

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE GENERAL PLAN

2000-2010

A Comprehensive Plan for
Rock Hill, South Carolina

Economic Conditions

Housing

Natural Resources

Cultural Resources

Land Use

The future of Rock Hill is tied to the strong economy and steady growth of the Charlotte Metropolitan area. Located in eastern York County, Rock Hill is adjacent to the Interstate 77 corridor, running from Charlotte, North Carolina, through Columbia, South Carolina. The Charlotte metro area is one of the fastest growing regions in the United States. Strong economic growth, job creation, and low unemployment characterize this corridor. A high quality of life is reflected in lower cost of living, affordable home prices, and proximity to many of the recreational amenities most people desire, including the mountains and the ocean.

Rock Hill is one of the five major ring cities that surround Charlotte and help shape the metro area. Demographic experts have been assessing the current growth patterns and predict that this region will be one of the next “mega-growth corridors.” In light of this predicted growth pattern, what are the implications for the City of Rock Hill? Certainly, new development and more people will be coming to Rock Hill and the surrounding area. Some serious issues arise due to increased physical and economic growth. Growth will place demands on many things: land, roads, schools, water, sewer, amenities, and many other community facilities and services. In addition, many residents are concerned that the growth will threaten the small town character and quality of life that make Rock Hill unique.

The City of Rock Hill Comprehensive Plan examines current growth and development trends in order to provide the City with the critical planning data necessary to shape the City’s future. This document provides the City with a foundation, as required by South Carolina State law, for future land use decisions and formulating development-related goals. The plan provides a framework for balancing competing interests and demands in determining optimal future land uses, and assists City officials in planning for the improvement of infrastructure to match future land use intensities. In addition, the plan provides information on which types of development to encourage by area of the City, gives the Planning Commission and City Council a guide for evaluating zoning requests, and improves mechanisms for preserving the quality of life characteristics that are important to all of us.

The scope of this plan includes all components required by the “South Carolina Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act of 1994”, (Title 6, Chapter 29), including economic conditions, housing, natural resources, cultural resources and an amended land use element. The Community Facilities and Population Elements have already been adopted, as well as the Land Use Element. All elements consider issues and goals that are most likely to influence community growth and development over the next 10 years. The final product attempts to establish a sustainable, livable development pattern for the community based on the concepts and principles of “Smart Growth.”

Smart Growth versus Sprawl

The new principles aiding growth management are collectively identified as “Smart Growth” and have captured the attention of many growing communities across the country as the new way to sustain livable communities. Generally, smart growth focuses on environmental and economic issues related to growth and is often concerned primarily with sustainability of the growth patterns and reducing “suburban sprawl” and its effects. Suburban sprawl is customarily defined as homogeneous, large lot, low density, noncontiguous or “leapfrog” development including ribbons of commercial strip corridors. Sprawl as a growth pattern has had negative affects on Rock Hill’s quality of life and threatens to permanently impair the City’s natural, social and economic conditions. Sprawl increases the tax burden on citizens when development is not supported by adequate infrastructure already in place. By endorsing the principles of smart growth, citizens can shape the future to create more livable communities where families can enjoy sustained prosperity, personal freedom, a strong sense of community and a high quality of life. The City of Rock Hill Comprehensive Plan and the recommendations contained within are intended to serve as the guidelines for developing smart growth practices and direct these principles through the implementation process.

The Community Planning Process

In the planning process, the formulation of community values and mutual understanding of the needs of various interests in the City, developed through discussions among policy making officials and concerned citizens, is as valuable as the final document produced. This planning process included the gathering of data to establish a sense of current characteristics for the City. Upon completion of data gathering, a thorough analysis was performed for each of the elements. In addition, the City, in an effort to adopt a citizen-driven document, formed a Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee consisting of various stakeholders in the community to lead the planning process.

