



# Rural Area Land Use & Transportation

## Draft Goals and Objectives





This document includes the draft Goals and Objectives for the updated Rural Area Land Use and Transportation chapter (previously two chapters - Rural Area and Transportation) and provides additional context and background on this topic. The document is organized by the following sections:

- **Overview:** Brief introduction to this topic.
- **Draft Goals and Objectives:** The draft updated Goals and Objectives for this chapter. This is the section we're asking for community input on in early 2024.
- **Phase 2 Community Input Themes:** Major themes from community input heard on this topic during the first two rounds of Phase 2 engagement (January - July 2023) and more recent input from the third round of Phase 2 engagement (October - December 2023).
- **Topic Report and Connections to the AC44 Framework:** Information on challenges, opportunities, recent trends, and data on this topic, as previously provided in the 'topic reports' at the beginning of Phase 2. Summary of how this topic is connected to the AC44 Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community.

## Rural Area Land Use and Transportation Overview

Albemarle County's Rural Area is approximately 689 square miles in size and is intended to provide land for agriculture, forestry, and protection of the natural environment. With the Growth Management Policy, the County has prioritized the preservation of agricultural, forestal, historic, cultural, and scenic resources and the natural environment in the Rural Area. These resources and environmental features are important for water and air quality, biodiversity, agricultural and silvicultural economic development, and climate resilience. By supporting clean water and air, Rural Area preservation brings daily benefits to rural and urban residents alike.

Transportation planning in Albemarle County's Rural Area works towards the same outcome as transportation planning in the Development Area: the development of a transportation system that supports a variety of transportation options for residents and visitors of all ages and abilities to access employment, educational, recreational, and other opportunities safely and efficiently. Transportation options may include walking, biking, transit, and using a personal vehicle. Measures of safety may include crash statistics, such as crash severity, crash type, and whether vulnerable road users were involved in the crash. Measures of efficiency may include traffic volumes and vehicle/person throughput for an intersection or roadway segment.

The Growth Management Policy designates the Development Areas (which are currently approximately 5% of the county, or 37 square miles) and the Rural Area (which is currently approximately 95% of the county, or 689 square miles). The majority of new residential, commercial, retail, office, industrial, and mixed-use development is intended to be located within the county’s Development Areas. The Rural Area is envisioned to have limited residential development, and commercial and employment areas are intended to support existing rural communities.

By using Development Areas land effectively and efficiently, including by promoting density and mixed-use areas that are supported by multimodal transportation networks, public parks and trails, and other infrastructure, the County can continue to preserve land for agriculture, forestry, and land conservation in the Rural Area. Concentrating development and avoiding sprawl supports climate action goals and tends to make service delivery more efficient.



## Draft Updated Growth Management Policy

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.

The County will use designated Development Areas (the growth area) and the Rural Area to guide land use, capital projects, and public service provision. The **Development Areas** will have a variety of housing types, a mix of land uses, and high-quality public infrastructure and services to support the majority of residential and business growth in the county. The **Rural Area** will provide land for agriculture, forestry, and conservation of ecosystems, the natural environment, and cultural resources, with small-scale businesses and limited public services and infrastructure that support existing communities without generating significant additional residential development. The Development Areas and the Rural Area will have distinct boundaries, without low-density transition areas.

While the provision of public services and infrastructure will continue to vary between the Rural Area and the Development Areas, the Comp Plan update is an opportunity to find ways to more equitably provide and distribute some public services in the Rural Area. This includes partnerships with community organizations and public agencies, such as the Blue Ridge Health District. The focus should be on essential health and safety services and opportunities for programs that can make use of existing spaces and buildings, such as health care, fire/rescue and police services, programs such as job training, community gathering spaces, emergency shelters, and access to affordable and healthy food. Transportation options are essential for accessing services and programs in both the Rural Area and the Development Areas for Rural Area community members.

Existing community facilities in the Rural Area, such as schools and community centers, and potentially some small businesses and community organizations, can provide space that may be used to support Rural Area residents. This includes the potential for ‘community resilience hubs’ in the Rural Area to provide or support the provision of services such as health care, food access/community gardens, emergency preparedness/response, and places for community gathering. These concepts were also echoed by the community input in Phase 2.





## Draft Goals and Objectives

These draft Goals and Objectives were developed based on input from community members, County staff and partner agencies, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Supervisors, the AC44 Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community, best practices, and the current Comp Plan. They will inform the Action Steps that will be developed in Phase 3.

### Rural Area Land Use

**Goal 1: Albemarle’s Rural Area will have thriving farms and working forests, traditional crossroads communities, and protected scenic areas, historic sites and districts, and natural systems, with a land-use pattern based on large parcels that are suitably sized for agricultural and silvicultural production and unfragmented habitats.**

Objective 1.1: Reduce the rate of conversion of Rural Area land to residential uses and mitigate the impacts to natural systems from the residential development that does occur.

Objective 1.2: Improve the effectiveness of the County’s land-conservation programs in implementing Rural Area and Environmental Stewardship Comprehensive Plan objectives.

Objective 1.3: Develop and adopt a Rural Area land-use plan that recognizes multiple geographic areas within the Rural Area with specific conservation needs, rather than a “one size fits all” approach. This plan should focus on protecting land-use and land-cover patterns that support working farms and forests, native forest ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems and healthy water supplies, and rural landscape context for historic resources.

Objective 1.4: Update permitted use categories in the Rural Area zoning district to better reflect the goals of this chapter.

Objective 1.5: Develop a location siting policy for utility-scale solar energy systems in the Rural Area that prioritizes protection of important agricultural and silvicultural soils, important areas identified in the Biodiversity Action Plan, and historic and scenic landscape contexts.

