

Powhatan Comprehensive Plan Update

Diagnosis and Assessment

Prepared for the County by
McBride **DALE**
C L A R I O N

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	1
I. Introduction	2
II. Regional and Local Growth	4
Regional Growth Influences	4
Local Land Use and Growth Trends.....	5
III. Current Comprehensive Plan	6
IV. Land Use and Zoning	8
Introduction.....	8
Planning Issues	9
Land Use and Preservation Citizen Working Group	12
Route 60 Overlay Citizen Working Group	14
Unresolved Policy Issues	14
V. Economic Development and Fiscal Impact	15
Introduction.....	15
Planning Issues	15
Economic Development Citizen Working Group	17
Unresolved Policy Issues	17
VI. Infrastructure and Public Services	18
Introduction.....	18
Planning Issues	18
Infrastructure Citizen Working Group	19
Unresolved Policy Issues	20
VII. Transportation	20
VIII. Conclusions	20

I . INTRODUCTION

Powhatan County is currently in the second phase of an update to its Comprehensive Plan. The first phase consisted of initial public outreach and research and analysis of data and information related to a wide range of planning related issues. This second phase of the process builds on the first phase by moving forward with further public discussion of planning issues, reports of citizen based working groups, formulation of goals and objectives, and the Comprehensive Plan itself.

The purpose of this document is to serve as a diagnosis of key community planning issues facing Powhatan County and to assess the ways in which the community has been working to address these issues. It is intended to be a source of discussion within the community as a step formulating a plan for the future, and a foundation upon which goals and objectives can be constructed.

There are many planning issues that are identified in a variety of planning sources prepared to date, in results from the first phase of this process, in results from multiple citizen groups, and in ideas offered by county leadership and staff. This document attempts to summarize and synthesize those issues. A set of final recommendations will come later as part of the actual plan.

The ideas and conclusions in this report are drawn primarily from the following sources:

- Reviews of current and historic documents related to planning in Powhatan County, including previous comprehensive plans
- Interviews with county and other officials involved in planning related activities
- Reviews of the extensive work and presentations of the Citizen Working Groups (CWG's) organized as part of the plan update process
- Review of the analysis prepared as a part of the first phase of this planning process

This report builds on the existing conditions report prepared during the first phase of the planning process. The consultant for the first phase, URS, prepared a Memorandum of Existing Conditions that covers a wide range of planning issues including demographics, economics, transportation, public utilities, community services, land use, and fiscal issues. That report should be consulted to specifics related to those topics.

Similarly, this report draws extensively from the results of the CWG's, but does not attempt to fully report their results – those reports contain much detailed analysis and they should also be reviewed directly.

This report begins with an overview of background related to planning in Powhatan County, immediately following. Section II reviews the regional

planning context that focuses on growth trends that will influence the county. As will be seen, regional growth pressures are pushing at the county's boundaries, making this a critical time to plan. The report includes a detailed summary of county land use patterns and an analysis of the amount of growth that could be accommodated under existing planning and zoning policies as a baseline for discussions. This will be compared to forecasted growth rates in order to understand the relationship between theoretical capacity and growth demands.

Section III offers a summary and diagnosis of the ways in which the current Comprehensive Plan addresses growth issues. There is much in the current Plan, particularly in the goals and policies chapter that remains valid and relevant for the future. But the current Plan does not communicate a vision for the county in a clear way, and there is a sense in the community that the plan has not been fully implemented or implemented in accordance with the community's vision. Further, while the current Plan may have been a good planning foundation for its time, there are many new and pressing planning issues that have arisen in recent years that are not addressed.

The next three sections address major topics that have been studied by Citizen Working Groups. These sections are:

- IV. Land Use and Zoning
 - County-wide
 - Special geographic planning areas, including the Route 60 and Huguenot Trail corridors
- V. Economic Development and Fiscal Impact
- VI. Infrastructure (primarily sewer, water, and schools)

For each of these sections, this report provides an overview of planning issues, a summary of the results of the CWG work, and a summary of outstanding policy questions or issues. The intent of this discussion is to focus future public discussions on those questions and issues that need more dialogue and consensus building.

A fourth substantive topic is transportation. A new Citizen Working Group is just underway in its discussions of transportation issues, and accordingly this will be a topic further developed over the next few months.

It should also be noted that the Huguenot Trail Advisory Committee is working to develop planning recommendations for that corridor.

II. REGIONAL AND LOCAL GROWTH

Regional Growth Influences

There are two primary regional influences that have had and will continue to have a major influence on Powhatan County.

First, the completion of Route 288 is providing greatly improved regional access to Powhatan County. The impacts of Route 288 can already be seen in the development pressures occurring in the northeast corner of the county. The pressures caused by this regional access pose one of the key planning questions in this process: How can Powhatan County capitalize on the economic development opportunities created by Route 288 while protecting the scenic and environmental integrities of the County's gateway and the Huguenot Trail corridor?

