



The Village Project Perspective on the Orange County Comprehensive Plan Update

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Purpose of this Statement

The Orange County Comprehensive Plan helps guide growth and development within the County's planning jurisdiction. In October 2006, the County Commissioners approved the Planning Board's recommendations for updating the Comprehensive Plan. The Update is scheduled to be completed by August 2008 and is intended to be effective until 2030. Thus, the Comprehensive Plan Update is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for everyone to provide guidance to the County on how it should grow and change in the future.

Accordingly, The Village Project seeks to ensure that the Update produces sustainable, just, and equitable outcomes for the residents and businesses of Orange County. This guidance is intended for the Board of Commissioners, the Planning Board, the Project Management Team, and the public at large.

The Village Project believes that our natural, built, and social environs will be best served if the Update articulates affirmatively what we desire for the future of our community and how growth can occur in a way that produces sustainable patterns of human habitation.

County officials will refer to the updated Comprehensive Plan as they decide future policies. The Update will be divided into eight topics, or "Elements:" Land Use, Transportation, Energy and Economic Development, Housing, Natural and Cultural Systems, Services, Utilities and Community Facilities, Recreation and Parks, and the County Profile. Consequently, this statement follows that eight-topic format in this policy statement.

Preface

Over the past two decades, local planning decisions, government investments, and land use policies in Orange County have had some unfortunate, though unintended, consequences. An emphasis on restricting growth as the primary strategy to protect the natural environment has resulted in a lack of affordable housing, a disproportionately low commercial tax base, and the

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prevalence of low-density subdivisions. Ironically, since this development pattern relies almost exclusively on the automobile for transportation, it produces more air pollutants per capita and isolates those who lack access to reliable transportation.

Local planning decisions have also had global impacts. That human activity is the primary cause of global warming is no longer in dispute. Many resources on which our local economy and daily activities depend are rapidly diminishing. To sustain the quality of life we desire in Orange County, we must consider climate change and worldwide resource depletion, as well as local conditions, as we plan for our future.

This statement provides a framework for local planning decisions that can produce a model of sustainable human ecology in Orange County. By “human ecology” we mean the realm built and inhabited by human beings – where we live, work, educate, and entertain ourselves; the infrastructure that connects us; and the places where we produce our energy, food, goods, and services. This model will ensure that the needs of County residents and businesses are met without compromising the needs of other communities and future generations. It will also affirm and protect natural ecosystems and the other species with whom we share the planet.

The Village Project believes that to be sustainable, human ecology requires local planning, government action, and public-private investment strategies that all promote urban forms that are compact and walkable, whose uses are mixed horizontally and vertically, and whose densities support efficient, reliable, and convenient public transportation to local and regional destinations. Further, our human ecology must actively conserve agricultural lands, watersheds, forests, and critical habitats.

For Orange County to be sustainable, we must direct development to areas most suited for it and limit development in unsuitable areas. Sustainable urban forms will minimize incursion into “greenfields” and will incorporate linked, publicly accessible green space throughout. In addition, we favor a Comprehensive Plan that reduces energy demands with robust conservation strategies and maximizes local energy production with renewable resources. And because our current food supply depends heavily on imports from outside the County and North Carolina, we support an Update that seeks to increase local food production and processing as well as regional food procurement.

In short, The Village Project asks the Commissioners to ensure that the County becomes a model of sustainable ecological stewardship, social equity and economic prosperity, by using a deliberate and expeditious process that includes significant levels of participation from residents and stakeholder groups throughout the County. The Village Project believes that this model will be the best path to healthy land, air and water, social equity, affordable housing, economic vitality, and a balanced tax base.

For more information on the Comprehensive Plan Update process, visit the County’s web site at the following link: http://www.co.orange.nc.us/planning/compre_cpupdate.asp

The Village Project Principles

The Village Project supports Comprehensive Plan Elements that reflect the following principles:

1. LAND USE. Implement development patterns that produce ecologically sustainable urban form that reduces the impacts of human activity on local and planetary resources, habitats, and other species. These patterns must facilitate and support the needs of everyone, regardless of individual means, and implementation of these patterns must respect everyone's equity.

2. TRANSPORTATION. Support the most economical and energy efficient mobility options for the pursuit of daily human activity and movement of people and goods throughout the County and region. Ensure universal access for people with disabilities. Protect local and global air, water, and soil quality.

3. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. Create a sustainable local economy that ensures the economic well-being of everyone, regardless of means and capabilities, and that generates a greater proportion of the county's tax base. Achieve sustainable balances between energy use, increased economic growth, the needs of existing communities, and protection of natural resources.

4. HOUSING. Ensure that everyone has access to affordable, attractive, comfortable, healthy, energy-efficient housing accessible to places of work, education, recreation, and worship.

5. ENERGY; NATURAL AND CULTURAL SYSTEMS (ENVIRONMENT). Develop ecologically sustainable urban form that protects and enhances existing natural systems, habitats, and other species, be they local, regional, or global. Support and facilitate the use of local, renewable energy resources to house, clothe, and feed us and to supply our daily needs. Ensure that new development and redevelopment conserve energy and address historic, aesthetic, and cultural contexts.

6. SERVICES (UTILITIES) AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES. Locate and co-locate services and utilities in a way that promotes sustainable land-use patterns, transportation infrastructure and operations, and economic activities.

7. RECREATION AND PARKS. Provide public facilities of various scales for passive and active recreation that are economically and conveniently accessible to everyone.

8. COUNTY PROFILE. Develop and utilize comprehensive data in the Update process. Ensure that different Elements use the same data and interpret it consistently.

The Village Project Goals and Strategies

1. Land Use

Goals: Existing and future built environments are ecologically sustainable. They promote locally self-reliant economic development, engender social equity, and include housing that is affordable to people of all income levels.

