AC44

ALBEMARLE COUNTY 2044

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

ADOPTED 10.15 2025

PART 2: GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICY

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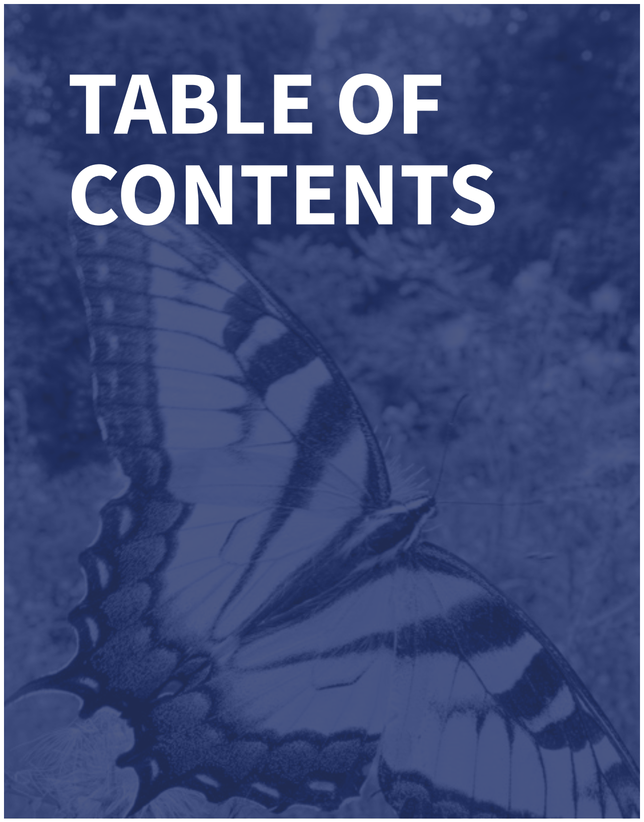

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WHAT IS THE GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICY?

AC44 is grounded in the same overarching idea as Albemarle County's 2015 Comprehensive Plan – **focusing growth in the Development Areas is the best way to preserve land for watershed protection, agriculture, forestry, and the natural environment in the Rural Area, and to foster a vibrant mix of uses and activities with services and amenities in the Development Areas, leveraging existing infrastructure and opportunities for redevelopment, discouraging sprawl, and providing services and infrastructure in a fiscally responsible manner.**

The purpose of the Growth Management Policy is to provide efficient and cost-effective public service delivery and to encourage compact, connected, and dense development patterns and uses in the Development Areas to protect the ecosystems and natural, scenic, historic, and cultural resources in the Rural Area. The expectations for infrastructure and service delivery are different for the Development Areas and the Rural Area. For example, the Albemarle County Service Authority (ACSA) Jurisdictional Area for the provision of public water and sewer primarily follows the boundaries of the Development Areas. The Growth Management Policy guides land use decisions, capital projects, and public service provision.

The County can most effectively provide fire-rescue and police protection, roads, utilities, school bus service, transit, and other governmental functions to smaller and more concentrated areas than to a large and dispersed rural population. Increased densities and intensities of uses in the Development Areas augment such efficiencies. Rural Area uses are generally widely dispersed housing and agricultural and forestry uses. Therefore, they result in public safety services that are provided at reduced service levels compared to service levels in the Development Areas.

Investing in the Development Areas is essential to creating thriving neighborhoods with a high quality of life to entice current and future community members to live in the Development Areas. It is also important to recognize that over 40% of current county residents live in the Rural Area. Therefore, while the levels of service provision are different in the Rural Area, there are still essential services provided as needed, including fire-rescue and police.

The Growth Management Policy directs density to the Development Areas.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICY (AC44)

Albemarle County is a welcoming community that will grow equitably and sustainably, supporting the needs of current and future community members for housing, jobs, and a healthy environment. This Growth Management Policy is the basis for the Goals, Objectives, and Actions of this Comprehensive Plan and is the primary means to achieve the County's vision for the future.