The second major regional influence is the potential growth pressure created as a result of extraordinary levels of development in northwestern Chesterfield County. According to the Chesterfield County planning staff, as of the beginning of 2008 there were approximately 7,000 existing housing units within three miles of the boundary between Chesterfield and Powhatan counties. That number is projected to grow to over 28,000 dwelling units in Chesterfield County based on Chesterfield's "build-out" analysis. This accounts for all vacant land that was zoned as of the beginning of 2008 and any land that was not zoned, but designated in the Comprehensive Plan for residential use. Approximately 6,000 of those new units can be accounted for by several major development proposals, including West Chester, Halsley, Roseland, and part of Magnolia Green.

Current commercial and industrial projects in the same area of Chesterfield County account for almost 1.5 million square feet. At build-out, that amount is projected to be almost 18 million square feet of commercial and industrial development. Much of that new development (5.5 million square feet) can be accounted for by the Watkins Center. As many in Powhatan County are no doubt aware, Chesterfield County has been engaged in extensive and ongoing debate over development in this area, and in particular over the impact of that development on the Upper Swift Creek Watershed, the upper end of which reaches into Powhatan County.

While the current downturn in the residential market creates uncertainty about growth, it is prudent to assume for planning purposes that growth pressures will remain.

However the planning for this area in Chesterfield County turns out, Powhatan County should assume that regional growth pressures will continue to be pushing against and into Powhatan County. The challenge, of course, is for Powhatan County to decide how it is going to respond to and manage those growth pressures.

Local Land Use and Growth Trends

One important question in planning for the future is “how much are we planning for?” In other words, given historic growth trends, what are reasonable forecasts of future growth?

As part of the first phase of this planning effort, the county’s consultant URS prepared growth forecasts to the year 2030. Using data and forecasts from the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission and the Virginia Employment Commission, URS forecasted population growth to rise from slightly over 27,000 as of 2006 to almost 46,000 in 2030. This represents a 70% increase.

Similarly, employment forecasts were also prepared. Employment within Powhatan County is forecasted to grow from almost 6,500 as of 2006 to almost 11,500 in 2030. This represents over a 75% increase.

Several things should be kept in mind about these forecasts. First, they are not predictions. They are based upon assumptions about how historic growth trends may or may not continue into the future. The recent downturn in the housing market illustrates how external events can affect growth. These forecasts should be considered as planning reference points, subject to periodic reassessment. Second, they do not reflect a value judgment. In other words, they are not represented as being either desirable or undesirable – they are simply points of reference for planning. Finally, as a portion of regional forecasts, they do not reflect a detailed analysis of local land use conditions. They do not, for example, involve an assessment of the ability of the community to absorb the growth or provide public services and facilities to new population or employment. Nonetheless, these forecasts provide a valuable benchmark in thinking about the future, particularly when compared to the local land use trends.

More detailed local land use trends will be evaluated in a separate capacity analysis. The capacity analysis is a tool that allows the county to evaluate the potential outcome of current land use policies in relationship to projected growth and determine if the current policies are adequate to achieve a desired future result or if adjustments are needed. The capacity analysis examines the current development and land use conditions in the county, identifies land that has potential development capacity, and then assesses the development yield of those areas by evaluating the impact of natural constraints and then multiplying the available unconstrained acreage by densities determined by existing land use policies including the existing zoning and land use plan.

On a preliminary assessment of the quantity of land available for development and the estimated demand for new construction the following topics rise to the forefront for consideration in this planning process and in the crafting of a vision and goals for the plan.

- The county does not have a shortage of land to accommodate future growth, so there is less a question of how much growth can occur, but rather where and at what density growth should occur.

- The capacity analysis can gauge the potential outcome of current policies and open the discussion about whether current land use policies including zoning are adequate to guide growth. The county will then be able to debate what, if any policies should be adjusted to provide for positive future development.
- The capacity analysis is also an opportunity to explore scenarios about protection of certain areas in an agricultural, natural or undeveloped state, and determine if there are adequate policies in place to protect these areas.
- The capacity analysis can also open discussion of the role of sewer and water services can or should play in determining the growth pattern.

III. CURRENT COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

It is instructive to consider how the current Comprehensive Plan addresses the issues discussed in this report. On the one hand, a review of the current Comprehensive Plan makes it clear that the county has long been working to address many of the issues discussed later in this report and is not just now recognizing them for the first time. On the other hand, there seems to be a consensus that the current Plan has not been fully successful in providing a vision or mechanism to address the issues adequately, and that more purposeful and effective growth management is needed from this point forward.

The most relevant portion of the current Comprehensive Plan is in Section III Goals, Policies and Actions. Here the plan includes a series of vision statements for:

- Rural character,
- Quality of development,
- Business and employment,
- Public facilities, and
- Community attributes.

