

Albemarle Comprehensive Plan
Adopted June 10, 2015
Chapter 7 Rural Area

Consideration of New Uses in the Rural Area

This Chapter recommends consideration of a few new land uses in the Rural Area, including supportive uses for agriculture, tourism, and crossroads communities. The County recognizes that a delicate balance exists between providing more opportunities for supporting rural uses and allowing so many of them that the Rural Area features are lost. Frequent tour buses along County roads can cause rapid deterioration of narrow gravel roads. Excessive noise can interfere with a horse or cattle operation.

It is important that any change take place slowly with enough time to evaluate potential impacts. Analysis of the impacts of the recent Zoning Ordinance changes should be conducted before adopting new zoning regulations. Policies, programs and regulations that address only one aspect of the Rural Area to the detriment of others should be avoided or, where already in place, revised. Only by prudent and thoughtful decision making will the Rural Area resources be preserved while encouraging uses that benefit the economy.

Criteria for Review of New Uses

As new uses are proposed in the Rural Area, it is essential that they be able to meet the following standards. New uses should:

- relate directly to the Rural Area and need a Rural Area location in order to be successful, (e.g., a farm winery has to be located in the Rural Area and would be unlikely to succeed in the Development Areas);
- be compatible with, and have a negligible impact, on natural, cultural, and historic resources;
- not conflict with nearby agricultural and forestal uses;
- reflect a size and scale that complements the character of the area in which they will be located;
- be reversible so that the land can easily return to farming, forestry, conservation, or other preferred rural uses;
- be suitable for existing rural roads and result in little discernible difference in traffic patterns;
- generate little demand for fire and rescue and police service;
- be able to operate without the need for public water and sewer;
- be sustainable with available groundwater; and

- be consistent with other Rural Area policies.

Most importantly, the success of the use should be related to its rural location. For example, a farm winery where most of the grapes are grown onsite is a Rural Area use. A standalone wine store that sells wines from all over the world is a commercial use that belongs in the Development Areas. A department store distribution center located near an interstate interchange should be in the Development Areas, but a storage and distribution facility for locally produced agricultural products could be located in the Rural Area. Performance standards will be needed for any new uses to ensure that the size, scale, and location of the new commercial uses recommended for the Rural Area are appropriate. It is of prime importance that the appearance and function of new uses blend and not detract from the key features of the Rural Area. New uses should not overwhelm an area in terms of their function or visibility.

Outdoor Recreational Activities

Outdoor recreational activities are one of the ways local residents and visitors enjoy the Rural Area. The Appalachian Trail, Shenandoah National Park, and County lakes and beaches are but a few of the public spaces available for outdoor activities. More information on parks and recreational activities may be found in the Parks and Recreation, Greenways, Blueways, and Green Systems Chapter. Private recreational facilities are also present in the Rural Area. Strategy

4b: Review the zoning regulations related to recreational uses to see whether updates are needed to better reflect rural recreational activities that should be available by special use permit in the Rural Area.

Rural recreational uses are activities that need a Rural Area location in order to be successful. The County's Zoning Ordinance currently lists "swim, golf, tennis or similar athletic facilities" as one category of recreational special use available in the Rural Area. These uses were adopted into the Zoning Ordinance in 1980 before distinctions between Rural Area and Development Area uses were as distinctive as they are today. Two issues exist with the current regulations: (1) the category is not reflective of the types of recreational uses that need a Rural Area location for success; and (2) the current listed uses may no longer be viewed as acceptable in the Rural Area.

Uses that need a Rural Area location to thrive are uses typically not found in more urban areas. Canoe liveries, day camps, and campgrounds are existing special uses available for recreational activities in the Rural Area. In recent years, interest has been expressed in commercial mountain biking, cyclocross, zip lines, and rock climbing activities. These uses or uses with their characteristics are not directly addressed in the Zoning Ordinance. Consideration should be given to further defining outdoor recreational uses that are most appropriate. In addition to the need for a Rural Area location, one of the most important considerations should be the impacts of rural recreational uses.

The current list of recreational uses allowed in the Rural Area should also be included in review of the regulations. Clubs for swim, golf, and tennis have many suburban characteristics and typically are located in or adjacent to the Development Areas. A Development Area location is more accessible to and compatible with nearby residential uses where sidewalks and road improvements are expected. Consideration should be given to removing these uses from the list of available special uses in the Rural Area.