

xecutive Summary

The Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

Since 1980 every Virginia locality has been required by State law to have a Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide growth and development over a 20-year time period by providing the long-range vision, goals, and strategies of the community. James City County's plan, *Historic Past, Sustainable Future*, serves as a guide to landowners, developers, businesses, citizens, and County officials about future land use decisions. By considering the types and locations of development and services needed or desired for a 20-year time period, decision makers are better able to evaluate individual proposals in the context of long-term goals.

Snapshot: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Today

James City County first adopted its Comprehensive Plan in 1975, which established the foundation for managing growth in the County. Since that time the population has increased over 160%, from approximately 20,000 persons to a current population of 63,135, with growth rates between 3% and 4% in recent years. In January 2008, the County was ranked as the eighth fastest growing locality in Virginia by State demographers. Increases in residential and commercial development since the 2003 Comprehensive Plan are evident in construction projects throughout the County. Nearly 1,500 residential units have been approved through rezoning cases (including the Villages at Whitehall, Weatherly at Whitehall, and Michelle Point in the northern part of the County; Liberty Crossing, Jennings Way, Windmill Meadows, and Burlington Woods in the central part of the County; and Governor's Grove, Villas at Five Forks, Mason Park, and Pocahontas Square in the southern part of the County). New Town (including Discovery Office Park and Settler's Market) also has provided commercial development, along with Prime Outlets expansions and new additions to James River Commerce Park (Volvo Rents and Jeanne

Reed), GreenMount Industrial Park (Haynes Furniture Company and Caterpillar), and Stonehouse Industrial Park (Citizens & Farmers Bank and an expansion to AVID Medical). To accommodate the growing population, the County has added an eighth elementary school (with a ninth elementary and a fourth middle school under construction now), a third high school, and a fifth fire station since the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, *Vision for Our Future*.

Quality jobs, quality housing, and quality amenities both contribute to growth and result from it. All attract new residents and residents expect quality services. Overall, the results of both the 2007 Virginia Tech Citizen Survey and the 2007 National Research Center Citizen Survey, which were statistically representative surveys of 1,079 total households, indicate that 91% of respondents rate the County as a "good" or "excellent" place to live and over 77% gave similar ratings to services provided by the County. Both of these results are above those received by similar localities across the nation. Survey respondents gave particularly high marks on questions dealing with public safety, fire, and EMS (emergency medical services); cleanliness of the County; health services; quality of recreation facilities; cultural and educational opportunities; and schools and library services compared to responses given in surveys of similar national localities. Since the 2003 Comprehensive Plan was adopted, the County has seen the addition of the Thomas Nelson Community College Historic Triangle Campus at Warhill, along with greatly expanded facilities at Warhill District Sports Complex, a new animal shelter, the completion of the Virginia Capital Trail through the County, a new dog park at Waller Mill Park, a new skate park, a new community building (Legacy Hall in New Town), and the relocation and rehabilitation of the Norge Train Depot. A new Police Department headquarters building is also planned for a 2011 opening. All of these are responses to higher demands for facilities and contribute to keeping James City County an attractive place to live, work, and play.

Vision of Where We Are Headed

Citizen Commentary

Feedback during the Comprehensive Plan update also indicates some areas of concern in relation to growth control, including both the **impacts of growth** and the **quality of growth**. The term "growth control"

encompasses varying policies and tools to address the timing, character, and location of development so that growth occurs in an orderly and efficient manner. It answers the questions of where, how, and when growth should occur.

With respect to the **impacts of growth**, citizens are generally concerned about the fast pace of population growth and the effects that growth can have on traffic, water availability, open space, housing, the environment, public safety, the economy, and overall quality of life within the County. Development, in this case, is separated into two types, and citizens had different concerns tied to each. While citizens expressed that the pace of residential development was too fast, some simultaneously recognized the need for some types of housing, including affordable/workforce houses. Sentiments were more mixed in regard to commercial and industrial development. Participants noted an excess of retail while calling for the redevelopment of existing vacant shopping centers and creation of better-paying full-time jobs. A new aspect to growth concerns during this update is that many citizens expressed the need to assess impacts of preceding and approved-but-not-yet-built development before approving new development. These comments are reinforced by the results of the 2007 Virginia Tech Citizen Survey, which indicated that 83% of respondents “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that development of the land in the County is happening too quickly. This is a 5% increase over 2001 Virginia Tech Citizen Survey respondents.

