



Northampton County, North Carolina 2040 Comprehensive Plan

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Executive Summary

Welcome to the Northampton Comprehensive Plan.

Northampton County is a place with a rich history, an evolving set of current conditions, and an array of opportunities. This Plan is intended to acknowledge the character and history of the County, documenting current conditions, and focusing on the future. Northampton County is facing a unique set of opportunities right now with promise of enhanced vitality. This Plan provides information and guidance to help the County achieve significant progress in attaining its desired future.

ORIGIN OF THE PLAN

This Comprehensive Plan serves as a policy document that outlines a vision and goals for the future of Northampton County, with a focus on land use issues. The Plan was prepared with the assistance and guidance of an Advisory Committee, comprised of

community members representing various interests within Northampton county, including county Residents, Homebuilders and Developers, Property Owners, Business Owners, and Service Providers. The Committee was appointed by the Board of County Commissioners.



USER'S GUIDE TO THE PLAN

This Northampton Comprehensive Plan is organized around four broad themes, which serve as a framework for the goals, objectives, and strategies contained in the plan:

- *Housing*
- *Utilities*
- *Economic Development*
- *Land Use*

This Plan builds on strategies and objectives that have been identified in Northampton County's 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, and discussions about Northampton's future. The Strategic Plan is included here as an Appendix, and identifies issues for immediate attention.

This Comprehensive Plan begins with an *Overview* section that includes information about Northampton's history and character, information about existing conditions and trends, comparisons to other nearby NC Counties, and how this plan fits into the larger context for managing and regulating land use in Northampton County. The "Looking to the Future" segment of the *Overview* highlights strategies designed to direct and manage growth in a purposeful, intelligent manner.

After the *Overview* comes a series of sections focused on the main themes of this Plan: *Housing, Utilities, Economic Development, and Land Use*. Each of these sections contains information about current conditions, identifies opportunities, and offers recommendations for action. Notable

in the *Housing* section is attention to supply and affordability. Notable in *Utilities* section is discussion about the possibilities and benefits related to developing public sewer service in Northampton County. Notable in the *Economic Development* section is review of significant opportunities for business recruitment and job creation. And notable in the *Land Use* section is framework for designating centers and corridors where new development should be most encouraged.

Following these themes is a section focused on *Implementation*. This section sets out specific Goals and Objectives, and recommends action steps for implementing this Plan. Key recommendations focus on completing road improvements, developing capacity for providing public sewer service in strategic locations, and promoting economic development.

The overall purpose of this Northampton County Comprehensive Plan is to document current circumstances, identify prospects for the future, and set forth a blueprint for how to achieve that future.



KEY FACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Northampton County has a long and rich tradition, dating back to its formation in 1741. There are nine incorporated towns in the County, and six unincorporated communities. Its history is focused mainly on activity related to agriculture, a dominant factor in the economy that

continues to today: Northampton County is number one in peanut production in North Carolina, and number two in cotton production. Agri-business accounts for approximately half of County revenues generated by local businesses.

The County is beginning to grow and diversify, and is increasingly expanding its economy in the context of a growing region. Business development and tourism are industry leaders in North Carolina. Agriculture continues to be the dominant focus of the County's economy and the center of its culture. At the same time, business development and tourism sectors are growing. Keys to success are the presence of the I-95 corridor running through the County, rail corridors, and lake amenities in the western portion of the County.

Key to efforts to promote business activity is the Northampton Economic Development Commission, which is responsible for managing the County's public sector efforts to strengthen the local economy and create job opportunities for County residents.

Key Issues

This Northampton Comprehensive Plan identifies specific issues of interest:

- The historical nature and image of the County has been rural agriculture. That nature and that image are changing.
- Residential development is welcomed, especially in areas near townships
- Non-residential development should be focused on highway corridors and towns.
- There is need to build small local businesses that serve rural citizens, and encourage small business development.
- US 301 corridor should be considered for industry or other development, partly based on easy access to I-95.
- River Road from NC 46 to the Warren County line already has several different highway business locations. Additional

businesses can be encouraged there because of proximity to Lake Gaston.

- There is continuing need to support agriculture in eastern portions of county.
- The widening of US 158 near/around Garysburg is an important project.

Key Recommendations

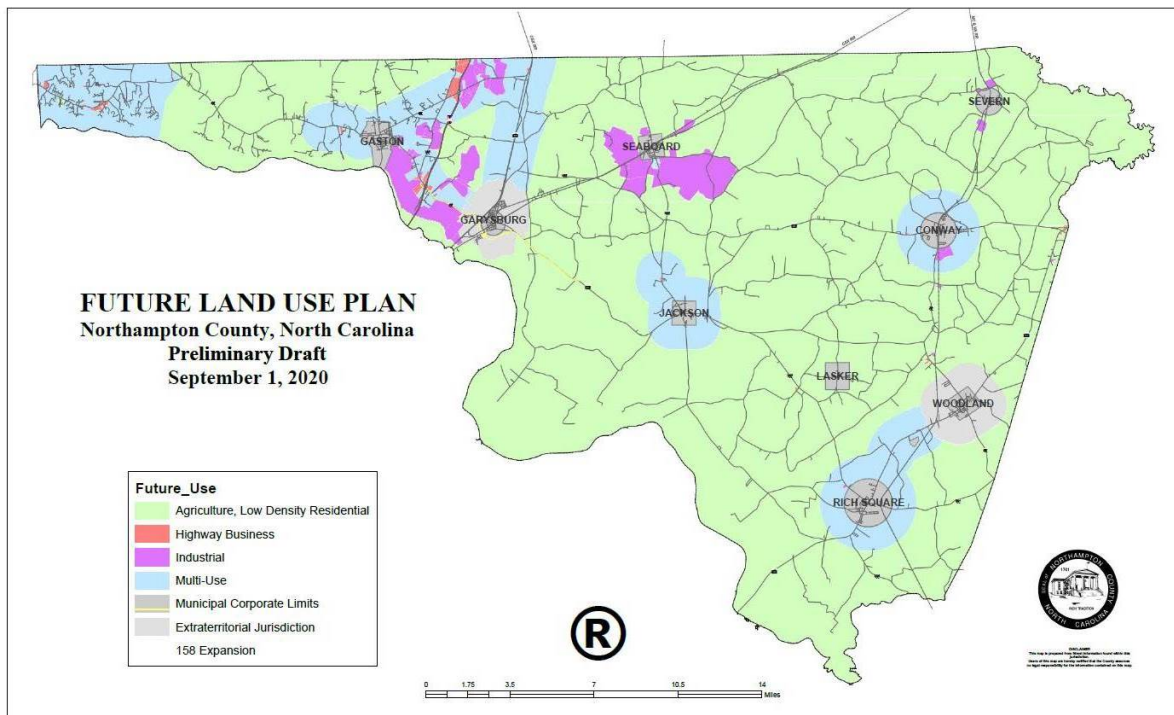
This Northampton County Comprehensive Plan recommends a set of Strategic Actions to be taken by the County and its partners, focused on the following issues:

- Retail development is needed and should be encouraged in these areas:
 - NC 46 from I-95 to Jackson
 - In and around Henrico, serving Lake Gaston area
 - 158 from Conway to 258
 - The area around Rich Square, along US 258
- Continue to explore improvements to US 158 between I-95 to Hertford County.
- Promote retail development in and around Gaston.
- Allow industrial development in I-95 corridor and parts of US 301 corridor.
- From Garysburg east along US 158 to the County line, keep rural and agricultural.
- From Gaston-Garysburg along NC 46, allow some retail and industrial development near I-95.
- Need retail development in/around Garysburg to pull traffic off the new 158 interchange.
- Pursue making public sewer service available in key areas of the County.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN

Through creation of a Future Land Use Map, Northampton County is charting how best to accommodate future housing, commercial and employment uses. Northampton County intends to provide opportunities for business development, organize development into cohesive centers, provide connections between working, shopping, and housing uses, and set up a framework for future road improvements. This plan is intended to be a guide, an expression of expected and desirable development patterns.

Municipal and ETJ areas are shown in shades of gray on the Future Land Use Plan. Highway Business areas are focused around key transportation intersections. Industrial areas are shown in key locations, and mirror zoning designations for industrial uses. Multi-use areas are intended to accommodate a mix of retail, office, and residential uses, which can reinforce each other, and are located around municipal boundaries, along key highway corridors, and in the western part of the county where lake-oriented development is thriving and appropriate.



