

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The City of Concord enters the 21st century faced with many challenges and a myriad of opportunities and potential. Situated within the fast-growing Charlotte region (Figure I-1) and home to Lowe's Motor Speedway, Concord Mills Shopping Center, Philip Morris, and an expanding regional airport, Concord is quickly evolving from its origins as a small one-acre town site to a regionally important City of considerable size and population. Close proximity to key southeastern transportation corridors including I-85 and I-77 as well as other regional corridors such as the I-485 Outer Belt, place Concord in a strategic position within the region, making it both a northeastern gateway into the Charlotte metropolitan region and a refuge from a fast paced large City.

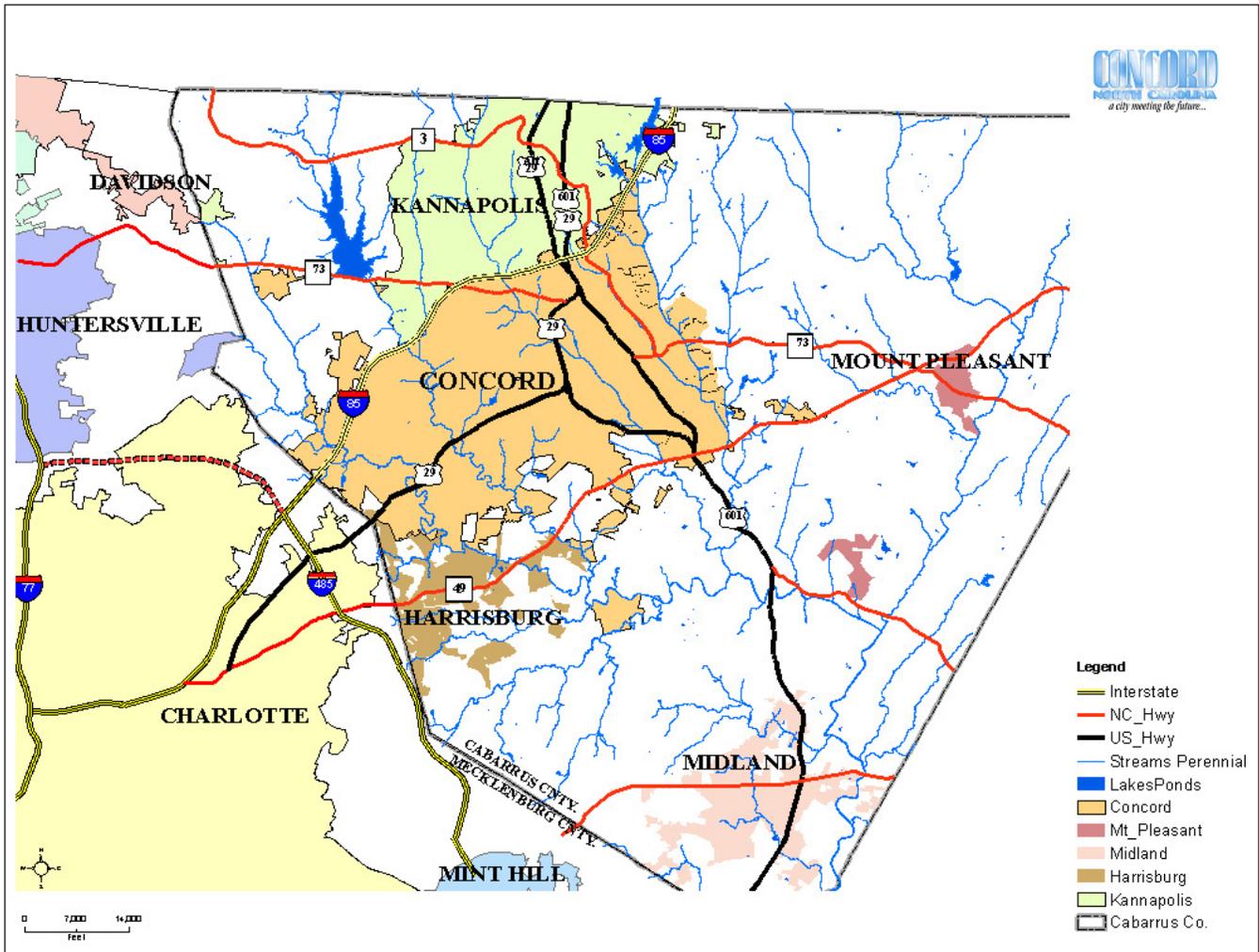
The unprecedented growth in population and housing within the City and surrounding region, as well as the growth of the commercial and industrial sectors, provides Concord residents with ready access to an abundance of cultural, educational, recreational, commercial, and entertainment opportunities. However, a 105% growth in population over the past decade has also brought inevitable challenges associated with rapid growth, such as increased traffic congestion, school overcrowding, increased demand on utilities, needs for more parks, etc.