The **quality of growth** is another area of concern that is directly linked to growth control. These comments deal with balancing the small town rural character of the County with the need to grow and broaden the economic base. Throughout public input meetings, participants also identified the importance of retaining community character in order to make the area more attractive to residents and businesses. Less than half of the citizens surveyed by the 2007 National Research Center Citizen Survey felt the County was doing a “good” or “excellent” job of preserving open space, farmlands, and greenbelts. During Community Conversations, over half felt that development in the County looked the same with no sense of place.

It is evident by assessing citizen commentary that residents expect the County to continue to practice

growth control, incorporating new tools as they are authorized by Virginia law, while still providing adequate services to meet growing demands. From these collective comments, an important question becomes how James City County can retain and build on what citizens like about the County and address the concerns which were raised about growth. The 2009 Comprehensive Plan update has taken on this question in a number of ways. One way is by examining the context within which growth control choices will be made, that is, what our possible future community might look like in terms of population size. A second way is by discussing the types of growth control strategies that are available and formulating recommendations on how they should be used in the County.

Population Projections

In order to explore what our community may look like in the future, two sections of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan include population projections. The Demographics section includes County-wide population projections to 2030 generated by the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) and Planning Division staff. Based on the current population estimate referenced above and using methods described further in the Demographics section, staff projects that the population of the County will reach 109,048 by 2030. This population increase will result in the need for expanded or additional facilities and services.

In comparison, the Transportation section includes population projections which were developed in order to help determine needed transportation improvements and were based on analysis of actual land uses and land availability rather than a projection of historical trends. URS Consultants prepared population projections for 2035 and build-out,¹ which were based on an analysis of the amount of undeveloped land and the applicable zoning or Comprehensive Plan designation recommended residential densities or commercial intensities. The consultant’s 2035 population projection, which is the most comparable to the projections in the Demographics section, was 117,841. The populations projected by the consultant

¹ Build-out is defined as full development of the County based on a certain set of assumptions, such as available land, zoning, land use designation, and current policies.

for build-out ranged from 118,482, according to the County's existing zoning map and ordinance, with build-out occurring in 2045, to 187,228, according to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan's land use designations (as voted on by the Steering Committee and assuming parcels were rezoned to align with the land use designation) plus the more intensely developed version of the newly designated Hill Pleasant Farm Economic Opportunity area.² Build-out in the latter scenario was projected to occur in 2089. Neither scenario accounted for the implications of changes in policies or ordinances regarding density.

Creating projections is an important planning tool, but it is important to realize that any given projection may or may not be realized based upon the validity of the assumptions and methodology, the impacts of local policy and regulatory decisions made along the way, consequences of changes to State and County codes, and market conditions. In all cases, projections are a best guess of what the County's population *might be* at any point in time, with decreasing accuracy in the outer years.

Growth Control Strategies

Past and Present

Recognizing that our community has the possibility of significant amounts of additional growth, it is important to know what growth control tools are (and are not) available, and then evaluate which of the available tools would best achieve the community's goals and vision. The Land Use section of the Comprehensive Plan discusses which growth control tools exist in Virginia, and notes that the County has traditionally been a leader in using the available tools. That section also notes that measures such as population and building caps are not currently supported under Virginia law. It is important to note that growth control tools deal not only with how much development occurs, but also about ways that communities can influence where new development is located; when new development occurs (timing); whether a particular new development is capable of being supported by water supply, public facilities and services, environmental resources, and the transportation system; and how development fits with

² More information about the assumptions and methodology for each build-out scenario are available from the Planning Division in the *Transportation Technical Report*.

existing community character. Primarily, the available tools provide information and guidelines to County leaders to help them make decisions on development proposals. The following are some of the tools that the County currently uses to manage growth:

Location of Growth

- The **Primary Service Area (PSA)** is where public water and sewer utilities exist or are expected to exist and serves as a boundary within which most growth is targeted to occur.
- **Land use designations and the Comprehensive Plan's Land Use Map** denote what are seen to be the most appropriate future uses and can indicate development intensity for a specific area or parcel. Higher intensity land use designations that allow higher densities and can have more impacts on roadways and water are clustered within the PSA, while lower intensity designations exist outside the PSA.
- The **Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Ordinance** more specifically define the type of development (use and density) currently allowed on a parcel and outline specific design and development guidelines (setbacks, lot size) for these uses. The ordinances will be updated to include revised standards and implement many actions identified in the Comprehensive Plan.