Strategies:

- a. Determine the best places to accommodate future growth within the County's planning jurisdiction and direct growth to these "Growth Opportunity Areas." These areas should include existing urban and urbanizing areas, identified Economic Development Districts, areas along transit corridors, and new Rural Nodes where transit-oriented, mixed-use development is appropriate. Discourage new development outside of designated Growth Opportunity Areas.
- b. Zone these areas appropriately to make them attractive to the private investment necessary for economic success.
- c. Set residential densities in these areas to average 15 dwelling units per acre to support transit and affordable housing.
- d. Enact ordinances and administrative systems that encourage, reward, and expedite desirable projects.
- e. Create a Transfer of Development Rights program that allows owners of lands not located in Growth Opportunity Areas to sell their development rights to landowners in Growth Opportunity Areas.

2. Transportation

Goals: New development and redevelopment within the County are walkable, bikable, and transit-oriented. Local and regional destinations are accessible without use of automobiles.

Strategies:

- a. Support the use of rail, bus transit, bicycles, and walking as *primary* modes of transportation to local and regional destinations by requiring amenities and proper design for these modes in all new developments and publicly funded projects.
- b. Locate new Growth Opportunity Areas along transit corridors. Set density in Growth Opportunity Areas to average at least 15 dwelling units per acre, the minimum density necessary to support convenient, efficient, and reliable public transit.
- c. Work with local and regional stakeholders and NCDOT to ensure that all roadway investments in the County improve conditions for cyclists, pedestrians, and transit users.
- d. Reject the parking and trip generation standards in the Institute of Traffic Engineers' manuals, which produce excessive parking and automobile infrastructure. Implement Transportation Demand Management techniques that reduce parking needs by channeling trips to transit and non-motorized modes.
- e. Plan for transit that enables both local and regional connectivity. Coordinate with neighboring Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations to improve connectivity.
- f. Petition the NCDOT Rail Division to re-establish the proposed Hillsborough stop on the Railroad Corridor.

3. Economic Development

Goals: A sustainable local economy ensures the economic well-being of everyone, regardless of means and capabilities. A robust commercial sector that can provide a third or more of County revenue balances revenue sources and takes pressure off residential property

Strategies:

- a. Promote the growth of the commercial tax base by specifying opportunities for commercial and light industrial development within horizontally and vertically mixed-use districts, whether within or adjacent to Growth Opportunity Areas (including Economic Development Districts).
- b. Focus public investments and capital improvements in Growth Opportunity Areas, and coordinate such efforts with the local municipal governments.
- c. Accelerate development of model commercial projects in the Economic Development Districts.

4. Housing

Goals: Quality, affordable housing is a viable option available to everyone, regardless of income level, and is accessible by walking, biking, and public transportation to their places of work, shopping, services, education, recreation, and worship.

Strategies:

- a. In Growth Opportunity Areas increase the supply of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income households by requiring a percentage of affordable housing in new developments and redevelopments above a specified minimum size.
- b. Expedite the development approval process for projects that commit to providing additional affordable and workforce housing.
- c. Promote innovative approaches to construction that maintain quality but reduce the cost of constructing, maintaining, and owning residential units.

5. Energy; Natural and Cultural Systems (Environment)

Goals: Local renewable resources provide most of our energy needs. The County is a healthy ecosystem in which critical habitats have been identified and protected, no watershed is impaired or threatened, and other native species' populations are thriving. A prominent sense of history and aesthetics is found in the built environment. Diverse local sub-cultures are flourishing.

Strategies:

- a. Continue to proactively conserve productive agricultural lands, watersheds, forests, and other critical habitats.
- b. Set goals for carbon reduction, water conservation, and air quality. Coordinate carbon reduction goals with the work already being done by the UNC-Chapel Hill Carbon Reduction Group.
- c. Set goals for local generation of energy through use of renewable resources.

- d. Adopt a development ordinance that incorporates and provides strong incentives for energy and resource efficiency goals, including high-performance building standards.
- e. Set goals for production and processing of locally grown food.
- f. Expand programs to support the local agricultural economy, including local farmers markets and accessible shared-use facilities for production of value-added goods.
- g. Incorporate performance measures in the County's Development Ordinance that will help produce a built environment that addresses historic precedents and the desire for attractive, livable neighborhoods.

6. Services (Utilities) and Community Facilities

Goals: The County provides basic services in an ecologically sustainable fashion that supports and enhances compact patterns of development and a balanced, vibrant economy for everyone.

Strategies:

- a. Plan for appropriate public-sector infrastructure investments to accommodate projected growth and enable mixed-use development in the Growth Opportunity Areas.
- b. Identify and preserve sites for future schools within Growth Opportunity Areas.
- c. Advocate at the state level for reduced or flexible school site size requirements.
- d. Identify and promote development of on-site water supply and wastewater treatment technologies and infrastructure that will allow for dense, mixed-use growth at rural nodes and other Growth Opportunity Areas where such systems would be more appropriate than traditional water and wastewater treatment technologies. Create institutional and policy mechanisms that ensure proper maintenance of such systems.

7. Recreation and Parks

Goals: Throughout the County, everyone has access by walking, biking, and public transit to a wide variety of recreation opportunities, both "passive" and active, from pocket parks to large complexes for competitive sports and other group activities.

Strategies:

- a. Plan and build future facilities integral with and for the benefit of Growth Opportunity Areas.
- b. Develop an integrated Recreation & Parks Program that fully utilizes existing resources in assessing County-wide recreation needs.
- c. Interconnect parks, recreation facilities, and public open spaces with greenways and other regional corridors (e.g., the Mountains-to-Sea Trail). Coordinate this work with the established Triangle Greenprint and similar efforts that have identified such facilities and corridors.

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