

## Comprehensive Plan Update 2017

Citizen Comments, Chickahominy M.S., July 31, 2017



### **COMMENTS FOR THE PLAN IN GENERAL**

The updated Plan should reflect changes in demographics. Population change demands will drive development

Need better outreach from Planning to access and gain input from different population demographics

Stream/ Facebook live the community meetings

Include a new section in the Comp Plan on sustainability so that sustainability is considered prior to development and not after

“War is too important to be left to the Generals” (Clemanceau); “Development is too important to be left to developers” (Hanover Citizen)

Preserve a sense of community

### **COMMENTS RELATED TO GROWTH MANAGEMENT**

Generally support the 20% -80% rural and suburban area population spilt

The current Suburban Service Area needs relief from growth; look at possibly expanding it along corridors that can handle additional growth

Do not expand the Suburban Service Area

### **COMMENTS RELATED TO LAND USE**

Encourage small parcel homesteading for farm-to-table activity

Encourage more greenspaces in subdivisions, explore incentives for developers to provide more open area

Too many fastfood and gas stations developing

**Encourage opportunities for work-force housing and mixed income neighborhoods**

**Keep rural areas rural and finds ways to better integrate rural areas with suburban areas**

**Encourage more mixed use development**

**Require hurdles be cleared (ie schools, infrastructure, roads) prior to continued growth. Example, traffic study scope for a project be expanded**

**Need better definitions for open space requirements, do not allow BMPs, natural open areas should exclude stormwater retention facilities**

**Look at potential for community gardens**

**Not happy when zoning amendments occur in large developments (ie Rutland); citizen expectations happen after initial zoning then changes happen that are not always acceptable to residents**

#### ***RELATED TO TRANSPORTATION***

**Avoid road stripping corridors**

**Need for better interconnection of neighborhoods**

**Need for walkable communities**

**County should ensure that the road network has capacity to serve development**

**Encourage public transportation opportunities; possible answer to road concerns are bus/public transportation corridors to relive additional traffic**

**Connect communities with bike/pedestrian friendly paths**

**Encourage the creation of proper pedestrian friendly ordinances**

**Do not like the condition of road capacity and the money need for improvements**

**Change the policy that a minimum acceptable LOS (level of service) for roads from "D" to "C"**

#### ***COMMENTS REGARDING UTILITIES AND FACILITIES***

**Need more recreational choices, not just sport facilities**

**Infrastructure such a fiber-optic cable and gas lines should be expanded into older neighborhoods**

**Need more public playgrounds and more diverse facilities in the public parks (not just ballfields)**

**Maintain a high quality for the schools**

**Plan of more parks**

**Need to explore expansion of high speed internet to rural areas**

In anticipation of the upcoming Hanover County Comprehensive Plan review process, please identify the topics and/or subjects that should, in your opinion, be included in the Plan review process. Also, please note any adjustments you feel the County should consider as you review the General Land Use Map for Hanover County.

- Consider/redefine what "open space" really means. I don't think it should include a retention pond or any other BMP. It should include things like natural areas left untouched/undeveloped. Other ideas include parks, native plantings or meadows.
- Add in criteria or incentives for "green" building structures or for developments that use LEED elements
- More consideration to transition areas between developed land and undeveloped land.
- Willingness to work collaboratively with existing and new organizations that may have an expert opinion when it comes to one specific type of planning element. (For example, consult the Master Gardeners when trying to figure out appropriate and native landscaping.)
- Additional signage highlighting major bike routes that flow through Hanover County. Supporting those bike routes with appropriate bike lanes that connect up with other major trails such as the Virginia Capital Trail.
- Add and define "bike friendly" elements to existing and new developments such as bike racks placed in central locations, entrance/exit ramps onto sidewalks, lighting along common routes
- Consider reviewing the Plan and making updates more frequently – maybe every three years instead of five
- Consider adding an environmental committee or board that would also be part of the zoning review process. (For example, does a site plan ever get sent to the VA Dept of Game and Inland Fisheries or a local group like the Mattaponi & Pamunkey River Association)
- Consider having developers of residential communities be required to distribute the Comprehensive Plan to all new residents upon moving in to Hanover County for their review.
- Encourage and accept written comments about the Comp Plan all year long. Save them for review at the planned review times.
- Consider distributing the Comp Plan to Hanover County school students for review as part of what they learn in school. By reaching out to the next generation, Hanover County residents will be raised knowing what the County plans as well as feel comfortable giving feedback about the Plan.
- Print various parts of the Plan throughout the year in local newspapers such as the Mechanicsville Local and the Herald-Progress so citizens can regularly familiarize themselves with its contents.