The remainder of the County (including most of the land area of the County), is designated for Agriculture and Low-Density Residential uses, reflecting rural character of those areas, the absence of public facilities, and the importance of farming in those areas.

The Future Land Use Plan will serve as a guide for future development and zoning decisions. It is not a mandatory regulatory document, but an important policy instrument for reference when land use options are being considered.

ZONING ORDINANCE CHANGES

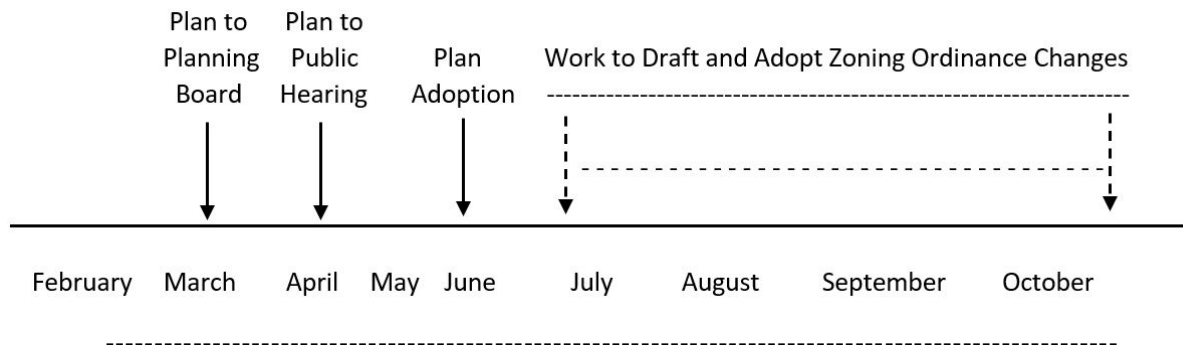
Some of the objectives recommended in this Comprehensive Plan will be pursued over time, as resources allow. One set of objectives, however, needs immediate attention: substantive amendments to the Northampton County Zoning Ordinance.

The Northampton County Zoning Ordinance carries an effective date of January 1, 1994, and has been amended multiple times since its initial adoption. There has been recent discussion about the need for substantive changes to the Northampton Zoning Ordinance, most recently focusing on dimensional standards for lots, buffer standards, and level of procedures required for review and approval of development applications. Consideration of possible substantive amendments to address issues with the current Zoning Ordinance are important next steps in achieving the goals of this Comprehensive Plan. A key recommendation for action in this Plan,

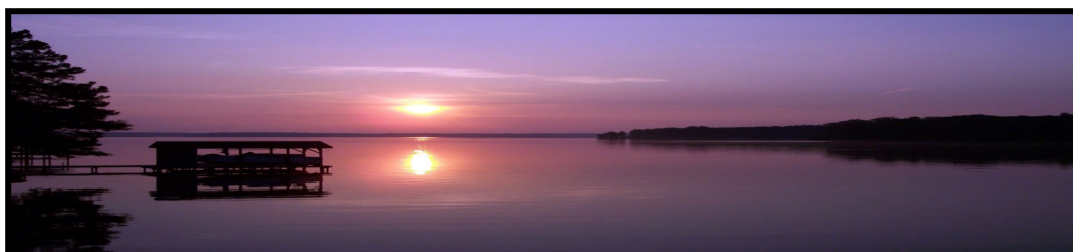
following its adoption, is to commence assessment, review and amendment of the dimensional and procedural provisions currently set out in the Northampton Zoning Ordinance, to achieve amendments that align with the goals of this Comprehensive Plan.

Technical Zoning Ordinance amendments are also required, to align terms and references in the Northampton Zoning Ordinance with recent changes to North Carolina General Statutes. Examples of those types of changes, which will be pursued simultaneously with preparation and adoption of this Comprehensive Plan, are included as Appendix 2 to this Plan.

Following is a projected timeline for adoption of this Comprehensive Plan, followed by consideration of substantive Zoning Ordinance Amendments.



This Comprehensive Plan has been prepared to describe existing circumstances and identify opportunities for strategic actions that can help Northampton County achieve a vibrant future. Prospects for moving forward are promising.



Overview

This section of the Comprehensive Plan sets the context for consideration of the future of Northampton County. It reviews the history of this jurisdiction, summarizes the array of natural resources available here, and offers examples of the local culture. Information is provided about municipalities within the County, information about population and housing statistics, and comparisons to characteristics of nearby counties. Information is summarized regarding transportation corridors, land use patterns and economic conditions. It describes Northampton County yesterday and today, setting the stage for looking ahead to the future.

Northampton Yesterday and Today

GEOGRAPHY AND ORIGINS

Northampton County is located in the northeast portion of North Carolina, along the North Carolina-Virginia border. The present land area is 533 square miles. There are nine incorporated towns in Northampton County and 6 unincorporated communities. The towns are Conway, Garysburg, Gaston, Jackson, Lasker, Rich Square, Seaboard, Severn, and Woodland. Unincorporated communities are Henrico, Margarettsville, Milwaukee, Pendleton, Pleasant Hill, and Turners Crossroads. There are 17 properties and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Northampton County was formed in 1741 from neighboring Bertie County. Settlement in the area began in the late 1660's. It is

bounded by the state of Virginia and Hertford, Bertie, Halifax, and Warren counties. The Roanoke River determines the southwest border of Northampton County. The Meherrin River marks the northeastern border. The present land area is 533 square miles.

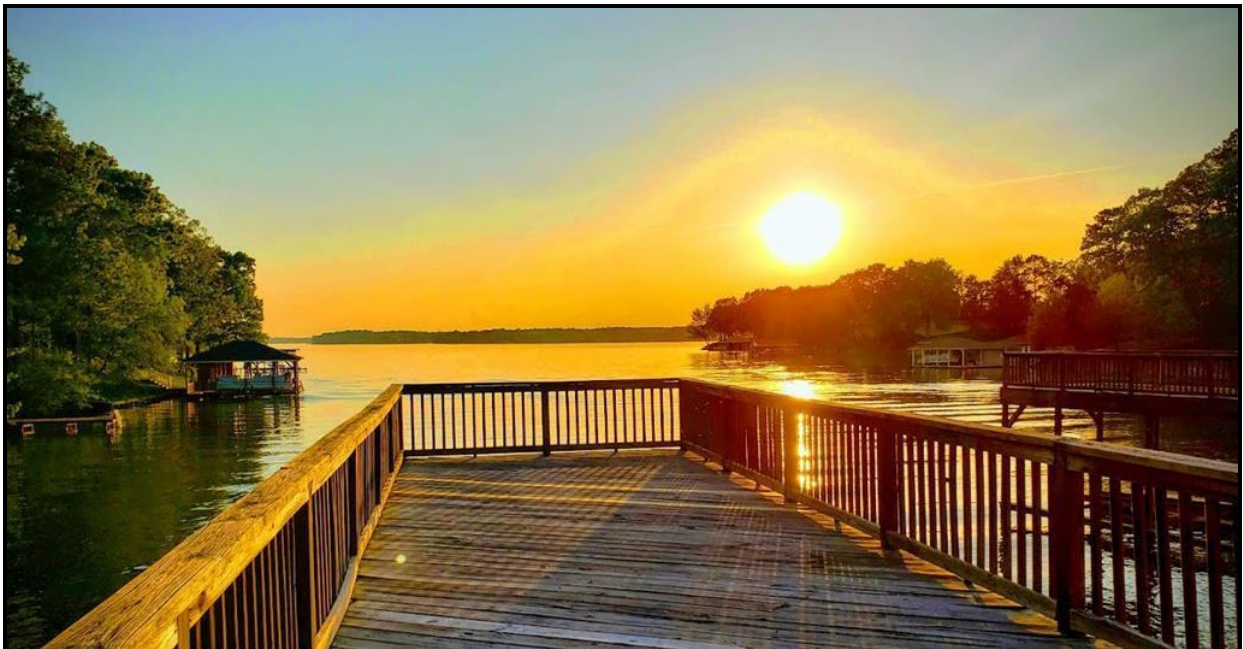
The Roanoke River that moves through Northampton provided early settlers a pathway to trade with surrounding areas. In 1833 the first railroad to cross into North Carolina was constructed by the Petersburg Railroad Company near Northampton to a trading post on the Roanoke River. The new transportation route opened the County to Virginia, and eventually another railroad was built to connect the eastern section of the North Carolina to the west.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Northampton County is located along the fall line between the Coastal Plain and Piedmont regions of North Carolina. Notable natural physical features of the county include the Roanoke River, Roanoke Rapids, Occoneechee Neck, Taylors Mill Pond, and Gumberry and Panther Swamps. Most notable among the physical features in and around Northampton County are two

lakes in the western portion of the County. Lake Gaston is a hydroelectric reservoir covering 20,000 acres with 350 miles of shoreline. Part of the lake is in the North Carolina counties of Northampton, Halifax, and Warren, and part extends into Virginia. The Lake Gaston Dam was completed in 1963. East of Lake Gaston is Roanoke Rapids Lake, built in 1955, covering 4,600 hundred acres with 50 miles of shoreline. Both are owned by Dominion Resources.



