



ALBEMARLE COUNTY PLANNING

STAFF REPORT SUMMARY

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| Project Name: CPA202100002 AC44 Comprehensive Plan Update | Staff: Ben Holt, Senior Planner II Tori Kanellopoulos, Principal Planner Kevin McDermott, Acting Planning Director |
| Planning Commission Work Session: October 10, 2023 | Board of Supervisors Work Session: Tentative date: January 17, 2024 |
| Owner: Multiple | Applicant: N/A (County-initiated) |
| TMP: Multiple Acreage: ~272,640 acres (726 sq mi) | Comprehensive Plan Amendment: Update of the Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan |
| Magisterial Districts: Rivanna, Scottsville, White Hall, Jack Jouett, Samuel Miller, Rio | Future Land Use: Multiple |
| DA (Development Area) or RA (Rural Area): All Development Areas and the Rural Area | Topics for discussion: Draft Goals and Objectives for the following three Comprehensive Plan chapters: Environmental Stewardship, Parks and Recreation, and Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources. |
| Discussion/Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Commission review the attached draft Goals and Objectives, community input summaries, and information provided in this staff report and consider the following questions for each chapter: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the draft Goals aligned with the AC44 Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community? • What is missing from the draft Goals and Objectives? | |

STAFF CONTACTS:

Ben Holt, Senior Planner II
Tori Kanellopoulos, Principal Planner
Kevin McDermott, Acting Planning Director

PLANNING COMMISSION:

October 10, 2023

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

Tentative date January 17, 2024

PROJECT BACKGROUND:

Albemarle County's Comprehensive Plan Update (AC44) is currently in Phase 2. The Comprehensive Plan is being updated through a four-phased process:

- Phase 1: Plan for Growth
 - AC44 Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community (Attachment 1)
 - Updated land use buildout analysis (2022)
 - Review of Growth Management Policy using growth management options
- Phase 2: Goals, Objectives, and Planning Toolkits
 - Updated Goals and Objectives for each Comp Plan chapter
 - Plan recommendations for each of the Toolkit topics (Activity Centers, Factors for potential future Development Areas expansion, Crossroads Communities, Rural Interstate Interchanges)
- Phase 3: Prioritize Action Steps
 - Updated Action Steps for each Comp Plan chapter
 - Prioritized Plan recommendations with 'Big Moves' (wide-reaching initiatives that cover multiple goals of the updated Plan that will set the County on track to reach its vision for 2044; Big Moves may include multiple Action Steps and are priorities for the next 5 years to implement the updated Plan)
 - Metrics for tracking successful Plan implementation
- Phase 4: Finalize and Adopt Plan
 - Finalized Comprehensive Plan document
 - Public hearings with the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors
 - Final adoption by the Board

At the beginning of Phase 2 (Step 1), staff shared a series of topic reports with data, trends, challenges, and opportunities for each Plan chapter that provide a foundation for updating Goals, Objectives, and Action Steps. Community members shared input on their priorities by topic through an online questionnaire, chat kits, and pop-ups. Several County committees, including the Natural Heritage Committee, the Historic Preservation Committee, the Architectural Review Board, and the Solid Waste Alternatives Advisory Committee shared their input on their topic areas of expertise and suggestions for relevant Plan recommendations.

The second round of Phase 2 engagement (Step 2) focused on the Planning Toolkit Topics: Activity Centers, factors for potential future Development Areas expansion, Crossroads Communities, and Rural Interstate Interchanges. Community members shared their input through questionnaires, open houses, and chat kits. Summaries of Phase 2 Step 1 (Attachment 5) and Phase 2 Step 2 (Attachment 6) are available on the AC44 website. Staff held work sessions with the Planning Commission (August 8, 2023) and the Board of Supervisors (September 6, 2023) and is continuing to refine the Planning toolkits based on community, Commission, and Board feedback.