A. Regional and Historical Context

The City of Concord is located in the piedmont of North Carolina in the western half of Cabarrus County. As the largest city in Cabarrus County, in both land area and population, Concord's population represents nearly half of the County's total population. As part of the larger metropolitan region anchored by the City of Charlotte, Concord is within close proximity to Uptown Charlotte and other regional employment, shopping and entertainment centers and is now becoming a and important player in the Charlotte metropolitan region.

Interstate 85, one of the busiest interstates on the East Coast, traverses the City along its northern border, making Concord easily accessible and provides residents easy access to destinations throughout the region. The I-485 beltway already provides residents with linkages throughout the metropolitan region and completion of the final sections of the beltway will improve Concord's connection to the I-77 corridor, a key route to mid-west and northern states, as well as to central Charlotte, Pineville, and South Carolina cities including Rock Hill and Columbia. The City is home to the Concord Regional Airport, the 4th busiest airport in the State. In addition, the Charlotte/Douglas International Airport, one of the top rated airports in the nation, is only a short 30-mile trip from Concord.

Figure I-1 City of Concord Location Map



Settlement of what is present day Cabarrus County began in the mid-eighteenth century. The area was originally populated primarily by Dutch, Scotch-Irish, Germans, and a small group of Welsh-English families. In 1792, the North Carolina Legislature approved the formation of Cabarrus County from what was then part of Mecklenburg. Crucial support for a separate county came from Stephen Cabarrus of Edenton, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and the new county was named in his honor. For some time following its creation there was much discussion and disagreement as to the location of the new county seat and the courthouse for the new town. In an effort to resolve the controversy, Stephen Cabarrus wrote a letter appealing to the citizens to bury their differences and have “concord.” Accordingly, a site was selected, and it was agreed to name the town “Concord.” The principal street within the Town was named “Union” to mark the resolution of the dispute about the town’s location. The Town of Concord was established

near the center of the County in February 1796, when Samuel Huie sold 26 acres of his land to the newly appointed town commissioners. Concord was incorporated in 1837 with a total land area of one square mile.

In 1839 Concord Manufacturing Company began construction of a textile mill at the highest point on the newly extended North Union Street, (the Odell-Locke-Randolph Cotton Mill). Completion of the North Carolina Railroad on the western edge of town also spurred growth and opened an additional route of transportation, Depot Street, now known as Cabarrus Avenue. By the turn of the century, the textile industry had transformed agrarian Concord into a leading industrial town.

In the later part of the 20th Century the economic base of the Concord area began to shift from textile manufacturing to a more diverse mix of industrial, commercial, governmental and health-related enterprises. In addition, access to major transportation routes enabled people seeking a quieter life outside of Charlotte to make Concord their home. As a result, residential development began to spread into the former rural areas of the City. The Concord of today is a blend of progress and heritage, providing residents with the comforts of a metropolitan area while maintaining the charm of a small town.

B. Key Issues

Now in its third century, the City of Concord must reflect on the forces and circumstances that brought it to its present role in the region, while looking toward the future to determine how best to guide growth and development to serve its citizens.

Maintaining a delicate balance of land uses within the City is essential to ensure that adequate infrastructure, employment opportunities, recreational facilities and commercial enterprises are available to meet the growing needs of Concord's citizens. As key components of the overall character of the City, it is also important that its historic and cultural resources, as well as farmlands and open space, be preserved and protected. As the historic heart of the City, the Concord Downtown plays a vital role in the community and should be protected and enhanced to continue serving and representing the City and its residents.

Through public meetings, stakeholder interviews, data inventory and analysis, a number of key land use issues related to the future development of the City have been identified. These key land use issues are summarized in Table I-1.

Table I-1

Key Land Use Issues in Concord

Key Land Use Issues

- Need for a balance between residential, commercial and industrial uses
- Provision of vehicular and pedestrian connectivity between residential, employment, commercial and recreation uses
- Creation of a sustainable community through the provision of a diverse range and adequate supply of housing, commercial, transportation, recreational, entertainment and employment options
- Preservation of the unique character of the City
- Ensure compatibility of neighboring land uses
- Provision of adequate infrastructure to serve the residents of the City both now and in the future
- Preservation of farmland, natural resources and open space

