

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

According to Census projections, the population of the Rock Hill 2020 Planning Area is expected to grow by nearly 24 percent over the next ten years, adding approximately 9,280 additional housing units to the area. Along with residential growth, more than 2.9 million square feet of additional commercial inventory within the office, retail, and industrial sectors is forecasted over the decade. The availability and reliability of public facilities, utilities, and services is essential to support new residential and commercial development; however, it is equally important to ensure that existing infrastructure shortfalls are addressed and levels of service are maintained.

Growth & Development

Due to limitations imposed by South Carolina annexation laws, Rock Hill’s corporate boundaries are irregular and full of “doughnut holes” of unincorporated islands (small properties that are not in the city limits but are completely surrounded by it). Unless property owners voluntarily ask to be annexed, it is difficult to bring those properties under the City’s jurisdiction. This growth pattern forces both County and City governments to provide duplicate sanitation, recycling, fire, and police services to different customers in the same area, leading to widespread inefficiencies. Neighbors pay uneven rates for services and are confused about which government delivers that service as well as who their elected representatives are. Every year, state legislators introduce one or more bills to address these annexation issues but none have been adopted successfully. Unless annexation laws are reformed, Rock Hill will need to develop more aggressive strategies to annex “doughnut holes” and rectify irregular boundaries.

Over the last few decades, many developers have chosen to build new subdivisions on “greenfield” sites far from the center of the City. This pattern of “suburban sprawl” is characterized by low-density or single-use developments that are auto-dependent, energy and land consumptive, and strain existing roadways, public facilities, and services. Sprawl developments fail to maximize existing infrastructure. They often require the costly installation of new facilities and extension of services while diverting resources from the maintenance of existing systems. The City should seek to maximize the efficiency of existing infrastructure by encouraging growth in in-fill and redevelopment areas where services and facilities are readily available.

The issue of growth management (balancing growth with resource preservation and provision of services) is reiterated in the Population, Housing, Natural Resources, Land Use, and Priority Investment Elements.

Job Training & Educational Facilities

Schools are important community resources and symbols of community aspirations. As such, they should be designed with smart growth goals of compact development, walkability, and open space conservation in mind. Over time schools have become increasingly larger and located farther from the students they serve. South Carolina is one of only a handful of states that have recently taken steps to encourage smaller, neighborhood centered K-12 schools by eliminating minimum acreage standards and allowing waivers for school square footage requirements. The state also requires school districts comply with local zoning ordinances and consult with the local planning commission as to the compatibility of the proposed school site with the comprehensive plan of the community [S.C. Code Ann. §6-29-540 (supp. 1999)].

As mentioned in the Land Use Element, properly planned and located schools can positively influence growth and community form.

In Rock Hill the siting of new schools is primarily driven by the district’s ability to locate appropriately sized parcels at reasonable prices. This is evident as three of the last five schools constructed in the Rock Hill school district are located outside the City’s jurisdiction and the other two, Dutchman Creek Middle and South Pointe High, are at the edge of the City limits. In planning for schools, existing and future land use

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patterns should be considered and schools located in a manner that does not promote suburban sprawl patterns nor place unnecessary strain on utilities and infrastructure. Furthermore, increased coordination is needed between the City, York County (when necessary), SC Department of Education, and Rock Hill Schools on the siting of future public educational facilities affecting Rock Hill students with communication commencing early in the planning process.

With the closure of several private schools in the last year and projected population growth, public schools are facing increased enrollment and potential over-crowding conditions in the near future. Funding for new facilities may not be readily available due to recent state budget cuts. Furthermore, the recently adopted SC Act 388 has substantially impacted local school operating budgets. With this 2006 legislation, owner-occupied homes were exempted from the property taxes that fund school operations while the state sales tax was raised to 6 cents on the dollar to try to capture the shortfall. Since sales tax revenue fluctuates based upon how much people spend on discretionary items, school districts have seen drastic cuts in their budgets during the current economic recession. Essentially, an unpopular but stable tax (property tax) was substituted for a less unpopular but more unstable tax (sales tax). In addition, the changes in property tax laws are adversely affecting those sectors of the market that are left to support schools: businesses and rental markets. Schools will need to find alternate funding sources and/or expand the use of non-traditional school facilities in order to reduce public school over-crowding.

Jobless rates in York County through 2009 have continued to rise with double-digit levels that significantly exceed national averages. Given the economic times and lack of local employment opportunities, greater emphasis should be given to support higher education, job training, and adult back-to-school programs. The business community and educational institutions should be encouraged to realize the link between education and job training as a means to retain and attract employers to the area.

The Economic Conditions Element also discusses the need to coordinate with major educational institutions on small business incubator and workforce training programs.

Public Safety

Rock Hill needs to ensure that police and fire departments have sufficient staff and equipment to meet today's demands as well as those resulting from future growth.