## **Goal 2: Albemarle County will have a strong agricultural and silvicultural economy in the Rural Area.**

Objective 2.1: In the Rural Area, focus the County's economic development efforts on supporting local production and value-added processing of agricultural and silvicultural products, and on small-scale outdoor-recreation uses that provide access to nature.

Objective 2.2: Protect important soils for agriculture and forestry.

## **Goal 3: Rural Area community members will have increasing community resilience, opportunities for community gathering, and equitable access to and distribution of resources, services, and amenities in a manner that is consistent with the Growth Management Policy.**

Objective 3.1: Identify opportunities for community resilience hubs in the Rural Area, which may be located in designated crossroads communities, prioritizing census tracts that have a higher Social Vulnerability Index score (indicating a higher vulnerability) than the County's overall score and communities that are more than 5 miles driving distance from the Development Areas, the City of Charlottesville, or the Town of Scottsville.

Objective 3.2: In crossroads communities, engage with community members to identify desired land uses that are consistent with Rural Area goals and identify opportunities to: support existing businesses and services; support or provide essential public services and basic service needs; increase community resilience; and explore rural transportation improvements that are consistent with the Rural Area Transportation goals and objectives.

**DRAFT Definition of Crossroads Communities:** Rural Crossroad Communities provide access to essential public services and basic service needs to rural populations that are more distant to designated Development Areas and can also function to serve as community resiliency hub locations. Crossroad Communities are not Development Areas designated for economic development purposes or to provide residential holding capacity. The primary purpose for crossroads communities should be to provide more equitable distribution of/access to public services in the Rural Area and to increase community resilience and wellbeing.

**Goal 4: Albemarle County will proactively plan for unique locations in the Rural Area with established land-use patterns, zoning, and existing development that are inconsistent with Rural Area goals, including locations where development has already occurred that does not conform with Rural Area goals, locations with zoning other than Rural Area that are adjacent to the Development Areas, and the rural interstate interchanges.**

[Cross-reference with Objective 1.4 in Community Facilities]

Objective 4.1: Coordinate on regional Rural Area land use issues of shared importance with the City of Charlottesville, the Town of Scottsville, the University of Virginia, the TJPDC, and surrounding localities.

Objective 4.2: Evaluate potential opportunities for non-residential land uses at the Shadwell and Yancey Mills rural interstate interchanges, including to support agricultural and silvicultural industries.

## Rural Area Transportation

**Goal 1: Albemarle County will design, invest in, implement, and support a balanced transportation network that meets the mobility needs of rural area residents and the movement of goods.**

Objective 1.1: Prioritize and invest in transportation projects that reduce vehicle congestion on regional routes and improve safety on all routes, prioritizing routes with the highest traffic volumes.

Objective 1.2: In collaboration with local transit providers and the Regional Transit Partnership, Albemarle County will plan for, invest in, and support transit service to rural destinations (including health facilities, community centers, parks, etc.) and transit connections to the development area.

Objective 1.3: Use the Rural Rustic Roads program as the basis for road paving in the Rural Area.

Objective 1.4: Plan for, invest in, and support infrastructure projects that provide regionally significant transportation improvements for goods movement.

**Goal 2: In collaboration with local, regional, and state partners, Albemarle County will support and invest in systemic changes to the built environment and local safety culture to reduce traffic-related deaths and serious injuries, considering the unique needs and experiences of travelers in the Rural Area.**

Objective 2.1: Use safety data (crashes, crash severity, etc.) to identify and prioritize locations for potential infrastructure improvements.

Objective 2.2: Collaborate with the Albemarle County Police Department and VDOT to respond to speeding complaints and proactively reduce speeds to improve safety, where appropriate.

Objective 2.3: Ensure that infrastructure improvement projects equitably foster safety and comfort for all road users.

Objective 2.4: Support Rural Area communities seeking through-truck restrictions, as appropriate, recognizing that the design, character, or adjacent land uses of some roadways are not compatible with frequent heavy vehicle traffic.

**Goal 3: Improve Rural Area community members' equitable access to walking and bicycling opportunities for transportation and/or recreation to support healthy, active lifestyles and create opportunities for social interaction.**

Objective 3.1: Support Rural Area crossroads communities desire for pedestrian and bicycle opportunities, where feasible and appropriate.

Objective 3.2: Support infrastructure projects with “placemaking” components, such that public spaces become more attractive, comfortable, and accessible while highlighting the unique nature of a specific crossroads communities.



## Phase 2 Community Input Themes

The following summary highlights the major themes from community engagement heard to date during AC44 Phase 2.

### Crossroads Communities and Community Resilience Hubs

- For comments on the types of small-scale businesses or services community members would like to see in crossroads communities, the most frequently mentioned uses (in order of number of comments) were: medical services and healthcare, country stores, small grocery stores, community centers, post offices, fire rescue/EMS stations and services, parks, restaurants, general retail (e.g. bank, hardware store, basic needs), and childcare options
- There should be engagement with individual communities prior to land use or zoning changes, and recommended land uses should be tailored to each community; feasibility will vary by location (e.g. groundwater, septic, transportation)
- For comments on recommended additional crossroads communities, the most frequently mentioned communities were Esmont, Scottsville, North Garden, Earlysville, and Keene
- Community input generally indicated support for community resilience hubs, with the need for community centers with classes/events/programming, affordable food access, senior or youth centers and related programming, and emergency shelter with phone/internet access
- Preference to use existing buildings (e.g. schools, community centers, fire stations) compared with new buildings
- Uses in crossroads communities should be small-scale and local businesses; rural character while recognizing surrounding residents need goods/services
- Concern with crossroads communities is expansion of development (even if starts out small)

### Protection and Restoration of the Natural Environment

- Use nature-based solutions and the Stream Health Initiative recommendations to protect and restore water quality in streams/rivers/waterways
- Protect and restore important habitats and wildlife corridors, prioritizing forest blocks and important areas identified in the Biodiversity Action Plan
- Protect dark skies including through revised lighting requirements

## Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources

- Historic Freetowns in the Rural Area should be recognized and protected; should use the UVA Finding Freetowns project; how to better share histories and engage with community members
- Support historic preservation and adaptive reuse of existing buildings; new buildings should have to have same footprint as previous buildings (if torn down and not salvageable for adaptive reuse)
- Use historic markers to recognize and share information about locally significant historic and cultural resources
- Recognize historic and cultural areas throughout the Rural Area (which may or may not be in crossroads communities), including historic cemeteries and the area of Howardsville

## Rural Area Land Uses

- Protect farmland and support sustainable agriculture, local food systems, and community gardens
- Rethink density requirements to allow more affordable units to be built in the Rural Area; 'village residential' designation could be expanded to allow for some more housing 'infill' without too much uncontrolled growth (especially if designated as affordable units); consider multi-unit and live-work units
- Consider zoning for workforce/small business opportunities that residents have interest in (specific to each crossroads community)
- Consider transfer of development rights to protect the Rural Area
- Mixed feedback (about half and half split) between support for and concern with changes to land uses at the rural interstate interchanges; most comments in support were specific to the Shadwell interstate interchange

## Multimodal Transportation in the Rural Area

- Make communities more walkable by exploring options for sidewalks, crosswalks, and traffic calming, including in crossroads communities
- Identify rural recreational roads and possible improvements for walking/running/biking, such as wider shoulders, signage, and improved line-of-sight; separated paths and trails should also be explored
- Concern with increasing traffic volumes and safety on some rural roads (e.g. Route 20, Route 6, Route 53); also concern with weekend winery/brewery traffic

- Public transit is needed to access larger/urban areas and services/goods/amenities, including health care and jobs
- Transportation options are needed for community members to age in place
- Show park and rides in the Rural Area; connection to the Multimodal Systems Plan
- Consider bike modal connections to the Rural Area where feasible in the Multimodal Systems Plan

## Rural Area

The Rural Area encompasses a diverse landscape, ranging from the low-lying valleys of the Rivanna and James rivers to steep mountain ridges. The following table summarizes the variety of landcover type found in the Rural Area.

As of the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the county had 182,781 acres (39.1% of the total area of the county) in farms. The majority of this farmland is made up of woodland and pasture. Crop agriculture is a smaller component of the local landscape.

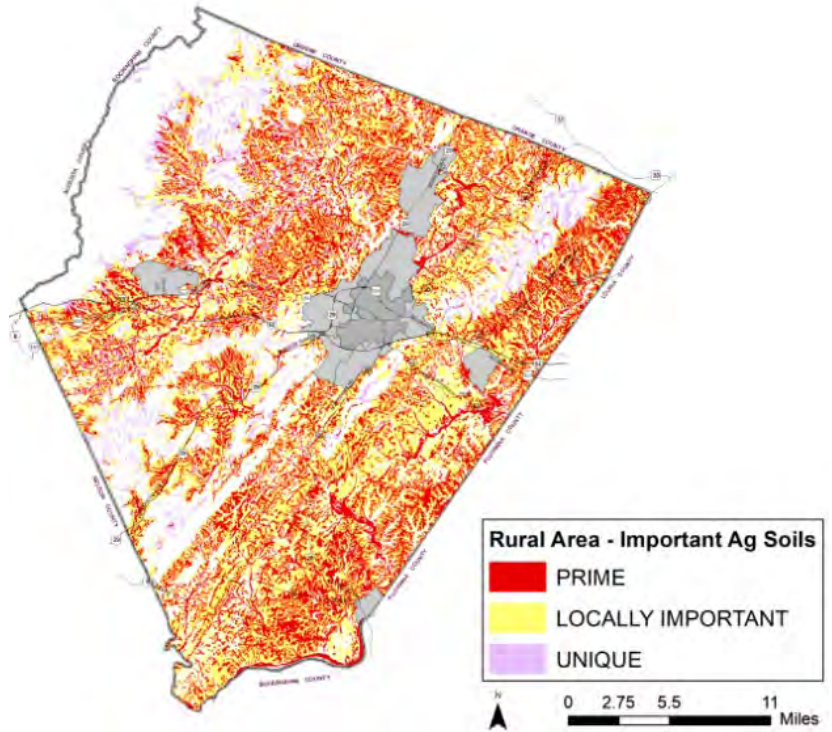
Land Cover Type	Acres	Percent
Forest (wooded areas one acre +)	305,741.3	65.8%
Pasture	73,949.5	15.9%
Tree (wooded areas < 1 acre)	26,751.9	5.8%
Turf Grass	26,585.7	5.7%
Impervious	12,159.8	2.6%
Cropland	8,021.3	1.7%
Open Water	3,370.2	0.7%
Wetlands/Other	3,121.5	0.7%
Harvested	2,671.5	0.6%
Scrub/Shrub	1,517.7	0.3%
Barren	736.7	0.2%