The vision statements in turn are supported by a series of goals related to:

- Growth management,
- Residential development,
- Business and economic development,
- Transportation,
- Community facilities,
- Agricultural, forest and environmental resources, and
- Historic resources.

It is significant that those vision statements and goals appear to be consistent with the values heard expressed in Powhatan County today. The emphasis on rural character preservation, housing diversity, economic development, relationships of transportation and community

facilities to quality of life, natural resource protections, and an overall desire for carefully managed growth all seem to be on target with current attitudes. The core values of the plan appear to be on point and still relevant today.

The plan then uses the goals to project a future land use pattern. It does so by organizing future land use at two levels. First is what is referred to as “land use policy areas” which include four broad categories including rural preservation areas, village preservation areas, village service areas, and business service areas. These land use policy areas act as a “broad brush” depiction of the overall form of land use in the county.

The second level is a more detailed depiction of future land use with seven future land use categories including low density residential, community residential, community commercial, village mixed use, light industrial, heavy industrial, and public/institutional. The land uses act as a finer grain depiction of future uses within the broader land use policy areas.

This approach of defining broad land use character at one level with more detailed land uses at a second level is a valid way of approaching land uses. It attempts to define a broad vision supported by more detailed land use planning. Having the broad brush level, supported by a finer grain level sets the stage for the third and most detailed level – the zoning map. While one might debate whether the categories are properly defined, whether they have the right densities applied to them, and whether the lines on the map are in the right place, this approach has merit.

One confusing feature of the current Plan is a section of approximately 20 pages of text describing a mix of rezoning criteria, location and density criteria, public facility requirements, transportation requirements, business and economic development policies, zoning policies, and other issues for each of the four “land use policy areas”. This content is valid and helpful (i.e. managing vehicular access, mitigating impacts on public facilities, the need for buffers, relationship to utility extensions, etc.), but is not user-friendly and crosses into the type of detail most often seen in zoning regulations. This may help explain why the current Plan is not being used and implemented as well as was originally intended. It is difficult to navigate.

In updating the current Plan, the task accordingly becomes one of acknowledging that the current Plan has served the county well in important ways while re-structuring the approach to be more user-friendly. By organizing the overall form of land use into four broad “land use policy areas”, the current Plan lays out a vision of the relationship between rural preservation and village and business concentrations. The Plan also set the stage for substantial reductions in rural density that was implemented through the R-5 zoning.

It is important for the public to view this current Plan update process within the context of this planning history. Planning for the future, trying to protect what makes Powhatan special, looking comprehensively at the relationships between land use and public facilities, promoting a strong

economy, and maintaining a quality of life are not new ideas. The challenge is to continue to evolve the county's ability to plan for the future, especially at this time of increasing regional growth pressures.

In summary, we conclude the following about the current Plan:

1. There is much that is relevant in the current Plan that should be carried forward;
2. There needs to be a simpler and more user-friendly way to depict the vision; and
3. The plan needs to evolve to the next level of sophistication, in recognition of the growth pressures and complexity of issues facing the county today.

With that background, the following sections address the four major issues of land use, economic development and fiscal, infrastructure and public facilities, and transportation.

IV. LAND USE AND ZONING

Introduction

A comprehensive plan is primarily a plan for the physical development or preservation of a community. While a plan should address a range of issues including economic development, infrastructure, transportation, and others, the way in which land is used and the way in which it is intended to be used in the future is the foundation of any plan.

It is important to recognize that land use has many dimensions, including its geographic pattern or distribution, its density or intensity, its quality or character, and its relationship to public facilities. Each of these dimensions should be recognized and addressed in a plan.

Powhatan's land use patterns are actually fairly simple and straightforward. The county is bisected east-west by Route 60 and north-south by Route 522. The majority of the land in the county is rural (a mix of open land, wooded areas, farms, large lot residential). The most prevalent zoning in the rural areas is Agricultural with a density of one dwelling unit per ten acres (although active agriculture is not the dominant land use in the rural areas). The current Comprehensive Plan recommends a density of one unit per five acres under certain conditions in this area, which corresponds to the current R-5 zoning district. Previous planning policies from before the current Plan allowed a density of one unit per two acres. As a result, there is a mix of 2-acre lot and 5-acre lot subdivisions sprinkled throughout the rural areas, primarily throughout the eastern half of the county.

The character of the residential subdivision development in the rural areas has until recently been fairly conventional large lot rural subdivision, meaning that lots are typically two to five acres in size, with little preserved open spaces outside of individual lots. However, the number of subdivisions is small enough that the overall character of the

area is still rural, but that could change quickly if the pace of new developments continues to increase in the face of regional growth pressures.

