

LAND USE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The Land Use Plan provides direction for the physical development of the County. It reflects the County's projected economic, population, and housing growth balanced against its policies emphasizing the preservation of the County's traditional rural character. It recognizes existing land use arrangement, supporting facilities, and physical development limitations. At the same time, the plan proposes a future land use direction that is more consistent with the expressed desires of residents to preserve the County's rural character and encourage development in areas that are more suitable for development. The land use plan recognizes the County as part of a larger region and attempts to integrate the County's physical development with that of neighboring jurisdictions. The Future Land Use Map and the Goals and Objectives are the significant parts of this plan that will be used to guide future land use actions and decisions.

The County's population is increasing while the demographics are changing as previously discussed in the chapter on Population and as evident from Table 19. An older population is migrating to the County from other urbanized areas. As a result, more rural land is being developed which is altering the character of the County. More importantly, it appears that land is being developed and subdivided at a rate exceeding the County's population increases. The popularity of large lot subdivisions throughout the rural areas of the County reduces the amount of usable agricultural and forestal lands. It is increasingly difficult for the County to provide public services to this scattered

residential population. In addition, there has been an increase in speculative land investment by non-residents for its future development potential. These trends have further contributed to the development and subdivision of land at a rate exceeding the ability of the market to absorb it and the County to provide services to it.

The overall impact of all of these factors has been a loss of productive agricultural and forestal lands as well as an increasing conflict between agricultural and residential uses. This is further supported by the Masters project conducted by Charles Deitzel, Duke University, 2002, "A Spatial Model of Land Use/Land Cover Change: Rockbridge County, VA," which examined the gradual urbanization of rural areas in the County through the use of satellite imagery. In the face of this pressure, measures should be taken to protect viable agricultural and forestal lands. These lands provide the direct economic benefit of production while indirectly preserving open space and rural character which positively impacts tourism, outdoor recreation, wildlife habitat and quality of life. A growth management scheme should discourage random and scattered development in favor of a more compact, coherent and sustainable pattern. Development should be encouraged in the urban fringes of Lexington, Buena Vista and Glasgow where growth can be accommodated by existing public infrastructure. Public infrastructure should be provided to areas such as Fairfield, Raphine, Goshen and Natural Bridge where existing and future populations warrant these services.

This chapter will describe why and how Rockbridge County intends to achieve a

more sustainable growth scheme. Land use patterns will be discussed, planning areas will be defined and a framework for preserving the more rural areas of the County will be constructed.

LAND OWNERSHIP

As of 2002 there were 16,290 tax parcels in Rockbridge County. Table 53 shows the number of tax parcels by Magisterial District and indicates out-of-county ownership:

From 1991 to 2002, there was an increase in total out-of-county ownership of 29 percent. This figure represents the number of tax parcels rather than the acreage. Currently, the Walkers Creek District and Town of Goshen have the highest percentage of parcels owned by non-county residents at 25.7 percent and 26.7 percent respectively. The Buffalo District is lowest at 14 percent. Of the 16,290 total tax parcels in the County, approximately 6,977 are undeveloped. 2128 of these undeveloped parcels are located in existing residential zoning districts while 4221 parcels are in the existing agricultural districts. This gives an indication of the potential for future development regardless of the creation of new subdivisions.

Table 53
Tax Parcels by Magisterial District
Rockbridge County
2002

Magisterial District	Tax Parcels	Out-of-County Owner	% Out-of-County Owner
Buffalo	3,270	460	14.07%
Kerrs Creek	2,927	524	17.90%
Natural Bridge	2,431	542	22.30%
South River	2,809	553	19.69%
Walkers Creek	3,144	808	25.70%
Town of Glasgow	1,249	192	15.37%
Town of Goshen	460	123	26.74%
Total	16,290	3,202	19.66%

Source: Rockbridge County Commissioner of Revenue, 2002.

