

Comprehensive Plan Update 2017

Citizen Comments, Community Meetings, October 2017

Patrick Henry H.S., Atlee H.S., Montpelier Center, Lee-Davis H.S.

COMMENTS On The Draft Plan

Concern expressed about the proposed 3.5-8 DU/ac designation on Elmont Road

Concern expressed about traffic generated from the proposed 3.5-8 DU/ac designation on Elmont Road

Clarification about the proposed roads leading to Woodside Lane

Need for economic development in the village of Beaverdam

Would like to have a rural character introduced into the SSA

Need to widen Atlee Station Road

Road improvement strategies are needed

CIP lacks adequate funding for road improvements

Need improved access to Pole Green Park

Encouraged by the introduction of complete streets and pedestrian connections in the updated Plan

Concern about eliminated the cash proffers and increasing density

Would like to see more countywide pedestrian trails

Does not agree with the Suburban High designation at Elmont and Gwathemey Church Roads

Concern that high density could become rental property

Questions about future bike facilities

Question about the timeline for the round-a-bout for Creighton/Cold Harbor intersection and the Rural Point/Studley intersection; and timeline of funding for Pole Green Road improvements

Many comments and concerns expressed regarding it being a bad proposal redesignating Spring Meadows subdivision for Multi-Use

Concern about the proposed Multi-family designation near Meadow Road

Environmental concerns with adding more development in the 360 area

Established families in Spring Meadows, why disrupt and not use undeveloped land

Comment that the County wants the Spring Meadows subdivision redeveloped since it has infrastructure and will generate additional money

Redesignating Spring Meadows will place neighbor against neighbor when seeking zoning changes

Concerns about school capacity with all the new development

Need to expand Pole Green Road

There is a need for additional neighborhood parks

Need Planning to post maps of lands that are potential development sites

Concern about business encroachment on the residential uses in Mechanicsville area; the proposed Plan opens the door for developers

Pole Green Road is inadequate for any further development

Should not expect tax payers to pay for "healthy living" proposals such as pedestrian trails, bike lanes and interconnections

Support for the healthy living component, better connections are needed for safe pedestrian walkways

Planning needs to better inform residents of changes like what was proposed for Spring meadows

Spring Meadows is affordable and the proposed land use change will price residents out

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE 2017

TRANSPORTATION PLAN WHITE PAPER

The purposed Hanover County Comprehensive Plan 2017 Update does not provide specific road improvement funding and scheduling guidance, as required by the State of Virginia that can be applied in future land re-zoning cases for development in the Suburban Service Areas. If the Comprehensive Plan is to provide specific guidance to county administrators on the transportation plan, it needs to include a detailed road improvement strategy for accomplishing the transportation plan goals. Otherwise, the county can not control commercial and residential development that can cause traffic congestion on the roads which adversely affects the quality of life of its citizens.

Discussion

State of Virginia Transportation Plan Requirements –

The Code of Virginia, Section [15.2-2223](#), Part B.1 states that “As part of the comprehensive plan, each locality shall develop a transportation plan that designates a system of transportation infrastructure needs and recommendations ...” Part B.2 specifies that “The transportation plan shall include a map that shall show road and transportation improvements, including the cost estimates of such road and transportation improvements from the Virginia Department of Transportation, taking into account the current and future needs of residents in the locality ...”

Growth Impact on Suburban Service Areas –

In the Forecast Section of the purposed Comprehensive Plan Update 2017, growth in the county is expected to increase at an average annual rate of 1.5 percent based on population growth assumptions. The Land Capacity Analysis Section specifies that the Suburban Service Areas comprise 22 percent of Hanover County’s land area. The Suburban Service Areas are designated to be where suburban growth will be focused. Also, the analysis states that this “eliminates suburban sprawl development by encouraging compact and contiguous land use pattern.”