Timing and Impacts of Growth

- **Legislative cases** include rezonings and special use permits (SUPs) and require consideration by the Planning Commission and approval by the Board of Supervisors. These bodies have the discretion to decide whether the proposed development is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan land use designation and whether it offers sufficient public benefit to the County.
- **Impact studies** are submitted for legislative cases and assess the impacts a proposed development is anticipated to have on traffic, schools, the environment, cultural resources, and the County's tax base and employment.
- **Proffers** are often offered by developers for legislative cases and may include cash contributions for water, Fire/EMS, libraries, parks and recreation, roads, and schools to offset the impacts of the development.
- **Adequate public facilities** tests help determine whether there is enough capacity in public facilities

to handle the additional demands generated by a new development. The County currently has such a policy to determine impacts to public schools.

- **Watershed planning, Community Character Corridors (CCCs), and Community Character Areas (CCAs)** are tools used during all case reviews to protect the quality of sensitive streams and wetlands, the appearance of certain designated roads, and sense of place in specific areas throughout the County.

Moving Forward

All of the above growth management strategies will continue to be implemented, but will be strengthened, expanded, and refined through goals, strategies, and actions (GSAs) in *Historic Past, Sustainable Future*. The primary location of proposed growth control strategies is in the Land Use section, but GSAs that influence growth within the County are included in every topical area. The following are a few of the new ideas included in *Historic Past, Sustainable Future* to control the timing, impacts, and quality of growth (more detail can be found in the sections referenced at the end of each bullet point):

- Cumulative impact analyses (Land Use and Transportation)
- Additional adequate public facilities policies (Land Use and Public Facilities)
- Lease or transfer of development rights (Land Use)
- Redevelopment and adaptive reuse (Land Use and Economic Development)
- Regional coordination (Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Economic Development)
- Mixed commercial and residential uses (Housing, Economic Development, and Land Use, Transportation)
- Community Character Area designations, such as Five Forks (Community Character and Land Use Map)
- Consideration of a Community Character Overlay District (Community Character)
- Preservation of existing vegetation (Community Character)
- Balance growth with the provision of public facilities (Public Facilities, Parks and Recreation, and Land Use)
- Non-residential uses and agriculture in Rural Lands (Land Use and Economic Development)
- Rural Lands densities, lot sizes, and development patterns (Land Use)

- Zoning Ordinance amendments to make all districts more consistent with land use designation descriptions and standards (Land Use)
- Population level and growth (Land Use)

Responses to Other Significant Citizen Concerns

Six other critical areas that citizens talked about most often as areas of the Comprehensive Plan that needed to be strengthened were also identified as hot topics. Some aspects of these topics, such as interconnectivity and energy efficiency, are new to this update, but many are concerns that have been on citizens' minds since earlier Comprehensive Plan updates and have become heightened given recent development trends.

- **Housing.** *Affordable housing options, particularly for workforce, young professionals, and the elderly, were the focus of most housing-related citizen comments.*
 - Affordable dwelling unit policy (Housing)
 - Incentives for mixed-cost or affordable/work force housing (Housing)
 - Housing trust fund (Housing)
 - Affordable senior care from independent living to Continuing Care Retirement Centers (Population Needs)
- **Economic Development.** *Economic development comments included looking for ways to diversify the economic tax base to entice businesses offering higher-paying full-time employment, exploring redevelopment opportunities, and making the development process more predictable.*
 - Economic Opportunity land use designation (Land Use and Land Use Map)
 - Commercial land inventory (Land Use)
 - Traditional and emerging economic opportunities, including agri-business and eco-tourism, in the Rural Lands (Economic Development)
 - Master planning for interstate interchanges (Economic Development and Land Use)
 - Business Climate Task Force recommendations (Economic Development)
- **Transportation.** *Citizen comments related to transportation included addressing traffic congestion using traffic calming, promoting neighborhood connectivity, and developing interconnected bike and pedestrian facilities.*
 - Public road interconnections (Transportation)
 - Mitigate congestion by developing a distributed grid or adding travel lanes in a context sensitive

