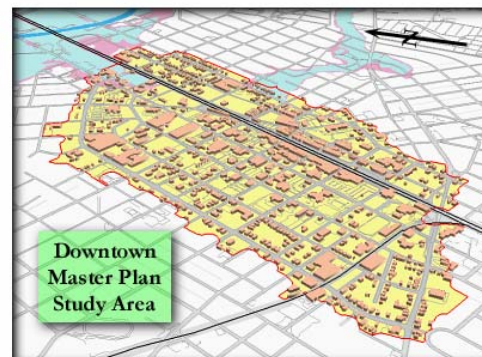
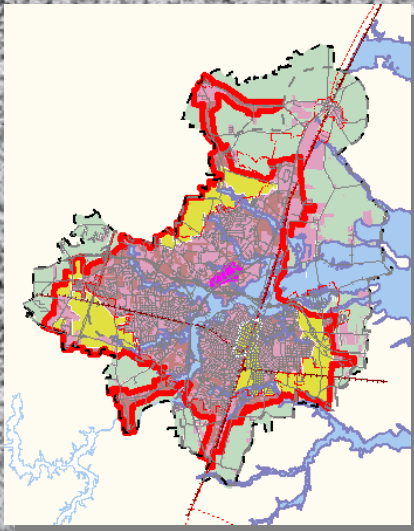


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Comprehensive Plan serves as the City's official policy document for the City Council, Planning Board, other Boards and the Administration when addressing growth.

There are three key components of any comprehensive planning process: gathering and analyzing data on existing conditions; developing goals, objectives, and strategies and preparing the plan.

When developing the comprehensive planning process, the City made a strong commitment to conduct a completely open and inclusive planning process. Throughout the comprehensive planning process, everyone who lived or worked in Rocky Mount had an opportunity to participate. All Steering Committee meetings were posted and open to the public and held on a regular basis. This open comprehensive planning process has resulted in a Comprehensive Plan that, as it is implemented, will result in an improved quality of life for all residents.



I. VISION AND GOALS

A. Vision

With the City at a significant crossroads, **TOGETHER TOMORROW** takes its cues from the distinctive history and form of Rocky Mount as it is today and provides a vision for what it can be tomorrow.

TOGETHER TOMORROW provides the opportunity to channel

Vision

In the year 2025, Rocky Mount will be a beautiful place to live, work and play -a city of new excitement and vitality with a high quality of life for all.

growth in a positive manner, avoiding the snarling traffic and overdeveloped pitfalls some of our neighbors to the West have experienced. Smart Growth principles judiciously applied to our local condition will guide in restoring vitality to our Downtown and older neighborhoods while promoting a greater sense of place for the City as a whole. The balance is critical in promoting progress yet retaining the things that are Rocky Mount's heritage for the generations to come. It is a vision worth striving for.

B. Goals

During the visioning process, residents of the Study Area attended a series of public meetings in which they identified issues of importance to the future of the Study Area. Following the initial hearings, additional public forums were held to consolidate these ideas into the goals and objectives of this plan. The goals were further refined and approved by the Steering Committee, which included representatives of the Rocky Mount Planning Board, area businesses, nonprofit organizations and private citizens. Goals for three optional elements -- Smart Growth Principles and Values, Natural Hazards, and Intergovernmental Cooperation -- were added during plan revisions in 2002, when Census 2000 data was incorporated in to this plan.

II. THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The following are the underlying principles for the Comprehensive Plan:

- Future development will be balanced to meet the needs of the community.
- Special attention will be directed to that portion of the Study Area located within Edgecombe County to "jump start" investment and revitalization.
- Rocky Mount will continue as a regional center in eastern North Carolina.
- The Downtown will be the City's preferred location for government, offices, businesses and cultural institutions -- but it will strengthen its retail and housing components.
- Major corridors will continue as the City's primary retail and office locations, but the City will facilitate balance in encouraging future businesses throughout the City.
- All neighborhoods will be improved to create outstanding places for residents.
- The transportation system will be upgraded to improve mobility.
- The open space system will be expanded.
- Floodplain considerations will play a larger role in the City's development and infrastructure decisions.

This Comprehensive Plan includes 11 goals and subsequent strategies that are based on these principles. Each strategy has been evaluated, matched with key community groups, leaders, organizations and agencies for implementation and provided a timeframe for completion.

As Map 1-1 indicates, two key components of this Comprehensive Plan are the Land Use and Thoroughfare Plans. The Land Use Plan includes 5 Smart Growth Areas (SGAs) where growth and development would be encouraged and can best be accommodated and supported because of existing and proposed local transportation networks; water, sewer and other utility systems and other infrastructure needed to support growth. The five Smart Growth Areas listed in Map 1-1 are designed to provide balanced "Inward" and "Outward" growth. Balanced growth aims to encourage growth within the City limits while at the same time fostering new growth on the City's periphery. The Southeast, West and Northwest Smart Growth Areas provide the opportunity for "Outward Growth" while the Downtown Smart Growth Area and the Community Enterprise District Smart Growth Area provide for "Inward Growth" and "Revitalization." The proposed major and minor arterial roads included in Map 1-1 will connect these Smart Growth Areas with each other and with existing commercial, residential, industrial, retail and recreational and other community facilities in the Study Area.



III. ELEMENTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be used on a daily basis as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment, capital improvements, economic incentives and other matters affecting the City's environment— built and natural. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Plan should be the basis for future planning across all functional areas, such as transportation and land use. The following are summaries of each element of this Comprehensive Plan.

A. SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Although a comprehensive plan is a reflection of social and economic values, the plan is fundamentally a long-range guide to the physical development of a city, county or region that covers the entire community, geographically. It is the translation of the community's values into a scheme that guides elected and appointed officials on how, why, when and where to build, rebuild, or preserve the community.

