

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant to a goal of the Concord City Council, staff planners worked with citizens and consultants to prepare a Land Use Plan. The Plan will provide the framework for land use and development within the City over approximately the next ten years. Based on extensive public input, the Land Use Plan consists of a land use map and a supportive text document that contains data and specific goals, policies, and recommendations for land use and development in the City and surrounding growth areas. The map illustrates, in a generalized manner, a suggested land use pattern for all areas within the City and surrounding growth areas.

Land Use Plan Study Area

The area studied includes land within the City's current boundaries, as well as some areas outside the City limits, which may be annexed at some time in the future. Work on this plan has been coordinated with the planning staff of the neighboring governments of Cabarrus County, Kannapolis and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, reinforcing the City's interest in coordinated regional planning.

Implementation

The Plan, as prepared, represents careful thought, consideration and planning for the future use of land within the City. Ideas portrayed are those of citizens, developers, property owners, and the professional staff of the City. The basic concept is twofold. It plans for and encourages development at urban densities in areas where urban services can be provided efficiently and economically. Secondly, it limits development in areas where urban services are not planned over the next decade.

As adopted, the Land Use Plan will be 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 Land Use Plan is very different from a regulatory document such as the Code of Ordinances. Although the Code and the Land Use Plan are both officially adopted by Concord City Council, only the Code sets forth regulations that are legally binding. The Land Use Plan will be an official statement by the City of its vision, intentions, goals, objectives and strategies for future land use development.

The Land Use Plan is a tool to guide growth in the following ways:

- ❑ The Plan will guide consideration by the City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission for rezoning requests, subdivision and other new developments, revisions to the Code of Ordinances, annexations and site plans.
- ❑ The Land Use Plan will provide guidance to City Officials as they plan for the expansion or upgrading of infrastructure.

- ❑ The Land Use Plan will provide guidance in the future public investment of services such as fire, police, and recreation.
- ❑ The Land Use Plan will provide private citizens and the development community with information on future land use needed to make investment decisions.
- ❑ The Land Use Plan will provide guidance in the revising and updating of existing land use regulations and the development of new ordinances, policies and studies.
- ❑ The Land Use Plan will also foster the goals and objectives related to land use that are provided by other locally important and respected 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.”

Amendments to the Land Use Plan

The City of Concord Land Use Plan is a long-term, general guide for a desired future development pattern and is not an inflexible or rigid document unresponsive to different land use development scenarios that may arise over the next 10 years. During the preparation of a Land Use Plan there was no way to predict all the changes that may occur in Concord. In recognition of the fact that positive changes may occur, the Land Use Plan accommodates flexibility while emphasizing the importance of a reliable mechanism for evaluating unique development proposals.

The Land Use Plan can be amended based upon forecasts, analyses, changes in goals and/or changes in policies that affect how land will be used, as well as the experience of implementation of the Land Use Plan itself. Any amendment request shall be submitted in application form to the City and referred to the Planning and Zoning Commission for consideration. The Commission shall evaluate the consistency of the request against the Goals and Objectives of the adopted Land Use Plan and determine if an amendment to the Plan is warranted. Their recommendation on the proposed amendment will then be forwarded to City Council for final consideration.

The Land Use Plan and Transportation Element

Within major transportation corridors that are adequately served by utilities, the infrastructure may permit focused development at higher densities, for example, near transit stops. Between major corridors, planned densities may be lower. What is sought is a healthy balance between resources and development. Public facilities have to adequately support the use of land and the density of development so that growth can be sustainable.

The Land Use Plan and Related Plans

The Land Use Plan provides a suggested future land development pattern in generalized format for the entire geography of Concord. In addition to this Plan, there are several other adopted plans, which are more specific and relate to a smaller geographic area. Some of these plans are more detailed and specific in nature. No one plan should be used by itself, but rather both should be used together for making decisions about future development proposals.

The Land Use Plan and Quality of Life

The Plan is based on an overall goal of maintaining and fostering a high quality of life in Concord. The mechanisms and means for attaining this goal will be incorporated into the chapters of the Plan. The map features land use designations that are familiar to people, such as greenways, open space, commercial and industrial areas; and it also includes designations that will be new to most people, including mixed-use districts and village centers.

Citizen Input on Key Land Use Issues

Citizens of Concord and its surrounding growth areas defined the key land use issues through numerous public participation sessions. Their involvement was a key element in developing the Plan. Planning staff held a series of six initial public meetings in September and October of 2002 at various locations throughout the City. The purpose was to introduce the concept of the Land Use Plan and solicit citizen comments and opinions on matters relating to preparation of the Plan. The meetings were advertised in local and regional newspapers and on local television and radio stations. More than 5,000 printed flyers were distributed through area churches, schools, recreation facilities, childcare centers, and businesses. Approximately 35,000 meeting notices were included in utility bills from the City of Concord. In addition, staff conducted one-on-one interviews with numerous local and regional stakeholders and various individual property owners to identify current trends and problems, and to discuss potential strategies to address issues, which are important to the community.

The following are the issues citizens identified.

- ❑ 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, recreation, entertainment and employment options
- ❑ Preservation of the unique character of the City
- ❑ Ensure compatibility with 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

A second round of three additional ~~more~~ informational meetings was held in January, 2003. As before, these meetings were ~~also~~ extensively advertised. A draft Future Land Use Map, which described the proposed types of land use and focused on how the City can address the issues previously identified by the public, was presented at these meetings.

In April, 2003, three meetings were held with residents of Cabarrus County who own property outside the City limits, but within the study area. Again, the purpose was to present the City's draft Land Use Plan. The primary concerns expressed by residents on the eastern side of the study area were their desire not to be annexed and ensuring that residential densities remain rural in nature. The predominant comments from western area property owners expressed opposition to annexation, and proposed pursuing a balance to allow development, but keep densities as low as possible.

Presentations were also given to the Cabarrus County, Harrisburg and Kannapolis Planning Boards regarding the proposed Land Use Plan for the purpose of keeping adjoining communities informed of the project since common borders are shared. The City's efforts were applauded by each of those boards.

Planning staff hosted an Open House in March of 2004 for the public to view the final draft of the Land Use Plan, where Staff received additional public comments. A joint City Council and Planning & Zoning Commission workshop was held in April of 2004, which allowed these boards to review the draft Land use Plan. At their May 18, 2004 meeting, the Planning & Zoning Commission unanimously endorsed the Land Use Plan and recommended it for approval by City Council. On June 8, 2004 the Land Use Plan was adopted by the City Council.

Plan Update

Subsequent to the adoption of the 2004 Land Use Plan, the City developed two small area plans and participated with other jurisdictions on two others. Since 2004, several zoning map amendments were also made, which along with the small area plans, created some inconsistency with underlying land use patterns and these conditions created the need to update the plan. Additional language was also added to Chapter IV, Future Development Plan, which helps provide City staff and the Planning and Zoning Commission with more information to help evaluate zoning map amendments and development proposals.

Organization of the Land Use Plan

The City of Concord Land Use Plan is intended to be an easy to use reference, resource and policy document. The Land Use Plan 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 the initial 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 Implementation Strategies 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, information, and 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 and in potential annexation 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