By comparing total tax parcels in 1977 to those in 1995 and 2002, it is increasingly evident that land is being consumed at a

faster rate than the County population is growing. In an approximately 20 year period, the population increased by 2897 while 4590 new tax parcels were created. Table 54 compares total tax parcels by Magisterial District in 1977, 1995 and 2002. Some errors are evident in the totals for the Natural Bridge District which can be attributed to the difficulty in accounting for the many small lots in the Glasgow/Natural Bridge Station area created at the turn of the century in preparation for a "boom town."

Table 54
Total Tax Parcels: 1977, 1995, and 2002

Magisterial District	1977 PARCELS	1995 PARCELS	2002 PARCELS	NEW SINCE 1977
Buffalo	1,976	3,098	3,270	1,294
Kerrs Creek	2,194	2,675	2,927	733
Natural Bridge*	2,820	3,762	3,680	860
South River	1,879	2,639	2,809	930
Walkers Creek*	2,831	3,470	3,604	773
TOTAL	11,700	15,644	16,290	4,590

*Includes incorporated towns of Glasgow and Goshen.

Source: Rockbridge County Commissioner of Revenue, 2002.

Zoning

Community land use controls have evolved to protect property rights and land values by requiring the separation of incompatible land uses. The purpose of these controls is to provide a degree of predictability to the future development of the community and to direct development in such a way as to insure that public services can be provided as efficiently and cost effectively as possible.

A community's need to regulate land use is often related to its population density. As more people occupy and use the land in a community, separations between landowners diminish and the potential for conflict among land uses increases. Communities with intensive rural uses, moreover, such as agriculture, timbering or mining, often feel it necessary to establish land use controls to protect the interests of individual property owners and of the entire community.

In 2002, using the County's Geographic Information System, the extent of zoning categories was as follows:

- Conservation - 22% or 85,273 acres
- Agricultural - 75% or 291,829 acres
- Residential - 1.7% or 6,899 acres
- Business - 0.7% or 2,686 acres
- Industrial - 0.4% or 1,793 acres
- Total land area - 388,480 acres

The majority of the business and residential zoning occurs around the periphery of the City of Lexington, which is located in the geographic center of the County near Interstates 81 and 64 and around the periphery of Buena Vista. Other substantial pockets of business and residential zoning occur along the Interstate 81 corridor at the junctions of Raphine, Fairfield and Fancy Hill, and along the Route 11 and Route 60 corridors. Table 55 shows tax parcels of conforming and non-conforming use by zoning district. The vast majority of land currently zoned for conservation exists in the

Table 55
Tax Parcels of Conforming/Non-Conforming Use
By Zoning District - 2002

Zoning	Conforming	Non-Conforming	Vacant	Total
Residential	1,817 (26%)	350 (5%)	4,824 (69%)	6,992
Business	771 (29%)	452 (17%)	1,437 (54%)	2,660
Planned Business	1 (2%)	0	58 (98%)	59
Industrial	174 (15%)	116 (10%)	875 (75%)	1,165

Source: Rockbridge County Planning Office, 2002.

George Washington and Thomas Jefferson National Forests near the eastern and western borders of the County. Other concentrations of conservation districts are located in the northwest quadrant of the County and include the Goshen and Little North Mountain Wildlife Management Areas. The central portion of the County is zoned primarily for agricultural use.

Substantial residential development is occurring on agricultural land. Increasingly, farms are developed into either large lot subdivisions or hobby farms. This trend

dramatically alters the character and productivity of the rural landscape as discussed in the Housing chapter, new single family homes averaged 155 per year between 1990 and 2000 and are scattered throughout the County. According to the Census of Agriculture, 1987, and the 2000 Virginia Statistical Abstract, the total number of farms in Rockbridge County has decreased from 682 in 1987 to 631 in 1997. This represents a 7.4 percent decrease between 1987 and 1997. Total farm acreage decreased during this time period from 146,455 acres to 141,766 acres. The average value of farms rose by 100.7 percent, from \$196,394 to \$394,195 in the ten-year period. To offset the real estate taxes associated with this increasing value, the County allows qualifying lands to receive a reduced assessment under a program known as Land Use. Categories of land use assessment include agricultural, forestal and open space lands. According to the Commissioner of Revenue's office, as of January 2003, there are 150,783 qualifying acres under this program.