The County will use designated Development Areas (the growth area) and the Rural Area designation to manage land use, capital projects, and public services. New development and public infrastructure investment will target the Development Areas. Limited new development will occur in the Rural Area. The Development Areas will have a variety of housing types, a mix of land uses, high-quality public infrastructure, and services to support most residential and business growth in the County. Density and connectivity, high-quality sustainable design, and reinvestment, redevelopment, and infill will be emphasized. The Rural Area will provide land for agriculture, forestry, the protection of the public water supply, conservation of ecosystems, the natural environment, historic and cultural resources, recreation, and climate resiliency. Small-scale businesses and limited public services and infrastructure supporting existing communities will be supported while minimizing additional residential development in the Rural Area. The Development Areas and the Rural Area will have distinct boundaries, without low-density transition areas.

UPDATES TO THE GROWTH MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Growth Management Policy has remained relatively consistent since 1971. It directs development into the County's Development Areas, while the remainder of the county's land is dedicated to preservation of Rural Area uses – farms, forests, open space, and natural, historic, and scenic resources. While the overarching Growth Management Policy has remained consistent, the distribution and character of the County's Development Areas have changed substantially. There were about 48,000 acres of land in the Development Areas in 1971. There are about 23,800 acres of land in the Development Areas today. In the Rural Area, development, including residential development, continues, albeit at a lower rate than in the Development Areas.

Some of the reduction of the acreage in the Development Areas is due to overestimates of population growth in the 1970s as well as a previously abundant supply of commercial and industrial land relative to past demand, and concerns about water quality in the South Fork Reservoir water supply watershed. The County's 1980 Zoning Ordinance update also downzoned (reduced the number of housing units and commercial/industrial uses allowed) most of the County's Rural Area. Past decisions to not significantly expand the Development Areas, even while the county's population continued to grow, can also be attributed to a changing approach toward more urban and mixed-use forms of development with the adoption of the Neighborhood Model in 2001.

In AC44, the text of the Growth Management Policy has been updated. The boundaries of the Development Areas remain unchanged. During AC44's first phase, County staff asked the community about the Growth Management Policy (per the 2015 Comprehensive Plan), including aspects of the Policy that should be prioritized in AC44.

County staff also used the County's Equity and Climate Action Lens to review the 2015 Policy language. In AC44, the text of the Growth Management Policy has been updated to reflect community input and incorporate equity and climate action, while retaining the core purpose of the Policy.

These updates include:

- Clear language that the County is planning for current and future community members, consistent with State Code requirements for Comprehensive Plans.
- Listing out the major areas guided by the Policy, including land use, capital projects, and public service provision.
- Addition of language for small businesses and limited public services in the Rural Area to support existing communities.
- Inclusion of language in the Policy about distinct boundaries between the Development Areas and the Rural Area (previously included only in other Comprehensive Plan chapters).

The Policy's text alone does not capture the many ways that the Growth Management Policy is connected to how people live, work, and move through the county. The Policy also informs all of AC44's Goals, Objectives, and Actions.

For example, County staff heard from the community about the need for clearer recommendations for the Rural Area related to small-scale community-serving land uses. Community input emphasized the importance of identifying options for health care (including mobile), food access, community gardens, emergency preparedness/response, and places for community gathering. Identifying ways to more equitably allow and provide access to services is also a key aspect of AC44, consistent with the Board of Supervisor's priority to incorporate equity and climate action throughout the document.

DEVELOPMENT AREAS UTILIZATION REVIEW

To administer the Growth Management Policy successfully, it is important to understand how effectively the Development Areas are being used. This effort includes measuring broad development patterns and trends (e.g., how densely land is being developed) and estimating the remaining capacity within the Development Areas for future development projects. This information is evaluated by the Land Use Buildout Analysis, which was completed in 2022 and updated in 2025 as part of AC44.

Data from both the 2022 and 2025 Land Use Buildout Analyses estimated that the Development Areas contained enough theoretical capacity to accommodate projected growth (both residential and business) for the next 10 to 20 years. However, it is important to understand limitations of this analysis; the figures are estimates, and theoretical capacity measures the *maximum* development potential of the Development Areas. The analysis also found that development projects often cannot realize their maximum development potential due to a variety of constraining factors. These factors limit the actual buildout of the Development Areas, which undermines the Growth Management Policy as well as other goals, such as goals related to housing and economic development.