**Land Cover Data**  
**Source: 2013 County GIS Data**

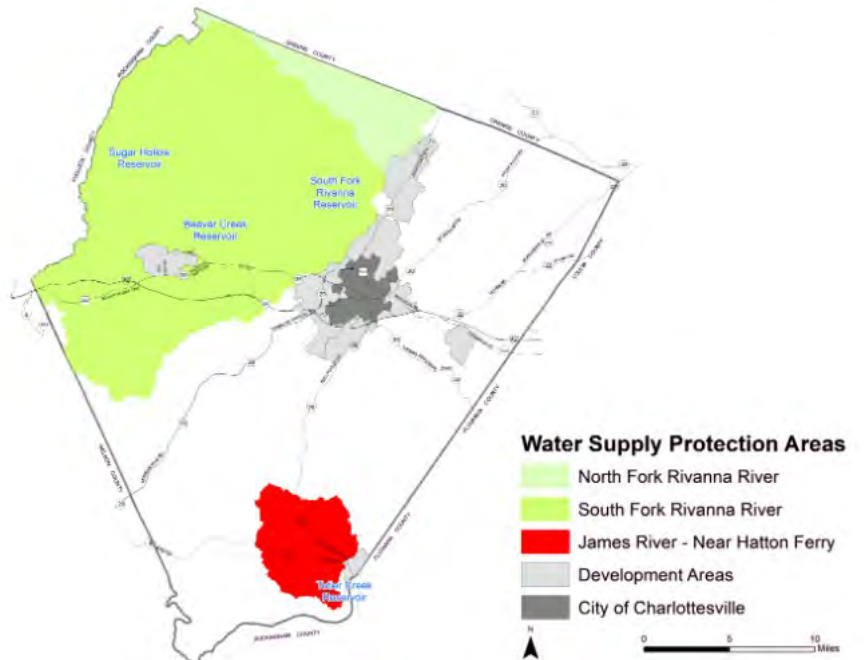


Soil Category	Acres
Prime	113,097
Locally Important	150,313
Unique (Orchards/Vineyards)	24,868
<b>Total</b>	<b>288,278</b>

These farmlands are dependent on productive soils, which are found throughout the Rural Area. The map to the right shows the locations of particularly important agricultural soils in the Rural Area:



The Rural Area is also the source of the majority of the public water supplies that support the Development Areas and the City of Charlottesville. The watersheds of the reservoirs and river-water intakes that supply public water to our community cover about 204,475 acres (319 sq mi) of the Rural Area.



As noted in the land cover table, much of the Rural Area is forest. Between 2008 and 2016 (years for which we have data), forests and other natural land cover in the county sequestered on average nearly one million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year, with forests contributing the most. Carbon dioxide is the most widespread greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. By storing carbon dioxide in trunks, root systems, and the soil, the county's forests are essentially reducing our contribution to climate change and helping maintain a healthy environment for our community. Albemarle County's 2018 Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory Report observes, "the magnitude of the sequestration provided by local forests, trees, and other ecosystems further emphasizes the importance of protecting these resources—to preserve their sequestration potential, to prevent large amounts of unnecessary emissions from forest loss, and for the many other benefits of healthy local forests."



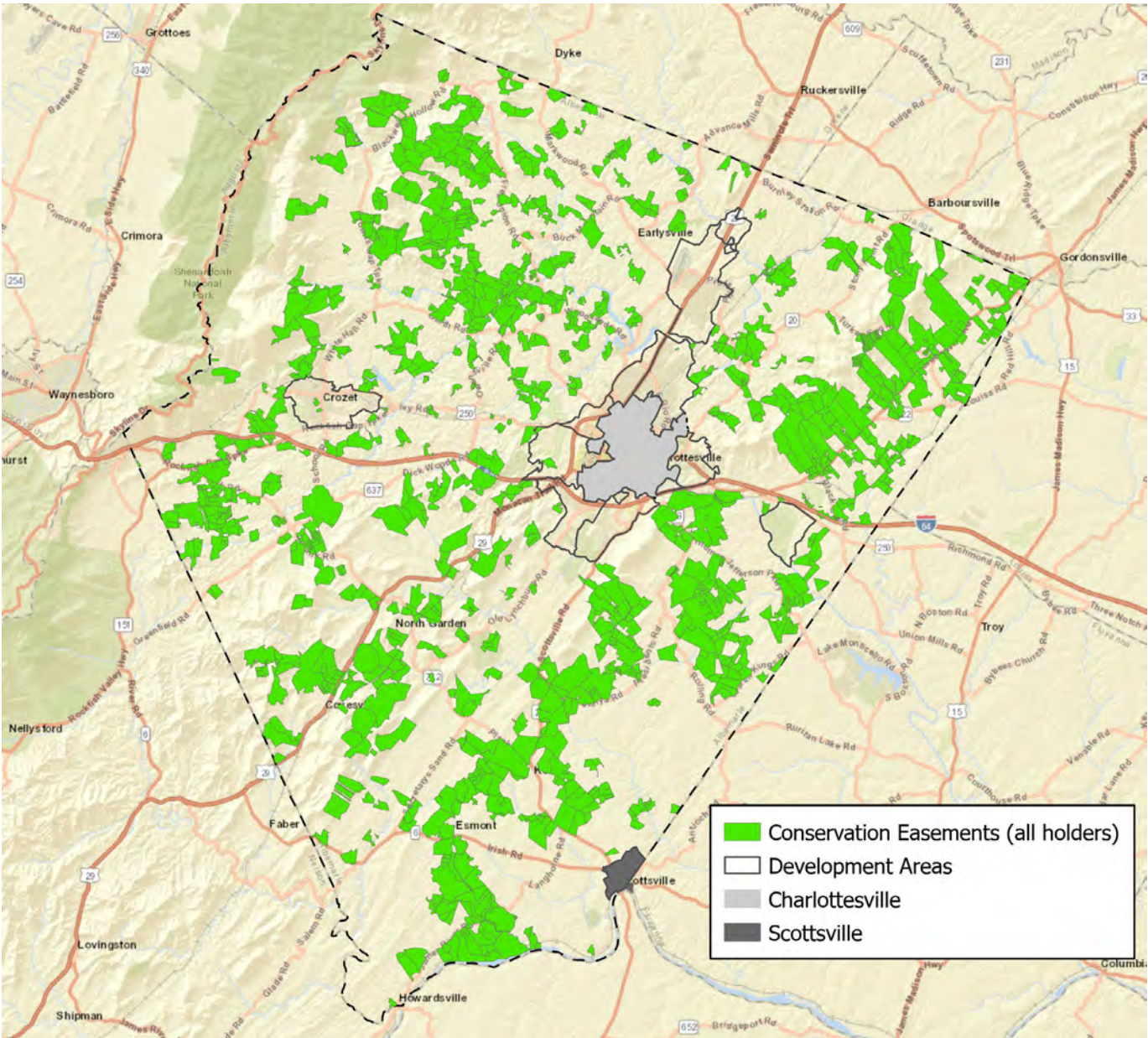
**Albemarle County Forest Cover**  
**Source: National Land Cover Database (2016)**