Loss of farmland has been even more dramatic over a 27 year period from 1974 to 2001 according to the Virginia Agricultural Statistics Bulletin, 2001. In 1974, there were 712 farms totaling 168,224 acres. By 2001, there were 631 farms totaling 140,110 acres. This represents an 11.3 percent loss of farms and a 16.7 percent decrease in farm acreage. The average farm value in 1974 was \$90,753 while the value of farms has increased 334 percent over this same 27-year period. Since 1993, 463 acres of agriculturally zoned properties have been rezoned for development purposes.

A further indication of land use trends is land parcel size. Table 56 depicts a range of parcel sizes by Magisterial Districts that gives an indication of the extent of land remaining with agricultural or forestal potential.

Table 56
Tax Parcels by Size
Rockbridge County - 2002

Magisterial District	Range of Parcel Size						District Total
	.001 to 2.00	2.01 to 10.00	10.01 to 20.00	20.01 to 50.00	50.01 to 100.00	100 plus	
Buffalo	1,278	1,002	254	328	213	195	3,270
Kerrs Creek	1,021	923	260	359	207	157	2,927
Walkers Creek	1,314	880	255	288	194	213	3,144
Town of Goshen	407	32	8	10	2	1	460
Natural Bridge	1,542	569	111	112	53	44	2,431
Town of Glasgow	1,234	12	1	0	1	1	1,249
South River	1,189	920	201	245	136	118	2,809
Total	7,985	4,338	1,090	1,342	806	729	16,290

Source: Rockbridge County Commissioner of Revenue, 2002.

RECENT ACTIVITIES & ACTIONS

Several studies have been conducted and numerous other activities and actions have been taken due to the recognition of the need to prepare for future growth pressures.

A 1993 study by Dewberry and Davis provided options for water and sewer extensions along West Midland Trail. Plans and specifications for a 0.5 million gallon water tank, pump station, water mains and sewer mains along Borden Road, serving Stone View, Mount Vista and Red Manor subdivisions were developed. The estimated cost for water and sewer line extensions in this area ranged from \$3.55 million to \$9.96 million.

The County studied the feasibility of providing public water and sewer to the current growth areas of Fairfield and Raphine. A 1995 study by Dewberry and Davis concluded that the estimated cost of extending sewer service to Fairfield would be approximately \$5.7 million. Sewer service to Raphine would increase the cost by \$1.6 million. A water line from North Lexington to Raphine has been completed. A 2002 study

by WW Associates has revealed the current costs for providing sewer to Fairfield and Raphine along with the required line upgrades along Mill Creek will be about \$8.5 million.

In 1996, the County, in conjunction with the City of Lexington, hired Lardner/Klein Landscape Architects, to study the major traffic corridors in the County to create a more workable and attractive pattern of roadside development. The "Entrance Corridor and Interstate Interchange Plan" for Lee Highway, Midland Trail and the interstate interchanges was the product of this effort. This plan provides an overall vision for these entrance corridors along with some simple design principles and planning strategies to achieve the vision. Recommendations include techniques to reduce the chaos created by multiple driveways close together, to encourage folks to walk safely from one building to another, to reduce visual clutter through sign size and height reductions, to orient the visitor through better placed signage, and to enhance everyone's passage with attractive landscaping.

A Community Visioning Workshop, co-sponsored by the County, the Alliance for

Sustainable Development and the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council, was held in 1997. Over fifty citizens attended the weekend event and charted goals and objectives for the area's future. A key component of the event was the creation of a "Sacred Places" map. This map identified areas and buildings of special significance, which may require extra protection through land use and zoning regulations. Citizens considered these elements critical in framing the perceived character of Rockbridge County.

