



**LAND USE AND GROWTH MANAGEMENT
Draft Text (June 5, 2023)**

Goal

Hanover County will strive to ensure the highest-quality living environment possible, through a mixture of land uses reflecting the needs and desires of local residents and how they want their community to develop. Residential growth and economic development will be primarily directed to appropriate locations within the Suburban Service Area (SSA), where utilities are planned. The majority of the County will remain rural with its agricultural, forestal, historic and natural resources being preserved for future generations.

Why It Matters

- **Maintain Rural Character:** One of the guiding principles identified during the public engagement process was to maintain the County's predominately rural character and to manage growth. Growth management involves using different tools to direct development to desired areas. Hanover County has historically used the Suburban Service Area (SSA) as a tool to manage growth by limiting where public utilities will be provided. This allows the majority of the County to remain rural. Supporting high-quality residential, commercial and industrial development in appropriate locations within the SSA provides the community with the resources necessary to preserve rural areas and keep development within a limited footprint.
- **Minimize Environmental Impacts:** The majority of the County (outside of the SSA) is deemed for rural/agricultural uses. Careful land use planning can reduce our environmental footprint by ensuring that resources are managed responsibly in rural areas and within the SSA. As a result, thoughtful planning helps preserve the environment, conserve resources, manage growth, and enhance communities.
- **Provide Services in an Efficient and Fiscally-Responsible Way:** The provision of high-quality services, such as public safety and schools, was identified as a guiding principle among our citizens. Compact and contiguous development can be more efficient to serve than sprawling development (shorter distance to provide utilities, roads, student transportation, etc.). Directing higher-intensity development to a compact area also allows the community to better anticipate public infrastructure needs.
- **Help Minimize Conflicts between Land Uses:** Transitions have been identified as a guiding principle by our citizens. Providing transitions between higher- and lower-intensity development will help reduce conflicts between uses and create a better integrated community.

Measuring Our Progress

- Number of Rezoning Requests Approved Consistent with the Comprehensive Plan
- Distribution of Residential Growth (70% SSA/30% Rural)

Quick Facts

- Accommodating development in a compact and contiguous area can help reduce growth pressures on rural areas.
- The SSA is the portion of the County where public water and sewer service are planned to be made available, allowing higher-density development to occur. The existing limits of the SSA are shown on Map XXX. The suburban area includes properties located within the defined boundaries of the SSA, with the rural areas being properties outside of the SSA.
- No changes to the SSA boundaries are proposed with this plan.
- The Suburban Service Area accounts for 22% of the land area for the County.
- The Comprehensive Plan targets the distribution of residential growth to be 70% in the SSA and 30% in the Rural Areas.
- This plan anticipates a 1% growth rate for the County.
 - 2020 Population: 109,979
 - 2045 Forecast Population (1% Avg.): 136,536 (+27,307)
- General Land Use Plan designations are not intended to be site specific, but are used as a guide regarding the recommended location of new development and use types.

How to Use This Chapter

Growth Management, Conservation, and Suburban Development Plan

The Growth Management, Conservation, and Suburban Development Plan shows where higher-intensity development should be directed and identifies areas that should retain their rural character. Growth areas are generally located along major transportation corridors in the central and southern parts of the County, where public utilities (water and sewer) exist or are planned. There are three area types shown on that plan:

- Suburban Service Area
- Rural Areas
- Rural Conservation Area

More detail regarding each of these areas is below:

- **Suburban Service Area:** Since 1982, the Comprehensive Plan has identified a Suburban Service Area (SSA) to control premature development and to restrict growth to areas where public facilities can be economically and efficiently provided. The SSA is the portion of the County where public water and sewer service are planned to be made available, allowing higher-density development to occur. The SSA is designed to concentrate development so that it occurs in a logical, compact, and contiguous manner and to maintain rural character in areas where utilities are not provided.

The Board of Supervisors may authorize the provision of public utilities outside of the boundaries of the SSA in the following instances:

- Economic development purposes where a private sector applicant is willing to fund public improvements.
- Locations where the County has determined the change is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.
- Locations where the County has determined there is demonstrated risk to the public health, safety, and welfare as a result of failing water or wastewater facilities necessary to serve an identified community.
- Locations for Hanover County public sites and facilities.
- **Rural Areas:** These areas include agricultural, forestal, and rural areas outside of the SSA. More guidance on the County's rural areas can be found in **Chapter XX: Rural/Agricultural**.
- **Rural Conservation Areas:** These areas include major rivers and streams, wetlands, prime agricultural soils, critical wildlife habitat, historic resources, and other features that contribute to the rural character and ecological health of Hanover County.

Due to their unique character and resources, additional preservation and conservation measures may be warranted. When reviewing development proposals within this area (and applicable land use policies), the following should be considered:

- Wider riparian buffers should be provided along rivers and streams (where possible) to protect water quality.
- Wider thoroughfare buffers should be provided along roadways to preserve scenic views and the area's rural character.
- Viewsheds from National Historic Landmarks and sites/districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places should be protected.
- Residential development should be designed as a cluster or conservation subdivision that maximizes preserved open space.
- The use of land preservation tools, such as conservation easements and Agricultural and Forestal Districts (AFDs), should be encouraged in these areas.

General Land Use Plan

The General Land Use Plan shows where new development may be appropriate over the next 20 years. It identifies where agricultural, residential, commercial, and industrial uses may be appropriate. A recommended land use designation is applied to every part of the County. The land use designations are not intended to be site specific, but show what types of uses and residential densities may be appropriate in a certain area.

