

Albemarle County Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 3.1 – Growth Management

Goal: Albemarle County's Development Areas will be attractive, vibrant areas for residents and businesses, supported by services, facilities, and infrastructure. Growth will be directed to the Development Areas and the County's Rural Area with its agricultural, forestal, historic, cultural, scenic, and natural resources will be preserved for future generations.

Strategy 1a: Continue to encourage approval of new development proposals in the Development Areas as the designated location for new residential, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development. Only approve new development proposals in the Rural Area that are supported by Rural Area goals, objectives, and strategies.

Chapter 4.1 Natural Resources

Goal: Albemarle's ecosystems and natural resources will be thoughtfully protected and managed in both the Rural and Development Areas to safeguard the quality of life of present and future generations.

Objective 1: Ensure clean and abundant water resources for public health, business, healthy ecosystems, and personal enjoyment by preventing shortages and contamination.

..."Investment in public utilities in the Development Areas occurs to help prevent sprawl and contamination of groundwater supplies. Retaining groundwater resources is one of the reasons why new residential development in the Rural Area is not encouraged." ...

Chapter 6.1 Economic Development

Goal: Albemarle's economy will be diverse, strong, and sustainable, and retain and benefit County citizens, existing businesses, and new local ventures.

Objective 4: Ensure that there is sufficient land to accommodate future business and industrial growth, and plan for infrastructure to serve employment areas where these businesses are located.

Strategy 4b: Encourage development of business and industrial uses in the Development Areas on appropriately zoned land and consider proactively rezoning land to allow for light industrial uses that have been identified on master plans.

Chapter 7.1 Rural Area

Goal: Albemarle's Rural Area will have thriving farms and forests, traditional crossroads communities, protected scenic areas, historic sites, and preserved natural resources.

Relationship to the Vision: The Rural Area provides places for agriculture, forestry, protection and preservation of natural resources, and tourism. These places are home to residents who find a sense of community in the Rural Area's crossroad villages. Retaining the important parts of Albemarle's rural heritage is essential to the County, which relies on its scenic beauty and natural resources to support its quality of life.

Features expected in the Rural Area include:

1. A strong agricultural and forestal economy with large unfragmented parcels of land on which owners can produce their goods, have opportunities to gain value from processing their own produce, and have access to local markets;
2. Protected natural resources, which include mountains, hills, and valleys, healthy streams and sustainable supplies of clean groundwater, and diverse, interconnected areas of viable habitat for native wildlife;
3. Protected historic structures, archaeological sites, and other cultural resources;
4. Rural and historic landscapes that enhance the visitor's experience;
5. Crossroads communities that provide support services and opportunities to engage in community life;
6. Distinct boundaries between the Development Areas and buildings and sites that are clearly rural; and
7. Well-informed citizens who understand the cultural, economic, and ecological aspects of the Rural Area.

Land Use Plan for the Rural Area

..."Policy and Zoning Ordinance changes are recommended to promote the County's preferred uses for the Rural Area, including supportive uses for agriculture, historic preservation, tourism, crossroads communities, and strengthening land conservation initiatives. The strategies discussed in this Chapter all share the goal of helping to keep the Rural Area rural."...

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.