LOCAL CULTURE

Northampton County has a long and rich history of community and connection. Residents come together to support one another, and to keep an eye on possibilities.

One notable example of that has been a set of efforts to develop and promote use of electric vehicles. In 1993 Virginia Power, one of two local utility companies, was gearing up for an electric vehicle competition to be held in Richmond, Virginia. Students and faculty from 4 local high schools began meeting after school at Northampton County High School-East to

put together academic and vocational knowledge to build a vehicle to compete in the Electric Vehicle Grand Prix to be held in 1994. A diverse collection of students came together to pool resources and ideas. And the Northampton Team captured a National Championship in Richmond. The Team went on to success in an array of other electric competitions, and it is a legacy that continues to today. In 2004 a book titled "Electric Dreams" was published, describing the feats of the Northampton County students and instructors. It is a book with strong themes about the environment, education and taking responsibility.

Another story, currently unfolding, reflecting the local Northampton culture, is an initiative to build a recreation, wellness center and convention center on the shoreline of Lake Gaston. The Lake Gaston Project would bring government and health services to the northwest corner of Northampton County, aligning with the objectives of expanding the availability services, providing public gathering spaces, and offering recreational opportunities to County residents.

Also, Northampton County places value on its history. A recent example has been dedication of a Trail Marker celebrating the

Lafayette Trail. This initiative calls attention to the Bi-Centennial of Marquis de Lafayette's Farewell Tour of the United States in 1825. Stories and exhibits celebrating the General's contributions and influence supporting the American Revolution were shared to honor the General, and promote interest and tourism related to the revitalization of historic Downtown Jackson.

These are a sampling of the strong community culture that helps define the character of Northampton County.



COMMUNITIES

Northampton County had a population of 22,086 in 2000, and 22,099 in 2010. The most recent population total for the County, from the 2019 US Census, is 19,483. The peak population total for the County was 28,432, recorded in 1950.

There are nine incorporated Towns in Northampton County. Following is information showing the demographic characteristics of the County and its municipalities.

	Northampton County	Conway	Garysburg	Gaston	Jackson	Lasker	Rich Sq.	Seaboard	Severn	Woodland
Population	19,483	836	1,057	973	695	103	931	695	263	833
Land Area	537 sq.mi.	1.84 ac.	.94 ac.	1.69 ac.	1.01 ac.	1.12 ac.	3.0 ac.	.96 ac.	1.01 ac.	1.25 ac.
Median Age	40	42	38	37	45	44	43	40	41	35
Median Income	\$26,650	\$23,250	\$22,604	\$23,824	\$29,375	\$31,607	\$22,656	\$20,500	\$32,969	\$22,125
Per Cap Income	\$15,413	\$14,964	\$14,172	\$14,247	\$14,588	\$51,432	\$13,019	\$17,973	\$16,227	\$12,682
% Below Poverty	21%	24%	28%	21%	20%	10%	19%	28%	14%	28%

Mechanisms are in place for frequent communication among elected officials and staff representing the County and municipal jurisdictions. As the County experiences the growth that is expected over the next several decades, increasing levels of coordinated policies and

regulations are desirable. A particular point of coordination should focus on linkages between the Comprehensive Plans being prepared by municipalities and the planning for use of land surrounding municipalities and along transportation corridors.



HOUSING INFORMATION

Most development in Northampton County (outside of municipalities) has occurred along historic transportation corridors and in the western portion of the County near Lake Gaston.

Census data show that there are 11,676 housing units in Northampton County, 69% of them owner-occupied. The average household size is 2.24 persons per unit.

The median value of owner-occupied housing units is \$83,300. Median gross monthly rent for rental units is \$717.

COMPARISONS TO OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Northampton County has a unique history and geography. But it is useful to look at the County in comparison to other nearby and/or similar jurisdictions, to understand Northampton's context and help set the stage for development of strategies for the future. Details below:

	Northampton County	Hertford County	Bertie County	Halifax County	Warren County
Population	19,483	24,699	21,282	54,691	20,972
Land Area	537 sq mi	360 sq mi	741 sq mi	731 sq mi	444 sq mi
Median Age	40	39	39	37	40
Median Income	\$26,650	\$26,422	\$25,177	\$26,459	\$28,351
Per Cap Income	\$15,413	\$15,641	\$14,096	\$13,810	\$14,716
% Below Poverty	21%	18%	26%	20%	19%

TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

Transportation systems continue to be a major influence on development patterns, as well as a major incentive to attract new businesses.

Interstate 95 is a major asset to Northampton County, attracting tourism, businesses, jobs, and sales tax revenues. Major new investment in transportation that is planned is the upcoming widening of U.S. 158/N.C. 46 between I-95 and St. John's Church Road, which will enhance mobility and facilitate development plans in that corridor.

Future road improvements hold the possibility of important enhancements to

mobility connecting to major activity centers. Planned future widening of U.S. 158 to Hertford will create additional opportunities.

LAND USE

The majority of land in Northampton County that is being used, in unincorporated areas, is devoted to agricultural use. Municipalities manage zoning and land use issues independently of County oversight. Industrial uses focus mainly within key transportation corridors. Residential and other non-industrial growth patterns cluster around towns and established communities, resulting in ever-increasing need for County-Municipal coordination.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Northampton County is number one in peanut production in the state of North Carolina and number two in cotton production. Agri-business accounts for approximately half of the revenues generated by local business.

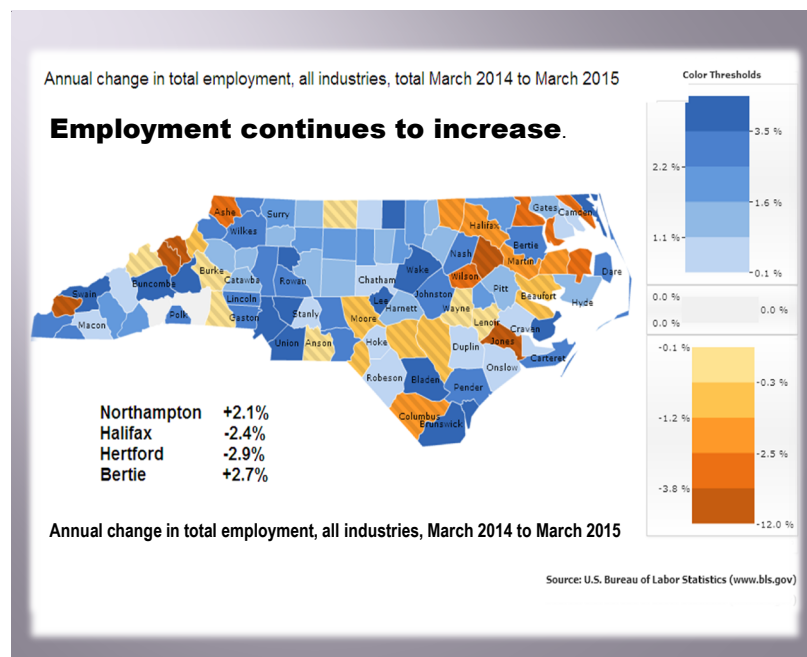
The main focus of economic activity in Northampton County traditionally has been related to agriculture, but that is in the process of changing. Business development, including retail operations, employment centers, and tourism-related activities, is on the rise. Further extension of U.S. 158 to Hertford County is being planned, with possible improvements further east to follow.