As part of the AC44 Comprehensive Plan update, the Board of Supervisors elected not to make any changes to the boundaries of the Development Areas. Longer term, there may come a time when the Development Areas no longer have sufficient capacity to accommodate future housing and employment needs.

The County can use a variety of tools to affect capacity before changing the boundaries of the Development in the future. Those tools include:

- Revision of the current Future Land Use Map (FLUM) through Area Plan updates to address the need for more housing or commercial or industrial property (e.g., changing a property from neighborhood residential uses to office/research and development/flex/light industrial uses).
- Public infrastructure and amenity investments to catalyze and support development in the Activity Centers.
- Revision of the Zoning Ordinance to permit a mixture of uses, denser developments, and a wider variety of housing types.

Virginia State Code requires that Comprehensive Plans address the needs of current and future community members based on anticipated population growth. As part of long- range planning in the context of uncertain changing economic and environmental conditions, tracking the use of Development Areas through a set of factors on a routine basis is intended to provide data to the Board of Supervisors for consideration.

The following factors should be used to monitor the use of Development Areas and can be used as a basis for making sound land use decisions.

1. How well current development in the Development Areas meets AC44's Objectives and Guiding Principles.

Potential variables to assess include walkability and bikeability scores tracked over time, miles of sidewalks, greenways and shared use paths built, accessibility to transit, and an inventory of public amenities such as added and preserved parks and open space.

2. Comparison of the estimated demand for residential and non-residential land uses with the estimated capacity.

Estimated demand begins with a market demand forecast that estimates the number of residential units and square footage of retail, office, and industrial square feet expected to be built in Albemarle County over the next 20 years. The forecast is based on projected population growth and historical growth and development trends from the past 10 years. (Potential growth limitations such as the availability of land, the cost of development, and environmental constraints are not considered).

This forecast provides a high-level estimate of the need for housing and non-residential development to support projected population growth over a 20-year horizon.

The estimated demand can be compared with the estimated capacity of the Development Areas for both future land use (per the Comprehensive Plan) and for existing zoning (by-right development).

Higher density is necessary in the County's Development Areas to accommodate growth.

3. The intensity/density of development approvals through rezonings and special use permits as compared with the recommended density per future land use categories.

It is important to understand how the estimated capacity of the Development Areas compares to actual buildout patterns and trends. This can provide a 'reality check' to help identify if the County is achieving the densities and land uses recommended by AC44.

For example, the 2022 Land Use Buildout Analysis found that, from 2016 to 2021, the total number of dwelling units approved through rezonings and special use permits was about 58% of the maximum number of dwelling units recommended per future land use categories in the Comprehensive Plan. The 2025 Land Use Buildout Analysis examined approvals from 2022 to 2025 and found that ratio had increased to approximately 70% (excluding the North Fork residential rezoning from the analysis; see page 7 of the 2025 Land Use Buildout Analysis Memorandum in Appendix E for more information).

4. The remaining percentage of the Development Areas are estimated to have capacity for additional development or redevelopment.

The 2022 Land Use Buildout Analysis estimated that about 6.9% of land in the Development Areas (0.3% of total county land area) had capacity for new development or redevelopment. By 2025, the capacity was about 6.1% of land in the Development Areas. The remaining part of the Development Areas consists of currently developed land and land with development applications that are approved or under review, or land that is determined to be undevelopable, due to various constraints such as lands allocated as road rights of way, floodplain locations, and areas with steep slopes.

Careful tracking of development activity is necessary to monitor this metric. In the 2022 and 2025 Land Use Buildout Analyses, the capacity for redevelopment was broadly identified by areas where the land value of a parcel was greater than the value of the improvements on the parcel. Then, additional assumptions were applied depending on the parcel's designation in the FLUM to further refine its potential for each type of land use (residential, retail, office, industrial, and hotel). For more information, please see the 2022 Land Use Buildout Analysis and the 2025 Land Use Buildout Memorandum in Appendix E.

