

INTRODUCTION

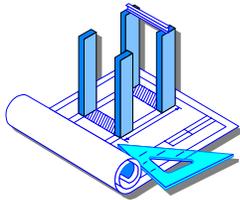
COMMON ELEMENTS of a COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

- ✓ A physical plan, a guide to the physical development of a county, city or region.
- ✓ The plan is long-range, covering a time period of more than one year and usually twenty years or more.
- ✓ Geographically and functionally comprehensive, including the entire land area and all the functions, such as land use, transportation, community facilities, housing, etc. that make a community work.
- ✓ Used to guide the decision-making of the community's elected and appointed officials.

◆ Source: *The Practice of Local Government Planning* ("Green Book") and *APA Growing Smart*, American Planning Association, 1998.



I. HISTORY OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN ROCKY MOUNT, NC



The Comprehensive Plan is an important tool that progressive communities use to establish a framework for future physical development. During a comprehensive planning process, a city assesses community needs and resources

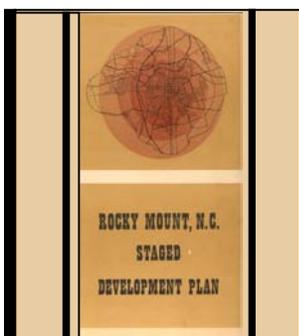
across a broad range of citywide functions. Beginning with preparation of a vision, more specific goals and strategies are then identified to guide a city's long-term development. After the plan has been produced, all subsequent planning across all citywide functions, such as transportation and land use, must derive from and be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

There are several common threads of a Comprehensive Plan. First, it is a physical plan. Although a reflection of social and economic values, the plan is fundamentally a guide to the physical development of a city, county or region. It is the translation of values into a scheme that describes how, why, when, and where to build, rebuild, or preserve the community. Second, the plan is long-range. It covers a time period greater than one year, usually twenty years or more. Third, the plan must be comprehensive. It must cover the entire community geographically. And, the plan must encompass all of the functions that make a community work, i.e. land use, transportation, community facilities, housing, etc. Finally, the plan should be a guide to decision-making by the community's elected and appointed officials.¹

Beginning in the 1960s, no less than three Comprehensive Plans have been prepared for the City of Rocky Mount and a brief description of each follows:

A. Rocky Mount, N.C. Staged Development Plan (1965)

The City's first Comprehensive Plan document with a distinctive black-and-brown cover (street-base map and growth-area figure), consisted of thirty-seven pages of text



and figures, was stapled and tape-bound, 12 1/2" x 12 1/2" page black-and-white format, and featured several two-color functional area plans and three large, fold-out multi-colored maps illustrating: Existing Land Use, Proposed Land Use - 50,000 population and Proposed Land Use -

75,000 people. The preparation of the report document was financed in part through a "701" comprehensive planning grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The planning staff of the Planning and Zoning Commission, City of Rocky Mount, prepared the plan with technical assistance provided by the Division of Community Planning, Department of Conservation and Development, State of North Carolina. The plan **was not**, however, adopted by the Rocky Mount City Council.

The Rocky Mount Staged Development Plan indicated there were approximately 40,850 persons residing in the Rocky Mount Planning Area. Their homes were distributed according to four categories: Single-Family Dwellings, Two-Family Dwellings, Multiple-Family Dwellings and Trailers.

The plan was intended to show desirable areas for future growth of the City. The plan was composed of two stages, based on different expected future population levels. Planning recommendations for the community facilities were then developed. It was decided not to develop a plan for a specific year, such as 1980, 1985, or 2000.