More recently the county has been encouraging the use of “conservation subdivisions” under R-5 zoning as a means to preserve rural character. This involves clustering on relatively smaller lots in exchange for the preservation of open spaces. This is an approach that is becoming increasingly popular around the country as a means to accommodate development in a way that preserves rural character. As the county gets more of a track record with this type of development, it is learning what makes for a successful design. Community reaction to R-5 subdivisions has been mixed, and it will be important to identify the features that are most successful and acceptable.

Businesses in the county are primarily located along the Route 60 corridor in the form of a series of small clusters at certain locations. While there are some small concentrations of employment related uses, most of these businesses are small scale retail uses. Most recently the county has been applying design standards in the approval process, which has improved the appearance of new businesses considerably. The primary concern with this corridor, as discussed further below, is that strip zoning encourages and causes strip development. As things currently stand, strip commercial land use is county policy by virtue of it being in the zoning code. Fine-tuning is needed. In some areas, the width of the commercial zoning strip needs to be widened, and in other areas reduced.

The other major land use area is the Route 711/Huguenot Trail corridor. This corridor is adjacent to the James River and is one of the most scenic and historic corridors in the county. However, the completion of Route 288 is now bringing growth pressures to the area. This is perceived as both a threat to the scenic character of the corridor to the west, and an opportunity for economic development at the interchange. These issues are discussed further below.

Planning Issues

Rural Preservation

There appears to be a strong community desire and consensus to preserve the rural character and low density pattern of land uses in rural areas. This community value is embedded in the current Comprehensive Plan, and by all indications it continues to be a strong community consensus. The basis of this desire is grounded in the desire to preserve community character, preserve natural environmental resources, promote an efficient land use pattern relative to public infrastructure and services, and generally avoid suburban or rural sprawl that has typified so many counties.

There are several aspects of the rural preservation issue. The first has to do with density. When the current zoning was adopted it established a base density of one unit per ten acres in the rural areas, which accounts

for the vast majority of the overall county area. However, the current Comprehensive Plan establishes a one unit per five acre density as being appropriate, which means that rezoning requests from Agriculture to R-5 Residential are viewed as consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and therefore county policy, as long as other standards in the plan are met. While a one unit per five acre density is an improvement over previous county policies, some question whether it is adequate to preserve rural character, or whether it simply encourages rural sprawl.

Another dimension of the rural preservation issue has to do with the design and character of new development. While the R-5 zoning provides a one unit per five acre gross density, it allows for the ability to cluster on two acre lots with open space set asides for the remainder of the land. Some R-5 developments are well received by the public, while others are not as well received by the public. The design of R-5 subdivisions appears to have much to do with how they are perceived – those that are designed so as to hide the actual residential development portion of a site from public view are perceived as being more successful from a planning perspective than those that give the appearance of rural sprawl with numerous home sites spread out over a large area and visible from the road. Thus, the way in which R-5 regulations address development standards will need to be revisited.

Another dimension to the rural character issue has to do with the geographic distribution of uses and density. Some have suggested, for example, that there should be a distinction in permitted densities between areas in the western half of the county as contrasted with the eastern half of the county. This argument is based on the idea that areas to the west of Route 522 have largely retained their very low density rural character making a lower density (i.e.: one unit per ten acres) reasonable and necessary to preserve that rural character. On the other hand, areas east of 522 have already experienced many rural subdivisions at a density of one unit per two acres and one unit per five acres making that area more suitable for a more moderate rural density (i.e.: one unit per five acres). The Land Use Citizen Working Group tackled this issue in a very detailed and thoughtful way, as discussed further below.

Route 60 Corridor

Another key land use issue relates to the Route 60 corridor. Route 60 is the primary east-west arterial through Powhatan County. There appears to be consensus that the Route 60 Corridor is the county's primary opportunity to serve as the economic engine for the county, supporting a range of business and service uses.

The corridor is currently zoned Residential Commercial 500 feet on both sides of the road, generally from the eastern boundary of the county to Route 522. While there appears to be consensus that this is an appropriate corridor for growth and development, there is great concern in the county about the potential for "stripping" of development in an inefficient pattern with many access points. There appears to be consensus that growth should be encouraged in this corridor, but it should occur in well defined and well designed nodes at key locations.

The recent use of architectural design standards for commercial and industrial use by the county is an important step in managing the quality and character of development along the corridor, but more substantial revisions to the geographic configuration of the zoning will ultimately be needed to better accomplish a more nodal development pattern. A zoning pattern that is based on a simple one-dimension measurement for the whole course of the corridor is archaic and should be revisited.

On the other hand, the county's adoption of access management regulations in 2005 is helping mitigating the impact of strip zoning.