Example of Suburban Service Area Road Corridor Targeted for Rapid Growth –

An example of a Suburban Service Area that has been targeted for growth, in recent re-zoning cases, is the Atlee Station Road corridor, since this corridor has some land remaining for residential housing development. The road is a narrow and winding two-lane secondary road that is currently experiencing significant residential housing growth. Sections of this road are considered ‘broken’ based on acceptable measures of delay (Level of Service) during AM and PM peak rush hours. Development along the Atlee Station Road corridor is represented by major projects such as The Charleston Ridge apartment complex and the approved Giles Farm (442 units) and Taylor Farm (125 units) subdivisions. This will concentrate vehicle traffic and

certainly break the southern section of the road in the near future. Over 4,000 existing and approved homes in the residential housing subdivisions and three schools affect traffic on Atlee Station Road and are creating the need to widen Atlee Station Road in a timely fashion.

According to the Hanover County Department of Public Works, the funds required to widen Atlee Station Road would be 31.2 million dollars in today's dollars. This figure is the largest estimated cost for 13 funded and unfunded road construction projects that have been identified for needed improvement. The Virginia Department of Transportation has not committed to provide the county with this level of funds and the county does not have the financial resources to fund the project. Therefore, the Atlee Station Road widening project is currently unfunded and probably will not be scheduled for construction for another 10 years. Without the widening of Atlee Station Road in a reasonable time period, this road will not keep pace with expected growth along it.

The problem is – there is no strategy provided in the 2017 Comprehensive Plan – Transportation Plan for how to fund and provide a reasonable schedule for road improvements, such that they will be able to keep pace with the growth along the Suburban Service Areas corridors.

Existing Strategy for Funding and Scheduling Road Improvement Projects –

During the February 8, 2017 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Director of Public Works provided a presentation on '2017 Transportation Initiative – Long Term Road Improvement Needs and Funding'. The presentation covered the following areas:

- Historical and Current Funding
- New Construction
- Allocation of State Road Funds
- Funding Alternatives

The information presented to the Board of Supervisors was based on valuable detailed engineering data that the Public Works Department has developed to fund and schedule desirable road improvement projects. However, based on reduced funds provided by the Virginia Department of Transportation through the new 'Smart Scale' construction program, Hanover County is having difficulty in finding the funds to support road improvement projects.

Plan of Action – Road Improvement Cost Estimates and Purposed Schedules

The Department of Public Works should develop an easy to understand summary of the detailed information provided in the '2017 Transportation Initiative – Long Term Road Improvement Needs and Funding' presentation. This summary of planned and unplanned projects with funding and scheduling information should be included in the Transportation Plan section of the Comprehensive Plan Update 2017. A disclaimer statement should be included stating in essence that 'the funding and scheduling of road improvement projects are goals that the county is

attempting to accomplish. However, the goals will probably be revised in the future based on the impact of inflation and the availability of funds to schedule the projects.’

Conclusions

To be in compliance with the State of Virginia Comprehensive Plan – Transportation Plan requirements, the purposed Comprehensive Plan Update 2017 should include a well developed strategy for road improvements that include funding and schedule implementation goals. The elements of that strategy already exist. The challenge will be presenting, in the Transportation Plan section, a summarization of funding and scheduling information in a form that citizens can understand and relate too. Also, the county Planning Department, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors should consider this approach to comply with the State of Virginia Code, Section [15.2-2223](#), Parts B.1 and B.2.

In conclusion, if citizens are unaware of the road improvement project funding and scheduling problems confronting the county, they are going to be increasing frustrated with traffic congestion on the Suburban Service Area roads and will hold county administrators responsible for the problem. However, if concerned citizens are provided with summarized information, they can better understand the Suburban Service Area road improvement issues. Concerned citizens and possibly citizen action groups may even become involved in helping the county address those concerns by contacting their state representatives with their concerns.

Dick Smith, Chickahominy MD, October 26, 2017

DENSITY CALCULATIONS AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Future Land Use section of the Comp Plan should be revised to add the following:

“All land which can be developed for dwelling units, including streams, ponds, wetlands and buffers; Chesapeake Bay Protection Areas; and electric transmission, pipelines, and utility facilities, shall be excluded in computing residential density.”