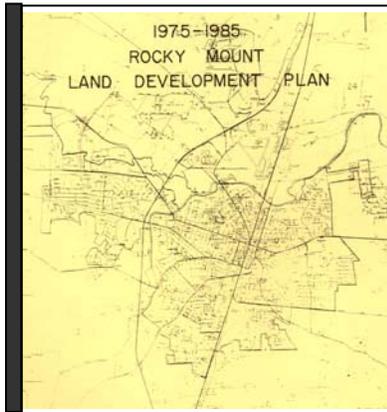
According to the plan, the City's "Horizon Year" is reached when the Planning Area is fully developed. The Horizon Year Plan therefore is an extension of the 75,000 population stage plan beyond the year 2000. Population for the Horizon Year, though not projected statistically, would be over 115,000 people. The Horizon Year Plan differs from the 50,000 and 75,000 population staged plans in that it is a designed plan rather than one computed statistically. According to the plan text, "Statistical projections of acreages and population so far into the future would not be realistic." Rather than make projections for specific years in the future each indicates the amount of land required for residential, commercial and industrial uses to support populations of 50,000 and 75,000 people.

The two plans indicate a general use for all of the land within the Planning Area. It was intended that the plan provide a general guideline for decisions when future development extends into areas not covered by the preceding staged plans.

¹The Practice of Local Government Planning ("Green Book") and APA Growing Smart, American Planning Association, 1998.



B. Rocky Mount Land Development Plan (1975)



The City's second Comprehensive Plan document consisted of a straightforward black-on-yellow cover (street-base map figure), two hundred and fifty-seven pages of text and figures, plastic comb binder, 8 ½" x 11" page black and white format, featuring

numerous black and white 11" x 17" functional area plans and one large, fold-out multi-colored map illustrating the "1975-85 Land Development Plan." The preparation of the report document was financed in part through a "701" comprehensive planning grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The plan was prepared by the planning staff of the Planning Board, City of Rocky Mount with technical assistance provided by the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, State of North Carolina. The plan **was** adopted by the Rocky Mount City Council in 1975. Senior planning staff continue to cite this plan in many development approval requests.

The intent of the 1975-1985 Rocky Mount Land Development Plan was to depict how land within the planning area was then used and to recommend how it should be used, providing general guidelines for development during a ten-year period of time. A wide variety of statistical data was analyzed in the plan, including data on population, existing land use, economic conditions, housing, community facilities and services, soils, and physical growth deterrents. The plan was based upon goals and objectives that were determined by the citizens of Rocky Mount. Plan implementation was also considered vital to the City's planning process and was stressed in a series of five-year programs and policy statements.

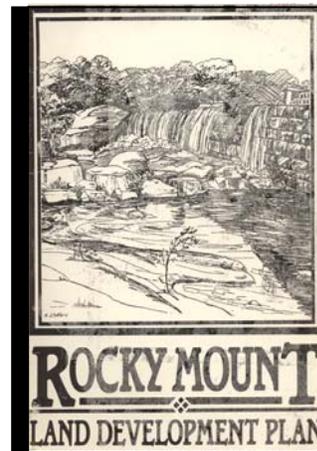
An in-depth survey of the City's residents was undertaken to determine the needs and problems in the City. During a weeklong survey, 550 residents were interviewed. As a result, thirty-three major problem areas within the City were identified. The five areas receiving the most attention in order of significance were: recreation, street maintenance, housing, central business district and traffic control.

The "Land Development Policy Plan" chapter provides a plan map and goals, policies and actions in six functional areas. Those areas include: recreation, housing, transportation, central municipal area, environment and intergovernmental relations.

The plan document concludes with a chapter titled "Work Schedule" that identifies major work elements for the subsequent five fiscal years. Major elements include the following:

- Increasing the input of local residents to the day-to-day decision-making process of city government.
- Preparing a housing plan that defines long- and short-term housing needs and policies.
- Developing a "201 Area Sewer Plan."
- Establishing an annual five-year capital improvements budget.
- Revising and updating subdivision and zoning ordinances.
- Preparing an open space and recreational facilities plan.
- Completing area wide base mapping.
- Preparing a bikeways plan.
- Developing a detailed, updated property line base map.
- Establishing a community protection plan (fire fighting, civil defense and police protection facilities).
- Conducting an annual land development plan update and major rewrite in five years.