An outgrowth of the Visioning Workshop was the creation of "Imagine Rockbridge". Imagine Rockbridge, a citizens group, wanted to continue the efforts of the visioning workshop out of a deep concern for the County's future. They addressed issues in the categories of health, elder and childcare, land use, business, economy and education, history, environment and quality of life, communication and information, proposed actions, and implementation. Vision fairs and community workshops were held involving over 1400 participants. The overriding concern for land use was protecting the rural character of Rockbridge County in order to maintain our quality of life. Imagine Rockbridge volunteers continue to track progress toward completion of actions laid out in their April 2000 report.

The County passed its first Telecommunications Tower Ordinance in 1997 in an attempt to better direct the development of this cellular infrastructure, which has had a tremendous visual impact on the rural landscape. The ordinance has been amended to reflect changing technologies. The new ordinance directs tower development below the crest of hills, particularly in the proposed Mountain Overlay district.

Private actions to protect the County's rural resources have been numerous. The County amended the Land Development Regulations

in 1997 to allow for Agricultural and Forestal Overlay Districts. This is a voluntary measure allowed under Section 15.2-4300 of the Code of Virginia whereby landowners may apply to have their properties placed in this overlay district. By establishing a district, property owners agree not to convert their farm, forest land and other open space lands to more intensive commercial, industrial, or residential uses for a term of between four and ten years. In return, the County and the Commonwealth agree not to take actions or make infrastructure investments that will place increased pressure on landowners to convert land in a district to more intensive uses during the term of the District. At the end of the contract period, land may be withdrawn from the district, new properties may be added and the district may be renewed for another period of time. Currently, the following five Agricultural/Forestal Districts have been established and 5238 acres are under contract with the County.

- Fancy Hill - 2064.76 acres
- Hog Back - 447.44 acres
- Smith Farms - 792.02 acres
- Sunnyside - 705.46 acres
- Turkey Hill - 1228.35 acres

Many citizens are beginning to see the value of placing conservation easements on their property. Conservation easements are permanent, legally binding, private agreements in which a landowner retains ownership of his property while conveying certain specified rights to the easement holder. While the specifics of individual easements are as unique as the land they protect, all conservation easements place limits on the future development of the property. Easements provide meaningful and lasting conservation benefits while keeping the land in private ownership. Donating a conservation easement that meets the federal tax code requirements is the same as making a charitable contribution and the

value of the easement may be deducted from taxable income. Additionally, savings may be seen on estate taxes and such properties may qualify for use value rates for open space under the County's real estate tax code. As of January 2003, conservation easements have been placed on over 5757 acres in the County and are held by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Valley Conservation Council and the Natural Bridge Soil and Water Conservation District.

In addition to conservation easements, in 2003 the County adopted a purchase of development rights program. Titled the Rockbridge Easement Agreement Program (REAP), the County would purchase the development rights on a qualifying property in exchange for the placement of a conservation easement on that same parcel.

The County hired Cox Company, a landscape architecture and planning firm, in 2000 to help with implementation of various previously approved goals and objectives and to assist in the development of the Land Use Plan component of the Comprehensive Plan. Commercial development issues were addressed and new land use goals were established which are listed at the end of this section. Working with the land use committee, areas targeted for future growth and other uses were identified. Historic development patterns were studied and recommendations were made to reach the goals.

FUTURE LAND USE MAP

A Future Land Use Map is shown at **Figure ___**. The map shows, in a summary fashion, the various land use areas of the County. Specific areas have been designated as Suburban or Village Planning areas with larger, open areas being designated for agricultural or rural residential uses in designated Rural Planning areas. Mountain

areas on the map are under consideration for inclusion in a new Mountain Overlay District. **Figure ___** shows the existing and proposed infrastructure that supports the growth concepts in this plan.

