



Northampton County, North Carolina 2040 Comprehensive Plan Executive Summary

ADOPTED APRIL 19, 2021



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

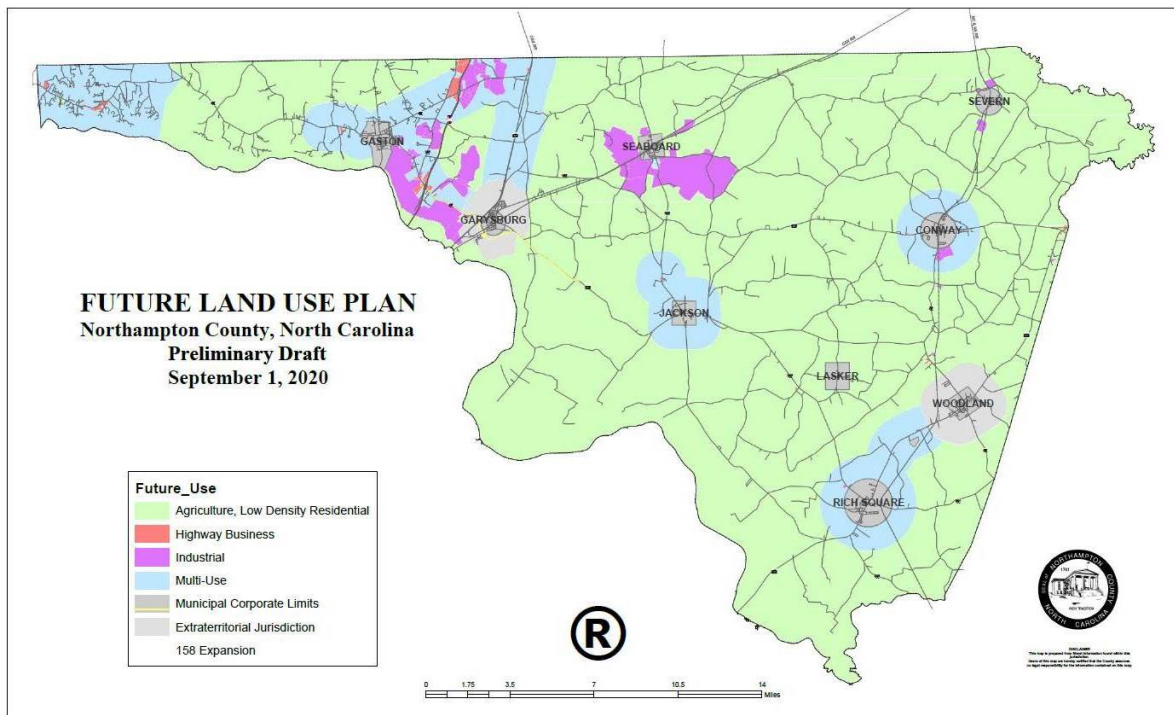
This Northampton County Comprehensive Plan recommends a set of Strategic Actions to be taken by the County and its partners, focused on the following issues:

- 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

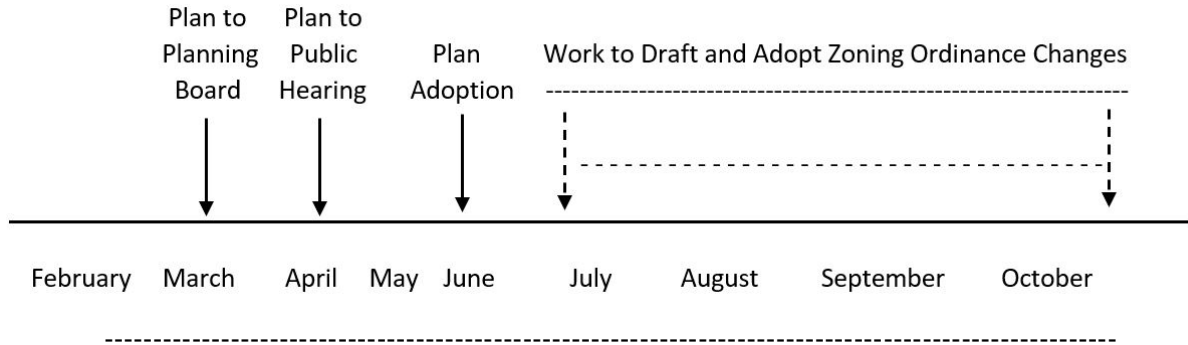
Some of the objectives recommended in this Comprehensive Plan will be pursued over time, as resources allow. One set of objectives, however, needs immediate attention: substantive amendments to the Northampton County Zoning Ordinance.

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.