C. Rocky Mount Development Plan (1993)



The City's third Comprehensive Plan document consisted of a bold black-on-white cover (water falls sketch), one hundred and fifteen pages, largely of text and tables, plastic comb binder, 8 ½" x 11" page black-and-white format and a few all black-and-white figures, including one community facilities map. The draft plan document contained a particularly short description of a future land development plan and only

a note on a blank page indicating space for a "Land Use Map." The plan was prepared by the Department of Planning and Development, City of Rocky Mount. The plan **was not** adopted by the Rocky Mount City Council.

The purpose of the 1993 development plan was basically the same as in 1974-75: to provide a land use guide that would assist the Planning Board, City Council, city administration and citizens in decisions affecting land use. The plan was to serve as an aid to future planning by providing a basis for the development of various other plans, including small area studies such as the South Winstead Avenue Corridor Land Development Plan.

The plan reported that the recent estimate (1990 US Census corrected figures) for Rocky Mount's population was 49,438, the eleventh largest city in North Carolina. The population projection for the City of Rocky Mount in the year 2000 was 57,499 and in the plan's time horizon 2010 it was 65,660.



The "Citizen Involvement" section did present results of a citizen survey completed in November of 1993. Survey results in the 1993 Plan, like those in the 1975 Plan, cite deterioration of the Central Business District as a land use problem. There appears to be no significant change in the attitudes of citizens concerning the downtown area. Historic preservation should play, however, a significant role in the redevelopment of downtown according to results of the 1993 survey.

The major components of the 1993 Plan were "Conditions Affecting Land Use," "Existing Land Use and Analysis," and the "Land Development Plan." "Conditions Affecting Land Use" included data on the population, economy, housing, community facilities, thoroughfare plan, environmental factors, and other municipalities. "Existing Land Use and Analysis" discussed the categories of land uses and their distribution, the location of major areas that were available for development, various land use problems that existed in the planning area and the "the Land Development Plan" contained development policies and a map of recommended future land uses. The 1993 Plan also included sections on citizen involvement, goals and objectives and the regional setting and implementation of the plan.

D. TOGETHER TOMORROW~ THE TIER 1 SMART GROWTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT (2003)

The current effort to prepare the City's fourth Comprehensive Plan began in October 1998 when the City Council appointed a 23-member Steering Committee. The Steering Committee reflects the diverse interests of the City and includes residents, business leaders, representatives of civic and neighborhood organizations, and elected and appointed officials. The Committee was organized to guide the planning process, gather ideas presented in public forums, and facilitate consensus around decisions related to the Plan.

The most successful city planning efforts are those that are inclusive in every aspect. Rocky Mount made a commitment to engage anyone that had an interest in the City's future. It was the community's desire to address important issues related to community appearance, community facilities, economic development, housing, land use, natural environment, neighborhoods, transportation, and utilities. These issues are addressed as elements in this document. These elements express the community's interest in providing for balanced growth for the area, while addressing the special needs of the portion of the City located within Edgecombe County.

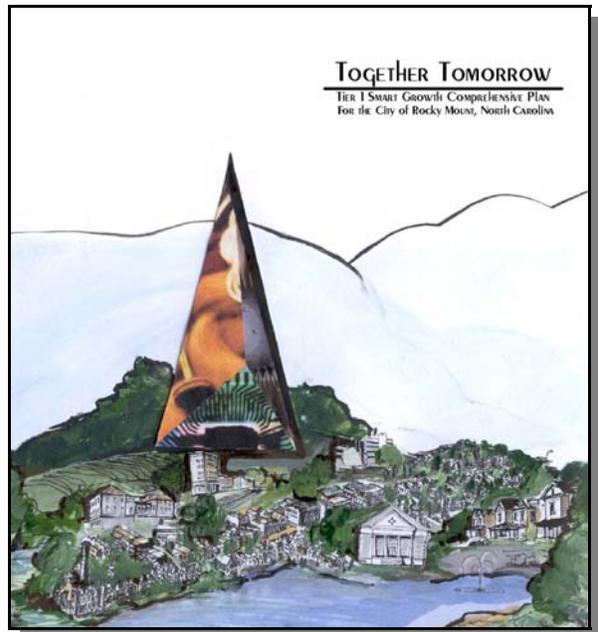
Additionally, the City made a commitment to citizen involvement in the development of this Comprehensive Plan. In October of 1998, a series of meetings were held throughout the community to gather ideas from the public regarding the issues of importance to the future of this