This chapter includes detailed descriptions of each land use designation shown on the General Land Use Plan. There is guidance on recommended design standards applicable to each land use designation (based on the intensity of recommended uses) to ensure high-quality development contributes to the County's rural character. While the 2017/2018 Comprehensive Plan is *use based* (focused on the location of different uses), a goal of this plan is to be more *design based*, reflecting citizen feedback received through a visual

preference survey and other public outreach. Not only do descriptions of each land use designation provide guidance on different use types and their location, but also include guidance regarding:

- Transitions between Uses (Landscaping/Buffers, Uses, Building Size)
- Buffering along Major Thoroughfares
- Pedestrian/Bicycle Infrastructure
- Access and Circulation
- Building Design
- Signage

The General Land Use Plan is advisory and does not legally control the use of land like a zoning ordinance or zoning map. It is a guide used by decisionmakers to help ensure that future development reflects the County's overall vision for growth and development. Recommendations on the General Land Use Plan are considered as the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors evaluate rezoning requests and other land use applications, such as conditional use permits. While each land use designation has specific design-based guidance, these standards are not required to be implemented, but their applicability and appropriateness will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

For development within all land use designations, special consideration should be given to the following issues:

- **Views from Community Gateways and Major Thoroughfares**

New development along major thoroughfares should be designed to create attractive gateways to the community through the use of high-quality landscaping, architecture, and site design. Landscaped thoroughfare buffers can be used to soften the appearance of development, protect rural viewsheds, and limit the impact of high-speed vehicular traffic on adjacent residential uses. High-quality architecture, materials, landscaping, and signage can create attractive business corridors, with loading areas, outdoor storage, and HVAC systems thoughtfully located and screened to minimize their visibility.

- **Open Space Design and Layout**

Open space must be provided within suburban residential development, but it is also encouraged within a variety of place types and land use designations. In addition to guidance provided for each land use designation, consider the following when designing and locating open space areas:

- Provide open space in a publicly-accessible and visible location that is central to the majority of the development's residents or users. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, such as:
 - Providing a network of sidewalks and pedestrian pathways to connect homes and businesses with open space areas.
 - Providing single-loaded streets, where homes and/or businesses are located on one side of the street and open space areas are on the other side.

- Locate open space at the end of a road or at an intersection to serve as a terminating vista.
 - Maximizing the number of residential lots that abut open space areas.
- Design open space areas to offer a mix of active and passive recreational opportunities.
- Protect environmentally-sensitive features (floodplains, wetlands, steep slopes, unique habitats, etc.) within open space areas.
- Where possible, protect historic and cultural resources within open space areas.
- Where possible, existing healthy vegetation should be preserved within open space areas.
- Where possible, locate open space areas to abut existing open space areas on adjacent parcels.
- When stormwater facilities are located within open space areas, up to 75 percent of the area occupied by these features may count towards open space requirements IF they are designed as an open space amenity. To qualify as an amenity, they should support passive recreation uses by providing access, gentle slopes (less than 3:1), pedestrian elements (pathways, benches and seating areas, etc.), fountains, and/or high-quality native landscaping. If fencing is used, it should be of a type that complements the site (such as split-rail fencing, three-rail fencing, and picket fencing).
- Narrow strips of land (generally less than 25 feet in width) should generally not count towards minimum open space requirements, as these spaces are generally not usable for recreational purposes and cannot accommodate significant landscaping.

- **Transitions between Uses**

Landscaping (buffers and/or screening) and/or greater setbacks should be provided on the perimeter of development when it abuts a use of a different type or intensity (existing or planned). Buildings on the perimeter of a development should be of a compatible scale and height as adjoining development. These transitions are intended to minimize negative impacts different use types may have one another (noise, dust, light pollution, etc.).

Specific guidance regarding each of these issues and how they apply to different use types is included within the descriptions of each land use designation.

Infill Development

Infill development is encouraged to maximize the capacity of the Suburban Service Area (SSA) and efficiently use existing public infrastructure. It may be difficult for infill development to address all of the recommendations within each land use designation, but sites should be thoughtfully designed to:

- Provide adequate landscaping and open space;
- Incorporate design features (landscaping, architecture, etc.) that reflect the character of the surrounding area;
- Orient new buildings in a similar manner as existing adjacent development;
- Minimize negative impacts to existing development (especially established residential neighborhoods) located on adjacent parcels by providing appropriate transitions between different use types and development intensities.

Overall Objectives and Strategies for Land Use and Growth Management

Objective LU.1: Provide for the orderly and timed development of land consistent with the County's ability to provide services.

- Strategy LU.1a: Continue to promote policies that encourage suburban and commercial development to occur in a compact and contiguous manner.
- Strategy LU.1b: Maximize the use of existing infrastructure, facilities, and services to ensure economically- and financially-responsible service delivery.
- Strategy LU.1c: Provide for the independent and harmonious development of separate and distinct agricultural and suburban areas.
- Strategy LU.1d: Maximize the use of existing utility infrastructure to ensure the most financially-responsible operation and maintenance of the system for the benefit of its customers.
- Strategy LU.1e: Evaluate the County's cash proffer policy to determine if changes are necessary to ensure that new development is contributing to the cost of capital projects (capacity improvements) in an equitable and predictable way.

Objective LU.2: Work collaboratively with different stakeholders to create communities that have a distinctive character and reflect Hanover County's unique history and rural feel.

- Strategy LU.2a: Complete small area plans within targeted areas to develop more detailed recommendations regarding the desired form and character of new development within specific communities.
- Strategy LU.2b: Evaluate the subdivision and zoning ordinances to ensure that the different zoning districts and development standards align with recommendations made in the Comprehensive Plan.

Note: Text for each land use designation will be included within this chapter, along with the General Land Use Plan.