



Date: November 7, 2022

To: Dr. Kimberly J. Sowell, County Manager
Through: Jay Gibson, General Manager
From: Sara M. Young, AICP, Planning Director
Scott Whiteman, AICP, Community Planning Manager
Subject: Comprehensive Plan Update

Summary

The new Durham Comprehensive Plan is in the final stages of development, with the revised policies and Place Type Map released late last month. Planning Staff is providing an update and follow-up to questions and concerns raised by the Board at the August work session.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board of County Commissioners receive the presentation.

Background

The process to develop a new Comprehensive Plan began in 2019. The latest draft of the Comprehensive Plan Place Type Map, Place Type Guide, and Policies were released late last month. The full draft plan will be released in early January for a final engagement phase before beginning the adoption process. Staff anticipates that the Planning Commission public hearing process will begin in late February, and that the Board of Commissioners will hold a joint public hearing with the City Council to adopt the plan in June 2023.

Issues

At the August 1, 2022 work session presentation on the Comprehensive Plan, Commissioners raised several questions and concerns, particularly about engagement with rural residents and development on the urban/rural fringe. Staff has listed out the issues we heard at the August worksession below, with responses to each.

1. *We heard concern that there has been no rural engagement until just recently and wanted to share some information on efforts throughout the past three years to engage rural residents.*

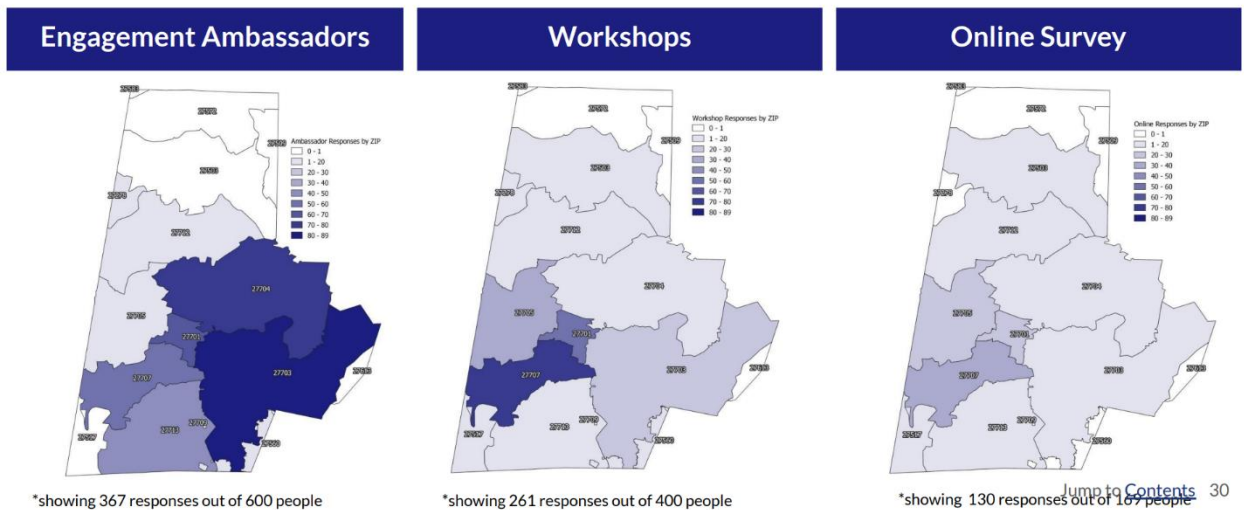
Beginning with the Listening and Learning phase of engagement at the start of the project in 2019, we heard from some rural residents in our community-wide engagement efforts. However, we know that rural residents may have specific, different concerns that other Durham residents. Geographic participation in that phase of engagement can be seen in the below maps from the Engagement Summary. To supplement that engagement and

ensure we heard the kinds of concerns rural residents had, we worked with County staff to recruit participation in a rural specific focus group that was held in December 2020. This focus group discussed some draft objectives and provided additional insight into some rural concerns to be incorporated as the work was revised. Some of the concerns we heard were the challenges due to a lack of broadband access in the County, particularly with virtual school, a strong desire for the northern parts of Durham County to retain their rural character, and some interest in limited additions of sidewalks, small commercial locations, and parks and recreation.

In addition, Planning staff heard from some residents that we need to do a better job of providing opportunities for rural community members to hear information on this new plan and to provide input, particularly for folks who may not have access to the online information and input opportunity. We worked with Oak Grove, Bahama, and Rougemont Ruritan Clubs to schedule two rural engagement sessions, one each in North and East Durham. Additionally, staff was invited to address the Redwood Ruritan club at their regular June meeting. Attendees at these meetings generally expressed support for preserving the rural nature of these parts of Durham County.