Since the 1960s, three Comprehensive Plans have been prepared for the City of Rocky Mount. This fourth Comprehensive Plan began in October 1998 when the City Council appointed a 23-member Steering Committee that reflected the diverse interests of the City. After working through the urgent recovery from the flood of 1999, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and the City's Planning and Development Department staff, in the fall of 2001, reactivated the planning process. Following a reevaluation of the plan, a consensus was reached that city staff would complete the plan based upon the Planning Tier 1, Comprehensive Plan Model adopted by the N.C. Legislative Commission to Address Smart Growth, Growth Management and Development Issues.

Under the Planning Tier 1 designation, the local government designates the Planned Growth Area (PGA), Smart Growth Areas (SGAs) and Critical and Sensitive (C&S) areas within its jurisdiction and its extraterritorial jurisdiction for a 2025 planning horizon. Tier 1 plans include standards and criteria for area designations, establish development and conservation goals, address affordable housing needs and express appropriate policies, practices and strategies for plan implementation. Additionally, the Tier 1 planning process includes broad-based public involvement to achieve consensus on the development and conservation vision for the community.

To help integrate Smart Growth Principles into the Tier 1 comprehensive planning process, the City of Rocky Mount's Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the Planning Board and City Planning and Development staff viewed a Smart Growth Presentation and afterwards completed a survey. The survey results revealed a consensus on the following issues:

- Growth and development are issues of concern in our community.
- Growth and development problems are getting worse.
- Smart Growth Principles would be beneficial to the comprehensive planning process.

In response to the survey, the following issues emerged as the top growth-related issues facing the City.

- Lack of affordable housing
- Traffic congestion
- Declining air and water quality
- Overburdened infrastructure
- Loss of farmland and green space
- Increasing risk from natural hazards

A comparison of the top Smart Growth Principles with the top growth-related issues showed that Smart Growth Principles address each of the growth-related issues (see Table 1-1). The fact that each top growth-related issue is addressed by a top Smart Growth Principle strongly suggests that Smart Growth Principles can effectively address the issues that Rocky Mount faces as it plans for the future.

B. DEMOGRAPHICS

The Study Area for this Comprehensive Plan includes the corporate limits of Rocky Mount, adjacent properties in the Rocky Mount extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) and properties beyond the ETJ that are likely to be impacted by future growth. Moderate growth forecasts that are used for this plan project the population of the Study Area to increase from 62,674, according to the 2000 US Census, to 95,866 in 2025. This rate of growth is consistent with the 35% growth rate that the City of Rocky Mount experienced in the past twenty years and will generate a need for more than 13,000 new housing units.



C. LAND USE

Goal

Provide flexibility and preserve residential neighborhoods, encourage commercial development, enhance community appearance, revitalize the downtown core and encourage the preservation and reuse of historic structures.

Implementing the following principles will help the City to attain this goal.

- The City Council should adopt and implement the Comprehensive Plan, following as closely as possible the schedule for implementation of its component policies. Once adopted, the Comprehensive Plan should be used as a policy guide for decisions on land use and all other geographic and functional planning in the Study Area.
- The City should continue to implement flood mitigation efforts resulting from Hurricane Floyd.
- Future development will be balanced to meet the needs of the community.
- Reinvestment in existing infrastructure in the Downtown must occur.
- Growth on the periphery must occur in the designated "Smart Growth Areas".
- Rocky Mount will continue as a Regional Center.
- The Downtown will be the City's preferred location for government, offices businesses, and cultural institutions but it will strengthen its retail and housing components.
- Major Corridors will continue as the City's primary retail and office locations but the city will facilitate balance in encouraging future businesses through out the city.
- All neighborhoods will be improved to create outstanding places for residents.
- The transportation system will continue to strengthen . At the same time access for pedestrians and cyclist will be improved.
- The open space system will be expanded.
- Floodplain considerations will play a larger role in the City's development and infrastructure decisions.

In order to attain the goal and support the principles, the following Smart Growth strategies will be implemented:

Promote the Planned Growth Area in the City of Rocky Mount. This is the land having the greatest investment of city infrastructure and are located outside the Critical & Sensitive Land Areas.

- Promote Infill Growth and Revitalization opportunities in the Planned Growth Area. The infill opportunities

within the current City Limits are the primary focus for ideal development. It must however be recognized that there is insufficient suitable land to provide all the projected growth requirements to the year 2025. The PGA outside the current City Limits will satisfy that additional requirement.

- Promote Smart Growth Areas. Each of the five designated areas are selected from the Planned Growth Area for unique opportunity for development.. The combination of Inward SGAs and Outward SGAs is the critical balance of growth opportunities for the City.
- Smart Growth Areas are aimed at directing new development to provide new housing options, pedestrian-scale development and efficient use of City infrastructure. .
- Inclusion of land within the Smart Growth Areas is not tied to any overriding financial incentive program.
- Promote SGAs as opportunities for distinctive new patterns of development. Each Smart Growth Area shall have individual planning strategies which maximize those opportunities for development within the broad goals of Smart Growth planning.

Promote a rational Land Use development pattern-

- Oppose Land Use, development and zoning decisions that are not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Oppose rezoning and infrastructure improvement that create a "leap frog" development pattern.
- Encourage development to occur with the supporting infrastructure to maximize the City's capital investments.
- Study annexation potential and the ETJ boundary based on the Comprehensive Plan and development trends.

Enhance opportunities of appropriate residential development.

- Facilitate compatible reinvestment, redevelopment,, and infill residential development in existing neighborhoods throughout the City.
- Encourage new residential development to locate adjacent to existing residential development where utilities are available to build stronger neighborhoods by connecting roads and sidewalks.
- Promote office development and limited mutli-family as suitable buffers between single-family neighborhoods and higher traffic uses such as commercial, industrial and highway areas.

Support appropriate commercial and office development.