COMP PLAN VISION AND PRINCIPLES

\* The Comp Plan should unify the county and minimize divisions between rural and suburban areas.

\* The Comp Plan emphasizes the need for a balance between development and growth, on the one hand, and infrastructure and preservation (natural resources, open space, forested and agricultural land), on the other hand. Development and growth are fundamentally out of balance with infrastructure and preservation goals in the SSA.

\* Planning for growth on 20% of the county's land with 70% of the county's population has unacceptably concentrated development impacts. Controlled development in the SSA should be emphasized in the Comp Plan.

\* Heavily impacted SSA corridors should be designated in the Comp Plan and receive greater consideration in planning.

\* Density should be reduced and open space should be increased in the SSA, more in line with Hanover's rural areas.

\* Roads have not been expanded or improved in a timely manner. Traffic on county roads is increasingly unacceptable and often intolerable.

\* Adequate roads must be the county's top priority. They remain essential for all residents, businesses, workers, commuters, and families who choose Hanover for our quality schools.

\* Current data and thorough analysis of development are essential and should be dynamically applied in assessing infrastructure needs and impacts, allocating county resources, analyzing rezoning applications, and making planning and land use decisions.

\* To minimize infrastructure needs and demands on county resources and maintain a rural character, remaining forested and agricultural land in highly impacted SSA corridors must receive enhanced protection.

\* Common or open space and parks are necessary for the long term health of our neighborhoods and residents, particularly in heavily impacted SSA corridors, and should have a higher priority in the Comp Plan.

July 31, 2017

Bob Nelson, Chickahominy MD

## DENSITY GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES

1. Acreage which cannot be developed for residential units should be excluded in density calculations.

Justification. Currently, 50% of Chesapeake Bay Resource Protection Area (RPA) acreage can be included in density calculations. In addition, 100% of streams, ponds, wetlands, and transmission line acreage outside an RPA can be included. The existing treatment and the difference in treatment of acreage, which cannot be developed, for density calculations makes little sense.

All acreage which cannot be developed for residential units should be excluded in computing a subdivision's density in rezoning cases. A developer should not be able to increase density on remaining developable land to reflect land that can't be developed.

2. Common or open space requirements should be increased by 5% in applicable zoning ordinances.

Justification. The zoning regulations contain minimum common or open space requirements which are tied to density. The county is also considering incorporating healthy community elements in the Comp Plan. Consistent with these objectives, and in order to retain Hanover's rural feel in heavily impacted SSA corridors, the county should increase common or open space requirements by 5%. Common or open space for active or passive recreation is a necessary component in achieving healthy community goals, particularly in areas which are heavily developed and contain most of Hanover's population.

3. The average residential density in the SSA should be eliminated or reduced to 2.0 units/acre, the average density in the Comp Plan prior to the last revision.

Justification. The Board of Supervisors amended the Comp Plan to remove 990 acres from the SSA in 2015. Moreover, the SSA is already highly developed; major corridors are in need of road improvements; the inventory of approved zoned lots and dwelling units was 4,865<sup>1</sup> as of June 30, 2016; and acreage remaining to be developed in the SSA is increasingly marginal and often highly stressed by existing and proposed residential, commercial, and business development nearby. The average residential density standard has also been selectively applied in reviewing proposed developments. The average residential density criteria should be eliminated or reduced to 2.0 units/acre, the figure in the Comp Plan prior to the last revision.

4. The maximum residential density should be reduced from 15 units/acre to 10 units/acre.

Justification. Large mixed use residential developments have a density of 8 units/acre or less. While some smaller developments have densities in excess of 10 units/acre, open space is often limited. Special exceptions would continue to be available for independent living and assisted living facilities to meet the needs of an aging population.

5. Population growth rate.

Discussion. At the Comp Plan kickoff meeting, without public input, the Board of Supervisors passed a resolution to use a historic 1.5% population growth rate in the Comp Plan to forecast growth over the next 20 years. The population growth rate forecast assumes the conclusion of what is best for Hanover

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<sup>1</sup> 4,218 zoned lots and dwelling units plus 599 units for the East Ashland mixed use development and 48 units for Honey Meadows.

County under its unique Comp Plan and can be questioned for the reasons noted above. The Board of Supervisors should reconsider the 1.5% population growth rate forecast and the uses made of it.