5. The ratio of dwelling units being built in the Rural Area compared with the Development Areas.

In 1971, when the first Growth Management Policy was adopted, about 60% of new houses constructed were in the Rural Area. That percentage changed significantly over time, in large part due to the effectiveness of the Policy. From the early 2000s through 2008, single-family construction in the county occurred in a roughly 50-50 balance between the Development Areas and the Rural Area. Since 2009, most new single-family construction has occurred in the Development Areas. It is important to continue to monitor these trends and to leverage land use and conservation tools in support of the Growth Management Policy.

More residential units are built per year in the Development Areas.

Current land prices foster market conditions that support higher density.

6. Cost and vacancy trends for residential and non-residential land uses.

Not realizing the full buildout of the Development Areas and limiting the supply of available housing will drive up costs locally and push new residential growth into surrounding localities, potentially increasing commute times and placing the greatest burden on lower-income households. This factor should also compare available affordable housing with the goals identified in the County's Housing Albemarle housing policy.

Additionally, increasing demand for non-residential space will lead to costs rising and influence businesses to look for space in other localities if there are not sufficient readily available land and sites for these types of uses.

The current trend of increasing land prices supports the market conditions that support higher density, as proposed in the Activity Centers concept. This cost and vacancy factor needs to be balanced with using land in the Development Areas effectively and not changing boundaries earlier than necessary when redevelopment and infill opportunities are still available. Leveraging site readiness opportunities will be key for industrial/employment land uses. Industrial land uses are the most likely to be directly impacted by land cost, with developers seeking larger tracts and lower values. High land costs could influence new industrial users to seek space in more affordable counties.

Reporting

These metrics should be reported to the Board of Supervisors for its review and consideration every five years or as requested, beginning in fiscal year 2026. Many of these metrics are included as part of the County's 2022 and 2025 Land Use Buildout Analyses, which will be reanalyzed every two years after the adoption of AC44.

If the Board of Supervisors determines that changes to the boundaries of the Development Areas should be considered in the future, an in-depth analysis of these metrics and other factors will inform that process. The analysis will be included as part of the Development Areas Report discussed in the next section.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AREAS BOUNDARIES

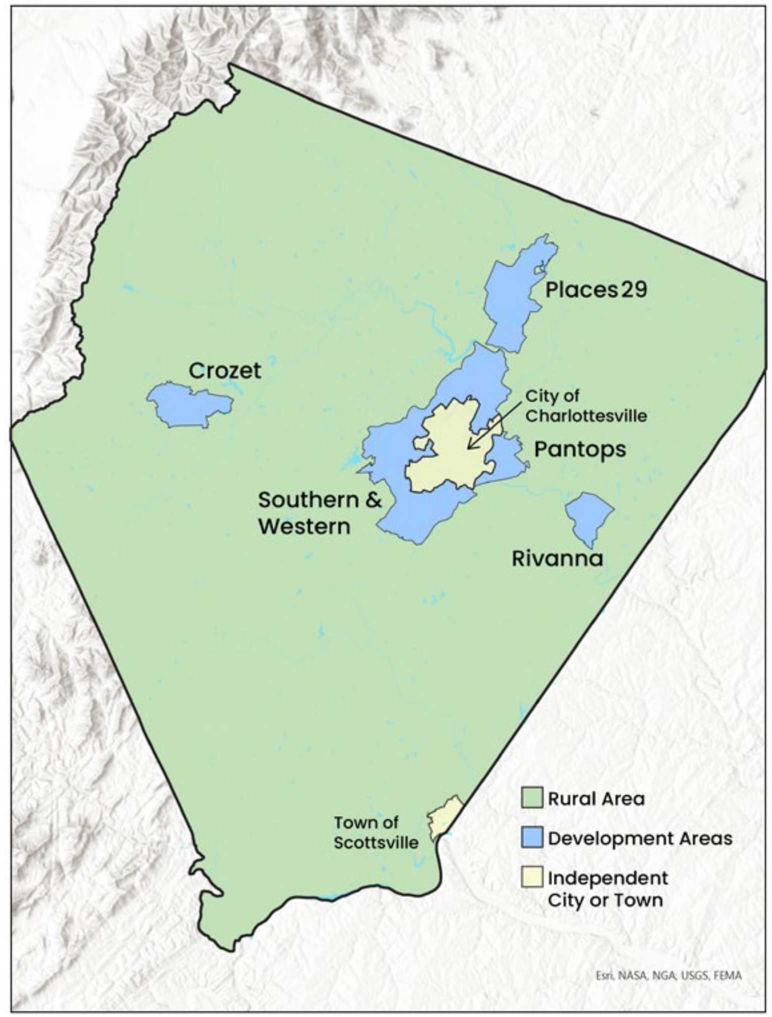
Since their establishment, the boundaries of the Development Areas have been adjusted to better protect the natural environment and encourage connected, dense, and mixed-use development. The County's Growth Management Policy prioritizes building efficiently in Development Areas over expanding the current boundaries. However, the current Development Areas may be unable to accommodate housing and employment needs, an issue already reflected in rising land costs and declining housing affordability. Premature boundary revisions would undermine the Growth Management Policy.