- Direst highway scale commercial development along major highways and adjacent to existing concentrations.
- Direct community-scale commercial development to



- occur in appropriate locations.
- Support neighborhood scale commercial development where such uses support neighborhoods, and meet local needs.
- Support office development in existing locations and facilitate corporate offices in the downtown area.
- Mixed-use development integrating different land uses and building types can create a vibrant blend of household types and should be sensitively encouraged in appropriate places within the community.
- The City should continue to facilitate industrial development. This should include continuing to invest and/or facilitate industrial park development. However, it also should include identifying appropriate industrial areas within the City limits, particularly since most industrial development is occurring outside the City.

D. TRANSPORTATION

Goal

A transportation system that increases transportation options for a diverse population, enhances roadways and pathways for pedestrians and bicycles, as well as cars, improves traffic flow, and promotes traffic safety.

A review of the existing transportation system revealed that its major components are highways, aviation, rail service, public transportation, sidewalks and bikeways. The Study Area is well served by a roadway system that includes an interstate (I-95), national routes (US 64, US 301), state highways (NC 4, NC 43, NC 48, and NC 97), state routes (i.e. Winstead Avenue, SR 1613) and City streets (i.e. Grace Street). When last surveyed in 1998, there were nearly 150 miles of state-maintained roads and 257 miles of city-maintained streets within the Study Area. This highway network offers the City excellent access to major urban and recreational areas within and outside the state.

The classification of all streets and highways is essential to any transportation plan. In this Comprehensive Plan, freeways, major arterials and minor arterials constitute the major thoroughfare system, while collector and local streets comprise the local street system. The first Rocky Mount Urban Area Transportation Plan was prepared and approved by the Metropolitan Planning Organization of 1998. On September 17, 2001 the Transportation Advisory Committee of the Rocky Mount Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which includes the Study Area, adopted a revised Transportation Plan 2025. This plan has been accepted and approved by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC DOT) and the Federal

highway Administration (FHWA) and includes the following:

- Constructing a 4.3 mile Northern Connector
- Building a bridge over CSX railroad in Battleboro
- Widening US 301 Bypass, NC Highway 43, Country Club Road, Hunter Hill Road and North Winstead Avenue
- Improving the bus systems, railway, pedestrian walkways and bikeways

Ensuring that these long-range planning documents keep pace with local growth and development patterns necessitates that transportation planning activities for the area remain continuous, comprehensive and cooperative.

In addition to collecting data to ensure that long-range planning documents keep pace with local growth and development patterns, the Transportation Plan includes the following objectives and strategies:

- Ensure that all transportation planning is consistent with and fully integrated into the Comprehensive Plan
- A nationwide trend toward building better communities through strategies such as a balanced transportation system deserves consideration in Rocky Mount. Attention is needed to the provision of sidewalks and bikeways, especially along major thoroughfares where these facilities are not currently provided, and in the design of new neighborhoods.
- The Transportation Plan should provide sufficient information to staff, appointed and elected officials to provide a strong basis for decision-making.
- Once corridor locations are designated and approved by NCDOT and the City, efforts should be made to plan, design and acquire the right-of-way in an expeditious manner for each of the preserved corridors.
- Localized traffic congestion occurs in Rocky Mount along the US 301 Bypass and on Sunset Avenue. The City should continue to require traffic impact studies for new development anticipated to impact operations on local roadways. The City may also need to investigate the feasibility of impact fee usage to offset the cost of transportation improvements needed to service future developments.
- Improve access to job centers, retail, tourist destinations, community facilities and other areas by completing key roadway improvements as part of the Transportation Plan recommendations and in Conjunction with NCDOT.
- Enforce traffic regulations, especially speed limits in residential areas, maintain clear directional signage and coordinate traffic signals.
- A thorough analysis of who utilizes public transportation should precede efforts to increase the number of riders. A Short Range Transit Development Plan is to be prepared in FY2002, and it will identify



- strategies to increase ridership.
- Provide additional above-grade crossings to link both parts of the city over railroad lines.
- Develop and implement a plan for providing beautified and safe railroad crossings in downtown Rocky Mount.

In addition to securing financial support from federal and state sources, the City of Rocky Mount and Edgecombe and Nash counties have implemented subdivision regulations that require new streets to be constructed by property developers in accordance with NCDOT or City standards. The City's zoning regulations also require additional setbacks for buildings located on specific thoroughfares throughout the City. This insures that property development will have minimal impact on future roadway improvements.

E. COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Goal

The Community Facilities component of the Comprehensive Plan outlines ways to develop facilities that serve a diverse and growing population and support a variety of community and individual needs and services & utilities that provide modern, convenient, affordable service to all areas within the community, and respond to the changing needs of a diverse population.

Community facilities include municipal facilities, safety services, public utilities, parks and recreation sites. The Rocky Mount City Hall, Judicial Center, Environmental (Solid Waste) Services Center and Field Service Center are included in municipal facilities. Safety Services are comprised of the Rocky Mount Police Department, Rocky Mount Fire Department, the Stony Creek Rescue Squad, the West Edgecombe Rescue Squad, Nash Health Care Systems and the Edgecombe and Nash County Health Departments.

The public utilities that the City provides throughout the Study Area are electricity, natural gas, water, wastewater treatment, and stormwater management. Parks and recreation sites include over 40 parks and recreation areas in the City's Department of Parks and Recreation, the Special Programs Division in the Department of Parks of Recreation, cultural facilities and events, the newly constructed Thomas Hackney Braswell Memorial Library and educational facilities.

Implementing the following strategies will help the City of Rocky Mount successfully meet the need for future community facilities:

- Improve and update municipal facilities and services.