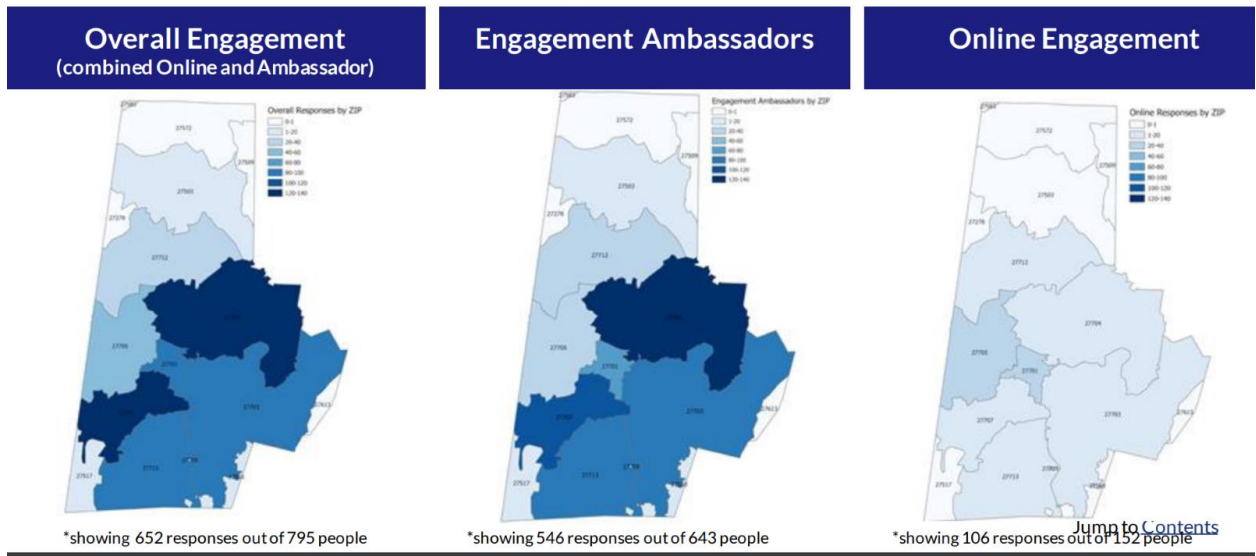
Listening and Learning engagement location maps:

What zip code do you live in?



Draft Goals and Objectives engagement location maps:

What zip code do you live in?



2. *We heard concern that residents feel they have not had an opportunity to give input on the plan and that they don't have enough time to give input before the project is complete.*

We have shared the message with the Commissioners and with our rural contacts that we are happy to continue to hear concerns and respond to questions through the remainder of the project revisions and through the adoption process – which will take us through the end of this calendar and into 2023. We have distributed information to the community specifically sharing additional information responding to the questions and concerns that we heard in the rural engagement sessions in June and in emails since then. (Attachment A).

In addition, once the plan has been revised to take into account all of the community input to date, the full draft plan, showing how the map and the policies will work together, will be shared with the community for another input opportunity. We fully intend to have in-person sessions and to ensure we have some of these sessions in the County, where residents who have less digital access can better access the information on the plan, the staff to answer questions, and the opportunity to provide input. After this, we will begin the adoption process, which itself will include at least two public hearings (before the Planning Commission, the Board of County Commissioners, and the City Council) where residents are invited to speak on the plan.

3. *We heard concern that the Commissioners need more opportunity to review and discuss this work.*

We want to assure you that the August work session is not the only input opportunity for you all on this plan. We have been and will continue to invite the full BOCC to attend the bi-monthly meetings of the Joint City-County Planning Committee. This is one of the best opportunities for staff to present updates and ask for guidance from our elected officials and for the City and County to jointly discuss issues around this joint plan. We also plan to return to a BOCC Work Session as the full plan is pulled together prior to our final

community engagement phase. We are open to additional suggestions for how to accommodate and support additional information sharing and discussion and would encourage these discussions to include both City and County elected officials where possible since this plan needs to reflect the priorities of both of our governing boards.

4. *We heard some concern about some of the pandemic-induced engagement strategies, specifically a heavy focus on virtual engagement. We also heard some suggestions of what some Commissioners would like to see in the final engagement.*

We know that engagement has been challenging during the pandemic and our staff has worked to balance the priorities around community health and safety with effective engagement. We fully intended to hold in-person engagement in the Fall of 2021, but as we got nearer to that engagement we heard significant concerns from residents and community partners around in-person events as the Delta variant hit our community. With our Spring and Summer engagement phase this year, we returned to some in-person engagement again for the first time since the summer of 2020, while still offering virtual opportunities for those who did not feel comfortable with in-person events. As we closed the last phase of engagement, we began thinking about what we have learned from that phase and how we can incorporate those lessons as we plan for the next engagement. We plan to be back out in the community with a series of in-person events, possibly a combination of partnering with residents and organizations to attend community events already happening along with some specific events hosted by staff on this project. During this engagement we want to be sure we get information on the project, it's recommendations and impacts, to as many more residents as possible. We invite any additional suggestions for how to get the word out and make sure our residents know about this plan before the adoption process begins.