Overall, total employment in the County totaled 4370 jobs in 2018, up 3.5% from the year before.

A key player in the efforts to promote and support business activity in the County is the Northampton Economic Development Commission. The Commission is responsible for initiating, organizing, and managing the County's public sector efforts to strengthen the local economy

and create higher-wage employment opportunities for County residents. The Commission works with individuals and companies – from restaurateurs to chemical manufacturers and distribution centers to assist in their success. The Commission partners with private sector interests along with State and Federal government organizations to add value to the County's business development interests.

Business development and tourism are industry leaders in North Carolina. And these sectors of Northampton's economy should be a focus for future growth, with more emphasis on business development than industrial development. The I-95 corridor presents major opportunities for business development and increases in sales tax revenues for the County. The majority of land in Northampton County is dedicated to agricultural uses. It is desirable to pursue development approaches along with infrastructure investments that preserve agricultural land, while focusing new business development around population centers and transportation corridors.



Looking to the Future

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Northampton County has a rich history. It also currently faces numerous conditions that represent both strengths and limitations. Following is a summary of current circumstances that have been highlighted during the discussions associated with development of this Comprehensive Plan.

Strengths:

- Rich Agricultural Heritage.
- Rich history - - Starting with Northampton as expansion from Jamestown in 17th century.
- A collection of friendly communities.
- Access to I-95 Corridor.
- Rail corridors – north-south rail corridor, and corridor east.
- Lakes: Attract development, provide recreational opportunities, housing.
- The I-95 corridor has an established industrial park. The county owns land that is available for commerce.
- Lake amenities: Recreational opportunities, including two day-sites in the County owned by Dominion Power, one off of NC HWY 46 and Family Lane, the other at River Rd and Webb’s Gate, for public use.

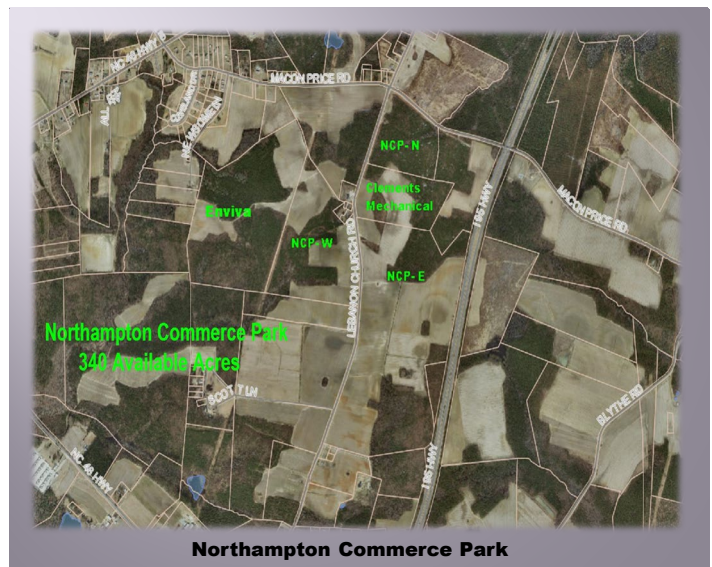
There are also circumstances and issues which present various levels of limitation and disadvantage to the County.

Limitations:

- Limited shopping, entertainment opportunities.

- Limited employment opportunities.
- Not taking enough advantage of two nearby community colleges in Halifax and Hertford Counties.
- Need to increase housing stock; insufficient access to housing can make it hard to attract workforce.
- Presence of nuisance and vacant properties.
- Existing problems with floodplains, especially eastern end of County, can affect main street businesses.
- Lack of good transportation systems is a problem in many parts of the County.

Taking those strengths and disadvantages into consideration, community discussion has focused on the opportunities that emerge as possibilities, as Northampton County moves into the future.



Following is a list of opportunities that have been identified:

- An objective should be a good stock of attractive and affordable housing for all. There is opportunity for the County to take an active role in promoting housing options.
- There are opportunities for greater presence, involvement of nearby Community Colleges.
- The County recently allocated \$1,000 to each town to develop Mainstreet landscapes, helping each of 9 towns to have a vibrant main street; Towns can leverage these funds.
- The availability of housing and commercial space go hand in hand. Promoting live and work opportunities for families and neighborhoods is a promising strategy.
- There is an abundance of open space available. Combined with possible grant money there are opportunities to provide areas that are accessible for people to use.
- There is need and opportunity to take care of our senior population. They've worked here, invested here, and an array of services should be available to them. A review of examples of Senior Centers in other communities would be beneficial.
- There is opportunity to explore opportunities for branding, based on geography (I-95 corridor, hunting, fishing, etc.).
- There is need for real estate structures that businesses can buy, lease, rent to own, including space for small retailers.



Theme 1: Housing

Availability of safe, affordable housing opportunities is an essential component of a vibrant community. Northampton County has an array of housing types; but growth in the number of new housing units has been slow (reflecting in part the slow pace of population growth), and indicators for household income are low compared to other areas in NC. Achieving Northampton's goals for growth in population and jobs, attention is needed to expand the supply of housing that is affordable to the County's families and workforce.

Current Conditions

ISSUES

Housing issues are complex in Northampton County. There are many older, modest homes - - many in excellent condition, many in disrepair and candidates for demolition. There has been little growth in the single-family housing stock, with the number of building permits issued countywide per year hovering around 20 over the last ten years. Currently there is a robust category of new multi-family construction, mostly focusing on units in condominium ownership, mostly located on or near lake shoreline areas.



There is interest and opportunity in areas located along key transportation corridors (most notably near I-95 interchanges, offering convenient commuting to job centers located outside of Northampton).



There are communities with a long history of family legacy in Northampton County. And there is the prospect of an increase in job opportunities (see Economic Development section below), which will increase housing demand.

Following are some basic indicators describing current conditions in Northampton County related to housing:

- Population: 19,483
- Number of Dwelling Units: 11,676
- % of Dwellings Owner-Occupied: 68%
- Median Value, Owner-Occupied: \$83,300
- Avg. Const. Cost, New Home: \$278,100
- Median Gross Rent: \$717
- Avg. # SF Building Permits/year: 20
- % Population Below Poverty Line: 21%

ORGANIZATIONS

There are organizations within Northampton County that are working to increase the supply of affordable housing. Those organizations include:

- There are 4 Housing Authorities managing a mix of approximately 400 Public Housing units and Section 8 rental units in Northampton County: Roanoke-Chowan Housing Authority, Garysburg Housing Authority, Gaston Housing Authority, and Seaboard Housing Authority.
- Other entities working to increase the supply of subsidized and special-needs housing options in Northampton County are the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program (approximately 150 units), The ARC of NC (6 units), and private developers

offering below-market units through Low-Income Tax Credit developments (approximately 50 units).

NEEDS

Recent data show that the Household Median Income level in Northampton County is among the lowest of all North Carolina counties, ranking 95th among the State's 100 counties. In 2018, Household Median Income stood at \$52,413 for the State of NC, and \$35,499 for Northampton. These income figures reflect circumstances where many households have difficulty finding and securing housing within affordable ranges. As Northampton County moves into the future, with promising prospects for job growth, attention is needed to support initiatives aimed at increasing the County's inventory of affordable housing in locations with proximity to potential job growth.

Recommendations

Northampton County currently has need for more extensive development of affordable housing opportunities for current residents. As the County begins to experience population and job growth in the future, as is expected, attention to this issue will grow in importance. It will be important for Northampton County to seek out

partnerships with regional housing organizations, to seek resources from potential funding sources, and to work with representatives of the homebuilding industry to be able to pursue achieving a mix in housing prices as new housing is developed.



Theme 2: Utilities

The Northampton Public Works Department provides rural and municipal public water and wastewater services. Water supply and treated water distribution have been generally adequate, but expansions will be needed to accommodate future development and growth. Availability of public sewer service has been minimal. Expanding the County's ability to extend sewer service to more areas of the County, especially growth targets, will be important for future vitality.