- manner (Transportation)
- Complete streets (Transportation)
- Integrated residential and commercial development (Land Use, Housing, Economic Development)
- Bikeway design standards and ordinance amendments to incorporate these standards (Parks and Recreation)
- Rural roadway character (Community Character)
- **Water.** *Public comments primarily focused on the need to ensure the availability of drinking water for current and future populations and to provide public access to clean water for swimming, boating, and passive enjoyment.*
 - Water conservation, rebate programs, irrigation restrictions, education, and higher water rates for greater usage (Public Facilities)
 - Reuse of gray water and reclamation of wastewater (Public Facilities)
 - Watershed management (Environment)
 - Blueways planning (Parks and Recreation)
- **Environment.** *Environmental comments focused on preserving open space, farm lands, and trees; minimizing flooding problems; protecting wetlands and environmentally sensitive lands; and pursuing green building practices in public and private construction projects.*
 - Green infrastructure plan (Environment and Parks and Recreation)
 - Early submission of environmental inventories (Environment)
 - LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), EarthCraft, and green building incentives (Public Facilities, Housing, Parks and Recreation)
- **Population Needs.** *Population needs comments included the need to focus on the special needs of the growing senior population, including health care, housing, transportation, and recreation. Comments pertaining to the youth population included similar topics, particularly concerns with the availability of safe areas to congregate.*
 - Universal design (Housing)
 - Public transportation and mobile service stops (Transportation and Population Needs)
 - Financial assistance programs for park programs and facilities (Population Needs and Parks and Recreation)
 - Adequate and safe facilities for seniors and youth (Population Needs)

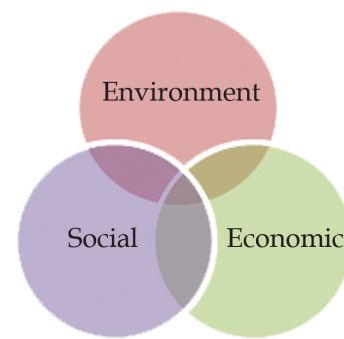
respond to all these concerns, that balancing the related, yet sometimes competing, needs for the population, economic development, public facilities, parks and recreation, environment, housing, transportation, community character, and land use is critical to effective growth control and is the overall approach of *Historic Past, Sustainable Future*.

Vision and Sustainability

Central to guiding the Comprehensive Plan update process was the development of an overall vision for the County. A resounding message heard through various studies and forums was that James City County is a special place to live, work, and visit. County citizens have a well-defined vision to help retain these unique community qualities and, as part of the 2003 Comprehensive Plan update, a group of citizens drafted the first Vision Statement for the plan. This served as the basis of the Vision Statement found on page one of *Historic Past, Sustainable Future*, which can be summarized as follows:

We will sustain the quality of life and economic vitality in James City County while preserving our special natural and cultural heritage. We will accomplish this by promoting smart and sustainable growth principles, adopting sustainable strategies, providing a variety of housing options, supporting economic development, and promoting diverse recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities for all ages.

Sustainability can be defined as the ability to meet present needs without compromising those of future generations, primarily in terms of the County's economic, social, and environmental well-being. There are other definitions, of course, but the concept of sustainability revolves around the symbiotic relationship between these three arenas.