- Investigate new locations for satellite police facilities to reduce overcrowding and allow more timely provision of police service throughout the community.
- The City needs to develop a master plan for expansion and maintenance needs for each utility system, electric, gas, water and sewer.
- Update the capital improvement plan to adequately fund utility improvements consistent with the comprehensive plan.
- Reduce litter and graffiti through comprehensive efforts.
- Beautify abandoned or overgrown sites through neighborhood-based efforts with City assistance.
- Upgrade deteriorating streets, sidewalks, culverts and bridges.
- Continue and expand curbside recycling pick-up program and maintain clean recycle drop-off centers.
- Various alternatives addressing rate schedule changes and projected proceeds needs to be investigated. Revenues should be analyzed to insure they cover the capital, maintenance and operational needs of the four municipal utilities.
- Methods to conserve water, particularly during periods of dry weather should be adopted and promoted. The City should study various policies to determine which are most effective in promoting conservation, such as using different rates during different times of the year, and assessing surcharges for excessive consumption.
- Develop a Comprehensive Stormwater Management Program that addresses the impacts of future development, meets proposed state and federal regulations and addresses current drainage problems and provides funding.
- Continue to monitor the electric deregulation issue and look for ways to address deregulation as it evolves.
- Consider placing utilities such as electric underground, especially in new construction, and retrofit existing areas.
- Provide appropriate street lighting to streets and other public places.
- Continue to develop the Tar River Greenway.
- Establish a plan for reuse of properties obtained through the flood buyout. Some parcels could be used as stormwater or compensatory floodwater facilities.
- Determine ways to fund and rebuild the Arts Center, Children's Museum and Playhouse Theatre at the Cultural Arts Complex in the downtown.
- Study the development of a historical museum in the downtown.
- Continue to sponsor and/or support local festivals.

The City has taken steps to improve the parks and recreation system by preparing a Comprehensive



Recreation Master Plan (CRMP). The City should implement the CRMP and ensure that it remains consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

- Improving access is an important part of ongoing maintenance of existing and provision of new community facilities. The City should ensure that all of its facilities are fully accessible.
- Meet the social and recreational needs of senior citizens, children and teens.
- Since education is a continuous process that occurs across many sectors of the community, the City should foster educational partnerships among all types of schools at various education levels, the business community and private citizens and help all citizens to participate in the process.
- Access to health care is extremely important to community quality of life. Proximity, transportation and choice of provider are all critical components of access. The City should support and promote access to health care services, facilities and programs throughout the community, but especially in areas that have special need, such as the Edgcombe portion of the City.

F. HOUSING

Goal

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the need for a wide range of housing for all citizens that is accessible throughout the community to a population of diverse ages, income levels, household types and lifestyles and that upholds high, consistent standards for design, safety, historic preservation and neighborhood character; while creating an equitable balance in these characteristics in both Edgcombe County and Nash County.

A review of the existing housing conditions in the Study Area at the aggregate level revealed a housing market that does have a moderate array of housing choices at multiple levels of cost. The typical residence is suburban in type, a three bedroom/two bath middle class home on a moderate lot. This configuration, while broadly appealing, does not adequately deal with the total gamut of needs and resources available to the residents of Rocky Mount. Future growth will require spacious homes in the executive level above \$125 thousand, growth in the mid-level family home, additional forms of apartment and rental living and certainly growth and replenishment in the affordable housing component in our community. The market driven aspects of home construction will ultimately deal with most issues of appropriate quantity for the mid- to upper- level

incomes, but new archetypes and neighborhood formats can make additional choices for all income levels. Smart Growth principles place heavy emphasis on the pedestrian scale, higher density development that will provide some answers to these needs.

The need for affordable housing is unquestioned. According to changes in the value of single-family homes, the area seems to offer an adequate amount of affordable housing. However, a more detailed analysis of housing conditions at the local level revealed a disproportionate number of renters versus owners, a disproportionate number of homes that lack complete plumbing and kitchen facilities, a large number of residents that spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs, a need for affordable housing (especially for the growing elderly population) and the need to remove some impediments to fair housing in mortgage lending.

Given the City's success in rehabilitating housing in distressed neighborhoods, meeting the challenge of rebuilding after the flood of 1999 and other successful housing initiatives, the City should be able to address these housing needs. The following are some specific strategies for helping the City attain its goals and objectives in housing:

- Continue to implement a comprehensive strategy for improving housing. The strategy should continue to target the most distressed neighborhoods for special and immediate improvements. Public investment in affordability, code improvement and enforcement, and property maintenance programs will create an atmosphere that encourages concurrent private investment.
- Continue to implement the Consolidated Plan and the Enterprise Alliance Program and revisit these policies and programs to ensure they are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
- The Redevelopment Commission has played an important role in the City's housing strategy. The City should continue to support the Commission as a partner in housing improvements. The Commission should review the boundaries of the City's redevelopment districts on a periodic basis and determine if and when new districts may be needed.
- The City should continue to take actions that foster the expansion of affordable housing options. Such actions might include marketing to potential developers, establishing relationships with banks and mortgage companies, providing incentive packages and evaluating densities and infrastructure requirements.
- Establish "Neighborhoods Of Choice" that provide residents with a wide range of quality and affordable housing options.



- Work with and support local non-profit organizations that implement housing strategies in a comprehensive fashion.
- Enforce compliance with minimum housing/building code standards, consider a “demolition by neglect” ordinance to discourage disinvestments and create an environment that protects property investments.
- The City should, as suggested by HUD, adopt a new Fair Housing Ordinance and continue to promote awareness of and compliance with the ordinance and other Fair Housing statutes and goals. Barriers to housing opportunity must be prevented from limiting people’s choices. Efforts should continue to educate the real estate board and banks on this issue.
- Study alternative funding sources for housing operations and bricks and mortar, such as Charlotte’s Housing Bond Program.
- Homeownership rates should be expanded throughout Rocky Mount, but especially in distressed neighborhoods. This will increase personal investment in neighborhoods, providing stability and improving the housing stock. It will also build long-term wealth for residents who benefit from increasing property values.
- It is in the community’s best interest to reuse existing but abandoned housing stock. The City should develop a land and housing inventory. Homes acquired in the program could be made available to qualified homebuyers, who could be asked to meet requirements, such as façade improvements or landscaping, in return for low-interest loan or other incentives.
- Expand options available to seniors for quality and affordable housing, working with senior organizations, developers and builders.
- Locate senior housing within walking distance of retail, medical, personal services, educational and cultural facilities and provide frequent and affordable transportation linkages.
- Continue to enforce housing ordinances and building codes.
- Encourage the renovation and reuse of abandoned buildings, and use demolition as a last resort.

G. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Goal

The economic development component of the Comprehensive Plan calls for Rocky Mount to promote growth and economic development throughout the community, with a special emphasis on Edgecombe County; help develop an economy that offers a range of shops, homes and services; recruit small businesses and new industries; revitalize the downtown, and provide opportunities for job training/retraining, and job creation with higher pay.

A review of existing conditions in economic development reveals that the Carolinas Gateway Partnership, the North

Carolina Eastern Region (formerly Global TransPark), the Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, local nonprofits, such as Rocky Mount Edgecombe Community Development Corporation, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce have done an excellent job in promoting economic development in the Study Area. Recent successes such as the opening of the Business Incubator at Fountain Industrial Park and the location of Universal Leaf in the Study Area are fruits of recent economic development efforts. However, as the tobacco industry continues to decline and the local, regional, national and global economies continue to become more service-based and less manufacturing-based, Rocky Mount must meet the challenge of sustaining existing industries while at the same time creating an environment that attracts new businesses.

A model for meeting this challenge of sustaining existing industries while attracting new businesses is the clusters of innovation model. In a recent report on the clusters of innovation model for the Research Triangle area, Dr. Porter suggests that the Research Triangle region expand from thirteen to eighteen counties that would include Nash and Edgecombe. Within this eighteen-county economic area, the textiles, chemicals and plastics economic clusters would be added to the Research Triangle’s existing clusters of pharmaceuticals/biotechnology and communications. The net result would be sustained economic growth for the entire region. Advances in technology in the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area would be applied to textiles manufacturing and agriculture in the Study Area, thereby improving productivity in those industries. Medium and small businesses throughout the region would provide support services to larger businesses; land that is readily available in rural areas could be developed for housing and recreation, releasing pressure on the Research Triangle’s overburdened infrastructure and excessive automobile traffic.

Other strategies, in addition to the clusters of innovation approach, for promoting and sustaining economic development in the Study Area include the following:

- Conduct a systematic analysis identifying the most promising industries and businesses, as appropriate, to diversify the City’s economic base and the regional economy over the next five years.
- Facilitate an adequate supply of clean, developable, and competitive industrial sites to support existing



manufacturers' expansion and new industry investment.

- Assist the local workforce to adopt successful high-performance workplace practices in order to increase the competitiveness of the area's leading manufacturing and service industries.
- Strengthen the quality of the City's infrastructure services, especially its information and telecommunications capabilities to support information-intensive industry development.
- Accelerate efforts to startup new technology-based service, manufacturing and e-business companies in the area by offering new, local incentives and intensive technical assistance to spur their growth.
- Study the concept of a comprehensive municipal development budget that identifies how all aspects of City government affect the City's economic development performance.
- Update (or develop) working agreements with economic development partners.
- Promote home-based businesses and self-employment consistent with neighborhood preservation efforts and good land use planning.
- Avoid business development that injures the environment or human health or disrupts community tranquility.
- Focus resources on attracting companies that create high-quality jobs. One benchmark would be jobs that pay 1.5 times the current minimum wage.
- Enhance the community's tourism industry.
- Maximize the use of state incentives that target Edgecombe County.
- Work with Carolinas Gateway Partnership to enhance employment opportunities for those who face challenges to job placement and advancement, including young people, single parents, minorities and older workers.
- Work with Carolinas Gateway Partnership to develop an economic incentives policy with performance standards that protect the City's capital investment.
- Continue to support investment in speculative industrial buildings in established industrial parks.
- Coordinate local, state and federal resources on Brownfield redevelopment projects, such as the Planters Oil Mill and the former Municipal Airport site.
- Create a special economic development position to solely focus on assisting disadvantaged communities, in particular neighborhoods in the Edgecombe County section of the City
- Improve the aesthetics of gateways and corridors.
- Support redevelopment efforts like those for the Rocky Mount Mills and the Douglas Block.
- Prepare a Downtown Master Plan that balances retail shopping, consumer and government services,

recreation, tourism and cultural facilities and entertainment. The plan should coordinate implementation activities, including zoning revisions, infrastructure investments, streetscape improvements and other related activities. Plan development should include significant participation by all stakeholders.

- Mitigate the impacts of flooding on businesses.

H. CRITICAL AND SENSITIVE AREAS

Goal

A City that builds and develops in a way that preserves and protects natural features and systems and enjoys the beauty, open space and recreational opportunities provided by the natural environment

A review of existing conditions of critical and sensitive areas within the Study Area revealed that the main factors with broad implications for future development within the Study Area are:

- The watershed protection rules.
- The Tar-Pamlico buffers and related stormwater management requirements.
- The location and size of the 100 and 500 year floodplains.

Together these factors affect between 25% and 30% of the entire land within the Study Area. By implementing the suggestions outlined in this chapter, Some of those specific suggestions are the following:

- Focus open space preservation efforts along the Tar River and its tributaries.
- Development regulations should establish clear, understandable, consistent standards that can be implemented to protect natural features. The City has updated its floodplain regulations and will be addressing the zoning code and subdivision regulations after the Comprehensive Plan is adopted. A comprehensive stormwater management ordinance will be prepared over the next two years. Updates should address buffers, siting, setbacks, density, retrofitting, flood proofing, impervious surfaces, drainage, erosion and other details or development. The City should make every effort to educate property owners and developers about any changes in the regulations that address natural features and open space.
- Promote best management practices to property owners located adjacent to critical natural features.
- Raising public awareness is one of the most effective



ways to preserve and enhance the natural environment. The City should publicize the benefits provided by the natural environment to the community and increase public understanding of why rivers, streams, floodplains and other natural features should be protected.