C. Plan Purpose

The Land Use Plan (LUP) for the City of Concord provides a suggested blueprint for development within the City over the next ten years. The Concord LUP is a policy document providing guidance to City officials as they develop future budgets, plan for the expansion of infrastructure and other services, and make important land use decisions. As a policy document, the Unified Land Plan is very different from a regulatory document such as the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). Although the UDO and the Unified Land Plan are both officially adopted by Concord City Council, the UDO sets forth regulations that are legally binding, while the Unified Land Plan is an official statement by the City of its vision, intentions, goals, objectives and strategies for future land use development. The Unified Land Plan does not directly regulate land use, but sets forth policies and procedures for the update and development of land use regulations. The Concord LUP is a tool to guide growth in the following ways:

- The LUP guides the City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission when considering rezoning petitions, subdivision proposals and other new developments, revisions to the UDO, annexations and site plans by providing a general framework of where and what type of land use and development should occur.
- The LUP provides guidance to City Officials as they plan for expansion or upgrades of infrastructure.

- The LUP provides guidance in the future public investment for services such as fire, police, and recreation.
- The LUP provides private citizens and the development community with information on future land use needed to make investment decisions.
- The LUP provides guidance in the revision and updating of existing land use regulations and the development of new ordinances, policies and studies.
- The LUP supports goals and objectives related to land use that are provided by documents such as “Envision Cabarrus,” the “Livable Community Blueprint for Cabarrus County,” the “Water and Wastewater System Master Plan,” the “Transit Implementation Plan,” and the “Classic Concord Downtown Master Plan.”

All land areas within the City boundaries are included in the Plan, as well as some areas outside of the City that may be annexed within the next 10 years and areas that are not likely to be annexed but will be influenced by growth in the city. The land use plan boundary constitutes Concord’s current service area boundary recently negotiated with Cabarrus County and its municipalities. Since Concord has no jurisdiction over areas outside of the City limits, City officials must work with Cabarrus County and nearby municipalities to coordinate future land use plans for these areas.

D. Plan Development Process

City of Concord professional planning staff prepared the 2004 Land Use Plan, with assistance from Arnett Muldrow Associates. The 2006 update was prepared by the planning staff. Legal authority for the development of the LUP is provided by *Article 19, Chapter 160-A383* of the North Carolina Statutes.

The Concord LUP represents a significant investment in time and resources by the residents, agencies, organizations, and businesses of the City of Concord. The citizens of Concord were extensively involved in the development of the LUP. Public participation was encouraged and facilitated through multiple forums, including public meetings, and one-on-one stakeholder interviews with area agencies, service providers, and private sector representatives.

A series of six initial public meetings was held in September and October of 2002 at accessible locations throughout the City to introduce the concept of the Land Use Plan and solicit comments and opinions on matters relating to the Plan. An extensive notification process characterized the public meeting process. The meetings were advertised in the local newspaper, *The Independent Tribune*, and in the regional newspaper, *The Charlotte Observer*. Public announcements were made via two local radio stations, WBT 1110 and WEGO, and on five local and regional television channels. An electronic questionnaire was also posted on the City web

site to encourage individuals who were not able to attend the public meetings to provide input on land use. Appendix A contains a copy of the questionnaire. Additionally, more than 5,000 printed flyers were distributed through area churches, schools, recreation facilities, childcare centers, and businesses (Table I-2). Approximately 35,000 meeting notices were included in utility bills from the City of Concord.

**Table I-2
Distribution of Printed Meeting Notices**

Central United Methodist Church	Cabarrus County School Board (all schools)
Crossroads United Methodist Church	Post Office/McCachern
First Assembly Church	Cabarrus County Chamber of Commerce
First Baptist Church of Concord	Alfred M. Brown Operations Center
First Foursquare Church	Cannon School
First Presbyterian Church	McGill Child Development Center
Mt Olivet United Methodist Church	Classical Covenant School
New Life Fellowship Church	The Sports Center
St James Lutheran Church	American Red Cross
West Cabarrus Church	Barber Scotia College
Young Memorial Baptist Church	Cabarrus Country Club
St. James Catholic Church	Philip Morris
Forest Hill United Methodist Church	Envision Cabarrus Newsletter
Trinity Reformed United Church of Christ	Downtown Businesses
Concord Regional Airport	Fire Stations
Cabarrus County Parks & Recreation	Neighborhood Associations

In addition, interviews were conducted with numerous local and regional stakeholders to identify current issues, trends, and potential strategies to address community concerns and issues. Stakeholders included representatives from public agencies, county and municipal governments, the airport, major employers, school districts, faith-based organizations, local businesses and private developers.

A second round of three informational meetings was held on January 27th and 28th 2003 at Municipal Building and Fire Station #8. These meetings were advertised as mentioned above for the initial meetings. While the first round of meetings presented basic land use concepts and sought public input on the general direction of Concord's future land use, the second round presented the draft land use plan map, described the proposed types of land uses, and garnered additional public input based on more specific information.

