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RURAL AREA

It’s Our Future

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RURAL AREA

DESCRIPTION

The vision of the Rural Area has not changed much over time. From providing a legacy for a future generation of farmers, to providing habitat for wildlife, keeping taxes low, assuring continued local food production, and maintaining the rural community, the vision for our rural landscape is important.

The physical character of this area is low, flat land with wide floodplains and altered drainage. It is a place that still contains working farms, farm related businesses, limited non-residential areas along with some scattered housing sites. There is a significant presence of existing agricultural and other rural-based economic activities in this part of Virginia Beach. This presence is reflected in the diversity of agricultural and rural related activities including traditional and specialty crop cultivation, tree farms, equestrian facilities, wetland banks, fish farms and other similar uses.

There are a few, small commercially zoned nodes that provide basic support retail and services to local rural community. Most notable of these is Pungo, a rural community gateway located at the intersection of Indian River and Princess Anne Roads that serves as the principal gateway to the southern rural area.

The Rural Area lies south of Indian River Road from North Landing Road to Muddy Creek and Back Bay and extends to the North Carolina border. The land, wetland and water cover nearly 145 square miles, close to half of the total area of the City. Approximately 28,000 acres, or nearly 44 square miles, of land is devoted to production agriculture, upland forest and pasture. Wetland and water cover about 48,700 acres and an additional 9,700 acres is either privately owned or federal and state owned property used for environmental conservation purposes. Only about 3,200 acres of land in this area is actually developed, comprised mostly of rural dwellings and a small amount of rural commercial uses.

Most of the area is comprised of Land Management soils. These are somewhat Poorly, Poorly or Very Poorly drained soils, as
defined in the 1985 issue of the U.S. Soil Survey for Virginia Beach, and are not suitable for large subdivisions.

It would be highly impractical to extend public water and sewer lines to this area. Given these factors, it is logical to conclude that the Rural Area will remain rural into the foreseeable future and, as such, it must rely on sound rural planning principles and effective economic strategies to help it retain its character and vitality.

RURAL PRESERVATION PLAN

It is the purpose of this Rural Preservation Plan to identify appropriate, fair and equitable rural planning policies for our Rural Area. The City seeks to achieve the following five planning objectives:

1. PRESERVE AND PROMOTE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CONTINUED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

One of the key objectives of the Rural Preservation Plan is to provide opportunities for preserving agriculture. Our City’s agricultural land (cropland, pasture, forest), both north and south of the Green Line, has dwindled from about 51,000 acres in 1982 to roughly 32,000 acres in 2009. In order to stop or reverse this downward trend, effective and affirmative agricultural preservation strategies must be put into place.

Agricultural preservation is an important economic and land use issue. Hence, it is important for comprehensive planning strategies to do their part in reinforcing and promoting agriculture as much as possible. One implementation tool Virginia Beach has been using with much success is the Agricultural Reserve Program.

2. RECOGNIZE THE RURAL CHARACTER AND THE NEED TO PRESERVE ITS OPEN SPACE AND SCENIC BEAUTY

The City of Virginia Beach wants to preserve the rural way of life for the people who live there, but how can we accommodate the demand for a rural lifestyle without diminishing the rural setting in the process? Many people who live in rural areas expect to continue the rural lifestyle enjoyed by previous generations.

Rural areas may be characterized as a balance between the natural environment and human uses with farms, horse boarding, campgrounds, wineries, and open space activities served by long stretches of two lane roadways. The presence and growth of equestrian-related uses complement the rural way of life and contribute to the diversity and
Economic health of the City. There are occasional “commercial nodes” like Back Bay and Creeds that are small in scale with a few houses next to some shops serving, in a limited way, the commercial needs of a rather large geographic area. Industrial uses will generally be those that are related to and dependent on natural resources such as agriculture, timber or minerals.

One way to protect the rural setting is to protect the historic resources in the Rural Area. Accordingly, it is the City’s policy to use all available resources including those provided by the City’s Historic Review Board and Historic Preservation Commission as well as the Princess Anne County / Virginia Beach Historical Society to preserve designated historic resources. Efforts to retain these historic resources should be accomplished in a responsible and innovative manner. The efforts include providing land use planning guidance and tax credit assistance to owners of historic properties in order to help protect and preserve the City’s limited number of valuable historic resources and surrounding open space areas. Owners of qualified properties should be encouraged to participate in the Virginia Beach Historical Register program and receive recognition for their contributions to our City’s heritage.

3. Protect and Sustain Environmental Resources for Future Generations

Well over half of the total area south of Indian River Road is comprised of water and tidal and non-tidal wetlands. Much of it is located in low-lying floodplain zones, publicly owned environmental conservation areas, and areas consisting of poorly drained soils. These so called “Land Management Soils” are capable of handling only a very limited amount of new development. It is an important comprehensive planning objective to protect and sustain all our valuable environmental, scenic and agricultural resources against inappropriate activities and intense growth pressures. We must orient rural residential development away from sensitive environmental resources to areas consisting of well-drained soils and deeper water tables that are capable of handling septic systems. This, coupled with the objective of maintaining a reasonable overall level of rural development potential, establishes sound planning policy that balances the need for limited rural growth against its impact on the surrounding natural environment. Because of the unique topography in this area, no new residential dwelling units shall be located within the floodplains as cited in Section 5B of the City’s Site Plan Ordinance.

