

## MEMORANDUM

To: Northampton County Board of Commissioners  
From: Roger Waldon, Northampton Planning Consultant  
Date: April 12, 2021  
Subject: Draft Comprehensive Plan

At the Board of Commissioners Meeting scheduled for Monday, April 19, 2021, the Board of Commissioners will be opening a Public Hearing to consider a recommendation for adoption of a draft Northampton County Comprehensive Plan. This memorandum offers an overview of the Draft Plan and the plan preparation process, and requests that the Northampton County Board of Commissioners conduct the Public Hearing and consider adopting the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Requirement for a Comprehensive Plan**

In response to a new State requirement that NC jurisdictions have an adopted Comprehensive Plan in place in order to administer zoning regulations, Northampton County prepared a draft **2040 Comprehensive Plan**, for consideration. The Plan is intended to focus on the future of Northampton County, and to provide information and guidance as decisions are made regarding future land use and development.

The Comprehensive Plan, once adopted by the Board of Commissioners, will serve as a policy document that outlines a vision and goals for the future of Northampton County, with a focus on land use issues. An Advisory Committee was appointed by the Board of Commissioners to discuss land use issues in Northampton County, review draft documents, and make recommendations to the Board. Beginning its work in March, 2020, the Advisory Committee was made up of 16 members representing various interests within Northampton County, including County Residents, Homebuilders and Developers, Property Owners, Business Owners, and Service Providers.

This Draft Plan has been prepared for community review, with intent of aligning with NC statutes and requirements.

### **Purpose of the Plan and How it Will be Used**

The new NC legislation requires that local governments have a Comprehensive Plan in place in order to administer zoning regulations. A Comprehensive Plan in North Carolina is a policy document to guide decision-making; it is not determinative law. The new legislation requires that, when a rezoning proposal or application is being considered, the governing board for a

jurisdiction must adopt a statement saying whether or not the proposed rezoning is consistent with the jurisdiction's adopted Comprehensive Plan. A decision to approve or deny a proposed rezoning can take place whether or not the proposed rezoning is found to be consistent with the Plan. If the finding is that the proposed rezoning is not consistent with the Plan, the rezoning can still be approved, as long as there is a statement adopted asserting why it is reasonable to approve the rezoning even though the rezoning is not consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

A Comprehensive Plan also can serve as a reference for policy-related decision-making regarding a range of community issues, such as allocation of County resources, prioritization of public infrastructure needs, intergovernmental coordination, and formulation of economic development strategies.

### **Key Sections of the Draft Northampton County Comprehensive Plan**

The Draft Plan is constructed to provide basic information about Northampton County, identify goals and objectives related to County character, and construct a vision to guide future land use decisions. The key piece of information in the Plan is the Draft Future Land Use Map (shown on page 26 of the Draft Plan). Other key components of the Plan include:

- An Executive Summary, starting on page 3
- An Overview of the Plan, beginning on page 8
- Description of the Land Use Plan, beginning on page 21
- Goals and Objectives, beginning on page 29
- Appendix 1, showing the Northampton County Strategic Plan, on page 34
- Appendix 2, showing Examples of NC requirements, on page 35

The Plan includes a short narrative at the beginning of each of the seven sections of the Plan, summarizing the key points included in that section. Those seven summaries are attached to this memorandum, to provide a description of the Plan content.

### **Recommendation for Adoption**

The Planning Board has reviewed the Draft Plan and has recommended that the Board of Commissioners adopt the Northampton County Comprehensive Plan dated March 12, 2021. Once adopted by the Board of Commissioners, the Plan will become a policy document to be used as a reference to guide decision-making in consideration of parcel-specific and countywide land use issues.

Excerpts from the Draft Northampton Comprehensive Plan, 3-12-2021:  
Summaries from the Beginnings of Each Section of the Plan

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*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.*

**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.*

**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*

**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.*

**THEME3: 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-*

**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.*

**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.*