Given the extent of important resources in the Rural Area, land conservation has become an important tool for achieving the County's land-use goals. Ten organizations, including the County and the County-appointed Albemarle Conservation Easement Authority (ACEA), hold voluntary permanent conservation easements that limit development and protect resources on rural land. A total of approximately 112,000 acres (about 25% of the Rural Area) has been protected in these easements. Of that total, over 30,000 acres are under easements held by the County and/or the ACEA. These conservation easements directly benefit all residents of Albemarle County by helping to maintain a clean water supply and biodiversity. The County's land-conservation programs also include Agricultural-Forestal Districts, another voluntary tool for limiting rural development and supporting resource conservation.



The Comp Plan update will include a review of the County’s programs for conservation of rural land and natural and cultural resources, to ensure that the most effective tools for resource protection are available.

Along with these resource-protection measures, it will be important to continue to review land use recommendations in the Rural Area. Existing and new land uses permitted in the Rural Area will be reviewed for their compatibility with the purposes of the Rural Area. For example, low-impact uses that support the economic viability of farms can be considered as a tool to help keep rural properties intact.



Map of existing conservation easements in Albemarle County (January 2024)



## Crossroads Communities and Community Resilience Hubs

While new development is encouraged to occur primarily within the Development Areas, there are **crossroads communities** in the Rural Area with active businesses, services, and community spaces that provide goods, services, and opportunities for gathering and holding events for surrounding community members. Many of these locations have historic buildings and structures, some of which have been adaptively reused or have the potential for future renovations.

Based on community input to date, the AC44 team has heard the need for more clear recommendations in the Rural Area related to crossroads communities and service provision. Community input has emphasized the importance of identifying options for providing or supporting services such as health care (including mobile), food access/ community gardens, emergency preparedness/response, and places for community gathering.

Based on this feedback, the AC44 team has drafted the following initial definition of crossroads communities. These would be locations that would likely be best suited for community resilience hubs and providing access to some public services and/or small businesses, though they do not preclude consideration of other Rural Area locations. At this time, the draft definition is focused on crossroads communities with active businesses, services, and/or community spaces.

### Draft Definition of Crossroads Communities

Rural Crossroad Communities provide access to **essential public services and basic service needs** to rural populations that are **more distant to designated Development Areas** and can also function to serve as **community resiliency hub** locations.

Crossroad Communities are **not Development Areas** designated for economic development purposes or to provide residential holding capacity. The primary purpose for crossroads communities should be to provide **more equitable distribution of/access to public services** in the Rural Area and to **increase community resilience and wellbeing**.

Using this draft definition, crossroads communities could include Esmont, Batesville, Stony Point, White Hall, Ivy, Earlysville, and North Garden. A refined definition and updated list of communities will be shared in Phase 3.

**The main purpose of defining and identifying crossroads communities is to set up a process for future community engagement and planning efforts to identify desired land uses (which includes the option of no changes), potential ways to support existing businesses and services, potential ways to increase community resilience, and potential ways to support or provide essential public services and basic service needs.** For example, crossroads communities may be good candidates for a new or enhanced community resilience hub. Engaging with individual communities through a planning process is an essential step, as preferences and development feasibility will vary by community, and it is possible that no land use changes are desired or feasible. Historic preservation and adaptive reuse of existing structures should be the preference over new structures throughout the Rural Area. It is also an opportunity to identify important natural areas and features that should be restored and protected. This type of process allows for more focused and detailed study specific to each area, which could include identification of possible transportation improvements that are consistent with the Rural Area transportation recommendations in this chapter and that are permitted by VDOT.



**The Yancey Community Center is an example of an existing building that was adaptively reused to increase community resilience, with a community garden, community events and programs, and access to food and mobile medical services.**

**Community resilience hubs are community-serving facilities that are enhanced to support community members in everyday operation and to coordinate resource distribution and services before, during, and after a natural hazard event.** Community resilience hubs can be public community facilities, such as libraries, community centers, and schools. They can also be spaces in businesses and community organizations. They should be locations that community members are already using and where they feel comfortable going. Community resilience hubs in the Rural Area should make use of existing buildings where feasible, prioritizing adaptive reuse or use of existing public facilities (such as community centers) over new buildings. Having these resilience hubs in the Rural Area could reduce the distance needed to drive to access services and resources for some community members, which would also reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The AC44 team has been collaborating with the Resilient Together project team to incorporate community resilience hub recommendations into both the Comp Plan and the Resilient Together project, which is a collaborative effort between the City, UVA, and the County to develop climate adaptation and resilience plans for each locality. As part of Resilient Together, the project team collaborated with the most recent Emerging Leaders in Architecture cohort to develop a toolkit of recommendations for community resilience hubs in Albemarle County.

Many of the more detailed recommendations from the cohort also overlap with the community priorities heard through the AC44 process, including community gathering and event spaces, community gardens and food distribution, warming and cooling centers, charging stations, wifi, and additional classes and workshops. The cohort considered ADA accessibility, a list of local resources, internet access, emergency power and alert systems, and first aid supplies to be foundational needs for resilience hubs. The cohort also noted that there could be toolkits developed to share with the private sector to use to make upgrades to privately-owned buildings to increase their resilience. They also identified the possibility of public private partnerships and using grant funding opportunities.