- Strengthen floodplain regulations, update floodplain maps and ensure development in the floodplain meets National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) requirements.
- Require Tar-Pamlico buffer improvements and encourage reforestation of stream corridors and slopes.
- Preserve or restore wetlands.
- Protect woodlands and stream corridors through tree preservation during construction and replanting, including continued enforcement of silt fencing.
- Promote quality landscaping of commercial, industrial, institutional and multi-family properties, conduct an annual beautification recognition program and continue to support the local Keep America Beautiful (KAB) Committee.
- Enhance the landscaping of public spaces.

I. NATURAL HAZARDS

Goal

The mitigation goal of the City of Rocky Mount is to protect public health, safety and welfare by identifying natural and manmade hazards, increase public awareness of those hazards, and foster both individual and public responsibility in mitigating risks due to those hazards.

In the analysis of existing conditions in the Study Area in respect to natural hazards, the drought conditions of the past five years and the flood that devastated the area three years ago are the natural hazards that pose the greatest risks. An assessment of the City's Natural Hazards element of the Comprehensive Plan, using the Institute for Business and Home Safety's evaluation, reveals that Rocky Mount does an excellent job of addressing its natural hazard vulnerabilities. Incorporate digital floodplain and topographic data into an automated permit database/system and Geographic Information System (GIS) data layer inventory.

- Evaluate whether public buildings and facilities are exposed to flood hazards.
- Improve pre-disaster planning for flood warning and public safety.
- Conduct a long-term campaign to increase public

knowledge of local hazards and ways to minimize their impacts on citizens appears necessary at this time.

- Identify hazardous materials handlers/waste sites in the mapped floodplain.
- Evaluate flood damage potential of electric utility, water and sewer distribution systems.
- Increase the City's classification in the NFIP Community Rating System.
- Develop a Comprehensive Open Space/Reuse Plan to support floodplain acquisition initiatives and recreational opportunities.
- Make flood hazard information available to other public agencies.
- Evaluate flood damage potential of transportation infrastructure.
- Identify high hazard dams on waterways that drain through the City.
- Obtain and maintain North Carolina Certified Floodplain Manager Status.
- Standardize procedures for handling certain post-damage permit processing procedures.
- Enhance awareness in the private sector of the NFIP regulations and requirements.
- Support enhancement of emergency management functions in the City.
- Develop and implement policies and programs that promote water conservation and wildfire prevention.

J. COMMUNITY DESIGN

Goal

A city in which the whole community, its residential neighborhoods and commercial areas, upholds high, consistent standards for historic preservation, beautification, sidewalk and roadway enhancements, landscaping and natural open spaces.

Community Design includes using practical and aesthetic principles to create a community that functions at a high standard. Such a place provides its residents with a quality of life that responds to the needs for safety, beauty, health, economy, leisure, recreation and vitality.

Good community design functions well. The quality of life is severely devalued when the function of design is inadequate to the tasks of living. The ideal approach to community design looks at the whole picture for a beauty that is efficient in form and function and an elegant workable design that appeals to the soul.

Good community design promotes a safe community

The safety and well-being of our citizens can be improved



with attention to design details which minimize the risks inherent in our country today. Such crucial aspects as traffic safety, crime prevention and terrorism prevention can all be affected by the quality of design of the city environment. The need for security and the sense of safety are critical to the future of Rocky Mount.

Good community design promotes a healthy community

Opportunities for recreation, exercise, and a healthy environment have a direct effect upon the quality of life for our residents. The continued efforts to improve our parks, pedestrian walkways and cultural opportunities are a commitment to the importance of mental and physical health. The design of these individual facilities as entities is important but equally so is their placement in the City and the ties between. Good decisions are critical to maximize the effectiveness.

Good community design promotes a beautiful community

Our community needs to prioritize efforts to make our city more beautiful, more livable and more appealing. The best qualities of Rocky Mount should be maintained. Our streets are more than a conveyance from Point A to Point B. Our transportation corridors and nodes should be a high priority for improving the function and visual appeal experienced traversing a beautiful tree-lined street free of visual clutter. Existing buildings of merit should be preserved for their beauty and meaning. We have many historic resources in Rocky Mount in need of rehabilitation. Efforts should be made to capitalize on this important part of our history. New development should provide a positive contribution to the existing fabric of Rocky Mount. Good design is sensitive to the context of in which it is placed. Design, which is not responsive, should be discouraged for the detrimental effect that it has.

Good community design promotes a vital community

Good community design promotes the City economically. The attraction of new businesses, the loyalty and retention of citizens and the appeal for new residents are all affected by the quality of our community design decisions.

How do we implement such concepts?

Regulations and codes are important tools for enhancing community design. The City should identify regulations that affect community design such as: zoning, subdivision, and environmental regulations, housing standards, parking codes and street and building design guidelines. It should review these regulations to ensure that they are consistent and clear and also address the full range of recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan. These regulations should be updated, when necessary, to implement the plan. New codes, such as a "demolition by neglect" ordinance, also should be adopted when necessary to implement these design concepts.

- Impact is more important than use
- Density is more important than lot size
- Design is more important than density
- Development should satisfy illustrated design standards that maintain community character
- The planning board & HPC need written criteria
- The LDC should be simple enough to understand & adequate enough to fulfill the objectives.