4. Provide Reasonable Rural Development Opportunities

This Rural Preservation Plan affords reasonable rural development opportunities well beyond the 10 or 20-year horizon. Property owners may choose to sell their development rights by participating in the Agricultural Reserve Program or to develop their land either ‘by-right,’ which yields a minimum density, or through a conditional use approach which may yield a higher rural density while preserving large tracts of farmland and open space areas. Rural development

Munden Point Park
potential is based on land area and soil quality as opposed to lot frontage. The design of a new development is a key component to minimizing impacts to or loss of rural character. Growth should be guided towards the more traditional rural center.

5. Eliminate Need for Urban Infrastructure

It has been a long-standing policy of the City not to allow the extension of urban infrastructure into the rural area of the City and this policy remains in effect. The Rural Preservation Plan allows reasonable levels of rural residential development to continue into the foreseeable future thus ensuring that demand placed on public facilities will remain at or below what is deemed acceptable for rural communities. For example, over the past few decades, the rate of development in this area has held steady at around 30 to 40 dwelling units per year. The City also recognizes its responsibility to provide programmed improvements and ongoing public facility and infrastructure maintenance projects in this area.

Pungo

Description

The most recognizable gateway to the southern rural area is Pungo. It comprises a small and varied cluster of commercial, residential and public properties located around the crossroads of Indian River and Princess Anne Roads. Both roads serve as major access routes into this region. The northern two quadrants of Pungo lie in the Transition Area where limited suburban growth is recommended and the southern quadrants are located in an area designated for rural use. The area south of Pungo consists of farmland, equestrian centers, small rural commercial centers, estate homes, rural residential neighborhoods and conservation areas. The area north of Pungo is characterized by large, suburban residential developments that are still under construction, patches of farmland and a 130-acre regional commercial center.

Recommendations

A community-based Pungo Center Implementation Plan should be undertaken to guide the creation of a vibrant village center, one that respects the rural integrity and heritage of the area. The Plan should include a process of developing an Implementation Plan with a coordinated effort to create a zoning overlay and design guidelines that will incentivize and enforce land use recommendations. The plan should include the following elements:

» Land Use
» Transportation
» Environment
» Infrastructure
» Other Public Service Delivery
» Economic Vitality
» Housing and Neighborhoods
» Design and Heritage
» Community Involvement
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RECOMMENDATIONS

» Cost Estimates
» Implementation Tools
» Branding and Marketing

INTERIM PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR PUNGO

Until the implementation plan is adopted, the following interim planning guidelines should be applied to development or redevelopment proposals within the Pungo area.

» Development proposals should reflect the rural character of existing historic structures.

» Refurbish and preserve older historic structures (i.e. Pungo Grill, Munden’s Store).

» Avoid further suburbanization (i.e. large, separate and single uses with parking in front).

» Avoid discretionary action that would further a suburban pattern of development.

» Plan and design a special character for Pungo Center that respects its rural heritage and incorporates the general Site and Design Principles as cited in the Comprehensive Plan’s ‘Reference Handbook’.

» Protect existing public rights of way and provide additional pavement width on Princess Anne and Indian River Roads in Pungo to accommodate safer movement of farm equipment and bicyclists.

» Improve traffic signalization and optimize dedicated turn lights and associated left turn lanes for the predominant turning movements during peak traffic periods.

» Consolidate scattered accesses to property into clearly defined entrances off the road.

» Provide a safe, attractive and continuous pedestrian network.

» Public water and sewer is recommended to serve the area north of Indian River Road with an alternative centralized sewer system serving the area south of this road.

GENERAL LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUNGO

Development proposals that affect properties in the Pungo Area prior to adoption of the implementation plan should consider the following general land use recommendations for each quadrant located around the Princess Anne and Indian River Road intersection. A fiscal feasibility assessment must be conducted prior to programming any public facilities within this study area.

» Northwest Quadrant
The property facing the intersection should accommodate primarily service and retail uses, and the buildings and structures should attempt to re-create a village street facade similar to that of older villages. Parking should be located behind the buildings.

The quadrant is an appropriate location for an inn, which could act as a distinct centerpiece, differentiating this quadrant from the others by projecting a unique site and architectural connection with Pungo Center. An inn would offer food, lodging, and resort-style services such as spa facilities, horseback riding, and “elder hostel” activities. It could act as an appropriate interface with the equestrian and agricultural uses in the northern and western extremities of the quadrant.
Northeast Quadrant
The preservation of small-scale retail and commercial uses at the intersection and the creation of a heritage park of about 15 acres incorporating a public market are recommended for this quadrant. The park would be an outdoor repository of historical structures and a place for seasonal activities.