Additionally, in April of 2003 three meetings were held with the residents of Cabarrus County who were outside the city limits but within the study area to present the City's draft Unified Land Plan. How land is used outside the City limits has a direct impact on how land is used within the City limits and vice versa; therefore, it is very important to the City to keep

neighboring property owners informed of our plans. Presentations were also given to adjacent municipalities regarding the proposed plan.

In addition to the extensive public participation process, the approval and adoption process for the Concord LUP consisted of four additional steps including an Open House for the public, a joint public information session with the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council, public hearings before the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council, and finally adoption of the Land Use Plan by the City Council.

Open House - City of Concord staff planners held an Open House for the public to view the final draft of the Land Use Plan and associated maps.

Joint Public Information Meeting – Once the Plan draft was finalized, the Concord Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council Members held a final public education and information meeting to further discuss the proposed LUP with members of the public. The information gathered at the public meeting was be incorporated into the draft LUP, and the Planning and Zoning Commission scheduled a formal public hearing.

Public Hearing – Before recommending the Plan to Council, the Planning and Zoning Commission held public hearing to solicit final comments, concerns and recommendations. The Commission gave advance notice of the hearing. The Commission considered the comments from the hearing and incorporated changes to the Plan draft as appropriate. The Commission followed with a recommendation for approval of the proposed Plan to City Council and forwarded the Plan to Council for review. In its recommendation to Council, the Commission referred to the draft LUP and accompanying maps.

Adoption - The Concord City Council was tasked with the final review of the LUP and subsequently took action by adopting.

The Concord Land Use Plan is a guide for public decision-making through 2012. However, a land use plan is most effective when there is an on-going commitment to review and update the plan on a regular basis to ensure relevance and address emerging conditions and trends within the City. This Plan should also be assessed annually by the City to see how well it is meeting implementation strategies. The Concord LUP will undergo a review and re-evaluation by the Planning and Zoning Commission a minimum of every two years. Such is the case in 2006, when several small areas plans and rezoning petitions were approved, necessitating minor changes to Plan. A comprehensive review of the LUP will also be conducted along with a major update and amendment of the Unified Land Plan at five-year intervals.

As the City of Concord grows and evolves, these periodic reviews are expected to identify new development challenges, changes in market opportunities and pressures, and other community needs and preferences that may require new planning strategies. When such changes warrant substantial amendments or revisions to the LUP, the formal procedure for drafting,

recommending and adopting changes will be followed to include extensive public involvement, formal public hearings, Planning and Zoning Commission review and recommendation, and formal adoption by the City Council. Following each revision, the City will revise municipal ordinances, programs, operations and procedures to reflect consistency with the current LUP goals and objectives.

E. Relationship to Existing Area Plans

The Land Use Plan provides a suggested future development pattern for the City of Concord and immediate areas adjacent to the city limits. In addition to the overall Land Use Plan, there are several adopted district and corridor plans for smaller geographic areas. These areas contain more restrictive land use and development criteria in strategic areas of the City. The Land Use Plan, while broader and more generalized in scope, does not replace these existing individual plans, but rather works in concert with them. The Land use Plan may also create the need for revisions to some existing plans. Chapter V discusses other adopted plans in greater detail.

F. Plan Organization and User's Guide

The Concord Land Use Plan is intended to be an easy to use reference, resource and policy document. The LUP is organized into five major chapters.

- ***Chapter I – Introduction and Overview*** outlines the planning process used to develop Concord's first land use plan.
- ***Chapter II – Issues and Trends*** includes input and key issues identified during several public meetings and stakeholder interviews. Chapter II also provides a summary of the existing and emerging issues identified in those meetings.
- ***Chapter III – Goals, Objectives and Policies for Future Land Use*** provides the vision, goals and objectives and implementation strategies for future development within the City. This Chapter also provides a process for evaluation of the progress and success of the Plan implementation.
- ***Chapter IV – Future Development Plan*** provides the future land use plan for the City, with a detailed description of the Future Land Use map and land use category definitions.
- ***Chapter V – Planning Elements*** provides background data and information and data analysis in the areas of population, housing, the economy, community facilities and public infrastructure, transportation, environmental and natural resources, and cultural and historic resources. The Chapter also includes a review of the City's existing plans and regulations and an inventory of existing land use both within the Concord city limits and in surrounding growth areas.

- **Chapter VI - Selected Planning References and Resources** provides Source information for much of the data and material used to developed the Land Use Plan.

- **Chapter VII - Appendices**
 - A. LUP Questionnaire
 - B. Major Concerns from Public Meetings
 - A. Public Meeting Schedule
 - B. Population Data by Census Block Group
 - C. Employment by Industry and Occupation
 - D. Park Area Requirements