Adding this language would eliminate residential density transfers and the existing arbitrary and unreasonable treatment of land which can't be developed. The environmental objectives and strategies of the Comp Plan would be fully advanced and affirmed by adding this language.

Discussion

Most re-zonings involve multiple parcels. Under current zoning ordinances, there is no downward adjustment to the number of residential units for land which cannot be developed (ponds, streams, wetlands outside resource protection areas (RPAs) and land subject to utility easements). A 50% adjustment is made to the number of residential units for land which cannot be developed within a RPA.¹

1. The following hypotheticals illustrate the number of residential units which can be approved under Suburban General (SG) zoning (proposed maximum 3.5 units/acre) for two adjacent 10 acre parcels: one consisting of 100% RPA acreage and the other containing no restrictions.

* The owner of the RPA acreage cannot construct any residential units, the owner of the unrestricted 10 acre parcel can construct a maximum of 35 residential dwelling units under SG zoning.

* If one owner owns both parcels, 50% of the 10 RPA acres or 5 acres, can be counted; and a maximum of 52 residential dwelling units can be constructed on the developable 10 acre parcel. 17 additional units can be constructed compared to separate ownership or 5.2 units/acre, 1.7 units above the SG maximum.

2. The following hypotheticals illustrate the number of residential units which can be approved under SG zoning for two adjacent 10 acre parcels: one which can be developed at all for residential purposes and the other containing no restrictions.

* The owner of one 10 acre parcel cannot develop any residential units at all, the owner of the other 10 acre parcel can construct a maximum of 35 residential dwelling units.

* If one owner owns both parcels, a maximum of 70 units can be constructed on the developable 10 acre parcel. 35 additional units can be constructed compared to separate ownership or 7.0 units/acre, double the SG maximum.

¹ Support for the hypotheticals and the discussion can be found in the files for the Taylor Farm re-zoning, C-34-15. There the developer claimed 100% of its undevelopable stream, wetlands, and transmission line acreage. The adjacent Honey Meadows subdivision, however, was subject to a 50% acreage reduction for RPAs. The developer of Taylor Farm argued that a 50% RPA adjustment was improper for Honey Meadows and no RPA acreage should be reflected in the residential density calculations.

3. The results would be the same if there were a single 20 acre parcel with the characteristics noted above.

The current zoning ordinances have the perverse effect of encouraging developers to acquire environmentally sensitive and other land which can't be developed in order to increase residential density on adjacent land which can be developed. The higher densities are particularly undesirable because they occur in close proximity to Chesapeake Bay protected areas and other environmentally sensitive stream and wetland acreage.

The adjustments are also arbitrary and unreasonable. RPA land which can't be developed is subject to a 50% adjustment. Other undevelopable land is not adjusted downward at all, 100% of its acreage can essentially be transferred and used on adjacent land.

Conclusions

1. Developers should not be allowed to increase the residential density on land which can be developed based on any acreage which they cannot develop for residential purposes. All undevelopable acreage should be excluded in residential density calculations, particularly in the highly developed SSA.

2. Increasing residential density based on land which cannot be developed maximizes environmental problems and adverse water quality and quantity impacts of development on adjacent land. It is contrary to the land conservation, storm water management, total maximum daily loads, stream and wetland preservation, and air and water quality discussion in the Environmental section of the Comp Plan.

3. Excluding land which cannot be developed in residential density calculations best meets and advances the following critical goals, objectives, and strategies in the Environmental section of the Comp Plan:

- * Preserve and protect Hanover's valuable natural resources for the health and enjoyment of present and future generations

- * Protect, preserve and conserve the County's natural resources from degradation and loss

- * Promote and support the preservation of surface and groundwater resources to provide adequate drinking water and recreation

- * Encourage land use decisions that protect wetlands, waterways, and other environmentally sensitive areas

- * Encourage the protection of Chesapeake Bay RPAs in the review of new development proposals

4. Residential density transfers should be eliminated. Gross acreage should not be the basis for residential density calculations. Net developable acreage is the correct, sustainable, and environmentally sound basis for residential density determinations.