Recent studies of the Rock Hill Police Department, "*A Staffing Study of the Rock Hill Police Department*" by Carroll Buracker & Associates, Inc. (November 2008) and the 2008 Annual Assessment by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), noted deficiencies in manpower and identified space needs. Recommendations include eliminating redundant, non-mission essential services such as closing the city jail, hiring 21 additional officers and 11 more civilian employees, and replacing the headquarters building. The *Staffing Study* also suggested that police response times be reduced, particularly for in-progress, life-threatening emergencies and recommended that the RHPD respond to at least 80 percent of Priority 1 calls within at least five minutes. The likely cause for delayed response is lack of adequate patrol staffing and resources.

Although crime statistics and rates have declined in Rock Hill over the last few years, they are still significantly higher than national standards. Furthermore, the community's perception of crime is also a concern. Residents want to feel safe and not live in fear of crime. As noted in the City's 2008 *National Citizen Survey*, about 61 percent of questionnaire respondents felt "very" or "somewhat" safe from violent crimes and only 48 percent felt safe from property crimes. Only half of the respondents rated crime prevention services favorably. Community policing efforts should be enhanced to ensure a police presence in neighborhoods.

The Rock Hill Fire Department plans to construct two new fire stations (#7 and #8) in the next few years; however, additional stations will be needed over the next ten years to accommodate demands in high growth areas. The primary source of funding for new fire stations, the Fire Impact Fee Program, has been limited due to the recent slow down in development activity. The City has also

been challenged with issues related to site selection: The most recently constructed fire stations realized unexpected delays and cost run-ups due to poor in-town soil conditions.

Piedmont Medical Center is the only hospital in York County. In 2006, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control awarded PMC a certificate of need to build a 220,000 square foot, 100-bed hospital on Hwy 160 near I-77 in Fort Mill. However, Charlotte-based hospitals have challenged the SC DHEC ruling and court proceedings are expected to conclude in late 2009 with a ruling in months to follow. Construction of a second hospital facility in York County will help meet the medical needs of the region's growing population.

Infrastructure & Space Needs

Rock Hill has identified the need for major public investments in certain blighted areas around the City to spur redevelopment efforts. The creation of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts is one method of capturing revenues generated by investment in the district to offset bonds for infrastructure improvements. The City currently has four TIF Districts:

- 1) *Textile Corridor/Downtown TIF District* – created in 1988 and includes the Downtown area. Amended in 2004 to include the Textile Corridor. Set to expire in 2029.
- 2) *Manchester TIF District* – created in 1988 and includes TechPark. Set to expire in 2013.
- 3) *Red River TIF District* – created in 1991 and includes Waterford Business Park and the Galleria area. Amended twice in 2008 to include undeveloped area around the Galleria mall and the Riverwalk area. Set to expire in 2033.

Within these redevelopment areas, basic infrastructure, including roads, water, sewer, trails, parks, and/or other public facilities, is deficient or non-existent. The City should ensure that aging infrastructure is evaluated and upgraded as necessary to maximize efficiency and meet increased demand, particularly within redevelopment areas and priority investment areas.

Sewer system improvements are needed to meet current and future demands. Replacement of aging sewer pipes is done incrementally due to limited funding, with priority given to upsizing problem areas. The City is currently considering options to either expand the Manchester Wastewater Treatment Plant facility within the next five years to treat a maximum of 30 MGD at a cost of \$44 million or construct a new wastewater treatment plant downstream on the Catawba River. Other potential sewer system improvements include installation of a new pump station to open up the Upper Fishing Creek basin, and expanding east by adding a third sewer line under I-77 and replacing an aging smaller line. Additional analysis needs to be completed to determine future sewer demands in the east Dave Lyle Corridor area.

The Capital Improvement Program is designed to address many community facilities needs. More information about the CIP can be found in the Priority Investment Element.

Because of the cost of pipe replacement, recent water system improvements have consisted of "looping" water lines for efficiency. To meet future demands, a new water plant will be needed and should be located near the existing Lake Wylie Water Intake to reduce infrastructure costs.

There are many challenges involved with improving the electric system. Growth of the system is primarily based on annexation and availability rather than service territory assignment. Since no City substations are located east of I-77 and the area has limited transmission availability, Rock Hill will need to coordinate with Duke Power to expand electric service into this area. In addition, Downtown has had continuing issues with electrical service. Although electric capacity is adequate, the system's reliability is problematic. Power surges are commonplace mainly because of internal wiring issues within historic structures and interference along the power lines that feed into Downtown. A new Downtown substation is desired for reliability and to promote economic development initiatives.

The City is faced with the challenge of balancing the need to expand and grow the utilities system while ensuring that infrastructure does not extend to areas outside the City limits in a manner that

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strains the system or promotes urban sprawl patterns. Water and sewer line extension is dependent on availability and service territory assignment while electric service is primarily confined to the City limits. When subdivisions are built with wells and/or septic tanks in the County, it becomes increasingly difficult to grow the City's utility systems. Furthermore, when well/septic systems fail and property owners request City services, the City generally must incur the costs to extend the lines in an area that has already been developed. Proper comprehensive and integrated planning of the water, sewer, and electric systems is essential.