This quadrant is also ideal for an outdoor arena and livestock or horse exhibition area of about 45 acres. The creation of a woodland preserve is also recommended to create a visual statement at the entrance to the outdoor arena area.

Southeast Quadrant
Locate a mix of civic, commercial, residential, and open space uses, providing a diversity of development opportunities. Revitalization of existing housing and shops should be accomplished to achieve consistency with older historic structures. For example, plans should integrate a renovated Munden’s store as an important historic cornerstone. Appropriate sidewalk, trail, and pedestrian facilities are recommended to allow movement between Munden’s, the adjacent vacant parcels, and the commercial core on either side of Princess Anne Road to the south. The City will need to determine the appropriate additional rights-of-way or easements necessary to accommodate these pedestrian facilities. The City should initiate and undertake these activities with cooperation from property owners.

Additional housing is recommended to increase the vibrancy of the community, providing the “living community” necessary to sustain a rural village feeling. A civic park for the local community should serve as the centerpiece of the southeastern quadrant. The park will cater to community gatherings, ensuring sustainability and vitality.

To provide emergency response for the settlement, a public safety facility should be considered adjacent to or as part of this park.

Southwest Quadrant
Existing commercial should be renovated to reflect the common vernacular of American folk architecture. Uses should be encouraged to move toward the road to provide the feeling of an intimate community that is both walkable and safe, while avoiding conflicts between pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

The retail focus should be on the intersection, with mixed-use service and community retail located along either side of the road within the settlement. As in the northwest quadrant, the agricultural equestrian interface of uses should be established both at the periphery and in the settlement proper. Wetlands and sensitive lands to the southwest should be protected.

INSTRUMENTS TO ACHIEVE A QUALITY RURAL ENVIRONMENT
The application of the successful Agricultural Reserve Program and the implementation of rural design guidelines will help stabilize and reinforce the rural way of life in southern Virginia Beach. These elements are described below.
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Agricultural Reserve Program

The Agricultural Reserve Program (ARP) was established in 1995 with a goal of preserving 20,000 acres of agricultural land and open space. It is one of the most successful programs in the nation, according to the American Farm Land Trust. The ARP is a non-development option available on a voluntary basis to property owners in the rural area. It preserves land for farming, preserves the rural character and environmental resources of the area, and reduces or minimizes the need for urban infrastructure. It works by voluntarily purchasing development rights from property owners at fair market value and instills fairness in the picture by offering market value compensation to property owners. This ensures that their land’s development value will be realized while agricultural production is maintained. The ARP is an important long-range implementation tool for rural and agricultural preservation. The ARP sites are not to be used for wetland mitigation.

Rural Development Guidelines

If the property owner elects not to enter the Agricultural Reserve Program, but instead wishes to develop his or her property, the Comprehensive Plan seeks to achieve these objectives by giving property owners a choice of two rural residential development options: a By-Right option with calculated density of no more than one dwelling unit per 15 acres; or a Conditional Use option allowing a slightly higher calculated density of one dwelling unit per 5 acres within areas designated as Soil Area 1 and one dwelling unit per 10 acres within areas designated as Soil Area 2 (See Southern Rural Soils in Appendix of the Technical Report).

Rural Community Areas

Non-residential development should be located within a Rural Community Area, as described above, unless the non-residential is agricultural in nature or a farm, part of a farm, stable or a mill. These Rural Community Areas should be thought of as focal points for the existing and future development in this area of the City. Development in these community areas can include a mix of locally oriented retail or services designed to be compatible with the landscape of the area.

Rural Residential Character

Rural settlement patterns reinforce pastoral ways of life. The immediate views along the main rural roads are of pasture lands, croplands, hedgerows, fence lines, natural fields and forests. Located at a distance off the road are farm homes, barns, silos, and other outbuildings. Successful rural residential developments do not dominate, but complement this pastoral setting and showcase the attractiveness of the natural surrounding countryside.
These successful developments include large open space areas that are retained in their natural state, used as farmland, gardens, equestrian centers or other rurally compatible uses. Houses are arranged and streets are aligned in ways that create or adapt to the natural rural setting and do not follow a typical suburban pattern of regimentation. Landscaping, fences and country roads are arranged and aligned throughout a rural subdivision in a manner that frames open spaces and provides an attractive connection between the main rural road and rural home sites.

Their uniquely rural design of homes does not turn their back to the main roadway but, though set back, conveys a sense of outward connection to the land and rural community. It applies such techniques as large, open wrap-around porches, pitched roof lines, detached or side-loading garages and incorporates an architectural treatment that takes its cue from local farm buildings, hunting clubhouses and other examples that reflect the architectural heritage and agrarian character of south Virginia Beach.

Rural residential and non-residential guidelines should be met, as appropriate, whenever a rural development proposal request is submitted for review. See City Zoning Ordinance Article 4 Agricultural Districts for further additional implementation purposes regarding the development of rural properties. Related design Guidelines for the Rural Area may be found in the Comprehensive Plan’s Reference Handbook and in the online document library at www.ourfuturevb.com.