AC44 emphasizes maximizing efficient land use within the current boundaries and does not recommend boundary revisions. Looking longer term, it is also essential to plan for potential future revisions, even if none are currently anticipated. This policy and the potential need for revisions should be evaluated at minimum with each required five-year Comprehensive Plan update. Any potential future revision should be considered through the Small Area planning effort well in advance of the act of expanding the boundaries of the Development Areas.

The next section discusses a process for considering potential revision of the boundaries of the Development Areas in the future.

Process

Ideally, the need for a Development Areas boundary revision would be identified by a future area planning effort. The County could pursue a boundary revision independent of a future area planning effort, inclusive of community engagement, and the Board of Supervisors would request that the County Executive direct County staff to develop a Development Areas Report. This report would evaluate a variety of factors, provide information through maps, order-of-magnitude cost estimates, and other resources, as necessary. The criteria on the following page provide a starting point for the consideration of potential revisions.



County Development Areas, labeled by Area Plan title.

Maintaining the Rural Area helps protect our natural resources.

Potential Criteria for Assessing the Removal of Under-Performing Areas from the Development Areas Include but are not Limited to:

- Locations that do not meet AC44's Goals, Objectives, and policies. These locations include areas that do not meet recommended densities per future land use designations and areas that do not meet the Community Design Guidelines (e.g., walkable and mixed-use areas).
- Locations that have significant topographic or other environmental constraints. These constraints reduce an area's potential to meet recommended densities and intensities of uses and the ability to develop an interconnected street network. There may also be important environmental features or habitats that should be protected (e.g., high-value forest blocks identified in the Biodiversity Action Plan).
- Locations with limited public infrastructure capacity and access. Factors could include existing road conditions and capacity, where development would be contrary to Virginia Department of Transportation goals and recommendations, and where connections to existing public roads, water/sewer, and other infrastructure are challenging.

If locations in the Development Areas are designated as Rural Area, the total acreage that is swapped to the Development Areas should be based in part on the developable acreage of the now-Rural Area land.

Criteria for Assessing the Adequacy of Land to be Added in the Development Areas Include but are not Limited to:

Factors	Impacts & Standards to Assess
Transportation	• Current level of service (LOS) for road network that new development would access compared to anticipated change in LOS. • Current safety issues for road network that new development would access compared to anticipated safety improvements. • Integration of planned transportation projects with potential development. • Ensuring that potential new development provides road, sidewalk, shared-use path, and trail connections to the existing road and bike/pedestrian network.
Public Schools	• Current and projected schools' capacity for the school districts for potential new development and how potential new development would impact and address school capacity. • Possible locations within potential new Development Areas for future school sites that meet Albemarle County Public Schools' needs and are walkable for as many nearby neighborhoods as feasible.
Public Water & Sewer	• Ability to be served by public water and sewer, either currently or in the future. • Coordination with RWSA and ACSA to plan for future infrastructure needs and develop estimated timeframes for when public water and sewer could feasibly be provided to new development in potential new Development Areas, in collaboration with the private sector.
Community Facilities & Services	• Assessment of adequacy of service provision for community facilities, services, and infrastructure, including fire-rescue and police. • Assessment of proximity to existing community centers, libraries, schools, and other facilities, and additional facilities/services/infrastructure that may be needed in potential new Development Areas. • Coordination with service providers and partner agencies to plan for the needs of future community facilities and services and possible timeframes and siting considerations.

