan shall be general in nature in that it shall:

- designate the general or approximate location and character of features shown on the plan, including where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, removed or changed;
- 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 transportation facilities, a system of community service facilities, historical areas, and areas for the implementation of groundwater protection measures.

Section 15.2-2200 establishes the legislative intent of planning and zoning enabling authority. In summary, the State's intent is to encourage local governments to:

- improve the public health, safety, convenience and welfare of the citizens;
- plan for future development with adequate highway, health, recreational and other facilities;
- recognize the needs of agriculture, industry and business in future growth;
- preserve agricultural and forestal land;
- provide a healthy surrounding for family life in residential areas; and
- provide that community growth be consonant with the efficient use of public funds.

The Comprehensive Plan may include multiple elements which may be produced as separate documents. Detailed Area Plans, Corridor Plans and Special Policy Studies are examples of elements that may be adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

In 2007, the General Assembly added Section 15.2-2223.1 to the Code of Virginia requiring high growth localities to designate Urban Development Areas (UDA) in their comprehensive plans by July 1, 2011 (counties) and July 1, 2012 (cities and towns). Designated UDA are to be areas of reasonably compact development that can accommodate 10 to 20 years of projected growth. In 2010, the legislation was amended to establish density and design criteria for UDAs and to improve the coordination between transportation and land use. In 2012, the legislation was amended to permit the establishment of UDAs to be optional.

Policy Basis of the Plan

In addition to statutory requirements, there are several fundamental reasons why a County would desire to prepare and implement a Comprehensive Plan. These include:

- To forecast and prepare for future changes in the community such as population size, employment base, environmental quality, and the demand for public services and facilities
- To set goals for the future based upon the needs and aspirations of local citizens;
- To establish policies, strategies and other implementation actions needed to achieve those goals and to protect the public health, safety and welfare.

The Comprehensive Plan is the most fundamental public document produced by a local governing body in that it establishes the basis for all subsequent actions, including zoning and subdivision ordinances, public investments in capital facilities, etc. For maximum effectiveness, all such implementation efforts, such as development regulations, should be based upon the policies set forth in the comprehensive plan.

In Virginia, the local comprehensive plan is not a set of regulations per se, but is considered to be a *guide* for decision-making. The comprehensive plan provides the basis for legislative decisions, but is not a regulation in and of itself.

The Terminology Used in this Plan

The terms that provide the Plan’s structure can be understood as a hierarchy, from the general to the specific, as follows:

Vision: A description of the desired state of the entire community in the long term future; an ideal image or “portrait” to serve as an overall target at which the community will aim.

Goal: A desired, ideal end-state for a particular community resource or feature. (example: “preserve the quality of natural resources”)

Strategy / Policy: A broad, general approach toward achieving a goal.

A course of action or guideline for taking actions and decisions toward pursuing a long term goal; in some cases may include the term “strategy”.

The term “strategy” is often used interchangeably with the term “policy”, although strategies are often broader in scope and less specific than policies. Typically, multiple policies are pursued to implement any given goal. (example of a broad strategy: “protect water quality”; example of a specific policy: “promote the setting aside of floodplain lands in open space during the development process”)

Action: A specific task or project implemented to carry out a policy. Often, multiple action steps are taken to carry out a given policy. Actions are typically organized into three categories: including:

Project: single-event efforts that have a clear beginning and end (example: “pursue better mapping of floodplains in the County”)

Program: ongoing implementation efforts carried out by local government personnel or by public/private partnerships of government, businesses and/or volunteers (example: “promote regular inspections of septic systems”)

Regulation: provisions that are adopted into local or state laws (example: “amend zoning and subdivision ordinances to require BMPs for new development”)

B. The Process - A Citizen-Based Planning Document

This Comprehensive Plan is based upon substantial citizen involvement and input, which was achieved mainly in two ways.

Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC)

At the very beginning of the plan update process in the autumn of 2000, the County Board of Supervisors appointed a 30-member Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) consisting of the five members of the Planning Commission and 25 other prominent citizen leaders from throughout the County. The CAC met regularly from late 2000 through completion of the draft plan in the summer of 2002.