Existing Water and Sewer Resources

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Northampton County's Public Works Department provides rural and municipal public water and wastewater services to portions of the County's residents and businesses.

Many properties in Northampton are served by the County's water system, with water coming from the Roanoke Rapids Lake, the Roanoke River, and a series of groundwater

wells. Many other properties, residents, and businesses use individual private wells as their water source. Plans are underway to expand the County's existing water delivery potential. The County is seeking funding sources for water expansion projects, and is beginning design and construction phases for water lines.

Public sewer service is available in portions of Northampton County.

Public Sewer Needs and Recommendations

Northampton County has historically been a rural county with an emphasis on agriculture and multiple small communities. Public sewer service is available in some portions of Northampton County. There are many areas that are currently strategically located and would be suitable for development, in terms of access to transportation systems and proximity to other centers of development, but for which public sewer service is not currently available.

As described in the following Economic Development section of this Plan, there is opportunity for development in

Northampton County of a nature that would benefit residents, property owners, and contribute to community vitality. One critical key to achieving that desired future is extension of public sewer availability to those strategically located properties.

Extension of public sewer service to key unserved areas of Northampton County is a core strategy for community progress. Pursuit of funding sources and public-private partnerships to expand this important component of public infrastructure is a priority initiative for the County.

Theme 3: Economic Development

Northampton County is a place in transition from historic past to a vibrant future. The geography of County is emerging as a powerful force for growth. Northampton County has established an Economic Development Commission, responsible for initiating, organizing and managing the County's public sector efforts to strengthen the local economy, improve the standard of living and create sustainable, higher-wage employment opportunities.

Current Initiatives

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Northampton County has historically and recently experienced modest economic growth, relatively low levels of median income and population growth, and a static set of economic conditions. Trends are now changing, and the County is positioning itself to attract jobs and development, and take advantage of strategic transportation corridors and growing activity centers. Northampton County is actively pursuing and promoting Economic Development initiatives. The Northampton County Economic Development Commission is in place both to coordinate development of public projects that encourage and strengthen the local economy, and to

provide assistance to private sector businesses to assist their success.

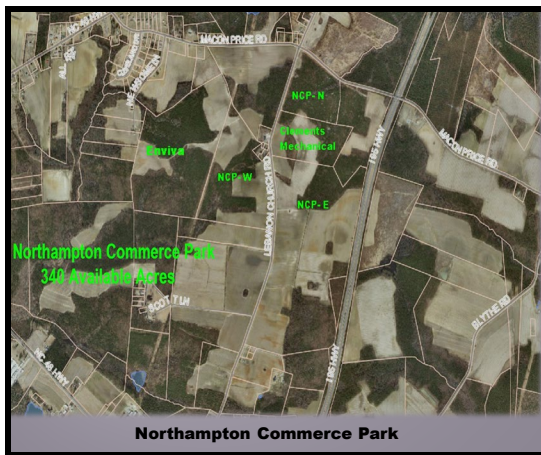
An example of an important project currently in development is the Edwards Beach project at Lake Gaston. The intent of that project is to develop a Wellness Center/Multi-purpose facility for county residents, while also promoting tourism by providing public access to Lake Gaston. The Commission also manages grant programs to support new and existing business expansion, and is creating a comprehensive marketing strategy to highlight the County's resources and opportunities.



ORGANIZATIONS

Northampton County is joined by multiple public and private organizations in efforts to promote economic activity in the County. Partners include the Northampton Chamber of Commerce, Northampton Travel & Tourism, the NC Department of Commerce,

the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, the NC Rural Center, and the North Carolina East Alliance. The County also provides assistance to Non-Profit organizations, and coordinates with the NC Works Career Center to support job growth.



Opportunities

Northampton County is working to strengthen the local economy and improve the standard of living for the County. Capitalizing on existing businesses and a strong agricultural sector, attracting new businesses, leveraging the assets and opportunities provided by the presence of

three railway corridors, a major Interstate highway, and lakeshore locations, Northampton County is promoting job growth and pursuing a promising set of positive future outcomes.

Theme 4: Land Use

Northampton County seeks to grow in a manner that preserves and expands opportunities for existing and new residents, while preserving the heritage and culture of the County. There is opportunity for Northampton County to target development and growth in areas best suited to accommodate it, and to encourage land use patterns to occur in a manner that best promotes the County's goals and objectives. Adoption of this Future Land Use Plan comes at key time, a time of opportunity to manage the growth possibilities that will be emerging, in forms that align with Northampton County's goals.

Existing Conditions

OVERVIEW

Northampton County's land use patterns have historically been heavily influenced by the prominence and locations of agricultural activity. Agricultural-related activity continues to be the dominant land use, but is now joined by industrial uses, highway business establishments, and lake-oriented residential development

Current land use patterns evolved to a large extent from a combination of influences: transportation infrastructure, local soil and environmental conditions, and regional context. A purpose of this Comprehensive Plan is to look forward: to understand current circumstances and to use that information to help manage future growth.

LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

One place to start is to review existing County Zoning designations. First, land that is within corporate limits of towns or municipal Extraterritorial Jurisdiction is not subject to County zoning designations. For the remainder of the County, subject to County zoning, most of the land carries zoning designations related to agriculture

and/or low-density residential uses. Other selected areas are zoned to allow retail, office, industrial, or a mix of uses.

SUMMARY OF KEY LAND USE OBJECTIVES

Three key objectives frame and inform the issues that are addressed in this Comprehensive Plan. Those objectives are described as follows:

Managing Growth

Northampton County seeks to grow in a manner that preserves and expands opportunities for existing and new residents, while preserving the heritage and culture of the County. There is opportunity for Northampton County to target development and growth in areas best suited to accommodate it, and to encourage land use patterns to occur in a manner that best promotes the County's goals and objectives.

Expanding Economic Opportunities

Recognizing the need for expanded shopping and employment opportunities, Northampton County welcomes a wide variety of businesses, providing many jobs,

from part-time work to professional employment. With its railroads, major state roads, and interstate highways, Northampton County is a marketable site for business parks and industrial development.

Preserving Farmland / Rural Character

Northampton County is known for its rural heritage and environment. It is important that farming as a land use needs to be protected as an important part of the Northampton County lifestyle, and also as a key anchor of the Northampton County economy. In addition, the natural vistas of

farmland and vacant wooded parcels of land enhance the visual character enjoyed by area residents and visitors, while preserving farmland. Property-owners' rights need to be respected, as they have been in the past. It is also important to keep a focus on the importance of preserving rural character as transportation and public infrastructure decisions are considered.

This Comprehensive Plan expands upon these three objectives, and recommends Goals and Strategic Actions formulated to help achieve those desired outcomes for Northampton County.



RELATIONSHIP OF LAND USE PLAN / ZONING

A key point to emphasize is the relationship of a Comprehensive Plan to Zoning regulations. Northampton County currently has a Zoning Ordinance and a set of Subdivision Regulations, which contain mandatory rules and restrictions regarding use of land in the County. A Comprehensive Plan, by contrast, does not set specific rules and restrictions regarding land use; rather it

is intended to serve as a guide to decision-making regarding the future of land use patterns in Northampton County.

This Comprehensive Plan is a general policy document to guide the physical development of Northampton County. The Comprehensive Plan does not have the force of law for the enforcement of its goals and objectives. Zoning maps and ordinances

must be adopted to create the regulations and enforcement authority to implement this Northampton County Comprehensive Plan.