The final round of Phase 2 engagement (Step 3) involves sharing draft Goals and Objectives for each Plan chapter with a series of community engagement opportunities and Planning Commission work sessions scheduled for September through December:

- October 10 work session: Environmental Stewardship, Parks and Recreation, and Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources
- November 14 work session: Housing and Economic Development
- December 19 work session: Land Use (including Development Areas and Rural Area) and Transportation and Community Facilities

Community engagement in Step 3 includes online questionnaires, pop-ups, and ‘chat with a planner’ office hours. During each Commission work session, staff will share community input heard to date on the draft Goals and Objectives. Staff anticipates keeping the online questionnaires open throughout the fall, to have ongoing opportunities for community input on the draft Goals and Objectives.

After community engagement and the Commission’s fall work sessions, staff will hold a work session with the Board of Supervisors on all Plan Goals and Objectives in early 2024, which will include sharing the Commission’s feedback. Staff will then revise Goals and Objectives based on community, Commission, and Board input, and will return to the Commission for a work session on Goals and Objectives for all Plan chapters.

PURPOSE OF THE WORK SESSION:

The draft Goals and Objectives for each Comprehensive Plan chapter are developed through collaboration by an interdisciplinary team of County staff, in coordination with partner agencies, by reviewing the current (2015) Comprehensive Plan, incorporating best planning practices, using the AC44 Framework, and by incorporating community, County committee, Planning Commission, and Board of Supervisors input.

The updated Comprehensive Plan will be organized by goals, objectives, and action steps. Each chapter will have multiple goals, and each goal will have associated objectives and action steps. A goal is a high-level and long-term direction to fulfill the AC44 Framework and Plan vision. An objective is a specific outcome or target that accomplishes a goal. An action step is a policy, infrastructure improvement, planning effort, or other activity or project to achieve and implement a Plan objective.

The purpose of this work session is to receive Planning Commission feedback on the draft Goals and Objectives for Environmental Stewardship, Parks and Recreation, and Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources, focused on the following two questions:

Q1 – Are the draft Goals aligned with the AC44 Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community?

Q2 – What is missing from the draft Goals and Objectives?

The Commission’s feedback will be used to refine the draft Goals and Objectives and will be shared with staff topic experts for each chapter and with the Board of Supervisors at their work session.

Environmental Stewardship: Draft Goals and Objectives

Topic Overview

Albemarle County’s landscape, located in the Virginia Piedmont and on the eastern flank of the Blue Ridge, has a variety of habitats, species, and environmental features. Ongoing protection and restoration of the environment is essential for the health of our ecosystems and biodiversity, our water supplies, our

community's resilience to the effects of climate change, and our enjoyment of the natural world. For example, the County's 2018 Greenhouse Gas Inventory estimated that, on balance, forests in Albemarle County sequester an estimated 945,732 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year on average, emphasizing the importance of protecting and sustainably managing 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.

Access to our natural environment should be equitably distributed throughout the county, including through parks, trails, and educational opportunities. Identifying gaps in access to our parks and natural systems and where community members may be most vulnerable to the effects of climate change are important initial steps for implementing the recommendations in this chapter and related sections of the Comprehensive Plan, including Parks and Recreation.

It should be noted that this chapter name has been changed from 'Natural Resources' in the 2015 Plan to 'Environmental Stewardship' in AC44. This change is intended to emphasize the importance of protecting and restoring our natural environment while recognizing its many benefits and its broader importance, rather than a series of 'resources' to be used.

Key Themes from Community Input

The following summary highlights the most prominent themes from community engagement heard to date during AC44 Phases 1 and 2. These community priorities help inform Plan recommendations. It should be noted that Plan recommendations for tree coverage, tree stewardship, community resilience hubs, and local food systems will primarily be in the Land Use and Community Facilities sections of the updated Plan, though they are also strongly tied to this chapter. Dark skies recommendations are found in the Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources chapter.