The CAC held 15 work sessions of its own, in addition to attending and conducting the 20 citizen input meetings discussed below. During its initial work sessions during the spring and summer of 2001, the CAC reviewed information prepared by the consulting team and staff. During the autumn of 2001 and the winter and spring of 2002, the Committee took several major steps in preparing the draft plan. The CAC:

- created a vision statement and set of key goals, based upon its judgment and the input it heard from citizens earlier in the process (discussed below);
- created and analyzed several alternative future “scenarios” for achieving that vision;
- selected a preferred scenario and conceptual strategy for achieving that scenario;
- prepared specific actions for the County to take to implement the Plan; and
- reviewed, refined and affirmed a draft Plan on June 25, 2002 to forward to the Planning Commission for its review (Draft Plan dated September 9, 2002).

Throughout its work, the CAC reached decisions by consensus, through highly interactive work sessions that featured creative and energetic discussions, resulting in a strong consensus support of the group for each element of the Plan, including the proposed framework for future land use and infrastructure that forms the basis of the Plan.

Citizens at Large

The public at large was invited to participate at three key stages, including a total of 20 interactive public meetings held at different locations throughout the County.

Initially, a series of 14 community input meetings were held in various communities throughout the County during late 2000 and early 2001. These were interactive, participatory sessions in which citizens were able to share concerns, ideas and suggestions about the future of their local community as well as the future of the County as a whole. These meetings were well documented and the results compiled into a formal report and

used as input into the later work of the CAC. Members of the CAC attended these as well, in order to get a good idea of what citizens were saying. In addition, citizens were invited and encouraged to attend the CAC meetings, and to submit ideas, questions and suggestions in writing to the County at any time throughout the process.

Second, after the CAC completed developing the key concepts of the new comprehensive plan, these ideas were presented to the public at large in a series of six additional community meetings held throughout the County in the spring of 2002. This input was used in preparing the draft plan submitted by the CAC to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors for formal review.