In response to our goals for preserving the rural character of the County and in order to more effectively provide public services, more development of areas around the Cities of Lexington and Buena Vista, the Towns of Glasgow and Goshen and Natural Bridge Station is to be encouraged. These Suburban Planning Areas are defined as areas bordering corporate cities and towns already characterized by existing development as well as undeveloped properties with access to sound transportation links, public services and relatively strong growth pressures. They may contain commercial corridors that would fall under a corridor overlay district to promote quality development. Mixed residential, commercial and industrial uses would be promoted in these areas. Projects with more intensive uses would be required to buffer their activity from adjoining less intensive uses. Neighborhood development that brings residents closer to employment centers, goods and services is desirable. Walking and biking should be promoted to reduce the dependency on automobiles. It is desirable for new projects within these planning areas to connect to public water and sewer.

Village Planning Areas are defined as the more remote village areas characterized by the presence of existing development, accommodating road networks and existing or proposed access to public water and sewer services. The Raphine area, Fairfield and Natural Bridge are determined to be such areas. The types of uses allowed would include mixed residential, retail; offices, civic or public uses, parks/recreation and limited, small scale industrial. New buildings should be similar in scale to and compatible with

existing buildings. As with Suburban Planning Areas, it is desirable for new projects within the Village Planning Areas to connect to public water and sewer.

Rural Village Areas are defined as those areas typically thought of as “crossroads communities.” They are characterized by the presence of a post office or a country store and a core of houses on small lots. Public water and sewer would not be expected in these areas in the near future, but may be desirable. Downtown Raphine, Brownsburg, Rockbridge Baths, Steeles Tavern, Vesuvius, Kerrs Creek, Collierstown, Effinger, Cornwall, Arnolds Valley and Fancy Hill meet these qualifications. Appropriate uses would include residences, civic or public uses such as parks, recycling centers, churches, small-scale commercial to support the daily needs of nearby residents. Rural industrial uses, typically dependent on locally available natural resources, may also be appropriate. A fundamental objective of the Rural Village is to allow for carefully organized residential and non-residential uses within planned village areas, employing commonly accepted “rural by design” and “smart growth” principles. The Rural Villages are intended to absorb residential land uses that may not directly relate to active agricultural and forestry activities. It is recognized that the rural village subdivision will receive a lower level of public service delivery than what would be provided to residential development located within the County’s growth areas

Subdivision of land must be sensitive to the physical scale and attributes of the surrounding rural areas. It must clearly demonstrate that the project will not conflict with the rural village planning objectives for specific location, taking into consideration the impact of increased residential density and scale, requirements for public services, transportation access and road capacity, environmental and historic preservation

issues, schools and other relevant community impacts. Cluster development is strongly encouraged within the Rural Village District. Each village cluster subdivision must provide a “village open space” parcel within the development. The subdivision lots must be designed so as to maximize the utility of the remaining open space tract for a bona fide recreational, preservation, or open space purpose.

Interstates 81 and 64 serve as heavily traveled, limited access regional highways. Their interchanges have been, and will continue to be, prime candidates for future commercial related activities. However, given the fact that each of the interstate interchange areas located in the County is unique in character, both in terms of existing land use patterns and in environmental attributes, the Interstate Interchange land use designation will only be applied to those areas located within Suburban and Village Planning Areas, where commercial activities would be most appropriate and where public infrastructure is either available or proposed in order to support these activities.

The Interstate Interchange land use designation and any associated development standards would apply to Raphine (Exit 205 on Int. 81), Fairfield (Exit 200 on Int. 81), Timber Ridge (Exit 195 on Int. 81), Lexington (Exit 55 on Int. 64), Lexington/Buena Vista (Exit 188 on Int. 81). The Fancy Hill (Exit 180 on Int. 81) and Kerrs Creek Interchange (Exit 50 on Int. 64) would be treated as a Rural Village Areas as previously discussed, while further expansion of the Natural Bridge Interchange (Exit 175 on Int. 81) is not recommended. It is further recommended that the Brattons Run Interchange (Exit 43 on Int. 64) be downzoned from its current business to a rural zoning designation.