- Protect and restore waterways, water quality, riparian buffers, and wetland habitats. Improve stormwater management practices to protect waterways.
- Ensure the county has an adequate drinking water supply, especially with increasing risks from climate change such as heat and droughts.
- Prepare for and protect against natural hazards and disasters, including flooding, heat impacts, and droughts. Disaster preparedness should include preparing for extended power outages.
- Increase tree coverage, including through more protections and incentives for existing trees, ensuring trees do not conflict with utilities, and requirements for replacement of tree coverage with new development.
- Have stronger protections for local habitats and native species, including mountains and ridge tops, old growth forests, unique local habitats, aquatic habitats, open space, wildlife corridors, pollinators, and natural carbon sinks.
- Prioritize protection of the habitats, species, and conservation focus areas identified in the County's Biodiversity Action Plan.
- Protect dark skies and mitigate the impacts of light pollution.
- Community resilience hubs could provide spaces for community gathering and emergency preparedness and response. Top priorities for these hubs are community centers, food access, senior and youth programming, and emergency shelters.
- Desire for community gardens and supporting local food systems.
- Encourage waste reduction and improve waste management, including by providing incentives, through education initiatives, and by expanding recycling programs.

Draft Goals and Objectives

The draft Goals and Objectives for Environmental Stewardship are provided in Attachment 2 (starting on page 4), along with a summary of community input and the topic report.

The updated Goals and Objectives for this chapter reflect community input and carry forward key themes from the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, including clean and healthy waterways, drinking water protection, biodiversity, connected and restored habitats, and natural hazard mitigation. The updated recommendations have a stronger focus on climate change resilience and mitigation efforts and recognize additional climate risks and vulnerabilities in our community. The updated chapter will also incorporate language and recommended actions from the County's ongoing Stream Health Initiative.

Parks and Recreation: Draft Goals and Objectives

Topic Overview

Parks, greenways, and recreation amenities play a critical role in the quality of life for a healthy and thriving community. These assets create a more attractive environment and support an active and healthy lifestyle. Greenways provide multimodal transportation opportunities and connections to key destinations. Parks and athletic facilities offer play areas for youth, sports opportunities, and access to nature.

Albemarle County's parks, greenways, blueways and natural areas create green systems that protect and connect valuable environmental features, including forests, waterways, hillsides, and natural habitats for native species. Additionally, these protected green systems support climate resilience, including trees and vegetation that capture CO2 emissions and mitigate urban heat impacts. Green systems also help by buffering waterways, reducing runoff, and protecting against flood impacts.

Greenways support active alternative modes of transportation through bike and pedestrian connections to various parks and recreational facilities as well as other destinations, such as schools, employment areas, shopping centers, and residential areas. These assets also reduce dependency on vehicles, lower emissions, and improve local air quality.

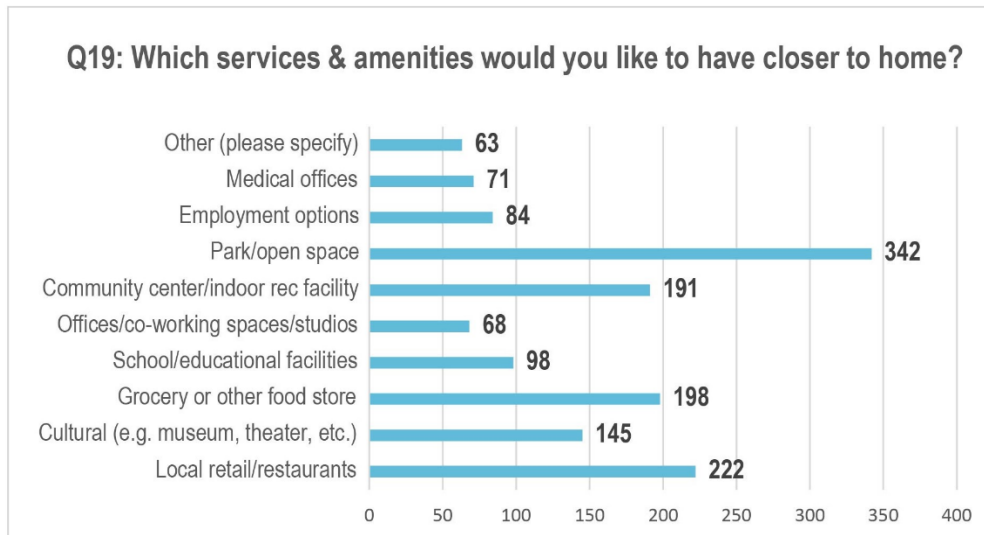
Parks and Recreation overlaps with many other topics within the Comprehensive Plan, including land use, transportation, environmental stewardship, and community facilities. Maintaining and expanding parks and recreation facilities and improving access to these resources will play a valuable role in creating a more equitable and vibrant community.