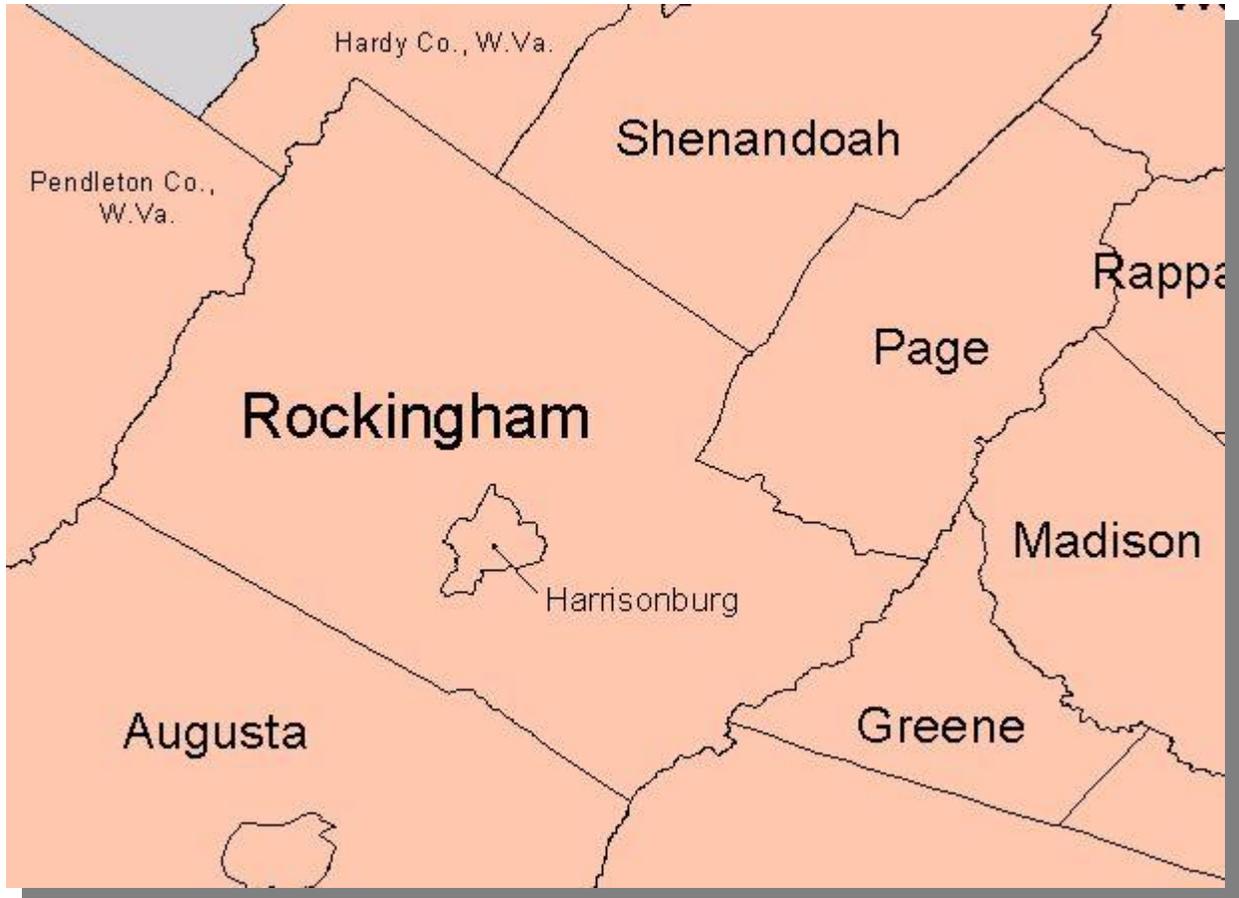


Citizen Advisory Committee Workshop



Citizen Advisory Committee Workshop

Figure 1-1
Regional Location Map



C. Summary of the Major Elements and Themes of this Plan

The Major Elements of this Plan

Section II: The Plan: Vision, Goals, Policies, and Actions

Part A contains a narrative description of the Vision of the County's future, describing what citizens wish the County to be twenty years from now and beyond.

Part B contains the long term Goals for each key resource

Part C contains the fundamental Policies for Growth Management, including the concept of phasing infrastructure and the guidelines for future land use

1. Framework for Planning the Future
2. Conceptual Plan for Phasing Development to 2010, 2020 and 2050
3. Integration of Land Use, Transportation and Utilities
4. Policies for Rezoning Decisions
5. Cooperation and Collaboration Among Local Jurisdictions

Part D contains Policies for Specific Geographic Areas

1. South and East of Harrisonburg
2. North of Harrisonburg
3. McGaheysville
4. Massanutten and Vicinity
5. Around the Towns
 - Bridgewater-Dayton-Mt. Crawford
 - Broadway-Timberville
 - Elkton
 - Grottoes
6. Rural Areas

Part E contains a brief summary of background analysis for each resource topic, as well as the Strategies, Policies and Actions for each resource, including

1. Natural Resources
2. Historic Resources
3. Agricultural Resources
4. Economic Resources
5. Land Use and Urban Design
6. Transportation
7. Public Facilities
8. Community Culture and Identity

Section III: Implementation

This section sets forth an Action Plan for Implementing the Policies of this Plan including a list of actions with timeframes, responsibilities and reporting procedures.

The Major Themes of this Plan

Several key themes emerged from the planning process, and are expressed in various ways throughout this plan, including the following:

1. Balance

- Balancing preservation and development of land resources through growth management techniques such as zoning and phasing of utilities and roads
- Balancing of public and private interests and needs through a combination of voluntary incentives, public funding and regulation of private land use activities

2. Cooperation

- Achieving effective planning through cooperation among the various local governments
- Achieving effective economic development and public service delivery through cooperation between the County and the City
- Achieving effective decision-making through open planning processes with substantial citizen involvement

3. Quality of Life for the Long Term

- Preserving the existing quality of life for future generations of Rockingham County residents
- Planning for the long term with a view not only to the 20-year time horizon, but also to the 50-year horizon