**Community Resilience Hub typical features and Phases of Operation**  
Source: Emerging Leaders in Architecture



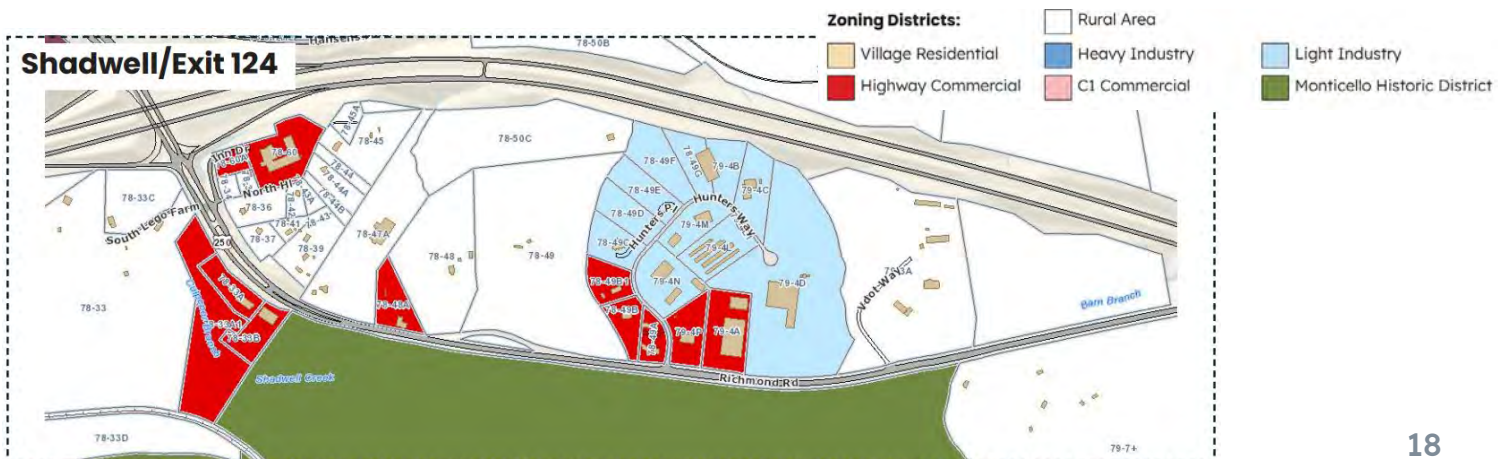
# Rural Interstate Interchanges

There are four rural interstate interchanges in the county’s Rural Area: Yancey Mills/Exit 107, Ivy/Exit 114, Black Cat Road/Exit 129, and the southern part of the Shadwell interchange by Exit 124. These are I-64 interstate interchanges that are located in the Rural Area. There is existing development and underlying by-right commercial and industrial zoning at the Shadwell and Yancey Mills interchanges, with the potential for additional by-right industrial/commercial/office uses.

The Rural Area portion of the Shadwell interchange includes existing light industrial/warehousing, research and development, auto service, retail, and hotel land uses. There is additional potential for by-right development with some properties zoned Light Industry and Highway Commercial. The Yancey Mills interchange includes Yancey Lumber, a VDOT storage facility, several gas stations, churches, and small businesses. There is additional potential for by-right development with some properties zoned Heavy Industry and Highway Commercial.

Development at some rural interstate interchanges could support the concepts developed in the AC44 Framework by providing space for local food systems and food processing/distribution, providing space for uses that may not be suitable for walkable and compact development in mixed-use Development Areas, providing job opportunities consistent with the target industries, and efficiently using land and existing infrastructure where there is existing development.

Further study of the Shadwell (Exit 124) and Yancey Mills (Exit 107) interchanges is needed to determine what land uses may be feasible and desired. **Small Area Plans** are recommended for the Shadwell and Yancey Mills interchanges, prioritizing Shadwell. Small Area Plans would identify general land uses, transportation impacts, protection of environmental features, and infrastructure needs and feasibility. It is possible that no changes in recommended land uses would be identified, and that land uses consistent with the Rural Area designation (mainly agriculture/forestry and supporting uses) would continue to be recommended.

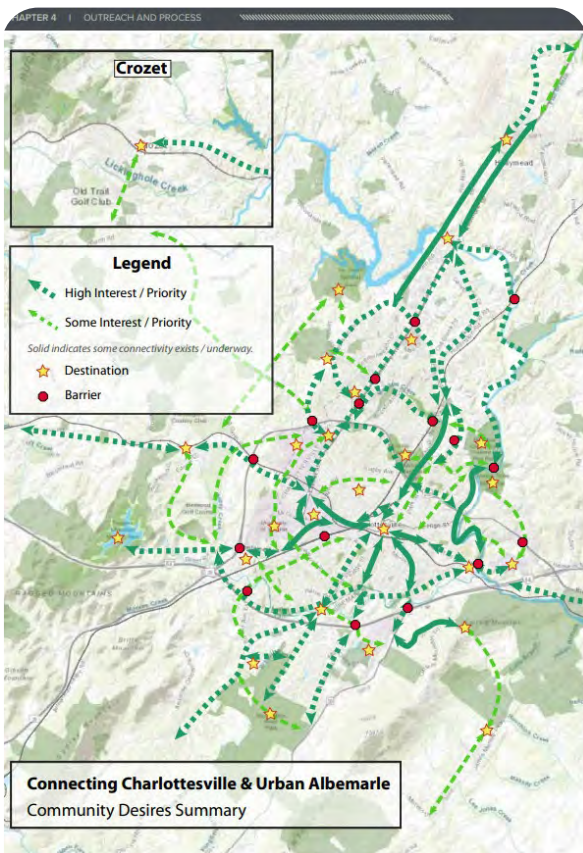


# Identifying Transportation Projects

Albemarle County transportation planning staff collaborate with state and regional planners, developers, and the public to identify future transportation projects. Through these collaborative efforts, staff uses transportation and land use data, planning studies and documents, and the personal experience of community members to determine where transportation challenges already exist and where transportation challenges are likely to arise in the future due to development or other changes.