The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee

One of the first steps in the process was to assemble a steering committee of interested citizens, businesspersons, community leaders, and stakeholders of the City. The Steering Committee was charged with identifying those members of the community with expertise and/or interest in one or more of the remaining elements, to meet and identify

issues, and to establish goals and assemble recommendations. The mission of the Steering Committee is as follows:

“The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee is committed to providing the Planning Commission with a complete set of goals, recommendations and implementation strategies for public and private development and investment, using citizen input and involvement, as well as intergovernmental coordination, to guide future growth for the greater Rock Hill area.”

The Steering Committee held two public meetings for the purpose of gathering volunteers to participate in the focus groups. The Steering Committee then organized focus groups for each element and invited individuals (and representatives from organizations) to join other volunteers on each of the focus groups. These focus groups met several times during a 2-3 month period (as described below) to provide the Steering Committee with recommendations and implementation strategies for their review and consideration.

Focus Groups

Five focus groups were created for each of the remaining elements. The focus groups met regularly from May through July to formulate goals, recommendations and implementation strategies from the issues discussed during their meetings. The issues include such general topics as quality of life measures, regulatory changes, intergovernmental coordination, and capital expenditures, to name a few. The focus groups also incorporated comments received during public input programs.

Public Meetings

Three community-wide public meetings were held on May 18th, July 12th, and August 16, 2000, to gather input for the development of each of the elements, as well as to identify special issues and discuss goals and recommendations.

Plan Overview

The plan includes both a Future Land Use Map, representing desired patterns of growth and development, as well as a text document, which includes findings of the planning process, the policies and recommendations on which the map is based, and recommendations for plan implementation.

For the purposes of identifying how the City may look 10 years from now, a planning area was created for the Comprehensive Plan. This planning area was established to anticipate growth and development over the next 10 years, based upon projected demographic information. The planning area for the Rock Hill Comprehensive Plan is that portion of urbanized area south of Lake Wylie and the Catawba River. The planning area also is the service area for Rock Hill School District 3, which extends from the river south to the Chester County line and east to South Fork Creek.

Goals and Recommendations

This section of the plan contains goals and implementation strategies for the City of Rock Hill as it expands and develops in the future. Based on the inventory and assessment performed during the planning process, goals, policy statements, and action statements were developed to provide guidance for future growth, as well as a framework for policies and policy implementation - which is the means for carrying out the goals and objectives of the community. This step answers the question, “Where do we want to go as a community?”

Using the information acquired for the inventory, and through a series of meetings with the citizen focus groups and Steering Committee, a set of goals, policy statements and action statements have been developed that reflect the vision for the future of the City of Rock Hill. The final step takes the recommendations from the Goals and advises a strategy for the realization of the community’s goals and objectives. This step requires that a work program be developed which lists specific actions that will be taken over the next five-year period to implement components of the plan. The question answered here is: “How are we going to get there?”

The City of Rock Hill is cognizant that a plan is only as good as the community’s ability and commitment to carry out its recommendations. The Comprehensive Plan for the City of Rock Hill is a document based on rational and achievable goals for future development, consistent with South Carolina law (Sec. 6-29-510). Thus, a strategy for goal implementation has been developed which brings together individual strategies for regulatory devices, enforcement efforts, proactive planning efforts, and capital facilities planning, as applicable.

Major Themes/Issues Identified

Overall, there are 50 identified goals and 273 recommendations collectively from the five elements under consideration. Many of the recommendations made by each of the focus groups reflected a common theme or issue. Of the total recommendations, 10 theme groups can be identified that will serve as the guidelines for developing smart growth practices and directing these principles through the implementation process.

1. “Protect” Key Areas of our Environment

The protection of the following areas:

- Catawba River
- Air Quality
- Greenways/Open Spaces
- Existing Neighborhoods
- Cultural Resources
- The Downtown
- Major Corridor Entrances

2. Conduct “Inventories and Needs Assessments”

The general feeling was that certain resources were not completely identified and were therefore not being adequately protected. The following areas need a complete inventory and needs assessment.

- Focal Point Plans (divide the City for detailed studies)
- Natural Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Vacant Land
- Pedestrian Facilities (new and existing)
- Connectors; Greenways and Parks

3. “Adopt” New Rules

The overall consensus by all groups was for City Council to consider the adoption of certain new regulations regarding growth and development.