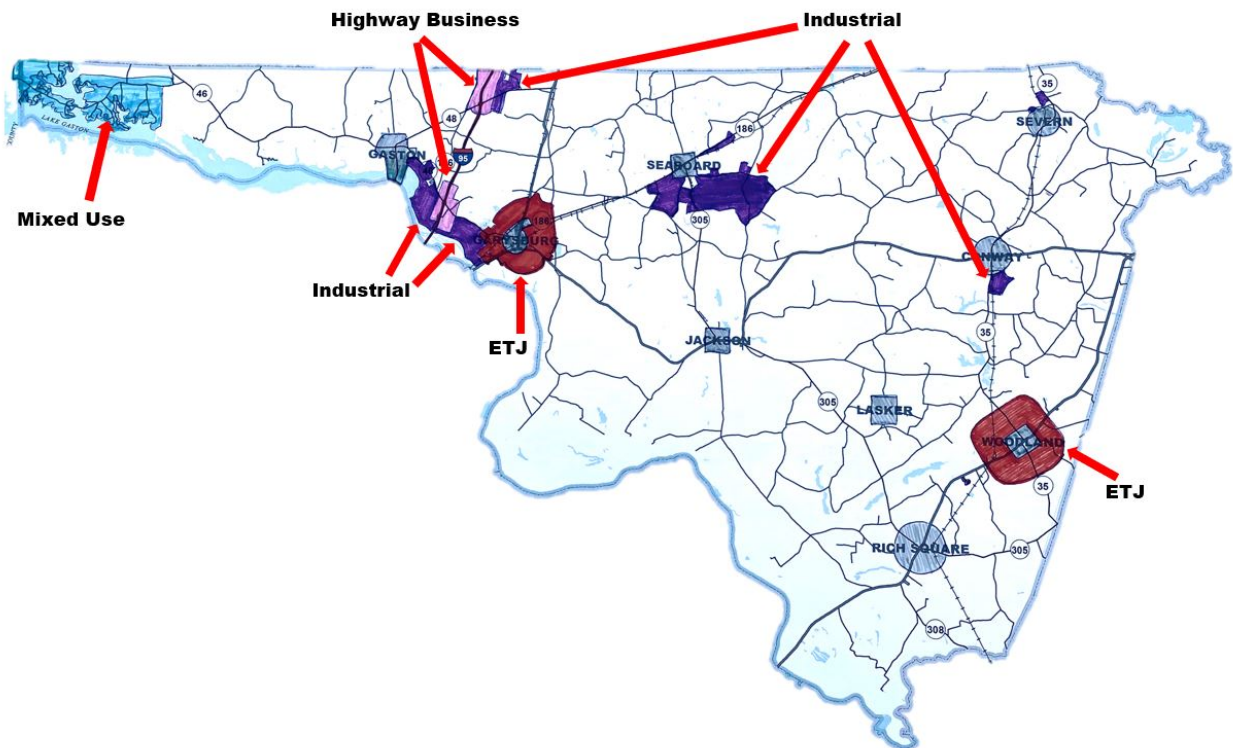
One key issue that has been raised during preparation and adoption of this Comprehensive Plan is the current state of regulations in the Northampton County Zoning Ordinance. Many provisions in the current Zoning Ordinance are out-of-date, and consensus opinion is that substantive

amendments to the Zoning Ordinance will be necessary in order to implement many of the recommendations included in this Comprehensive Plan. Accordingly, one of the first “next steps” listed in the Implementation section of this Comprehensive Plan is work on a series of substantive Zoning Ordinance amendments that will serve to align regulatory requirements with the goals and strategies presented in this Comprehensive Plan.

Future Land Use Plan

Much of Northampton County is currently zoned for rural and agricultural uses. The following map illustrates the general locations of non-rural properties in the County, properties which carry zoning designations

that permit more intensive uses. This existing set of non-rural zoning areas reflects the patterns of existing land use in the County, and serves as a starting point for preparation of a new Future Land Use Plan .



Looking ahead, with consideration of recent and likely-to-be forthcoming transportation improvements, a picture starts to emerge about where new dwelling units and accompanying non-residential growth can or should occur. The new areas of growth could be spread across the county, or could be focused in centers and corridors by a combination of policy, regulation, and investment. The table below describes the land use categories used to create the Future Land Use Map that follows. These land use classifications are intended to guide future development decisions, provide direction for rezonings, and inform the

process for updating the County’s development regulations and zoning map.

The future land use categories include:

- (1) Agriculture/ Low-Density Residential;
- (2) Mixed Uses: Retail, Office, Residential;
- (3) Highway Business;
- (4) Industrial;
- (5) Municipal Jurisdiction; and
- (6) Extraterritorial Municipal Jurisdiction

These six Land Use Categories correspond to clusters of Zoning District definitions, as shown in the following table.

Land Use Categories for Northampton Future Land Use Plan

Existing Zoning District	Future Land Use Category
Agricultural-Residential District (AR)	Agriculture and Low-Density Residential
Agricultural-Residential Watershed District (AR-1)	
Agricultural-Residential Watershed District (AR-2)	
Residential District (R-15)	
Residential Watershed District (R-1)	
Residential District (R-10)	
Residential Watershed District (R-2)	
<hr/>	
Neighborhood Business District (NB)	Mixed Uses: Retail, Office, Residential
Neighborhood Business Watershed District (NB-1)	
Neighborhood Business Watershed District (NB-2)	
<hr/>	
Highway Business District (HB)	Highway Business
Highway Business Watershed District (HB1)	
Highway Business Watershed District (HB2)	
<hr/>	
Light Industrial District (LI)	Industrial
Heavy Industrial District (HI)	
<hr/>	
Municipal Corporate Limits	Municipal Jurisdiction
<hr/>	
Extraterritorial Jurisdiction	Extraterritorial Municipal Jurisdiction
<hr/>	

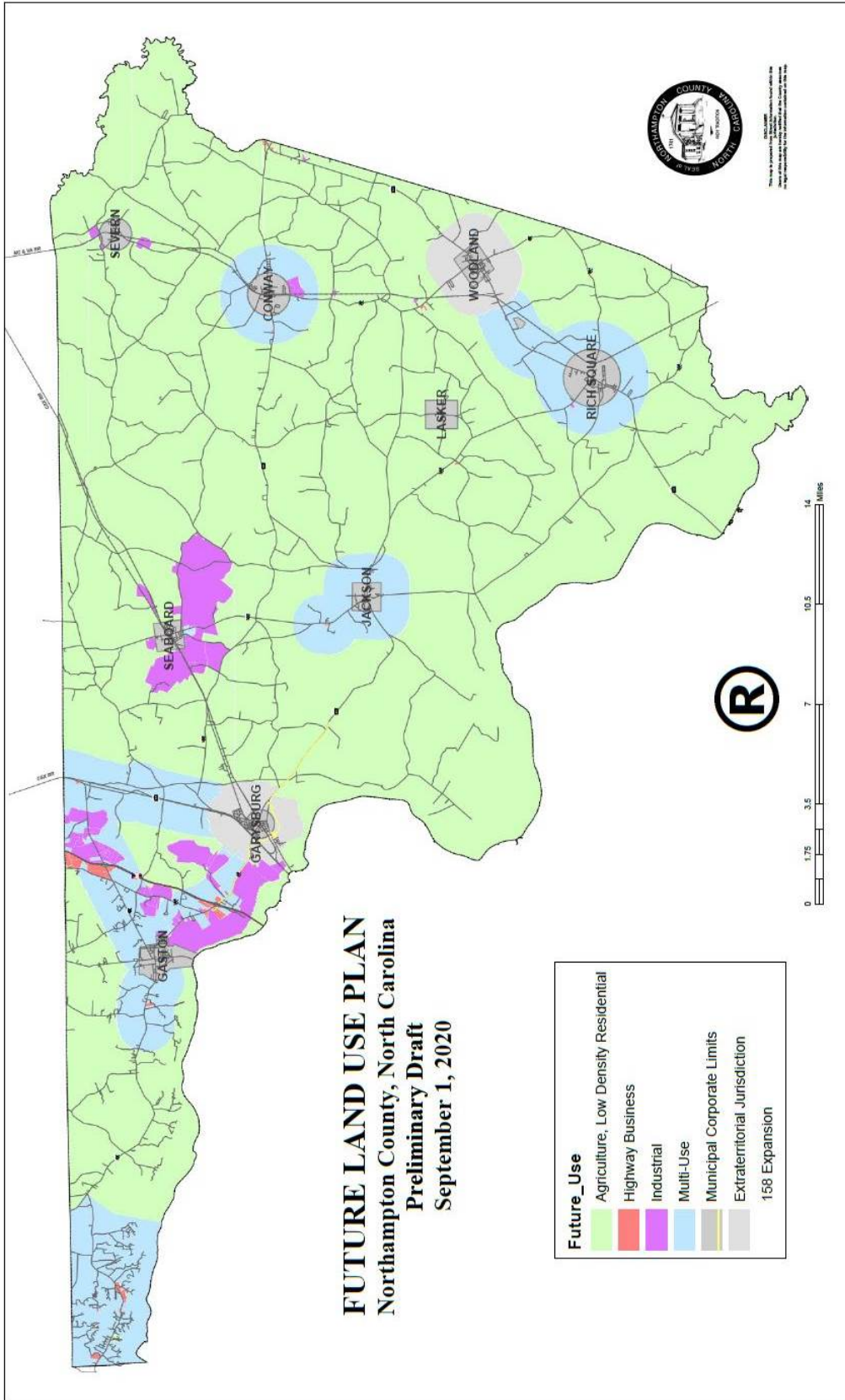
FUTURE LAND USE MAP

Through creation of a Future Land Use Map, Northampton County is charting how best to accommodate future housing, commercial and employment uses. Northampton County intends to provide new opportunities for business development, organize development into cohesive centers, provide connections between working, shopping, and housing uses, and set up a framework for future transportation improvements. A compact development form lays the groundwork to help create a sustainable, efficient, and livable future Northampton County.