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## MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT

The model for mixed use development in Hanover County is the Rutland subdivision.<sup>1</sup> Rutland has 520 approved residential units on 138.6 acres (256 single family, 264 townhouses) or 3.75 units/acre, a relatively low density for this zoning classification. Rutland also has 61.9 acres of approved commercial, business, and public space which currently generates major traffic and will add more when a library and other commercial space is developed.

Standing alone, Rutland would be one thing. The concerns arise from major developments nearby: Cool Spring Forest – 193 units, 96.2 acres, 2.01 units/acre and Cool Spring West – 276 units on 59.2 acres (159 single family, 117 townhouses), 4.66 units/acre, a density greater than Rutland. The total for all three developments is almost 1,000 homes, and the overall density is 3.36 units/acre.

Vehicle traffic from these three developments creates traffic throughout the Rutland neighborhood, primarily on Atlee Road, Combs Road, and Rutlandshire Drive which will only get worse in the future. Rutland residents are concerned with speeding on neighborhood streets and wish to protect pedestrians and maintain their quality of life.

### Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

\* The density of mixed use developments should be reduced below the maximum of 15 units/acre. 8 to 10 units/acre is the maximum which should be allowed.

\* High density development near areas designated for mixed use development is ill-advised. A maximum of 4 units/acre should be allowed in the vicinity of mixed use developments.

\* The mixed use zoning ordinance allows plazas to be counted at twice their acreage in satisfying common or open space requirements. Residents of mixed use developments need more common or open space, not less; and these requirements should not be met by double counting acreage. Plaza acreage should be counted once.

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<sup>1</sup> Two other mixed use developments have been approved in Hanover County: East Ashland – 599 units, 132.5 acres, 4.5 units/acre and Scotchtown – 532 units, 67 acres, 7.9 units/acre. However, neither has been developed to date.

## HEAVILY IMPACTED CORRIDORS

All areas in the county are experiencing development impacts, but some areas are more heavily impacted than others. They should be the focus of detailed discussion and review in the Comp Plan and rezoning cases.

The corridors most heavily impacted have the following in common: major ongoing development, a large residential lot inventory from approved developments, new rezoning requests, increasing traffic on the roads, schools and school traffic, school capacity concerns tied to residential development, and roads in need of improvement. A non-exclusive list of heavily impacted corridors includes Atlee Station Road (ASR), US 360 east of I-295, and Pole Green Road.

The ASR corridor best illustrates the challenges the county faces. 3,150 residential units have been constructed and occupied directly affected traffic on two lane ASR. Another 935 units have been approved for development at nine subdivisions, six of which are currently being developed. Three schools have major impacts on traffic, and the middle and high schools have been at or near capacity in recent years. Pearson's Corner elementary school is currently bearing the brunt of major ongoing development at Rutland and Cool Springs West with large increases in enrollment and class sizes. From 2011 to 2016, 34% of new residential development in the SSA was approved in the ASR corridor.

There are no plans to widen ASR until 2027; and as with US 360 widening, it will be done in phases. The 2013 estimate to widen ASR was \$20.0 million, but widening is now projected to cost \$31.2 million. Funding is uncertain, and the likelihood of delays and further cost increases is great because utility relocations, right of way acquisition, and contracts still need to be addressed.

The county's ability to address development has also been adversely affected by the 2016 change in state law concerning proffers. County staff has advised the Board of Supervisors that additional information should be obtained from developers in connection with proposed development, and the rezoning application needs revision.

### Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The Comp Plan and the maps should be revised to list heavily impacted corridors and the standards and criteria which will be applied in rezoning cases involving these corridors.

\* Traffic and Roads. Traffic studies and counts should be obtained for the entire corridor and should consider traffic from all existing developments and approved developments whether or not lots have been recorded. County plans for improving the roads (widening, signals, and turn lanes) and the availability of funding from proffers, federal, state, and county funds should be discussed with an emphasis on present and future level of service impacts.

\* Schools. The county relies on average data for students per residential unit to assess the impact of new residential developments on schools. However, new residential development add more students than county-wide average data would indicate; and this has occurred at elementary schools, like Pearson's Corner and Kersey Creek. The county should obtain and analyze specific data on actual and projected school age populations from new subdivisions and use this data to assess the impact of proposed residential developments on schools. In addition, the county currently only considers current enrollment and projections in assessing the impact of proposed residential developments. This fails to

adequately consider the impact of ongoing development. The county should consider the impact of approved but undeveloped residential units on school enrollment and capacity.