The Priority Investment Element identifies several important unfunded capital needs related to public facilities, utilities, parks and recreation projects, and transportation improvements.

The current Airport Master Plan for RH/YC Airport was adopted by the Airport Commission, Rock Hill City Council and York County Council in 2003. It forecasts future aviation needs based upon an evaluation of the Airport and its surrounding environs and presents both short- and long-term airport development improvements to meet operational demands. Based upon forecast operations, the Master Plan specifies a range of improvements to be phased in through 2022. These include a 6,500 foot runway, over 12,000 square feet of terminal area, 216 terminal area parking spaces, as well as a range of incremental improvements to the apron area, aircraft tie-downs, hangars, and navigational aids. Funding for airport improvements is discretionary and no state assistance is currently available. The next Master Plan update must be completed by 2013 to position the Airport for future growth.

There has been an identified need for additional office space for Homeland Security personnel and a dedicated Emergency Response Center that could also be used for general meetings and safety/security measures training. A new ERC should be self sustaining with restrooms, kitchen facilities, and a rest area for rest and recovery during extended operational periods. The Police Department is also in need of a new headquarters facility for administrative personnel.

Quality of Life

A long-range facilities plan for the York County Library System, completed and approved by the Library's Board of Trustees in 2003, recognized that the library system must be expanded to meet the needs of the County through 2023. The study recommended the expansion and addition of facilities as well as increasing collections of library materials to approximately 1.6 million pieces by 2023. Planned facility improvements in Rock Hill include a new or expanded Rock Hill Main Library as well as a new Rock Hill East Branch Library.

Rock Hill offers a variety of parks and recreation facilities for residents and guests to enjoy. However, many of the neighborhood parks that were built in the 1960s and 1970s through the Model Cities Program are now outdated, difficult to maintain, and do not adequately serve the needs of the surrounding community. Parks should be updated to better reflect neighborhood preferences.

The City does not have a Parks Master Plan to forecast the future need for parks. The significant amount of non-City residents that utilize City parks and the lack of County facilities and services in the unincorporated Planning Area will potentially put an additional burden on City recreational facilities and programs as growth continues in the future. A Parks Master Plan is needed to set standards on future parks and programming, identify possible locations as well as assess possible funding sources for future improvements and priorities.

Planned parks and recreation improvements over the next five years include renovations and maintenance of existing facilities, as well as two proposed parks. India Hook Park, located near the

Recreational and cultural facilities and programs should be enhanced to better represent the City's diverse population and promote community identity. The Population, Cultural Resources, Natural Resources, Economic Conditions, and Priority Investment Elements also identify this growing need.

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Lake Wylie Dam, will feature water-based recreational amenities. Also, a new regional park is proposed to be completed by FY 2015/2016. Although a site for the future regional park has yet to be selected, it will likely be located in the northwest quadrant of the City to address area needs.

Riverwalk, a planned mixed-use development located at US-21 and Cel-River Road along the Catawba River, will include a cycling and recreation center. A focal point of the development will be an Olympic standard velodrome and BMX Supercross track. Other proposed recreational amenities include bike trails, water activities, and more than three miles of riverfront greenway. The development will be a public/private undertaking with the City providing approximately \$3 million from hospitality taxes and money from the tax increment financing district; however, financing is dependent on the amount of growth and redevelopment that occurs in the area. The developers have committed approximately 250 acres, valued at approximately \$8.1 million, for public use.

The Priority Investment Element identifies the Riverwalk Development as a capital project that will have a significant impact on the operating budget in FY 2010/2011.

Rock Hill has a number of facilities that cater to historic, cultural and outdoor recreation tourism. In a recent study commissioned by the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Rock Hill was identified as both a tourist hub and a gateway into the greater Catawba region for its strong historic and cultural appeal. The report recommends that leaders create two flagship attractions within the City to complement other existing tourist attractions, noting the need to create a "visitor magnet" along the I-77 corridor and further develop the scenic and recreational opportunities of the Catawba River to boost tourism locally and statewide.

The Trails and Greenways Master Plan Update, adopted in May 2008, identifies a list of proposed trails and greenways to be added to the existing network as funding becomes available. It also includes design guidelines and maintenance standards and a list of recommended implementation strategies, including an implementation action plan that provides information on funding sources, construction cost estimates, maintenance, and scheduling. The recommendations within the Master Plan should be reviewed and updated every 5 years. Priority should be given to funding proposed trails that have been identified as segments of the Carolina Thread Trail.

To support sustainable growth, targeted investment in infrastructure improvements and community facilities is essential. By following the 2020 Priority Policy Directions identified in the Vision 2020 Plan Summary, Rock Hill can better address current and future infrastructure and public facility needs. These include:

- *Focus on Redevelopment and Infill*
- *Achieve Sustainability*
- *Plan for Dave Lyle Corridor East*
- *Enhance Mobility and Connectivity*
- *Promote Redevelopment and Infill Development Along Key Corridors*
- *Create Livable Places*
- *Leverage Resources through Partnerships and Coordination*

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