In addition there is interest in considering the Route 60 Corridor as being more than just a business corridor. As a complement to the rural preservation policies for the bulk of the county, many believe that Route 60 development nodes should also accommodate opportunities for more diversity in housing, such as attached or multi-family uses. Many envision a series of mixed use nodes along the corridor that could accommodate a mix of employment, retail, residential, service, and civic related uses. Such a pattern could accommodate the desire for Route 60 to serve as both an economic engine for the county as well as an opportunity to provide more affordable and work force housing.

Issues associated with sewer and water service are important in this corridor, and are addressed in the infrastructure section below.

Huguenot Trail

Huguenot Trail offers unique challenges and opportunities that involve both rural preservation and economic development. This is an area that is subject to an ongoing citizen working group discussion.

The area between Huguenot Trail and the James River, from near the eastern boundary of the county to Fine Creek, is zoned Rural Residential with a density of one unit per ten acres. However, unlike other rural areas in the county, the Comprehensive Plan recommends that this base density of one unit per ten acres be retained due to its unique scenic character.

On the other hand, the completion of Route 288 has opened up potential pressures for growth along this corridor, including the potential for economically productive uses that could benefit the economy of Powhatan County. In fact, the county has seen development interest already in this area. The county has applied special overlay zoning in this area (popularly know as "Article 15A" based on the zoning code section that authorizes it) in an effort to recognize this potential while carefully managing its impact. However, this development is relatively small scale in nature and in the far eastern boundary of the county; one of the challenges of this plan will be to define the acceptable scale, design, and geographic boundaries of future non-single family uses in this area.

Further, Route 288 has increased the traffic pressure on Huguenot Trail, which has a rural cross-section that is not well suited for high traffic patterns. Many are concerned that it will be very difficult to make any

improvements to Huguenot Trail without negatively impacting the scenic character of the corridor. The county faces a classic planning dilemma here – should the road be improved to accommodate increasing traffic and to improve safety, recognizing that improvements could impact the scenic character of the area and may simply encourage even more regional traffic?

These three interrelated factors – the scenic and rural character of the corridor, increased traffic pressures, and increased development pressures around the interchange – will be addressed by the ongoing citizen working group in that area.

Regional Growth Influences

Another land use issue has to do with the ways in which the county responds to regional growth pressures. As discussed previously in this report, there is a tremendous amount of growth occurring and forecasted to continue in Chesterfield County immediately adjacent to Powhatan County. The question for Powhatan County is how it responds to this pressure.

There are generally two schools of thought on this. One is to essentially “hold the line” and simply not consider rezoning requests to higher densities for the rural areas adjacent to Chesterfield County. The second is to provide for a reasonable transition of densities from the eastern county line. The solution for Powhatan County is likely somewhere in the middle – how the county responds to this regional growth will be a key part of this planning dialogue.

Land Use and Preservation Citizen Working Group¹

The Land Use and Preservation Citizen Working Group (CWG) Report represents an extraordinary effort to address many of the issues discussed above. This report includes several key components including:

Vision and Goals

The Land Use CWG developed a vision statement and supporting goals for land use. This vision and these goals are generally compatible with the current Comprehensive Plan, with a substantial increase in emphasis on open land and green space protection, preservation of environmentally sensitive land and habitat, connected walks and pathways, controlling light pollution in the county, and overall preservation and conservation of rural resources.

¹ The discussions of the CWG results in this report should not be considered a substitute for reading those reports. Each report is thorough and detailed, and this discussion is intended only to relate them to planning issues discussed in this report.

The report identifies a number of concerns and shortcomings related to the current Plan and its implementation as it relates to the vision and goals.

The CWG also identifies a series of strategies to accomplish each of the goal statements.

The Land Use CWG Report proposes to address many of the rural preservation concerns discussed above through an innovative approach that is based on a sophisticated GIS-based analysis. Using a series of land use, zoning, and environmental feature overlays, the plan recommends a “core preservation district”, “agriculture and forestry reserve district”, and a “Huguenot Trail Byway District”, each of which is mapped. The CWG approach establishes a potential basis for distinctions between areas that are proposed by the CWG for lower density preservation (i.e.: one unit per ten acres) and areas that are suitable for relatively higher density areas (i.e.: one unit per two acres).

The report then recommends and emphasizes the importance of implementing what is known as a “transfer of development rights” program (TDR). TDR’s are a mechanism that have been used in some regions as a way to allow for the transfer of densities from areas desired to be preserved (“sending areas”) into areas that are more suitable for growth and development (“receiving areas”). In this case, the Land Use CWG identifies the proposed Core Preservation District, the Agriculture and Forest Reserve District, and the Huguenot Trail Byway District as being potential sending areas. It then identifies two categories of areas for receiving areas. One is the Route 60 Corridor. The other includes a series of rural areas north and south of Route 60 primarily in the eastern half of the county as depicted on the CWG maps.