area. Following the initial hearings, additional public forums were held to refine these ideas into goals and objectives as well as to receive reaction to the action strategies. Finally, in recognition of the electronic age, information was made available on the City's website for public information and comment.

In the middle of the planning process, Rocky Mount faced one of its greatest challenges – flooding that resulted from Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd in September 1999. Much of the City's day-to-day business, including the Comprehensive Plan, was put on hold as the community began the clean-up process. This traumatic event focused community attention on a host of important long-term issues, and resulted in the reevaluation of the direction of many City functions due to the need to integrate facility replacement into future plans for the area.

In the fall of 2001, the planning process was reactivated in a meeting between the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and the City's Planning and Development Department staff. Following a reevaluation of the plan document, 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 on January 19, 2001. (Refer to Chapter 2, page 9 for further discussion on Planning Tiers.)

This planning process continues to bring citizens together, to provide opportunities to debate important issues and to identify solutions through open and respectful dialogue. With the adoption by City Council, June 9, 2003, implementing the Comprehensive Plan will be the next bold step for the citizens of Rocky Mount to take.



II. SMART GROWTH

"Smart Growth is an urban-renaissance movement designed to encourage high-density mixed use and transit- and pedestrian-friendly communities as a way to avoid the urban sprawl that plagues much of the United States..."

Source: American Planning Association (APA) Policy, adopted April 15, 2002, Chicago, IL

WHAT IS SMART GROWTH?

Smart Growth means using comprehensive planning to guide, design, develop, revitalize and build communities that:

- Have a unique sense of community and place
- Preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources
- Equitably distribute the costs and benefits of development
- Expand the range of transportation, employment and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner
- Value long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over short-term, incremental, geographically isolated actions
- Promote public health and healthy communities

Numerous organizations along the public-political spectrum are concerned about development patterns and have adopted proposals and policies for "Smart Growth." At one end of the public-political spectrum is the Sierra Club. At the other end is the Home Builders Association. Even though many of these policies advocate generally accepted principles for efficient use of land, resources and infrastructure and have merits worthy of consideration, they are also designed to reflect the collective goals of their membership and the "public" that they serve.

Community planning on the other hand, recognizes that it is necessary to balance the interests of diverse public and political groups. Contained within "Smart Growth" are many interrelated and potentially conflicting elements that need to be organized and prioritized, perhaps on a regional basis. Additionally, a number of the existing definitions of "Smart Growth" omit areas of concern to planners, especially social equity and disinvestments in inner city and first-ring suburb infrastructure, community facilities and services.

NORTH CAROLINA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION'S (NCAPA) SMART GROWTH INITIATIVE

To help communities understand "Smart Growth" and how to implement it, the NCAPA's Smart Growth PowerPoint presentation has been shown in over 30 counties, including Nash and Edgecombe. The goal is to have the presentation shown in all 100 North Carolina counties. The objectives of the presentation are to:

- Describe some of the benefits and impacts of growth;
- Show some examples of Smart Growth in North Carolina;
- Listen to the audience about growth issues in their community.