It is clear by looking at the strategies developed to

County staff, along with elected and appointed officials, has been monitoring growth in the County for decades and has worked diligently to balance new economic activity with a high quality of life for all residents. However, in the three years leading up to the start of the Comprehensive Plan update, the County experienced increased development and construction activity, with Certificates of Occupancy jumping from an average of 717 a year from 1999-2004 to an average of just over 1,000 per year from 2005-2007. The years 2006 and 2007 also saw the biggest increase in business licenses issued by the County. As the Comprehensive Plan update process began, the notion of preserving the County's assets and resources for future generations while providing for the needs of current residents became a guiding principle. This concept was defined as "sustainability" and contributed to the vision and theme of *Historic Past, Sustainable Future* for the 2009 Comprehensive Plan. Each of the sections in the document discusses an important aspect of community life, highlights the connection between that section and the sustainability theme in a "Community Sustainability Spotlight," and concludes with the GSAs for that section. Below is an excerpt from the Community Sustainability Spotlight and the goal for each section of the Comprehensive Plan:

- **Population Needs:** Sustainability of our population means meeting the needs of all of our citizens, especially youth and seniors, while creating a safe and healthy environment in order to provide the framework for their future well-being. The County's goal is to ensure that all citizens, especially youth and seniors, have safe, affordable, and convenient access to programs, services, and activities.
- **Economic Development:** Economic sustainability is the creation of an adaptive, resilient, diverse, and vibrant economy that provides high quality jobs and stability for County residents. The County's goal is to build a diverse, balanced local economy that supports basic needs of all segments of the community and contributes positively to the quality of life.
- **Housing:** The role of housing in a sustainable community is to create a mix of types and costs of quality housing that result in well-connected communities with transportation and communication that effectively and efficiently link people to jobs, health providers, amenities, and public facilities. The County's goal is to achieve high quality in design and construction of all residential development and neighborhood design, and provide a wide range of

choice in housing type, density, price range, and accessibility.

- **Environment:** Environmental sustainability is the ability to maintain the qualities that preserve life by maintaining ecological processes, functions, biodiversity, and productivity into the future. The County's goal is to continue to maintain and improve the high level of environmental quality in James City County and protect and conserve sensitive lands and waterways for future generations.
- **Community Character:** Community Character sustainability is embedded in the establishment of Community Character Corridors and Areas and the preservation of open space, scenic, cultural, natural, and historic qualities. The County's goal is to acknowledge the responsibility to be good stewards of the land by preserving and enhancing the scenic, cultural, rural, farm, forestal, natural, and historic qualities that are essential to the County's rural and small town character, economic vitality, and overall quality of life.
- **Parks and Recreation:** A sustainable community provides generous access to parks and safe and healthy playgrounds and recreation facilities for its residents while providing opportunities for social connectivity. The County's goal is to provide a range of recreational facilities and activities that are affordable, accessible, appropriate, and adequate in number, size, type, and location to accommodate the needs of all County residents to promote personal growth, social development, and healthy lifestyles.
- **Public Facilities:** Sustainable practices apply to the location, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and renovation of County facilities through maximizing efficiencies, minimizing the use of non-renewable energy sources, maintaining a high degree of indoor air quality, recycling waste, conserving water, utilizing recyclable and reusable products, and applying green building practices. The County's goal is to commit to and provide a high level and quality of public facilities and services.
- **Transportation:** A sustainable transportation system provides for the efficient movement of goods and people and provides a well-connected roadway system, sidewalks, bikeways, multi-use paths, and transit. The County's goal is to provide citizens, businesses, and visitors with an efficient, safe, and attractive multimodal transportation system that reinforces or is consistent with the goals and land use patterns of the Comprehensive Plan.