Additional community discussion of these recommended approaches to land use should include consideration of the following:

1. The use of a layered mix of land use and environmental overlays is a standard and time honored approach to land use planning and analysis, assuming all the underlying assumptions are reasonable and valid. The use of GIS (digital mapping) analysis allows this type of analysis to be even more detailed and sophisticated.
2. The use of transfer of development rights (TDRs) can also be a valid tool as a way to preserve low density open spaces. The challenge with TDR programs is several-fold. First of all, a TDR system must be based on a careful and extensive analysis of land markets and economics. Simply identifying a sending area and a receiving area does not necessarily mean that TDR’s will work from an economic perspective. Until such an analysis is conducted for Powhatan County, no one can say with any certainty that use of this tool is feasible. Second, TDR systems are relatively complex (and expensive) to set up and maintain. They require staff resources and the underlying analysis must be monitored and updated on a regular basis. It is common to hear TDRs proposed as a solution to similar problems in counties throughout the country; however, very few counties or regions have actually implemented successful TDR

programs.

This is not to discourage such an approach from being explored. It could very well be a valuable long term tool for Powhatan County to use. On the other hand, the success of a rural preservation program in Powhatan County should not be solely contingent upon a successful TDR program – it is too premature to conclude that this is a solution for Powhatan County. In fact current state law relating to TDR's is limited and local Virginia adoption has not been widespread.

Route 60 Overlay Citizen Working Group

The Route 60 CWG addressed a full range of issues, recognizing the combination of land use, infrastructure, traffic and economic development issues at play in the corridor. They recommend mixed use nodes of focused development as discussed above. They recommend continued improvements in architectural design standards. They recommend managed vehicular access measures and coordination between land use and transportation planning. Finally, they recommend measures to better coordinate sewer and water services with economic development goals.

In general, the recommendations of this CWG are consistent with the direction of other CWG's and ideas that have been expressed as part of this process.

It is our understanding that this CWG is continuing to work to identify potential locations for focused growth nodes along the corridor.

Unresolved Policy Issues

Following are policy issues and questions that require additional discussion and dialogue in the community:

1. Is there a desire to consider changes to the underlying rural density? If so, is the approach advocated in the Land Use CWG Report a reasonable basis for that?
2. How can the design of R-5 subdivisions be improved so that they are consistently well designed for Powhatan County?
3. Where are the most appropriate locations for mixed use or business nodes along Route 60? How does the county handle the zoning on those areas that are not identified as nodes?
4. Should there be a transition in density identified in the rural areas immediately adjacent to the eastern Powhatan County line to recognize regional growth pressures?
5. What is the future land use policy for Huguenot Trail, both around the interchange and to the west?

V. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND FISCAL IMPACT

Introduction

Almost all communities strive to have a balanced economy and to have a fiscally healthy local government able to provide public services and facilities in a sustainable manner. These two desires are interrelated – a healthy local economy typically generates tax revenues that allow for more responsible local government spending.

In the case of Powhatan County, the economic development issues are closely related to land use issues, in that there are two areas that offer the most opportunity for economic development: the Route 60 Corridor and the Route 288 / Huguenot Trail interchange. The land use issues for each of these are discussed above.

This section discusses the planning issues associated with economic development and how that CWG addresses those issues

Planning Issues

There are several issues associated with the economic health of the community and county government. These include the question of what the best economic development niche and mix is for the county, how this relates to future land use, what the proportional relationship of business and residential uses should be, and how this translates into long term sustainable fiscal health for county government.

What is the best economic development niche and mix?

There appears to be consensus within the county that a more balanced, well planned and diverse economy is needed. A strong economy is needed both to provide economic opportunities for existing businesses and residents as well as to create the basis for sustainable public services and facilities. It appears to be well accepted that providing employment opportunities for local residents is desirable to minimize regional commuting and to help retain young and talented people who might otherwise move elsewhere. Likewise, there is a sense that a strong and diverse local economy will create an economic engine that in part enables county government to be responsive to the needs of business and residents in the provision of local services and facilities.

The challenge is to identify the kinds of businesses that can reasonably be attracted to Powhatan County and to put a plan of action into place to implement an active strategy for doing so. This must go beyond the idea of attracting clean industries with high paying jobs in high tech service sectors – virtually all communities desire such uses. What is needed is a comprehensive economic development plan. At this point, there is no consensus understanding of what an appropriate economic niche or mix is for the county, at least not one that is based on an economic analysis.

Location Issues

As is discussed previously, there seems to be broad consensus that the Route 60 Corridor is the most logical and desirable place to focus new economic development efforts in a high quality, mixed-use, nodal pattern. The county is already working to implement utility improvements to enable this to occur. It is anticipated that this issue will be addressed in this plan with the continued assistance of the Route 60 CWG.