The presentation also includes the following eight selected Smart Growth principles:

Selected Smart Growth Principles

- 1) Build walkable communities
- 2) Invest in existing neighborhoods
- 3) Create transportation choices
- 4) Preserve our rural heritage and rural economy
- 5) Protect a network of green space
- 6) Ensure affordable living
- 7) Promote regional cooperation
- 8) Build disaster resilient communities



A. ROCKY MOUNT SMART GROWTH SURVEY

On February 25, 2002, the City of Rocky Mount's Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the Planning Board and City Planning and Development staff viewed the Smart Growth Presentation. After viewing the presentation, each person present completed a survey that included the following items:

SMART GROWTH SURVEY ITEMS

- 1) To what extent do you feel growth and development are issues of concern in your community?
- 2) Do you feel the problems that your community faces regarding growth and development are generally getting better or worse?
- 3) Please rank your top three (3) growth-related issues from the following list:
 - Traffic Congestion
 - Declining air and water quality
 - Loss of farmland and green space
 - Increasing risks from natural hazards
 - Overburdened community infrastructure
 - Lack of affordable housing
 - Other
- 4) In general, to what extent do you believe the Smart Growth principles described in the presentation can be beneficial to communities?
- 5) Please rank your top three (3) Smart Growth principles.

1. Extent To Which Growth and Development Are Issues of Concern

As you can see from Figure 2-1, more than four out of every five persons that responded to the survey thought that growth and development were issues of concern in our community. Given that the respondents were members of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the Planning Board and City Planning and Development staff, these results indicate a consensus among those charged with guiding and implementing planning and development in Rocky Mount that growth and development are issues of concern.

Figure 2-1: Extent To Which Growth and Development Are Issues of Concern

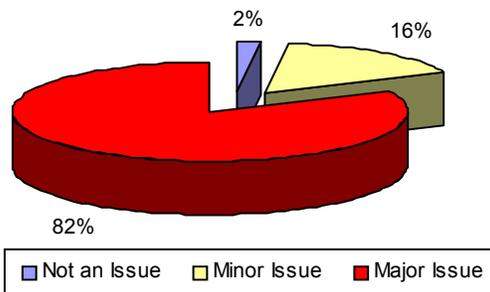
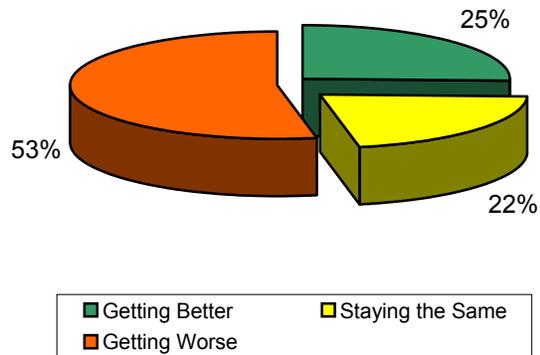


Figure 2-2: Growth and Development Problems Getting Better or Worse



2. Growth and Development Getting Better Or Worse

Figure 2-2 shows that a majority of the respondents said that growth and development problems are getting worse, 22% said they were staying the same and only 25% thought that the problems were getting better.

3. Top Growth-Related Issues

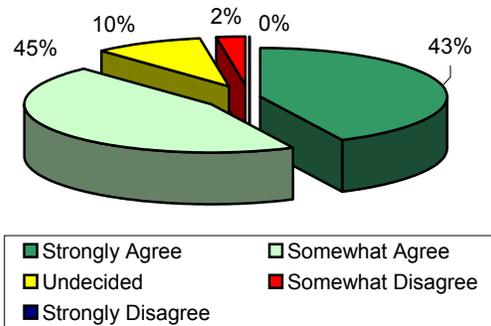
In Table 2-1 the respondents maintained the level of agreement that they showed on the first two questions when they ranked the top growth-related issues. Six issues emerged as the top issues with lack of affordable housing and traffic congestion leading the list followed by declining air and water quality, an overburdened infrastructure, loss of farmland and green space and increasing risk from natural hazards.

4. Agreement That Smart Growth Principles Are Beneficial

The strong level of consensus that respondents had to the first question, the extent to which growth and development are issues of concern, returns in responses to the fourth question, how beneficial are Smart Growth principles. Figure 2-3 shows that more than four out of every five respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed that Smart Growth principles are beneficial. This suggests that integrating Smart Growth principles into Rocky Mount's planning process is viewed positively by key groups charged with city planning, namely the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the Planning Board and City Planning and Development staff.