5. Excluding all land which cannot be developed in residential density calculations is a core principle which should guide Hanover County. It should be memorialized in the Comp Plan.

Bob Nelson, Chickahominy MD, October 18, 2017

A BETTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – POSITIVE CHANGES

1. Maps. Maps are a powerful source of information. They advance transparency and inform citizens on land use matters. Citizens should not have to spend hours or days researching the facts related to rezoning applications and Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) issues when they can view, download, print, or share a map.

The following maps should be prepared and made publicly available as part of this Comp Plan revision.

* Heavily Impacted Corridors – A map showing road corridors heavily impacted by development and including, at a minimum, US 360, Pole Green Road, and Atlee Station Road. Designation as a heavily impacted corridor would trigger a heightened review of the impact of new development proposals to include consideration of cumulative impacts from ongoing development and approved re-zonings.

* Land Re-Zoned But Not Developed – A map showing major residential subdivisions (20 or more units) which have been approved for development but where lots have not yet been recorded. Citizens should have access to a map which indicates where residential developments have been approved for purposes of assessing new development.

* Undeveloped Land – A map showing remaining undeveloped A-1 parcels in the Suburban Service Area (SSA), colored coded (four to 20 acres, 20 acres and above), consistent with the planning criteria used in the land consumption analysis. This would identify areas of possible future residential development.

* County Owned and Undevelopable Land – A map showing land which is owned by Hanover County and land which cannot be developed because it is RPA or otherwise protected or restricted. This would identify land which could potentially be used for recreational purposes.

* Parks and Recreation Facilities – This map exists but is not part of the current Comp Plan and is difficult for citizens to access online. The map and changes to it are, however, part of the draft Comp Plan package. A map of park and recreation facilities should be in the Comp Plan to guide land use decisions.

2. Parks and Recreation. In the July and August workshops, many citizens discussed the need for public parks and open space and noted the absence of parks in the Chickahominy MD and Mechanicsville MD. Other citizens highlighted parks, like Pole Green Park, which are large and located reasonably close to the SSA.

The revised Parks and Recreation section in the Comp Plan combines smaller Community (3-50 acres) and Neighborhood Parks (up to 20 acres) and shows a current deficiency of 74 acres in the combined category,¹ increasing to a deficiency of 187 acres in 2037. Neighborhood Parks are ones “with very limited selection of active recreation facilities (e.g., playgrounds, picnic areas, ball fields, hiking/jogging trails) that are within easy walking/biking distance of residents’ homes.” It states that the county “currently does not administer any Neighborhood Parks but will continue to seek opportunity to develop this park classification in the future,” language unchanged from the current Comp Plan.

¹ The current deficiency would be 135 acres if 61 acres at two proposed Community Parks (Little River Park and Winding Brook Park) were not included.

Neighborhood parks, ones “within easy walking/biking distance of residents’ homes,” are exactly the type of parks which are lacking, but needed, in the highly developed SSA to carry out the goals of the Comp Plan. Neighborhood parks should be inventoried, assessed, planned, and integrated into the park system. Evaluating existing parks, potential neighborhood parks, and open space is a necessary step in assessing bike and walk transportation options.

The following language should be included in the Utilities and Community Facilities section of the Comp Plan:

““In collaboration with the Parks and Recreation Dept. and other county departments, the Parks and Recreation Commission shall develop a plan for neighborhood parks and accessible public open space. In addition to existing park and open space resources, the plan should consider active and passive recreational activities, including dedicated off-road greenway or linear bike and walk resources linking parks and communities.”²”

3. Maintaining a Rural Connection in the SSA. Many new residents moved to Hanover County because it is rural. Many long-time residents remember when the SSA and their neighborhoods were rural, dotted by farms and forests, and miss the loss of rural character. Hanoverians generally support the rural goals and objectives which make the county unique in the Richmond area.