Key considerations include coordination with municipal planning initiatives, and taking into account decisions and investments already in place.

Encouraging economic development in corridors, with related and nearby residential areas, can create employment opportunities in areas that can be served with utilities and infrastructure, and directly address the County's goals and objectives.

The Future Land Use Plan Map that has been created, based on information about existing conditions, current zoning designations, and overall County objectives, appears on the following page. This map illustrates the recommended geographic locations of the land use categories shown on the Land Use Categories table.



On this Future Land Use Map, Municipal and Extraterritorial Jurisdiction areas are shown in shades of gray. Highway Business areas are focused around key transportation intersections. Industrial areas are shown in key locations, and mirror zoning designations for industrial uses. Multi-use areas are intended to accommodate a mix of retail, office, and residential uses, which can reinforce each other, and are located around municipal boundaries, along key highway corridors, and in the western part of the county where lake-oriented development is thriving and appropriate.

The remainder of the County (including most of the land area of the County), is designated for Agriculture and Low-Density Residential uses, reflecting the rural character of those areas, the absence of public facilities which can support more intense development forms, and the importance of farming in those areas.

This is not a zoning map; it is a guideline, not regulation, that focuses on future land use patterns 10-20 years out. It is a plan, a guide. It is an expression of expected and desirable development patterns.



Recommendations

This Future Land Use Plan, adopted as a part of this Northampton County 2040 Comprehensive Plan, becomes a key policy document for the County. North Carolina General Statutes require that, while a Comprehensive Plan is not a binding regulatory document, it must be considered during review and approval of any zoning-related action. There is a requirement that, when adopting or rejecting any zoning text or map amendment, the Northampton Board of County Commissioners must approve a brief statement describing whether its action is consistent or inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan,

and explaining why the action taken is reasonable and in the public interest. Accordingly, this Future Land Use Plan is to be a component part of review and action on any zoning-related proposals under consideration.

The Northampton County Zoning Ordinance carries an effective date of January 1, 1994, and has been amended multiple times since its initial adoption. There has been recent discussion about the need for substantive changes to the Northampton Zoning Ordinance, most recently focusing on dimensional standards for lots, buffer

standards, and level of procedures required for review and approval of development applications. Consideration of possible substantive amendments to address issues with the current Zoning Ordinance are important next steps in achieving the goals of this Comprehensive Plan. A key recommendation for action in this Plan,

following its adoption, is to commence assessment, review and amendment of the dimensional and procedural provisions currently set out in the Northampton Zoning Ordinance, to achieve amendments that align with the goals of this Comprehensive Plan.



Implementation

This Northampton County Comprehensive Plan is a launchpad. In a County whose past has been dominated by agriculture and rural lifestyles, current and emerging conditions offer opportunities for future growth and development. This Plan can help serve as blueprint for organizing initiatives that can help Northampton County move successfully into the future. This section of the Plan outlines actions that can and should be taken to help promote this journey. This listing of Implementation Actions addresses how to make progress on issues discussed in this Plan. Some of the initiatives are medium-term or long-term actions to be undertaken. Others are short-term in nature, and can be pursued immediately.

Paramount among these short-term implementation actions is a recommendation to accomplish amendments to The Northampton County Zoning Ordinance. This action can serve to help remove impediments to progressive action, and can help convert the County's land use objectives from goals into realities.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Through the Future Land Use Map, Northampton County is charting how best to accommodate future housing, commercial and employment development. The County encourages new opportunities for business development, encourages development to locate in and near key activity centers, and encourages connections between working, shopping, and housing uses, while maintaining a vibrant agricultural heritage. Specific areas and issues of interest include:

- The historical nature and image of the County has been rural agriculture. That nature and that image are changing.
- Residential development is welcomed, especially in areas near townships
- Non-residential development should be focused on highway corridors and towns.
- Most of the county is rural, so it is likely that any business will be local. There is need to make it possible to build small local businesses that serve rural citizens, and encourage small business development.
- US 301 corridor should be considered for industry or other development, partly based on easy access to I-95.
- River Road from NC 46 to the Warren County line already has several different highway business locations. Additional businesses can be encouraged because of proximity to Lake Gaston.

- There is need to provide jobs for Northampton residents, but there is also need to avoid bringing in industry that will cause damage to the land or contaminate groundwater or air.
- Emphasize importance of farming, especially in eastern portions of county.
- Emphasize recreation for public use in Henrico / Lake Gaston area.
- Widening of US 158 near/around Garysburg is an important project, and opportunities related to that project should be explored.

Given the importance of those issues and the points of geographic focus, and given the community issues and discussion that have been reviewed, the following specific recommendations emerge for consideration and action. The meanings of the terms goal and objective, as used in this plan, are summarized as follows.

Goals are statements about what the County aims to achieve over the next 20 years, or over the life of the Comprehensive Plan. Goals should give decision-makers and citizens a clear idea about the County's intended direction. It is possible to use indicators to measure how well a community is accomplishing its goals.

Objectives provide a definite course of direction for the County that will guide decisions and set a framework for actions. They provide ongoing guidance for elected leaders, appointed officials, community leaders, staff, and administrators as they make decisions about development, programs, and capital investments in the County.

The goals and associated objectives in this Comprehensive Plan are organized into three categories:

1. *Managing Growth and Infrastructure*
2. *Expanding Economic Opportunities*
3. *Preserving Rural Character*

Following are the goals and objectives of this Comprehensive Plan.

Goal 1.1: Grow in a Fiscally Efficient, Compact Manner

Dispersed development patterns create a higher tax burden on the county than more compact patterns that can make more efficient use of existing infrastructure. In addition, sprawling development patterns can increase conflicts with agriculture. The County will encourage new development to locate near existing communities.

Objective 1.1A: Encourage growth to be located within developed and developing areas

The County will continue to work with municipalities to adopt clear boundaries for Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Areas and expected areas of annexation. County regulations and zoning will be adjusted so as not to encourage growth outside of these corporate areas, and to encourage development to locate in areas that are planned for availability of services such as water and sewer.

Objective 1.1B: Allow for higher densities and a greater mixture of land uses near developed areas

The County will encourage development and mixed land use patterns in areas that make the most efficient use of infrastructure.

Objective 1.1C: Adjust Zoning Regulations

Pursue amendments to the Northampton County Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to reduce obstacles to development and facilitate desirable growth.

Goal 1.2: Encourage preservation of rural character

The County recognizes that taking measures to mitigate potential negative impacts to the community at large will help it grow in a way that is conducive to its needs and maintenance of its character.

Objective 1.2A: Preserve rural character
Support initiatives designed to permanently preserve open space and agricultural land.

Goal 2.1: Diversify and expand the economy

Objective 2.1A: Business expansion and development

Encourage and promote the development and expansion of new and existing business and industries by offering a progressive atmosphere for enterprises that will diversify the local economy, expand the tax base, and enhance the quality of life in Northampton County.

Objective 2.1B: Identify Future Industry Sites

Identify areas best suited for industrial and commercial development, and make land use and infrastructure decisions to encourage development in those areas.

Objective 2.1C: Promote Agricultural Entrepreneurship

The County will continue to encourage agricultural business undertakings, by providing information about state and federal farm incentive programs.

Goal 3.1: Preserve Farmland

Encourage protection of productive areas of the county for continued agricultural and forestry use.