**Figure 2-3:
Agreement That Smart Growth Principles
Are Beneficial**



5. Top Smart Growth Principles

The respondents agreed not only how beneficial Smart Growth principles are but also what the top smart growth principles are. They agreed that the most important Smart Growth principles are investing in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure and ensuring affordable housing, followed by promoting regional cooperation and building communities and concluding with protecting green space, preserving rural heritage and lifestyle, creating more transportation choices and building disaster-resilient communities.

A comparison of the top Smart Growth principles with the top growth-related issues shows that the Smart Growth principles address many of the growth-related issues. Table 2-1 shows each top growth-related issue and the corresponding Smart Growth principle that addresses it. 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. OVERARCHING GOALS AND STRATEGIES ²

North Carolina is blessed with scenic treasures, a rich cultural heritage and a strong economy. Within a generation, we've transformed from an economy based on agriculture and traditional manufacturing to a leader in high technology and banking. We are well positioned to prosper in the emerging New Economy.

This change, however, brings problems that we ignore at our own peril. More than a million people have moved to North Carolina since 1990. Precious farmland and open spaces are vanishing. Sprawling communities mean more driving to complete life's basic chores and less time with families. Schools are overcrowded. We must do better.

Table 2-1: Top Growth-Related Issues and Corresponding Top Smart Growth Principles	
Top Growth-Related Issues	Corresponding Top Smart Growth Principles
Lack of affordable housing	Ensure affordable housing Invest in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure
Traffic Congestion	Build walkable communities Create more transportation choices
Declining air and water quality	Protect green space Preserve rural heritage and lifestyle
Overburdened community infrastructure	Invest in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure
Loss of farmland and green space	Protect green space Preserve rural heritage and lifestyle Invest in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure
Increasing risks from natural hazards	Build disaster-resilient communities
Prevention of the previous conditions	Ensure affordable housing Invest in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure
Economic growth	Promote regional cooperation Ensure affordable living Invest in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure
Community development	Ensure affordable housing Invest in existing neighborhoods and infrastructure Build walkable communities Create more transportation choices Protect green space Preserve rural heritage and lifestyle

² "Goal 1," *Overarching Goals and Strategies*: Final. Adopted by the Legislative Commission to Address Smart Growth, Growth Management and Development Issues on January 19, 2001

The key question for North Carolina is not whether to grow, but how. If we grow by chance, we have to accept the results. If we grow by choice, we can keep our communities livable, affordable and vibrant. On January 31, 2000, a Commission assembled to address Smart Growth, growth management and development issues in the state. The Commission's charge was to study ways in which the state could help communities grow in a way that promotes economic vitality, protects natural resources, and enhances our quality of life. Commission members came from all walks of life – farmers, builders, doctors, bankers, lawyers, local elected officials, environmentalists, and others. Each found appreciation for the complexity of issues facing the state and for the commitment and dedication of those working to address those issues.

The final report detailed the Commission's findings. It represented months of study, debate, and consensus building. While the report presented eight goals with corresponding strategies, of particular significance to the City of Rocky Mount, is Goal 1, which is to promote Smart Growth Planning in all counties and municipalities. The strategies identify minimum levels of planning, potential incentives to reach beyond the minimum standards, and planning requirements that are tiered based upon criteria such as size of locality, growth rate and the presence of environmentally sensitive areas.

C. TOGETHER TOMORROW - THE TIER 1 SMART GROWTH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE CITY OF ROCKY MOUNT

This Comprehensive Plan, **TOGETHER TOMORROW**, is based upon the Planning Tier 1. The plan designates the Planned Growth Area, Five Smart Growth Areas (SGAs) and Critical and Sensitive (C&S) areas within the City's jurisdiction and its extraterritorial jurisdiction for a 20-year planning horizon - 2025.