While the strategies for assuring that Hanover remains one county, undivided by the Comp Plan, necessarily vary, an SSA rural connection and preservation objective should be included in the Comp Plan as follows:

“Rural values are reflected in farm land and forests throughout Hanover County. Open space and maintaining a rural connection to the rest of Hanover County are no less important in the SSA. Remaining SSA farm land and forests impose no development burdens and buffer the impacts on roads, schools, other infrastructure, and the environment from approved development. Farm land and forests in the SSA add visual diversity and a rural feel along roads. Preservation of remaining farm land and forests is a priority in heavily developed SSA areas.

Protection of natural resources in the SSA, including lower environmental impact forests and farm land, achieves the goals of the Chesapeake Bay action plan, lessens the need to restore and rebuild stream channels, and prevents further erosion, pollution, and sedimentation. These objectives are common to the SSA and rural areas.”

4. Recognition of the SSA. The revised Future Growth section of the Comp Plan affirms the contribution of the rural areas to Hanover County. However, there is no comparable discussion for the SSA, a prime economic driver for the county in terms of residential, commercial, and business activity and property tax assessments. A comparable discussion of the SSA should be included in the Future Growth section of the revised Comp Plan.

5. Population Growth. The current and projected 1.5% population growth rate is applied to a higher 2017 estimated population, yielding an increase in the 2017-2037 population change over the current

² Two examples of such a system would be the trolley line right of way extension south of the Town of Ashland and one linking Civil War battlefield parks in the Cold Harbor MD.

2012-2032 increase. Residential development to satisfy that growth will, however, necessarily occur on less and less available SSA land.

The 1.5% population growth rate assumption is equivalent to asking a mouse to run faster in a smaller cage. A 1.0% population growth rate is consistent with the limited available SSA land, major county road and infrastructure needs, and open space and environmental preservation goals. It also recognizes the existing seven year inventory of recorded lots and approved re-zonings.

6. Land Consumption Analysis. The Comp Plan assesses the capacity of the SSA to satisfy future population growth by determining how much land needs to be “consumed” to satisfy the 20 year population growth. The two bases for that determination are the approved lot inventory (recorded and unrecorded lots) and the remaining available land, both as of 6/30/2017.

The approved lot inventory is over 4,400 residential dwelling units. The remaining available land includes parcels currently zoned A-1. There are three issues with the analysis.

First, the Town of Ashland is in the SSA and has approved lot inventory and available land for residential re-zonings on its land use map. Examples include the East Ashland project, the Lauradell project (148 units), and smaller subdivisions. Current and future development in the Town of Ashland affects SSA land consumption, and Ashland’s population is included in Hanover’s population. The Town of Ashland’s approved lots and available land should be reflected in the land consumption analysis.

Second, the approved lot inventory should be broken out by housing type in the Comp Plan. Specifically, the number of single family detached, single family attached (townhouses, duplexes), condominiums, and apartments should be listed, by SSA and rural, in the Comp Plan. This is critical information in assessing the need for additional residential dwelling units and should be available to citizens, developers, and decision-makers.

Third, neither the population projections nor the land consumption analysis consider new independent living, assisted living, and other senior housing units. This should be corrected.

7. Average Anticipated SSA Density. This standard has been selectively applied in re-zoning cases; and an average is not a proper or meaningful basis for making decisions in re-zoning cases, particularly given the number of residential categories. It should be eliminated.

If retained, the current 3.0 units/acre average anticipated SSA density should be reduced to 2.5 units/acre, consistent with the proposed 3.5 units/acre maximum Suburban General residential density. The Comp Plan should also state:

“The average SSA density shall be computed and discussed in re-zoning cases.”

Conclusion. The Comp Plan should provide information for citizens, guide re-zoning decisions, protect the environment, address community and infrastructure needs, and unite the county. The recommendations above advance these objectives.

Bob Nelson, Chickahominy MD, October 26, 2017