Factors	Impacts & Standards to Assess
Environmental Stewardship	• Natural boundaries should be used to guide the boundaries for potential new Development Areas and for identifying areas to protect and avoid, such as significant areas in steep slopes, protected stream buffers, and floodplains. These environmental features should be identified and mapped. • Assessment of the presence of areas identified in County policies and plans for enhanced protection and avoidance, such as important forest blocks and conservation areas identified in the County's Biodiversity Action Plan and the mountain protection areas.
Form, Density, & Redevelopment	• Prior to potential Development Areas revision (beyond minor adjustments), assessment of the extent to which the current Development Areas meet AC44's recommendations for a mix of uses, percentage of affordable housing, density toward the higher ranges of land use designations, walkable Activity Centers, multimodal transportation options, redevelopment and infill, and access to parks and trails.
Area's Potential Location in a Water Supply Watershed	• Evaluation of whether an area is undeveloped/vacant or already has existing development. • Areas with no or very limited existing development or without underlying by-right zoning that would allow development (beyond typical Rural Area uses) should be avoided. • Areas with existing development that are inconsistent with Rural Area chapter recommendations may be considered, as these areas have already been impacted by development. Assessment would include whether connections to public water/sewer and some additional development could have potential beneficial effects, especially to replace older or failing well and septic and to comply with updated stormwater management and other regulations.
Land Use & Expected Form of Development	• New development in expanded areas is expected to meet the Community Design Guidelines and other chapter recommendations for the Development Areas, including having a mix of land uses, a variety of housing types, parks, trails, multimodal transportation options, and employment and business opportunities. • Single-use areas may be appropriate with relatively minor boundary changes or for possible new Employment Centers. • Expanded Development Areas should be adjacent to existing Development Areas, prioritizing the 'urban ring' (the Development Areas next to the City of Charlottesville).

Factors	Impacts & Standards to Assess
Access to Public Recreation, Parks, & Trails	• Assessment of potential access to existing public parks, recreation opportunities, open space, and trails. • Coordination with Albemarle County Parks & Recreation to evaluate parks and recreation needs generated by potential new development in potential new Development Areas and to develop estimated timeframes for when new public parks and trails could feasibly be provided, in collaboration with the private sector.
Potential Impacts on & Opportunities for Nearby & Adjacent Areas	• Assessment of potential impacts to and opportunities for nearby and adjacent development. • For any new Development Areas/Rural Area boundary, relevant recommendations from the Development Areas Land Use, Rural Area Land Use, and Transportation chapters of AC44 should be followed, including having a 'hard edge' between the two areas. • Evaluation of opportunities to connect existing neighborhoods in the existing Development Areas with new Activity Centers, neighborhoods, parks/trails, employment opportunities, and other amenities. • Planning for land use and transportation in a coordinated manner between existing and new Development Areas, including evaluating compatible land uses and multimodal transportation connections.

It is important to evaluate current infrastructure and services prior to consideration of any revision of the Development Areas boundaries.

Along with an evaluation of the factors above, the following information should be presented to the Board of Supervisors as part of the Development Areas Report.

1. A generalized map of broad potential locations for future Development Areas boundary revision. It should consider factors related to location such as:
   - Whether the area is in a water supply watershed.
   - Proximity to existing and planned infrastructure and services.

   Priority should be given to protection of the natural environment and public water supply watersheds, the ability to create multimodal connections with the adjacent existing Development Area, and the cost and feasibility of needed infrastructure connections and improvements.

2. In collaboration with relevant service providers, County departments, and partner agencies, identify infrastructure that would need to be built or upgraded based on new development.

3. Potential timeframes for future revision, with consideration of:
   - The current Development Areas meeting AC44's recommendations for a mix of uses and density toward the higher ranges of land use designations.
   - The current services and infrastructure capacity to support future development in the proposed area.
   - Available funding to provide anticipated infrastructure needs.

4. Land use, transportation network, community facility, park, and preservation of natural areas and environmental feature recommendations for the proposed revision area. These recommendations should be established prior to the boundary revision and should be consistent with all appropriate County long-range plans.

Protection of the water supply and the provision of recreation opportunities would be part of the criteria considered prior to boundary expansion.