The City's Planning Tier 1 approach also provides the framework for future detailing and expansion of the plan as required for Planning Tier 2 and Planning Tier 3. Overarching Goal 1 and its strategies are as follows:

Goal 1: Promote Smart Growth Planning in all Counties and Municipalities. Planning should be required of all municipalities and counties.

- Establish a minimum level of planning for all communities, with incentives to reach beyond the minimum standards.
- Smaller localities would be encouraged to incorporate their efforts into the county's planning program.
- Planning requirements should be tiered based upon criteria such as size of locality, growth rate and the presence of environmentally sensitive areas.
- Each planning tier would specify a baseline of planning elements.
- At a minimum, local governments would designate 'Smart Growth Areas' and 'Critical and Sensitive' resource areas.

Planned Growth Areas (PGAs) are areas where infill growth and new development would be encouraged and can best be accommodated and supported over a 20-year period. PGAs would include existing and proposed local transportation networks, water, sewer and other utility systems, and most other infrastructure and public facilities needed to support growth. Smart Growth Areas (SGA's) are selected subsets of the Planned Growth Areas and will receive specific planning strategies suitable to their individual needs and supportive of Smart Growth Principles. Most local, state and federal monies would be targeted within these areas. Critical and Sensitive (C&S) areas include, but are not limited to, water supply watersheds, floodplains, jurisdictional wetlands, gamelands, parks, significant areas (habitat areas, natural areas and forestlands), significant farmlands and timberlands, and similar resource or high hazard areas. Within C&S areas, transportation projects and other infrastructure and public facilities would be limited or restricted to avoid or minimize negative effects on natural and agricultural resources.

- Planning Tier 1: The local government designates the PGA, SGAs, and C&S areas within its jurisdiction and its extraterritorial jurisdiction for a 20-year planning horizon. Plans would 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. Land Use is defined in general developmental patterns that will be defined with more detail in the Tiers 2 & 3 described below. Planning programs would include broad-based public involvement processes to achieve consensus on the development and conservation vision for the community.
- Planning Tier 2: In addition to Tier 1 planning requirements, the local government prepares a comprehensive plan that includes land use plan and transportation at an increased detail from the Tier 1 plan. Plans for future development of infrastructure, open space and natural resources elements would be included. All plan elements must be internally consistent as well as consistent with state smart growth principles.
- Planning Tier 3: In addition to Tier 1 and 2 planning requirements, the local government prepares a comprehensive plan that includes multi-modal transportation, public facilities, cultural resources, and intergovernmental coordination elements. This tier provides analysis and planning at the most accurate & detailed level.

Localities should risk losing access to certain state grants and funds if they fail to meet minimum planning requirements. Localities should have enhanced access to state funds if they exceed their minimum requirements. Localities should evaluate their progress in implementing plans through periodic audits.



III. ORGANIZATION OF THE DOCUMENT

This document has three primary components — the Demographics and History of the Study Area, the Vision, Goals and Plan, and Implementation.

The first section tells the history of the Study Area, provides key demographic information, and projects future population of the City of Rocky Mount and the Study Area.

The second component of this plan is the Vision, Goals, and Plan. This information has been organized into ten issue areas: Land Use, Transportation, Community Facilities, Housing, Economic Development, Critical and Sensitive Areas, Natural Hazards, Community Design, Neighborhoods and Intergovernmental Cooperation. After providing a detailed and comprehensive analysis of current conditions within the study area, this section presents the goals and policies developed through the public input process. The final component of each subsection is the objectives, and strategies deemed necessary to address key community concerns.

Following these two informational components is the Implementation component. This chapter summarizes actions and strategies that must be accomplished in order to achieve the policies identified by Rocky Mount citizens. It indicates the timeframe in which the action and strategies should be implemented, as well as the key players responsible for their implementation.

An additional resource, the Appendix, has also been included to assist with the understanding of this document. It will contain all current copies of Sub Plans as they are developed in the future, a glossary of terms, the bibliography, and a document index.