- Impact Fees
- Urban Service Boundary
- Adequate Public Facilities
- Mixed Uses, using “Smart Growth” Principles
- Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs)
- County Standards on Watershed Buffers
- Tree Preservation Ordinance
- Housing Diversity
- Transit-Oriented Development
- Incentives/Dis-incentives for developments using Smart Growth principles

4. “Amend” Existing Regulations

Many of the items recommended by the focus groups will require the amendment of certain existing regulations regarding growth and development.

- Zoning Ordinance
- Zoning Map
- Land Development Regulations
- Open Space Definition/Criteria for Public Acceptance

5. “Establish” Citizen Commissions

In a general consensus, it was agreed that many City residents have expertise and should be called upon to assist the City Council when making decisions in certain specific areas. The result is the establishment of certain commissions as follows:

- Greenways Commission
- Natural Resource Commission
- Air Quality Task Force
- Cultural Resources Commission
- Smart Growth Advisory Committee

6. “Invest” in the Community

The City Council should consider the following areas as part of the budget process:

- Master Planning for the Downtown, Major Corridors and Neighborhoods
- Land Bank (an option for developers to pay in lieu of required open space)
- Tree Bank (an option for developers to pay in lieu of required tree replacement)
- Greenways, Trails, bikeways and other pedestrian facilities
- Purchase Natural Habitats
- Maintenance of Public Lands
- Aggregate Land in Targeted Development Areas
- Downtown
- Arts Environments
- Mass Transit (continued involvement in light rail study with regional partners)
- An Interactive Website
- Convert Manchester Wastewater Lagoons into a Park
- Redevelopment of Corridors and Older Neighborhoods
- Education and Work Force Preparedness

7. “Regional Coordination/Cooperation”

It was concluded by many focus groups that there is a need for improved coordination between the City and other governmental and institutional agencies. Some of the suggestions on improving regional coordination and cooperation include:

- Consistency between City and County Zoning and Development Standards
- The Consideration of an Extra-Territorial Jurisdiction between the City and County
- Transportation Planning and Improvements
- City/County/School Systems and Education Providers Coordination
- Coordination of Certain City, County, and State Regulations and Permitting

8. “Educate” the Community

A widespread campaign to educate the public about new issues relating to the City, especially with regard to growth and development was suggested, including the following areas:

- Smart Growth
- Livability
- Neighborhood Mixed Uses
- Available Resources
- Endangered Resources

9. “Communicate” with Citizens

All groups felt it was necessary to share information with the public on a regular basis, providing opportunities for education and participation, including:

- Land Use Issues
- Transportation
- Cultural Resources
- Natural Resources

10. “Livable City Land Use Map”

Under the proposed future land use map or “Livable City Land Use Map,” the following new land use categories are considered:

- Neighborhood Centers
- Special Activity Centers, (including Commercial, Industrial, and Transportation Facilities)
- Land Use Types, (including Urban Residential, Neighborhood Mixed Use, Community Mixed Use, Industrial/Employment Use, Educational/Institutional Use, Open Space, and Public Use)

Plan Implementation – Suggested Work Plan

Several recommendations made by the focus groups and steering committee require immediate consideration for implementation. The intent of the focus groups and steering committee is the development of an action plan for these recommendations, including dates for implementation. Many of the recommendations require ongoing steps while others may develop over time. Of the 273 overall recommendations, the steering committee would like to accomplish the following in the immediate future:

- The division of the City into focal areas for detailed studies, (including the downtown, major corridors and neighborhoods).
- A complete overhaul of the Zoning Ordinance and Map.
- The establishment of an Urban Service Boundary.
- The consideration of Impact Fees - or other forms of incentives/dis-incentives to promote and direct quality development.
- Specific studies (inventory and needs assessment).
- Citizen awareness education.

Summary

Overall, the citizens and stakeholders, who have dedicated their time over the past year, feel that the City of Rock Hill is a great place to live, work and play. However, all participants recognize that change and growth will occur and understand how the Comprehensive Plan can chart ways to maintain quality of life, while absorbing future development.