\* Water and Sewers. The Water and Wastewater Facilities Master Plan referenced in the Comp Plan is dated June 2009 and has not been revised. Since that date, the BOS has removed 990 acres from the SSA and has made eight years of changes in the timing, scope, size, and funding of water and sewer facilities. The Water and Wastewater Facilities Master Plan should be updated.

\* Emergency Services, Law Enforcement, Health, and Safety. The response time of emergency vehicles can be adversely affected in heavily impacted corridors by traffic, particularly during peak hours. In the last Comp Plan review, Sheriff Hines discussed law enforcement personnel needs and issues tied to growth in Hanover County. A rezoning application in a heavily impacted corridor should be reviewed to assure that its impact on emergency services and law enforcement is acceptable and that county citizens will continue to live in a safe county.

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## TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Traffic on Hanover roads is often intolerable, particularly during peak hours in the SSA. The three year inventory of recorded residential lots and the eight year inventory of zoned residential lots and dwelling units both indicate that traffic on Hanover's roads will get worse.

The current Comp Plan provides a framework for future improvements and a functional classification of roads but lacks discussion of concrete plans for improving them. The goals and objectives section in the Comp Plan generally states that there will be a "cost-effective use of resources to adequately balance the transportation infrastructure with land development," cooperation with VDOT to "identify and develop highway improvement projects that are compatible with the growth policies identified" in the Comp Plan, and a functional road classification system that "identifies the intended purpose of existing and proposed roads and is reflective of land development changes." What does this mean? Arguably nothing because any road system or land development proposal could be deemed to satisfy the Comp Plan. As far as specific road improvements, the Comp Plan lists six: two US highways (Routes 33 and 360) and four other road projects (Route 1250, Creighton Parkway, New Ashcake extended, and Lewistown Road extended). The plans for these projects were developed and approved by the Board of Supervisors long ago, yet their completion lies in the future. The strategies section in the Comp Plan list three other projects of limited scope, completion of which is also in the future.

Secondary road improvements which are, and should be, a top county priority are listed in an appendix attached to the Business and Residential Road Improvements Transportation Policy adopted by the Board of Supervisors in March 2013 and revised in June 2016. However, these projects are generally not referenced in the Comp Plan.

Traffic studies are performed in connection with proposed new developments, but data is often lacking or inadequate on the actual impact of development on traffic and roads. As an example, the county's traffic consultant reviewed the detailed Taylor Farm traffic study and expressed concerns with the volume and growth in traffic on Atlee Station Road (ASR) and data in VDOT's annual reports. Traffic data on secondary and feeder roads is often estimated, unavailable, or dated. For example, almost 200 homes are owned and occupied in Cool Spring West. However, because the roads have not yet been transferred to the state, VDOT annual reports do not show traffic for the subdivision.

The Board of Supervisors must strengthen the role of the Comp Plan in reviewing and guiding development of Hanover's essential road infrastructure. A complete inventory of road improvement projects should be included in the Comp Plan based on actual traffic data, level of service, and VDOT criteria. Hanover's roads should be scored on a regular basis, particularly in areas of major ongoing residential, commercial, and business development.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies.

\* Actual traffic counts and, as necessary, studies should be performed on major secondary roads at least once every five years and on all roads impacted by ongoing development at least once every two years. To illustrate using the ASR corridor, data would be collected biennially on ASR and roads and developments which are likely to affect ASR traffic but where current data is not available.

\* In addition to actual traffic counts, projected traffic increases should be determined in two categories. First, future traffic from ongoing development should be determined. Second, traffic from

approved but undeveloped subdivisions should be considered. Information in both categories should be reviewed in assessing the need for road improvements.

\* Based on this information, current and projected levels of service on major secondary roads should be determined. All roads which currently function or are projected to function at a level of service of C or lower during peak hours shall be identified, along with roads which VDOT recommends for improvement.

\* Using the expanded list, road improvement projects shall continue to be listed, prioritized, and reviewed annually; and project information should indicate whether they will be done in phases, the dates when the county expects they will be started and completed, and the cost of the improvements and funding sources for them.

\* The Comp Plan should contain concrete goals and objectives for a truly adequate and functional road network that adequately serves its residents and businesses. As an example, the Comp Plan could require that all roads be improved to a level of service of C or better or to VDOT standards by the next Comp Plan review or 2027 at the latest.

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