Objective 3.1A: Ensure well-planned Rural Development

Discourage development patterns that result in the excessive reduction of farmland, open space, and wooded areas.

Objective 3.1B: Support Preservation

Encourage/promote programs and regulations that result in the protection of farmland, open spaces, and wooded areas.

Goal 3.2: Continue the Agricultural Tradition in Northampton County

Northampton County has been an agricultural community since its founding. Agriculture is a valued and defining feature of the history, landscape, and culture of the county that will be retained for future generations to enjoy.

Objective 3.2A: Support Local Agriculture

Work to market and promote local agricultural production through such vehicles as farmer’s markets and community supported agriculture.

Objective 3.2B: Encourage Agri-tourism

Promote appropriate agri-tourism activities that can help support a local farm’s economic vitality.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

In pursuit of these Goals and Objectives, this Northampton County Comprehensive Plan recommends a set of Strategic Actions to be taken by the County and its partners:

Specific Recommendations

- Retail development is needed and should be encouraged in these areas:
 - NC 46 from I-95 to Jackson
 - In and around Henrico, serving Lake Gaston area
 - 158 from Conway to 258
 - The area around Rich Square, along US 258

- Continue to explore improvements to US 158 between I-95 to Jackson.
- Promote retail development in and around Gaston.
- Allow industrial development in I-95 corridor and parts of US 301 corridor.
- From Gaston-Garysburg along NC 46, allow some retail and industrial development near I-95.
- From Garysburg east along US 158 to the County line, keep rural and agricultural.
- From Gaston-Garysburg along NC 46, allow some retail and industrial development near I-95.
- Encourage retail development in/around Garysburg to pull traffic off the new 158 interchange.
- Adjust Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to facilitate development in a manner that helps achieve the goals of this Comprehensive Plan.

Strategic Action Plan

Through the Future Land Use Map, Northampton County envisions how best to accommodate future housing, commercial and office development, and future employment opportunities. The Future Land Use Map sets up a framework for organizing development activity.

The Northampton Board of Commissioners has also worked to construct a Strategic Plan for use in pursuing the County’s objectives. Among targets in that Strategic Plan is an intent to adjust planning and zoning ordinances to be expansion friendly. Other elements of the Plan include efforts to expand existing water delivery potential to underserved communities, to establish an Economic Development Commission, and to secure funding for capital project needs in the county.

Specifically, the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan calls for aiming at the following targets:

- Create partnerships for recreation in the Town of Rich Square.
- Complete improvements at the Cultural & Wellness Center.
- Partner with the school system to improve Creeksville Recreation offerings.
- Seek funding for water expansion projects.
- Pursue design and construction of water lines.
- Continue efforts to plan and complete the Lake Gaston project.

The goals and objectives of this Comprehensive Plan are consistent with those Strategic Plan elements, and call for land use patterns that align with visions for the future of Northampton County.



Intergovernmental Coordination

One of the keys to success in implementing the vision for future land use patterns in Northampton is effective coordination with the County’s municipalities. Pursuit of desired development patterns is enhanced through execution of Intergovernmental Agreements that identify opportunities for collaborative actions. Preparation of such agreements is ongoing, and execution will help to achieve desired outcomes.

Zoning Ordinance Amendments

Adjustment to existing zoning and subdivision ordinance provisions is a high priority need. Revisions to substantive dimensional and procedural requirements in a manner that facilitates desirable land development within Northampton County should be prepared for community consideration, as an initial next step following adoption of this Comprehensive Plan.



Appendix 1: Northampton County 2019-2023 Strategic Plan



2019-2023 Strategic Plan

Recreation

By 2023, Northampton County will expand the Recreation Department's reach into each community

2019

- Develop a plan and create partnerships for recreation in the town of Rich Square
- Complete the expansion of the fitness room and small conference room project at the Cultural & Wellness Center
- Land Option on Lake Gaston for a recreation, wellness and convention center

2020

- Partner with school system to improve Creeksville (old NCHS) Recreation offerings, facilities and grounds
- Solicit bids for the design and engineering of the Lake Gaston project
- Update bids on the second phase of the Cultural & Wellness Center Project to include indoor gymnasium and pool.

2022

- Begin next phase of the Cultural and Wellness Center
- Completion of the Lake Gaston Project

Water

By 2020, Northampton County will expand its existing water delivery potential to underserved communities.

2019

- Seek funding for water expansion projects

2020

- Begin design and construction of water lines

Tax Rate

By 2019, Northampton County will begin to strategically provide tax relief to its citizens.

- By July 1, Cut residential taxes by 1/2 cent
- Aggressively seek delinquent taxes

Human Resources

By 2023, Northampton County will reduce its workforce by at least 5%.

2019

- Review and revise the county's Reduction in Force Policy
- Complete department staffing needs assessment and research automation for effectiveness and efficiency

2020

- 5% reduction in staff through attrition, staff reassignment in vacant positions and automation

2023

- Additional 5% reduction in staff

Finance

By 2019, Northampton County will implement a process to provide transparency and ensure fiscal responsibility.

- Bi-Annual finance retreat with commissioners and the finance department
- Monthly financial statements
- Monthly status of current year's audit

Economic Development

By 2020, Northampton County will establish an Economic Development department that is progressive and results driven.

- Submission of a minimum of twenty grants per year to support new and existing business expansion
- Create an inviting and comprehensive marketing plan highlighting the county's resources and opportunities
- Develop an economic stimulus package

Planning & Zoning

By 2020, Northampton County will rewrite its planning and zoning ordinances/regulations to be expansion friendly.

- Create a committee consisting of citizens, contractors/builders and county staff to adopt or rewrite new regulations

Capital Projects

By 2022, Northampton County will seek, prioritize and secure funding for capital project needs in the county to ensure safety and efficiency.

2019

- Complete feasibility study for a new county courthouse and completion of the remaining county office complex
- Receive updated facility plan and needs from the local school system
- Prioritize the capital projects for Northampton County

2020

- Seek additional funding, if needed, for identified projects including grants

Appendix 2: Examples of Technical Zoning Ordinance Amendments

The North Carolina General Assembly has enacted statutes that address required form and organization for local zoning ordinances adopted by NC jurisdictions. These requirements are found in a new Chapter 160D of the North Carolina General Statutes. The required changes to local ordinances triggered by Chapter 160D affect the language of local ordinances, the options for local decision processes, and administrative practices. Local zoning ordinances must align with these new rules by June 30, 2021, in order to remain in operation.

Following are examples of changes that jurisdictions must make to their ordinances:

- Update any references to provisions in G.S. Chapter 160A or 153A to align with Chapter 160D.
- Align ordinance terminology with Chapter 160D.
- Ensure that ordinance definitions for terms used are not inconsistent with definitions provided in state law and regulation.
- Broaden conflict-of-interest standards for governing and advisory boards and staff.
- Include requirements for keeping minutes of proceedings, and having each board member take an oath of office.
- Include provisions for maintaining paper or digital format current and prior zoning maps for public inspection, and any state or federal agency maps incorporated by reference.
- Clarify issuance of notices of violation in conformance with statutory procedures.
- Specify rules for inspecting properties.
- Specify processes for revocation of development approvals that follow the same process as was used for initial approval.
- Conform subdivision performance guarantee requirements with statutory standards.
- Require standardized process for housing-code enforcement to determine owner's abandonment of intent to repair and need for demolition.
- Must process development agreements as legislative decisions, and have a local government as a party to such agreements.
- Align procedures for legislative decisions and zoning map amendments with provisions in Chapter 160D.
- Procedures to refer proposed zoning amendments to the planning board for review and making comments on plan consistency.
- Require adoption of statement of plan consistency as part of adoption of any amendment to the zoning ordinance.
- Include provision that automatically updates adopted Land Use Plan when any rezoning is approved that is deemed inconsistent with the Land Use Plan.
- Must prohibit third-party down-zonings.
- Must specify statutory procedures for all quasi-judicial development decisions.
- Must provide that applications for development approvals must be made by a person with a property interest in the property or a contract to purchase the property.
- Must include procedures for appeal of administrative decisions.
- Must establish provisions for recognition of vested rights related to building permits, development approvals, site-specific vesting plans, and multi-phase developments.