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) tracks and shares a wide variety of transportation data, much of which can be found on easy-to-view web maps at [virginiaroads.org](http://virginiaroads.org). Data tracked and shared by VDOT includes road segment traffic

volumes, measures of congestion (such as level of service), and measures of safety (such as crashes by mode, type, and severity). This data allows planners to better understand where there are existing transportation challenges and may suggest likely causes of those challenges – for instance, numerous rear-end collisions preceding an intersection might indicate the need for a dedicated right-turn lane, so that individuals traveling through an intersection are not surprised by vehicles slowing down to make a right-turn at the intersection.



**A map from the TJPDC Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan highlighting community input on desired bike and pedestrian connections**

The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) developed the Jefferson Area Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in 2019 for all TJPDC member jurisdictions – Albemarle County, City of Charlottesville, Fluvanna County, Greene County, Louisa County, and Nelson County. This Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan uses data to identify high-priority bicycle- and pedestrian-focused projects for the region, including in the Rural Area.

VDOT also regularly supports Albemarle County by leading planning studies for both the Rural and Development Areas, primarily through their Project Pipeline program. This program commits state and local resources to studying an intersection or corridor with identified safety, congestion, or other concerns. The study process uses traffic data



to better understand the transportation challenges at the intersection or along the corridor. Planners and engineers then develop a variety of alternative treatments for the intersection or corridor and workshop those alternatives with stakeholders and the public. Ultimately, a recommended conceptual design is prepared; this design is a vital part of the materials needed to submit for grant applications.

## Prioritizing Transportation Projects

Once transportation challenges and opportunities have been identified, transportation planning staff must prioritize potential projects based on their expected benefit to the community. Limited financial and administrative resources mean that Albemarle County cannot immediately and simultaneously address every transportation challenge and pursue every opportunity.

Since 2019 (the most recent year projects were prioritized), some of the most highly prioritized projects have been funded and are on their way to completion. Other potential projects have been reimagined and new potential projects have been identified given updated transportation data, information about new development projects, and public feedback. As such, staff are updating the transportation priorities for 2024.

The updated prioritization process will score every potential project on the same metrics as the 2019 process but will add consideration of environmental impact and reimagine the accessibility metric to include specific considerations for equity.



**Proposed SMART SCALE Project: park and ride lot at Exit 107 (south of I-64 interchange)**



Albemarle County transportation planning staff aim to proceed through the list of prioritized projects by addressing the most highly ranked projects first, but there are additional factors to consider. At times, projects that are (locationally) close to each other may be grouped together, as hiring a single consultant to complete the preliminary engineering or construction can result in significant overall cost savings. This may mean that projects ranked #1, #5, and #17 are grouped together and completed before projects #2-4 and #6-16.

Additionally, each funding mechanism is not appropriate for every potential project. This means that a lower ranked project that fits the parameters of a funding opportunity may be pursued before a higher ranked project that does not fit those parameters. The table below shows some of the more common funding opportunities for Albemarle County transportation projects. It should be noted that some of these funding opportunities have long gaps between the date funding is awarded and the date when that funding becomes available for use.

Transportation Project Funding Opportunities					
Funding Opportunity Name	Fund Source	Maximum Funding	Opportunity Frequency	Delay Between Award and Funding Availability	Competitive?
RAISE	Federal	\$25 million; no local match required	Annual	~ 1.5 years	Extremely Competitive
Smart Scale	State	Varies depending on availability; no local match required	Every 2 years (even years)	~ 6 years	Highly Competitive
Revenue Sharing	State	\$10 million/project; 50% local match required	Every 2 years (odd years)	~ 6 years	Moderately Competitive
Capital Improvement Program	Local	N/A	Annual	Following fiscal year	Requires Board of Supervisors support

Examples of transportation project funding opportunities

## Transportation Planning for the Rural Area

While the transportation planning process is largely similar in both the Rural Area and the Development Area, differences in land use and demographics present unique challenges and opportunities for each area and encourage utilization of different transportation planning programs and strategies.

Historically, transportation planning for the Albemarle County Rural Area has been focused on the safe and efficient movement of personal vehicles. Consequently, there has been an emphasis on keeping roads in a state of good repair and paving unpaved roads.

One of the more frequently used transportation programs for the Rural Area is the Rural Rustic Road Program. Funded through the Secondary Six Year Plan, the Rural Rustic Road Program funds the paving of Virginia’s low-volume unpaved roadways. Unlike traditional road reconstruction, in which the rural road may be realigned and/or improvements may be made outside of the right-of-way, the Rural Rustic Road Program improves the road surface within the existing right-of-way, while aiming to maintain the traditional rural lane ambience.

Some rural roads may also qualify for VDOT’s Traffic Calming Program. Residents who notice speeding on their road can contact transportation planning staff to begin the traffic calming process. If a speed study determines that operating speeds (how fast people are actually driving) exceed the posted speed limit by at least 10mph and the roadway meets all other necessary requirements, County staff can continue to work with VDOT to develop a traffic calming plan. Additional funding must be identified to implement the traffic calming plan.

While the programs and processes described above will continue to play important roles in the future, the proposed goals and objectives described in this report refine and expand the County’s approach to transportation planning for the Rural Area. These goals and objectives aim to meet the unique needs of the Rural Area and address many of the comments and concerns voiced by rural residents in the Comprehensive Plan update process and in everyday communications with transportation planning staff.

The proposed goals and objectives plan for investigation of what is needed to improve and expand transit services - including microtransit service, as is currently being piloted in select areas of the Development Areas. Improved and expanded transit service would improve equity in the Rural Area. Nationally, rural communities are home to more people over the age of 65 than urban communities, and that share of the rural population seems to be growing. By 2040, it is estimated that 25% of rural households will include an individual 65 years or older (Smart Growth America). Transit options allow older individuals to maintain their independence without relying on a personal vehicle.