Recommended land uses in the areas designated for Interstate Interchange

development should be related to and supportive of the interstate highway function. These would include regional uses, which rely on a regional or large-scale market and, consequently, would depend on the interstate highway's function as a non-local mover of people and goods. This category would include such uses as regional shopping centers; major office, business or industrial employment centers; regional governmental or institutional centers; and large scale recreational and tourism facilities. Light industry, warehousing and wholesaling businesses dependent on the trucking of goods also favor such locations. The Interstate Interchange designation may also include highway service businesses which primarily rely on the interstate traveler as a market including hotels, motels, restaurants, service stations, convenience stores and gift, craft and antique shops.

The balance of the County would be designated as an area for the purpose of protecting agricultural, forestal and open space resources and the preservation of the County's traditional rural character. The current two-acre density allowed in these areas is not appropriate to achieve these goals. New use districts within the Rural Planning Area are being developed in accordance with the Goals and Objectives that follow. These use districts would have much lower development densities than is currently allowed. Conservation subdivisions with small lots and significant open space would be considered as by-right subdivisions with the most favorable development densities. Standard subdivisions with large lots and little or no reserved open space would be approved for lower densities. Additionally, the net developable area of a given property would be calculated prior to applying the allowable lot density. This technique allows the land to influence its own carrying capacity. The net developable area would be determined by totaling the land area comprised by slopes greater than

25%, the 100-year flood plain, sinkholes, water bodies and wetlands. These physical land units would then be subtracted from the gross acreage to determine the net developable area.

The Rural Planning Areas provide a vehicle by which prime agricultural and forestry lands, mountain areas, natural and scenic resources, critical watersheds, sensitive environmental areas, and other large tracts of land of rural character within the County may be preserved and maintained. It is the intent of this district to promulgate existing farm and forestry operations, conserve natural features and vegetation, eliminate scattered residential uses on small lots demanding public services, protect river frontages and water recharge areas, promote new agricultural and forestry production, and encourage the conservation and maintenance of sensitive environmental areas.

Residential land uses that are not related to and supportive of active agricultural and forestry activities are not encouraged within the Rural Planning Areas. Such development would better be located in a designated Growth Area or a Village Area as designated on the Future Land Use Map. Pursuant to its adopted goals for new development, it is the intent of the County to concentrate its efforts to provide services and infrastructure within the designated Growth Areas. Conversely, individual residences, subdivisions and other uses in the Rural Planning Areas will receive a lower level of public service delivery than what would be provided to development located within the designated Suburban and Village Planning Areas and connections to public sewer may not be allowed.

An applicant for subdivision in the Rural Planning Areas must clearly demonstrate that such development would not conflict with rural preservation objectives. When and where permitted, the subdivision must be

designed in such a manner as to maximize the utility of any remaining rural tract for a bona fide agricultural, forestry or conservation purpose.

To further support the rural character goals, a Mountain Overlay District is being developed as called for in the Goals and Objectives. The mountain overlay will be established by identifying slopes greater than 25% and the associated elevation. In the eastern portion of the County along the Blue Ridge Mountains, the 1600-foot contour achieves this objective. In the western portion of the County along the Allegheny Mountain range it is the 2000-foot contour. Big and Little House Mountain, Short Hills and a few ridges around the Brownsburg area would also be included. Areas above these contours may receive additional protection from development under zoning due to their environmental, scenic and cultural value to the community.

LAND USE GOALS

GOAL: Enhance, protect and preserve the ambiance and environmental quality of Rockbridge while promoting a greater awareness of the scenic beauty and other positive attributes of the County. Maintain areas in their rural state and attempt to protect sensitive and unique land resources from degradation. Agricultural areas are to be maintained, and incompatible land uses (such as commercial and industrial development, dense residential development and their related public improvements) shall be discouraged in rural areas.

Objective: Promote the conservation of open space within the County and actively promote the long-term preservation and maintenance of valuable natural resource areas through public acquisition, continued

support for and implementation of use-value taxation, increased regulatory control over and fees associated with new development and other cooperative efforts.