Key Themes from Community Input

The following summary highlights the most prominent themes from community engagement heard to date during AC44 Phases 1 and 2. These community priorities help inform Plan recommendations.

- Expand the County's parks system – including playgrounds, nature areas, pocket parks, and community green spaces. Provide more pocket parks and greenways in communities that currently lack such amenities, including lower income neighborhoods.
- Provide more greenway trail networks and access to water recreation through blueways.
- Expand sports facilities to meet growing demand, including playing fields and courts.
- Proactively plan for parks and green spaces prior to development, redevelopment, and increasing density.
- Improve parks amenities, including restrooms, picnic tables, and benches.
- Improve wayfinding and signage for parks and greenways.

- Improve accessibility to parks and greenways, making it easier to navigate parks and trails with wheelchairs and strollers.
- Provide more recreation opportunities, including evenings (outside school and work hours)
- Plan for the recreation needs for a variety of users, including teenagers and seniors.
- Provide trails, amenities (such as benches), and public parks and civic spaces in Activity Centers.
- Provide facilities in Crossroads Communities such as small parks, playgrounds, exercise equipment, youth centers, trails, and community gardens.



Responses to Phase 2 Step 1 questionnaire on services and amenities community members would like to have closer to where they live. Parks and open space was the top choice.

Draft Goals and Objectives

The draft Goals and Objectives for Parks and Recreation are provided in Attachment 3 (starting on page 3), along with a summary of community input and the topic report.

The updated Goals and Objectives for this chapter reflect community input and carry forward key themes from the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, including developing parks and greenways systems, protecting natural areas, expanding access to greenways and blueways, multimodal transportation options for accessing parks and other destinations, and regional coordination. The updated Plan recommendations have a stronger emphasis on planning for a countywide park system and greenway network, accelerating the development of parks and greenways, enhancing the visitor experience, using sustainable land management practices and facility maintenance practices, and responding to the growing and changing needs of our community.

Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources: Draft Goals and Objectives

Topic Overview

Albemarle County's rich historic, cultural, and scenic resources contribute to the county's identity as a unique and storied place. These resources also contribute significantly to the quality of life of Albemarle's residents

and enhance the experience of visitors. These valuable resources must be preserved and protected to maintain Albemarle's distinctive character and the resulting benefits to the community.

Maintaining and preserving the county's character first requires comprehensive identification of the defining individual historic, cultural, and scenic resources. Celebrating these resources and educating the public communicates their value to residents and visitors, fostering a sense of community pride and responsibility. Such efforts of identification and education establish a foundation for a balanced program of incentives and protection measures to support active preservation.

Preservation and education efforts also play a critical role in enhancing equity in the community. A more inclusive history of the county can be established by recognizing and uplifting under-told narratives that represent a broad and diverse range of community members and the places that represent those events and efforts. A more complete picture of the county's development can be told by expanding the traditional definition of "significance" to acknowledge those places, and by increasing storytelling and access to those stories.