The proposed goals and objectives also aim to improve Rural Area quality of life and accessibility by investigating ways to add pedestrian and bicycle facilities in Crossroads Communities, when desired and feasible. National data on obesity, achievement of federally recommended physical activity levels, and related health outcomes, suggest that rural residents - even more so than their urban counterparts - would benefit from additional opportunities for regular physical activity (Smart Growth America). Infrastructure that prioritizes the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists may encourage more active transportation and recreation among rural residents.

# Planning for Equity in the Rural Area

More broadly, Albemarle County can improve equity in the Rural Area by investigating new and innovative ways to provide a safe, comfortable, and convenient transportation network for all road users.

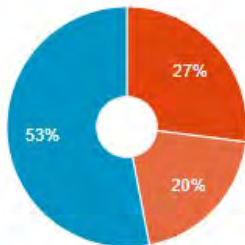
Household housing and transportation costs are often intertwined, such that homes further from the County’s Development Areas may be more affordable than similarly sized homes closer to many daily destinations. However, household housing cost savings may be offset by increased transportation costs – which can fluctuate unpredictably based on gas prices and car maintenance needs. The national Housing and Transportation Affordability Index considers the average combined cost of housing and transportation. In Albemarle County, combined housing and transportation costs account for 47% of a household’s annual income, on average. Transportation alone accounts for 20% of household income, or \$14,756 on average annually.

Transportation costs as a share of overall housing costs also increase as trip distances increase. A white paper by Smart Growth America notes, “Households in rural areas and urban areas alike are driving significantly farther per trip on average as of 2017 than they were in 2001 to accomplish their commutes and daily tasks, 12 percent and 10 percent farther, respectively...And while these trends look similar across rural and urban areas, longer trips have the potential to create much greater burdens on rural Americans, negatively impacting their economic opportunities, quality of life, and health care access” (Smart Growth America, Page 16). Careful land use planning and the provision of a variety of transportation options ensure that Rural Area residents – and their Development Area neighbors – are able to reach vital destinations.

### Average Housing + Transportation Costs % Income

Factoring in both housing *and* transportation costs provides a more comprehensive way of thinking about the cost of housing and true affordability.

- Housing
- Transportation
- Remaining Income



### Transportation Costs

In dispersed areas, people need to own more vehicles and rely upon driving them farther distances which also drives up the cost of living.



**Average housing and transportation costs in Albemarle County as a percent of household income and average annual transportation costs for Albemarle County households.**

**Source: Housing and Transportation Affordability Index 2023**

## Phase 1 Engagement – Recap

Community input shared during Phase 1 reflected the following challenges and opportunities for the Rural Area:

- **Avoid sprawl** and **concentrate development** to protect the natural environment.
- Explore **more services** in the **Rural Area** at an **appropriate scale**.
- Explore land uses that meet our **climate action** goals, such as regenerative agricultural uses and solar.
- Improve **transit/paratransit service** in the Rural Area
- Explore opportunities for better access to **recreation** in the Rural Area (including parks, walking, and biking)

## AC44 Framework



The [Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community](#) was developed during Phase 1 of AC44. The Framework presents a snapshot of what Albemarle County aspires to be in the year 2044, which is a community that has centered equity and resilience in its policies, plans, and actions. The Framework was developed based on input from community members, the AC44 working group, the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, and by incorporating equity and climate action considerations, reviewing goals in the current Comprehensive Plan, and researching best practices. Moving forward, the Framework will be used to guide updating Plan recommendations, including Plan Goals, Objectives, and Action Steps.



Relevant recommendations from the **AC44 Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community** for this chapter include:

- The County will strive for **healthy and thriving ecosystems with protected natural areas**, such as the Rivanna River and Blue Ridge Mountains, water, wildlife, forests, and other natural resources. It will work towards protecting these resources, especially those that serve as natural carbon sinks, increase biodiversity, and enhance its resilience to climate change.
- As part of the commitment to resilience, the County should encourage **sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices** that are supported through a robust local food system making healthy food choices available locally.
- The County’s legacy of valuing its natural, historic, and cultural resources should support a **thriving rural economy** with sustainable farming and heritage based and ecologically based tourism.
- Green and resilient designs should also be incorporated in the Rural Area through **energy efficient** building practices, retrofits of existing building stock, and conservation site design.
- Access to a range of services, including schools, community centers, recreation, health care and other needs for daily life should be **equitably distributed** to all communities and income groups, including **within key locations in the Rural Area** to support rural communities.
- In the Rural Area, there should be **multimodal options** for walking and bicycling that coexist safely with cars and buses.
- Natural and wild areas should be protected and there will be wildlife habitats with connecting **corridors** and stream networks.



## Sources and References

Albemarle County Certificate of Occupancy Data for estimated units built from 2012 through 2022. <https://www.albemarle.org/government/community-development/view/certificate-of-occupancy-reports>

Albemarle County, VA, “2018 Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory Report,” September 1, 2021, <https://www.albemarle.org/home/showpublisheddocument/10553/637659234201630000>

“An Active Roadmap: Best Practices in Rural Mobility”, Smart Growth America, July 2023, SGA-Rural-Transportation-Field-Scan\_Final\_7.27.pdf (smartgrowthamerica.org).

Housing and Transportation Affordability Index (H+T Index), H+T Fact Sheets, <https://htaindex.cnt.org/>

National Land Cover Database, Albemarle County Forest Cover, 2016.

Weldon Cooper Center. Population Projections for Albemarle County. <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/virginia-population-projections>

Willauer, Archer, ‘Crossroads Communities: Creating an Inclusive Definition’, August 26, 2020.

Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Roads Open Data Portal, <https://www.virginiaroads.org/>