Strategy

1. Identify environmentally sensitive areas within the County and implement innovative growth management procedures that promote design sensitivity to the environment at a site-specific level.
2. Define specific valuable natural resources (i.e. viewsheds, aquifer recharge areas, drainage ways and open space) which the County wants to preserve and identify these resources on a map to be used as a planning base map.
3. Define specific descriptions of environmentally sensitive areas (i.e. erodible soils, slopes, drainage ways, ridges, areas adjacent to interstates and major highways and historic and natural resources).
4. Recognizing projected levels of natural resource demand, allocate sufficient land areas within the Future Land Use Plan for open space, as well as agricultural, forestry and recreational uses.
5. Potential natural resource sites should be identified and managed for sustainable use.
6. The preservation and enhancement of agriculture and forestry is a fundamental cornerstone of the social, environmental, economic and cultural character of Rockbridge County. The Plan shall establish Rural Preservation Planning Areas for the purpose of delineating and guiding land use policies for these areas.

7. Agricultural and forestal areas shall be given priority in the land use planning process over the potential for "leap-frog" urban development in outlying areas of the County.
8. Agricultural soils of highest local quality should be identified and preserved as an important natural resource.
9. Woodlands and open spaces along County road corridors should be preserved.
10. Endorse the Virginia Department of Forestry's recommended forest management practices.
11. Identify specific measures to aid the County in its ongoing efforts to preserve rivers and streams for the purpose of preserving their natural beauty and environmental attributes, while maximizing recreation potential and conservation opportunities, and locate specific geographic areas where these measures may be applied.
12. Discourage the development of permanent structures in areas situated within the one hundred-year-floodplain.
13. Develop a wellhead protection program to safeguard public water supply systems.
14. Develop and implement groundwater education programs geared toward homeowners with respect to fertilizer and chemical application practices.
15. Protect the quality and reliability of the regional aquifer by establishing guidelines for the judicious use of groundwater supplies.
16. Regulate development in karst areas in order to reduce the hazards of ground subsidence and collapse and the hazard of groundwater pollution.
17. Incorporate the recognition of the limitations of existing natural features such as air, water, slope, geology, soils and natural habitat in the County when planning future residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural growth.
18. Encourage new residential developments to provide sufficient open space and neighborhood parks.
19. Incorporate a "Rural" or "Rural Character" test into the regulation of future land use development and rezonings. This test would require future applicants to explain how his or her project would help to preserve the ruralness or rural character of the County.
20. Coordinate environmental preservation efforts with neighboring jurisdictions and establish an action plan targeting environmental concerns that require a regional approach.

Objective: Create a rational balance between the management and preservation of the County's rural areas and the accommodation of fiscally responsible growth and economic development.

Strategy

1. The Plan shall be used to guide the location, scale and timing of new development while ensuring that development does not exceed the County's fiscal capacity to provide adequate public facilities and infrastructure.
2. The Plan shall provide for the inventory and assessment of the development opportunities and constraints of the County's land. The County shall be organized into "Planning Areas" to delineate the boundaries of geographical areas with similar characteristics.
3. The Zoning Ordinance and County Zoning Map shall be changed based upon the goals objectives and

strategies of this plan. The preferred mix of future land uses for each of the "Planning Areas," as well as their related land use densities and intensities. The recommended future uses shall be based on the County's analysis of the following: (1) the existing use, physical, ecological, infrastructure and economic characteristics of the land; (2) the application of the relevant goals, objectives and planning policies; and (3) the location and marketability of the land for appropriately scaled and phased land uses.