Protecting and preserving historic, cultural and scenic resources also contributes to the county's climate action goals. Preservation and adaptive reuse of historic structures conserves building materials and can incorporate energy retrofits. Protection of scenic resources includes preserving forests, farmlands and waterways. Protection of scenic rivers includes vegetated buffers along waterways, which help prevent flood damage, improve water quality, and capture CO2 emissions.

Key Themes from Community Input

The following summary highlights the most prominent themes from community engagement heard to date during AC44 Phases 1 and 2. These community priorities help inform Plan recommendations.

- Identify historic and cultural resources throughout the county, especially histories that have not typically been recognized.
- Recognize Black and African American and historic Freetown communities in the Rural Area. Consider using the UVA Finding Freetowns project and other ways to better share Freetown histories and engage with community members.
- Collaborate with indigenous groups for tribal acknowledgement and commemoration.
- Provide educational opportunities to share information about local historic resources.
- Use tourism to support historic preservation.
- Expand the County's historic marker program.
- Improve historic preservation and adaptive reuse in villages and Crossroads Communities in the Rural Area, using an appropriate small and rural scale.
- Increase incentives for property owners to preserve historic resources.
- Adopt regulations to protect historic and cultural resources and landmarks, including prevention of resource demolition.
- Protect scenic resources, including viewsheds, scenic corridors, and scenic streams.
- Update the County's lighting ordinance to better protect dark skies and to decrease light pollution.

Draft Goals and Objectives

The draft Goals and Objectives for Historic, Scenic and Cultural Resources are provided Attachment 4 (starting on page 3), along with a summary of community input and the topic report.

The updated Goals and Objectives for this chapter reflect community feedback and include key themes from the 2015 Comprehensive Plan, including identifying and recognizing the value of historic resources, sharing information about historic resources, protecting historic, cultural, and scenic resources, protecting dark skies, and maintaining the visual integrity of scenic roadways and entrance corridors. The updated Plan chapter now incorporates recommendations for uplifting narratives and resources of historically underrepresented groups, promoting energy-efficient upgrades with adaptive reuse, and more proactively identifying and protecting historic, scenic, and cultural resources.

Next Steps

Throughout this fall (September through December), the AC44 team will continue to gather community input on draft Goals and Objectives and will hold corresponding Planning Commission work sessions. The next works sessions are scheduled for November 14 (Housing and Economic Development) and December 19 (Land Use and Transportation and Community Facilities).

In early 2024, staff anticipates holding a work session with the Board of Supervisors on draft Goals and Objectives for all Plan chapters. Staff will share community input and Commission feedback and recommendations for each chapter. Once the AC44 team has received community, Commission, and Board input on all chapters, the team will revise the draft Goals and Objectives based on this feedback. Staff will then hold a work session with the Commission on all draft Goals and Objectives. From that point, staff anticipates moving into Phase 3 where the Action Steps, metrics for tracking successful implementation of the Plan, and prioritized “Big Moves” for the next 5 years will be developed.

Attachments:

[Attach 1 – CCP2023-01 AC44 Goals and Objectives for Natural and Historic Resources and Parks and Recreation – AC44 Framework for an Equitable and Resilient Community](#)

[Attach 2 – CCP2023-01 AC44 Goals and Objectives for Natural and Historic Resources and Parks and Recreation Environmental Stewardship: Draft Goals and Objectives](#)

[Attach 3 – CCP2023-01 AC44 Goals and Objectives for Natural and Historic Resources and Parks and Recreation – Parks and Recreation: Draft Goals and Objectives](#)

[Attach 4 – CCP2023-01 AC44 Goals and Objectives for Natural and Historic Resources and Parks and Recreation – Historic, Scenic, and Cultural Resources: Draft Goals and Objectives](#)

[Attach 5 – CCP2023-01 AC44 Goals and Objectives for Natural and Historic Resources and Parks and Recreation – Phase 2 Step 1 Engagement Summary](#)

[Attach 6 – CCP2023-01 AC44 Goals and Objectives for Natural and Historic Resources and Parks and Recreation – Phase 2 Step 2 Engagement Summary](#)