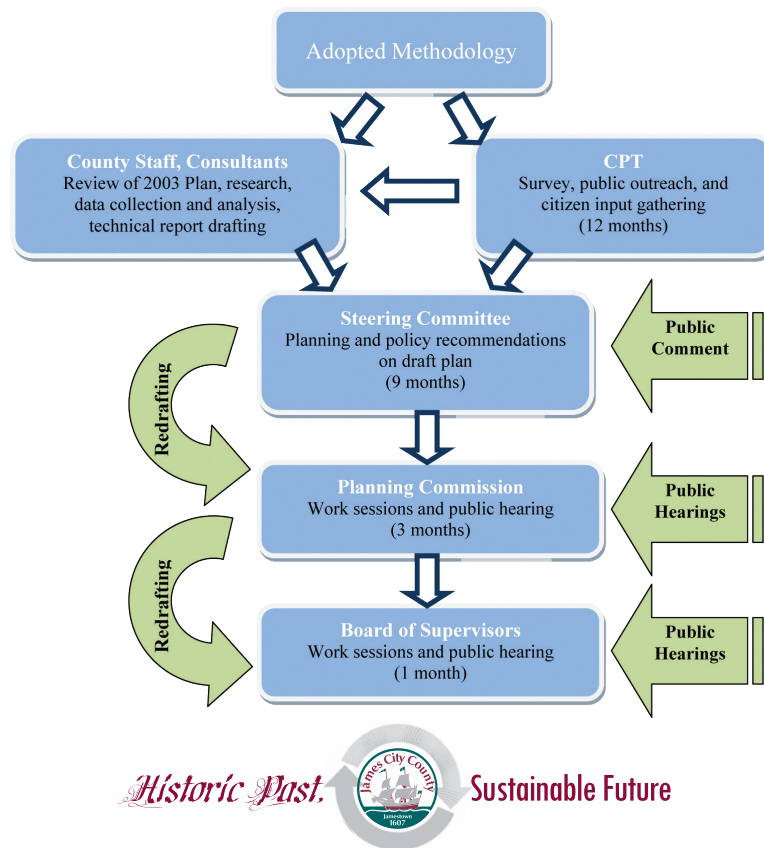
- Land Use:** Sustainability in land use requires planning practices that will preserve natural resources, plan for adequate transportation and housing infrastructure, create a sense of place and community, and maintain an economic base that remains vibrant under a variety of conditions. The County’s goal is to achieve a pattern of land use and development that reinforces and improves the quality of life for citizens and assists in achieving the goals of the Comprehensive Plan in Population Needs, Economic Development, Housing, Environment, Community Character, Parks and Recreation, Public Facilities, and Transportation.

Tying each section of the Comprehensive Plan to the sustainability theme also helps illustrate how the various sections of the plan are connected to each other. It is important to remember these interconnections as priorities are determined for the County for the next 20 years.

Process, Implementation, and Evaluation of the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is James City County’s master plan for guiding the physical development of our community. It is intended to be a long-range document, with goals and visions for a 20-year time period or beyond. Long-term visions can only be realized, however, by aligning individual decisions with that vision. Only by taking interim steps can the desired outcome be achieved. To this end, State law requires localities to review their comprehensive plans every five years. To satisfy this requirement, the locality merely has to reaffirm the information contained in the plan. The tradition in James City County has been to update the Comprehensive Plan every five years, using the process discussed on pages 3-7 of *Historic Past, Sustainable Future* and shown in Illustration 1. This process was designed to be open, transparent, and participatory and results in

Illustration 1: James City County’s Comprehensive Plan Update Process



a compilation of tasks and priorities. The plan was reviewed by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors at 11 work sessions and two public hearings. The plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on November 24, 2009.

The Comprehensive Plan Implementation Schedule and Guide provide explanations of all County implementation tools and serve as a compilation of all GSAs from all sections of the Comprehensive Plan. The schedule and guide also establish performance measures for each action. While some of the actions are targeted for accomplishment in the short term, several others will be on-going or have a longer-term target date for completion. The strategies and actions contained in this Comprehensive Plan are intended, in some cases, to serve as the interim steps necessary for the County to achieve the stated vision and goals. In other cases, they serve as benchmarks against which to measure proposals that may come before County officials. In addition to the Comprehensive Plan, there are several other documents in place that help provide the County with direction, including the County budget and Strategic Management Plan (SMP), departmental master plans and strategic plans, Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), Zoning Ordinance, and Subdivision Ordinance. It should be noted that financial constraints or scarcity of human and other resources can delay or change the implementation of stated actions.

In order for the Comprehensive Plan to have value and remain useful through its planning horizon, it is important to monitor progress in achieving adopted GSAs to recognize those that have been completed, identify areas where additional resources are needed, and to re-assess for changing conditions. The Planning Commission will evaluate the progress of implementation efforts and prepare an annual report to the Board of Supervisors. The report will identify actions that have been completed and actions that should be considered for a change in priority. The evaluation process will not only measure progress and identify areas that need attention, but also serve as a catalyst to engage the community in dialogue about the future of James City County.