4. The Future Land Use Plan recognizes that the densities and intensities of future land uses should be based on "environmental performance standards" which establish the "carrying capacity" of the land. The Plan promulgates the concept and methodologies to calculate the "net developable area" in determining a subject property's inherent "carrying capacity."
5. Recognizing that a certain amount of future growth and development is inevitable in Rockbridge County, the Future Land Use Plan should direct future development to occur on vacant or infill parcels located within or directly adjacent to developed areas (i.e. in and adjacent to the Cities of Lexington and Buena Vista).
6. Develop and implement procedures that will promote the conservation of environmentally sensitive land areas that would be adversely impacted by new development and redevelopment activities.
7. Designate growth areas, urban service districts and village districts in order to promote a coherent development pattern.
8. Industrial and technology parks and commercial centers should be carefully

master planned, landscaped and buffered to preserve the visual quality of the County and in order to avoid conflicts with any existing or planned residential or agricultural areas.

9. Encourage establishment of conveniently accessible and attractive commercial concentrations in a variety of locations as supported by appropriate infrastructure through the planning, implementation and enforcement of new zoning regulations.
10. Establish conceptual master planning strategies aimed specifically at encouraging appropriate new development in and around interstate interchanges.
11. Identify areas suitable for redevelopment and develop specific strategies on a site-by-site basis to encourage such redevelopment.
12. Timely assessment of land use following rezoning and subdivision recordation.

GOAL: Protect and enhance both existing and future development in Rockbridge County through pro-active growth management programs, including the implementation of modern zoning strategies and progressive community design guidelines.

Objective: Protect and enhance the unique qualities of Rockbridge County's small County atmosphere, as well as its sense of history and place.

Strategy

1. Promote development opportunities that respect, preserve and protect the County's ambience, historic properties, riverfront areas and sensitive environmental areas.
2. Encourage new development to locate

- designated service areas near population centers where public water and sewer service, schools, emergency services and other community facilities are provided or are planned.
3. Develop a formula based upon a maximum allowable lot coverage that maintains the rural character of the region.
 4. Ensure the high quality of future development in the County by enacting creative urban design standards and implementation procedures.
 5. Emphasize strict adherence to well-coordinated urban design themes, as well as the organized phasing of adequate public infrastructure to support planned growth within the County.
 6. Reduce the adverse impact of growth through the continued refinement of architectural and landscaping standards.
 7. Future development applications should be reviewed on the basis of its projected impact on County school capacity.
 8. Encourage citizen participation and increased public awareness of local issues in the planning and growth management process through timely notices and announcements in the newspaper and radio. This encouragement should be stressed not only during the development of the Future Land Use Plan but also in advance of monthly public hearings, meetings and future "visioning" sessions.
 9. Update the Rural Area and Conservation zoning district language in order to provide the County with means to reduce future sprawl development and the "parcel-by-parcel" development of valuable agricultural lands and open spaces.
 10. Develop economically feasible strategies for minimizing the visual impact of electrical power lines, telephone lines, television cables on principal, and entrance corridor viewsheds.
 11. Explore the potential for establishing a Mountaintop Development Ordinance, which would be designed to protect valuable ridgelines and scenic viewsheds from future development using a threshold elevation to be established by the Board of Supervisors.
 12. Enhanced performance standards governing driveway access and the stabilization of steep slopes for single family detached residences that are not contained within platted subdivisions should be developed in order to provide improved erosion control and emergency vehicle access.
 13. Investigate the range of opportunities for regional control on steep slopes in both developed and rural areas.
 14. Encourage development applicants to dedicate right-of-way within their projects to accommodate "hiker-biker paths."
 15. Encourage parking lot connections at commercial sites to minimize traffic from major corridors.
 16. Continue to use the County's Historic Overlay District in conjunction with the Tourism Corridor Overlay District as means of protecting scenic and historic landmarks and other sacred cultural features in the County.
 17. The County should develop a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) that incorporates specific implementation strategies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan and includes a realistic time line for implementation.
 18. Encourage regional cooperation in developing planning goals, strategies, zoning regulations and permitting

decisions with Lexington and Buena Vista, especially in the County "growth belt" around the two cities in order to promote land use compatibility.

19. Consider the development of a special North Lee Highway overlay district or other zoning technique that will protect this scenic, rural highway from strip development, either residential or commercial, in sections between designated service areas.