The more difficult comprehensive plan challenge is associated with the opportunities created at the Route 288 and Huguenot Trail interchange. Interchanges between regional limited access highways and state route arterials are natural magnets for growth and development and opportunities for economically productive uses. On the other hand, this particular interchange provides access to one of the more scenic and sensitive corridors in the county. Decisions about land use around that interchange, related transportation improvements, and scenic corridor protection will require additional community discussion and dialogue.

Fiscal

The county is working hard to prepare itself for the long range abilities to provide public services and facilities in a fiscally responsible manner. The county currently has a five year capital improvement plan and is in the process of developing a twenty year financial plan that will look at long term capital facility needs and how to fund those needs. This effort is occurring parallel to this Comprehensive Plan update.

In addition, an ad valorem tax study is being prepared by the Utilities Department to identify ways to fund additional sewer and water infrastructure along Route 60.

The county has estimated on a preliminary basis a potential five year capital improvement need in excess of 40 million dollars and an estimated longer term need of over 150 million dollars. While this is only a general estimate subject to refinement as part of the financial planning, it is clear that current revenue sources will not be adequate to cover those costs. The cash proffer system that is utilized by the county, while helpful, will also not generate enough revenue to fund those needed capital improvements, nor does it create a predictable flow of revenue that allows the county to plan adequately in the future.

There have been discussions in the county about the need to increase the commercial tax base relative to the residential tax base – many people suggest a need for a tax ratio of something in the neighborhood of 30% commercial, 70% residential. While there seems to be broad support for the idea of increasing this ratio, there is no quantitative support that a 30/70 ratio is the correct number. In order to determine a long term fiscally sustainable relationship between land uses, a full fiscal impact analysis would need to be conducted.

In summary, there is consensus that a strong diverse economy is needed for the long term health of the county, and a long term fiscal plan is needed to plan for funding the true needs for public services and facilities. The county is working hard to address these issues, but much remains to be done.

Economic Development Citizen Working Group

The Economic Development CWG recognizes and addresses the issues discussed above. Their report embodies a mission statement “to actively pursue a balanced and well planned business friendly environment resulting in job creation and a diverse tax base for the county”. The report emphasizes the need for a compact pattern of business development that retains the county’s rural character and residential areas. It includes a series of goals associated with the need to target geographic areas and economic sectors as well as the importance of architectural and landscape standards. It also incorporates the desire for a 30/70 commercial/residential tax ratio.

The report also addresses a range of questions similar to those discussed above relating to the kind of economic development and potential locations that are appropriate for economic development focus, including the Route 60 Corridor and the Route 288/ Huguenot Trail interchange.

The plan includes 32 separate recommendations for economic development which should be reviewed separately in their report. The bottom line is the Economic Development CWG reflects the conclusions of the issues discussion above by calling for a substantial amount of additional planning and actions being taken to address this issue.

Unresolved Policy Issues

The fundamental need for a stronger economic base in the community is not in question. The unresolved policy issues have to do more with the question of “what?”, “where?”, and “how?” It is relatively easy to agree on the need for a stronger and more diverse economy. The real challenge is to fashion a plan and to provide the resources to implement the plan, and to coordinate local government actions related to providing supporting infrastructure.

The related critical question is the role of the county as a unit of government, working with other agencies and organizations to facilitate the kind of effort that will be needed to have real success.

Thus, the following are some of the policy questions that require additional discussion and dialogue in the community:

1. What is the relative priority of economic development as a county government function?
2. What is the appropriate role of county government?
3. How can the county best lead or facilitate a multi-organizational economic development effort?

4. What is the best tax ratio to aspire to? How does this relate to the future land use plan – are adequate areas identified for future economic growth?

VI. INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Introduction

This section focuses on several types of infrastructure provided or funded by Powhatan County. These include sewer and water, schools, and public safety services. The county is undertaking a facilities needs study that will be addressing many of these issues on a parallel track with this Comprehensive Plan.

Planning Issues

Sewer and Water

Sewer and water is provided, or planned to be provided in three service areas, including the Courthouse Village area, the eastern portion of the Route 60 corridor, and the middle portion of the Route 60 corridor. The county completed a sewer and water master plan in 2005 that reaffirms the commitment to provide services in these three areas.

Sewer service for the Courthouse Village area is currently provided by the county using the Fighting Creek treatment plant. Public water is managed by a private water company via wells.

Sewer service for the eastern portion of the Route 60 corridor is provided using the Dutoy Creek treatment plant, with substantial excess capacity. Water is purchased from Chesterfield County under an agreement that is good until 2015.

The middle service area is not currently provided with sewer or water services and there are no short term plans to do so – this is a long term planning need.

Generally speaking, there appears to be adequate service in the Courthouse Village area and in the eastern Route 60 area to accommodate growth and development for the foreseeable future.