Improving community design will result in Rocky Mount being a city in which the whole community, its residential neighborhoods and commercial areas, uphold high, consistent standards for historic preservation, beautification, sidewalk and roadway enhancements, landscaping and natural open spaces. Experience shows that good community design comes from requiring a higher standard. Rocky Mount deserves good Community Design. We will get only what we ask for. The opportunity is here to make a difference in the future of our community.

A review of existing conditions in the Study Area reveals that while there are some community design features that are commendable, there is much room for improvement. Those areas of improvement include the following:

- Attention to appropriate use of scale throughout the community with a sensitivity to the context of each site.
- Improve the visual quality of nodes or gathering places in the City.
- Encourage a safe community through sensitive and appropriate design decisions concerning crime prevention.
- Continue to support establishing and expanding historic districts to display the City's heritage and unique character.
- Improve the safety and attractive qualities of pedestrian sidewalks and bikeways, crossings at the railroad tracks and streets and provide other pedestrian amenities throughout the City with particular attention to the Downtown area and major thoroughfares.
- Reduction of visual clutter, such as poorly designed and placed signage, prevalence of above-ground utility lines, improper placement of service areas visible to the public, poorly placed parking areas which dominate the view.
- Encourage higher design qualities for all buildings with particular attention to the improvement of franchise architecture.
- Encourage use of outdoor recreational and leisure facilities to promote a healthy community.



The following are some specific strategies that the City can implement to make the improvements that emerged from the review of existing conditions and thereby attain this goal:

- The Historic Preservation Commission plays an important role in preserving the City's historic resources. The City should continue to support this organization as a partner in the preservation of older neighborhoods and historic resources.
- Maintain an inventory of historic resources and promote restoration and rehabilitation.
- Create a historic museum in the downtown area of the City.
- Adopt and implement comprehensive beautification plans for improvements in the right-of-way.
- Study the feasibility of adopting and implementing zoning overlay districts to address private property.
- Provide an appropriate level of street lighting.
- Consider landscaped median treatments where feasible and appropriate, given maintenance considerations.
- The City should identify major gateways into the community and enhance them with landscaping, public art, signage, lighting and other amenities in a way that reflects that character of the adjacent neighborhoods.
- Undertake enhancements through the Tree Advisory Board and Tree Power.
- Stewardship programs are excellent resources for enhancing community appearance. In addition to including specific tasks, these programs have an educational component that supports long-term enhancement activities. The City should continue to support and promote these programs and encourage these programs to prioritize projects identified in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Recruit businesses to participate in enhancement programs.
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K. NEIGHBORHOODS

Goal

To delineate how the City can develop safe, attractive, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods – and active neighborhood associations – that promote community pride, preserve historic character, encourage activities for people of all ages and support appropriate commercial and business uses.

Rocky Mount neighborhoods range the spectrum from low-density high-end neighborhoods, such as Greystone, with homes costing up to \$1 million or more, to high-density neighborhoods, such as Little Easonburg, with a large number of rental units that are mobile homes. There are certainly country club type neighborhoods available to those citizens that desire and have the resources. However, the predominate housing market is distinctly suburban in form and middle class with the traditional 3 bedroom/ 2 bath home on a modest lot being the typical developmental pattern within the planning area. This typology does not solve all the issues for the varied population of our community. New forms in neighborhood design with Smart Growth principles can be developed that will offer greater variety in choices. People want a variety of housing, shopping, recreation, transportation and employment options. Variety also accommodates residents in different stages of their lives and adds stability. The preservation of existing neighborhoods revitalized by appropriate infill development which could also be applied with similar Smart Growth principles and should be a priority for the City.

The analysis of the existing conditions recognizes the strong need to deal with affordable housing issues that spring from a significant percentage of older neighborhoods with a large percentage of low-income population and a complex socio- economic condition that does not allow for quick-fix solutions. This critical factor must be taken into account. Rocky Mount will, however, need additional neighborhoods in all economic levels to accommodate new growth and replacement of aging and inadequate housing stock to deal with current and future neighborhood issues. Neighborhoods should provide attractive, safe designs with a variety of choices in density and location.

One study estimates that houses located in developments that incorporate good design principles-including walk ability, green space, a feeling of community and a human scale- command a premium of anywhere from 4 to 25 percent of the home's value, compared to houses in surrounding area (quoted from *Valuing the New Urbanism*). Our neighborhoods deserve attention to such developmental detail. New development should recognize



the vital quality these Smart Growth principles have to offer in providing housing choices for the population, existing and projected, for the City of Rocky Mount.

The following are some specific strategies for attaining this goal:

Several key neighborhoods should be strengthened to ensure all residents live in acceptable – even outstanding – residential environments. Although there are many neighborhoods within the City, those needing special attention at this time include: the Cross-Town/East Grand Avenue area, Happy Hill, Joyner’s Hill, Little Raleigh, Holly Street, Clark-Branch and South Rocky Mount. These neighborhoods should be targeted for special and immediate improvements. Public investment in open space, pedestrian improvements, landscaping and safety will create an atmosphere that encourages concurrent private investment.

- Assess neighborhood conditions and prepare and implement revitalization plans.
- Update the Consolidated Plan to be consistent with neighborhood plans.
- Maintain and upgrade public infrastructure, including streets, curb and gutter, sidewalks, street lighting, street trees and parks on a regular, comprehensive basis.
- Increase homeownership rates.
- Target reinvestment, redevelopment and infill residential development for the community’s older neighborhoods, ensuring compatibility with these areas.
- Mitigate land use impacts resulting from commercial and industrial intrusions through stronger standards for setbacks, screening and buffering.
- Demolish abandoned and dilapidated structures of little economic & cultural value and reclaim these sites for new residential development.
- Promote pride through physical improvements, outreach and work with neighborhood and faith-based organizations.
- Adopt conservation guidelines for existing neighborhoods.
- Expand the number of neighborhoods on national and local historic registers and promote existing historic neighborhoods.
- Use physical improvements to create “Neighborhoods Of Choice” and instill a sense of identity and pride in residents of individual neighborhoods.
- Identify and prioritize areas suitable for new residential development based on criteria consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Support new subdivision development with new infrastructure development in the Edgecombe County portion of the city.

- Expand financing sources to facilitate affordable housing development, such as bonds, City revenues, etc.
- Oppose re-zonings and infrastructure improvements that create a “Leap Frog” residential development pattern.
- Support neighborhood retail that provides for neighborhood-oriented goods and services.
- Support community-based safety programs.
- Strengthen police-community relationships, including increasing police visibility, especially foot and bicycle patrols, and youth outreach programs.
- Promote crime prevention through urban and environmental design.
- Improve lighting on sidewalks and roadways and in community facilities, such as parks and community centers.
- Link public safety to neighborhood investment strategies.

L. INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Goal

To foster and improve relationships among local, regional, state and federal government agencies that will improve the quality of life for residents of Rocky Mount and promote Smart Growth in the region.

A review of the current level of governmental cooperation between various departments within the City of Rocky Mount and federal, state, regional and local governmental agencies shows that the City’s cooperation with other government agencies is large in magnitude and broad in scope. The 17 City of Rocky Mount Departments and Divisions that responded to an informal survey on their intergovernmental relations reported that they formally cooperate with 222 different federal, state, regional and local agencies. The scope of this intergovernmental cooperation ranges from economic development and transportation to health care and education. Rather than provide a comprehensive review of each of the intergovernmental relationships, three such relationships were reviewed as cases to demonstrate how intergovernmental cooperation takes place to show the benefits and challenges of maintaining these relationships and to provide suggestions for improving those relations. Some specific strategies for doing this are listed below.

- The City should develop specific criteria to develop a means for assessing and improving existing intergovernmental cooperation activities.



- In the National Civic League's (NCL) Model City Charter Revision Project, the NCL raises the issue of expanding the model city charter to include language that promotes intergovernmental cooperation. Rather than expand its city charter to include language that promotes intergovernmental cooperation, the City of Rocky Mount should continue to address intergovernmental cooperation issues primarily through planning boards and ordinances as outlined in American Planning Association guidelines.
- The City should work with the Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, Carolina's Gateway Partnership, North Carolina's Eastern Region and other governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations to develop a strategic plan for implementing the clusters of innovation that links Rocky Mount to the Triangle Region yet retains the unique identity of Rocky Mount. This strategic plan should identify opportunities for economic growth while maintaining the quality of life and distinctiveness that makes Rocky Mount a great place to call home.

- in encouraging future businesses throughout the City.
- All neighborhoods will be improved to create outstanding places for residents.
- The transportation system will be upgraded to improve mobility.
- The open space system will be expanded.
- Floodplain considerations will play a larger role in the City's development and infrastructure decisions.

This Plan includes 11 goals, 54 objectives and 224 strategies. For each goal, there is a related set of objectives and strategies identifying key actions necessary to achieve each goal.

Ensuring that goals of the Plan are achieved also necessitates identifying the order in which each step will be undertaken as well as which community members or staff that will be involved in making it happen. Each strategy has been evaluated and assigned an appropriate timeframe for accomplishment. In addition, the key community groups, leaders, organizations and agencies have been identified and are matched to the strategies in need of their attention. Implementation and accurate updating of the of Goals, Strategies and Objectives developed will require continued commitment of the City to provide adequate resources for GIS mapping and staff development.. Of all the strategies, 63 items were identified as Ongoing functions, 63 are scheduled for completion in the Short-Term, 43 in the Mid-Term, and 13 in the Long-Term, and the remaining 42 items were scheduled in two or more categories.

M. IMPLEMENTATION

Goal

To use **TOGETHER TOMORROW** as a tool to guide daily decision-making throughout the City .

TOGETHER TOMORROW is to continue on in development through the addition and adoption of Sub-Plans such as the Downtown Master Plan which immediately follows Together Tomorrow in focus. The Implementation chapter provides a crucial timetable for working strategies held within this Comprehensive Plan.

The following are underlying principles of this Comprehensive Plan:

- Future development will be balanced to meet the needs of the community.
- Special attention will be directed to that portion of the Study Area located within Edgecombe County to "jump start" investment and revitalization.
- Rocky Mount will continue as a regional center in eastern North Carolina.
- The Downtown will be the City's preferred location for government, offices, businesses and cultural institutions – but it will strengthen its retail and housing components.
- Major corridors will continue as the City's primary retail and office locations, but the City will facilitate balance

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be used on a daily basis as public and private decisions are made concerning development, redevelopment, capital improvements, economic incentives and other matters affecting the City's environment– built and natural. Furthermore, the Comprehensive Plan should be the basis for future planning across all functional areas, such as transportation and land use. The following are some ways to effectively implement the Comprehensive Plan:

- The City Council, individual City departments and administrators should be cognizant of the recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets. Several strategies can be implemented in this way.
- Administrative and legislative approvals of development proposals, including rezoning and subdivision plats, should be a central means of implementing the Comprehensive Plan. In fact, the zoning code and subdivision regulations should be updated in response to regulatory strategies presented in the Comprehensive Plan.
- The City's annual five-year capital improvement plan



(CIP) should be prepared consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's land use policies and infrastructure recommendations (water, sewer and roads).

- Economic incentives marketed by Carolinas Gateway Partnership should be integrated with other Plan strategies and policies to ensure consistency, particularly with the Plan's land use recommendations. The City should consider packaging other incentives within its jurisdiction, such as strategic infrastructure investments.
- Property owners and developers should be encouraged to consider the strategies and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan in their own land planning and investment decisions.
- The extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) and annexation processes should be used to implement key elements of the Comprehensive Plan, such as ensuring that infrastructure is provided to the Smart Growth Areas.