The primary planning issue associated with water is the need for additional long term supply. There are several options being considered, including a potential Cobbs Creek reservoir, purchase from Henrico County, tapping in to the James River, or some mix of each of these. While supply is a long term challenge, the opinion of the utilities department is that with advance planning the problem can be solved and should not deter long term economic development.

A related issue is the future mix of uses along the Route 60 corridor. As discussed previously, there is considerable interest in promoting a mix of residential and business uses along Route 60. However, there are

currently no residential water customers – the policy in the past has been to reserve capacity for business uses. This policy would have to be reassessed if the county moves in the direction of promoting housing opportunities along the corridor. It should also be viewed in the context of the economic development needs discussed in the previous section.

There appears to be consensus that the county should continue to focus water and sewer services in these geographic areas, both to target economic development opportunities as well as avoid water and sewer from encouraging sprawled development patterns in rural areas. Specifically, there are no plans to provide water and sewer in rural areas.

Schools

Schools represent the largest share of the county's capital budget. Thus, while the county has no direct role in school planning, the way in which capital facilities are addressed is something that the county is very interested in.

The school system has a five year capital improvement plan. Major projects include a new elementary school coming on line this year, a new junior high and middle school expansion or renovation, and related school facilities.

One planning issue associated with this Comprehensive Plan has to do with school forecasts, and specifically with the assumptions that the schools make in terms of student generation. If the county pursues a more diverse housing mix (as discussed relative to Route 60), there could be implications for future school planning, highlighting the need to continued coordination between the schools and the county.

Public Safety

Fire protection is provided by a volunteer based fire company with a part time paid chief. There are over 125 volunteers working out of five fire houses. One station is owned by the county, with the rest owned by volunteer companies. The county provides the fire fighting equipment. Two new stations are planned, one of which has had the land "proffered".

The current fire protection system should continue to serve the county well, as long as the rural pattern and density of land uses continue. The fire department is working from a Year 2000 service study conducted by the Virginia Fire Service Board.

Infrastructure Citizen Working Group

The Infrastructure CWG includes a comprehensive set of goals and objectives related to a wide range of services and facilities. Their work is based on extensive analysis and interviews with the service providers. It contains a wealth of recommendations for additional needs.

Like the results of the economic development CWG, the challenge with the Infrastructure CWG will be to prioritize the recommendations. The CWG recognizes the needs for extensive additional needs assessments and master facility planning.

Many of the recommendations go beyond what would normally be addressed in a comprehensive plan. However, they are valuable recommendations that should be considered.

Unresolved Policy Issues

There do not appear to be major questions associated with the need for infrastructure and public service improvements. Like the economic development issues, the questions have more to do with how the county prioritizes the needs and how it will go about long term planning.

VII. TRANSPORTATION

Transportation issues will be developed by the consultant via direct work with the recently formed Transportation Study Group. This group will be asked to provide input on the following issues:

- Long term funding constraints
- Coordinating with the regional planning efforts
- Relationship between traffic and economic development issues along Route 60
- The design and function of Huguenot Trail
- The need for alternative east west routes north of Route 60
- Bicycle access

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The following key ideas emerge as Powhatan proceeds with additional community discussions:

1. Powhatan County is truly at a planning crossroads. While it has a long history of planning and fairly well established planning values, regional growth pressures are knocking at its borders. If it truly wishes to maintain its planning values, it will need to move to the next level of planning sophistication.
2. There are several well defined land use challenges:
 - Assuming general consensus on the desire to preserve rural character, what is the best policy mix of geography, density, and quality that balances these values with private property expectations?
 - How can the county best restructure the planning policies and zoning configurations along Route 60 to serve as an economic engine for the county with a series of well defined mixed use nodes?

- What is the land use pattern, mix, and design around the 288 / 711 interchange that best balances the economic development and scenic corridor interests?
3. There are serious challenges with the related issues of economic development and fiscal sustainability in county services and facilities. While all recognize the need for a strong economy, there is not a comprehensive and systematic program in place. Similarly, while the county is taking the steps it needs to take to plan for the long term funding of public services and facilities, there is not a linkage between land use planning and fiscal impact.
 4. Powhatan County, like any jurisdiction, has limited resources – both financial and personnel. The CWG reports, while all thorough, highlight the need for the county to focus strategically on priorities. County staff and leadership are already pursuing many initiatives, and the CWG reports recommend the need for many more, all of which are important. This, of course, is one of the reasons for going through a comprehensive planning process. In this case, it will be particularly important to use this process as a mechanism to assess these myriad issues all in relationship to each other, and to set priorities for action.
 5. Finally, the challenge here is more than just agreeing to a community vision. It is to use the plan not as an end of a process, but as a stage setter for action. Given the issue of limited resources contrasted with a long list of needs, the Powhatan County planning process more than others needs to try to put the policy issues to rest sooner rather than later, and focus on the next actions steps.