5. *We heard a question about how much land is being added to the Urban Growth Boundary in the new proposal.*

The Urban Growth Boundary proposed for the new plan is smaller than the Urban Growth Boundary in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan. Below is the clarification on this question that staff presented to the Joint City-County Planning Committee at their August 3 meeting. The recording of that meeting can be heard here: <https://www.spreaker.com/user/cityofdurham/august-3-2022-jccpc-minutes-actual-meeti>. (the presentation begins at approximately 65:35 in the recording)

The 2005 Comprehensive Plan established a Tier system to help distinguish different types or amounts of growth in our community. In that plan the outer Suburban Tier boundary acted as an Urban Growth Boundary. The Rural Tier, all area outside the Suburban Tier boundary in that plan, was to remain rural in character. Area within the Suburban Tier was envisioned to develop over time.

All of the current annexations being approved are within that Suburban Tier boundary, or Urban Growth Boundary. This is enforced by the City Code which prohibits expansion (or annexation) beyond the established Urban Growth Boundary.

The proposed plan does not retain the Tier system. The new plan proposes to replace the Suburban Tier with an Urban Growth Boundary. This is an area beyond which annexations cannot legally occur. The proposed Urban Growth Boundary is smaller than previous approved boundary. As a community we need to balance the desires and needs to protect rural character, drinking water, and environmental lands, and the desires and needs to accommodate residents and growth that is occurring. In the proposal, we recommend retracting areas of the existing Urban Growth Boundary that are all or mostly within a critical watershed, are not yet served by public sewer, and/or areas that are outside the City limits that would require the construction of a new lift station to establish sewer infrastructure.

If the City were to be built out to the extent of the Urban Growth Boundary that is proposed, 42% of County will remain rural. The total area being removed from the Urban Growth Boundary is approximately 13 square miles. (Attachment B)

6. *We heard a list of priorities that were identified as missing from the draft policies, including policies missing related to childcare, rapid transit, immigrants/refugees, use of public land for affordable housing. and different kinds of housing (like co-housing, more conservation subdivisions, efficiency apartments, dorm rooms and shared suites).*

Staff reviewed the draft policies and identified where we do have policies addressing these priorities to ensure we can get any specific feedback on improving those policies from folks with these priorities. In addition, we have several action items that were developed by Policy Working Groups and that we are currently pairing with revised policies that more explicitly address these and other priorities. Those action items will be shared with City and County staff once fully developed and will be shared with the community as part of the full draft plan engagement.

Staff welcomes suggestions for revisions to these edits, but below are policies that address many of the priorities named by the BOCC in the work session:

Rapid Transit:

There are policies that address improving transit service, improving access to transit, and placing (affordable) housing and jobs near transit, for example:

T.09 Plan future transit corridors near existing jobs, education, commercial, and mixed-use centers to support an accessible, convenient, safe, and direct transit network. Prioritize existing public transit and public transit riders over new modes and users.

T.14 Improve regional transportation options to destinations in the Triangle. Prioritize transportation services for residents without access to a car, including pedestrians, transit riders, paratransit riders, and bicyclists, over vehicle drivers.

Childcare:

J.03: Increase the accessibility and availability of affordable high-quality childcare services. Support programs that reduce the cost of childcare for low-income, Hispanic/Latino, and Black residents.

J.04: Co-locate childcare within or adjacent to major employment centers, education and medical institutions, and community and civic places.

J.13 Support and advocate for living wages that support life in Durham, including housing, transportation, and childcare costs.

ED.04 Prioritize access to pre-K, K–12 schools and universities, institutions of higher learning, places of employment, and childcare services when planning public transportation investments such as sidewalks, trails, bike lanes, and transit routes and stops.

ED.05 Collaborate with City and County departments and educational institutions when making decisions about trail alignments and park facilities near schools or childcare facilities. Design parks, trails, and sidewalk connections so that they provide safe access and connections for students and staff.

ED.06 Design vehicle drop-off lanes and parking areas at schools and childcare facilities to reduce the negative impacts of air pollution and congestion in the surrounding community. Improve walking, biking, and transit access to school sites.

Reuse/use of public sites for affordable housing and other community needs:

ED.07: Encourage outdoor learning environments for recreation, social activities, habitat conservation, and community gardens on land surrounding community institutions (including schools, libraries, or community centers).

EN.47: Use publicly owned land, including parks, schools, and libraries to support equitable community access to green space, recreational opportunities, cultural and historical sites, public art, adequate stormwater management, energy production, community gardens, and urban agriculture.

Sample draft action item:

- Under Housing policies: Allow and develop innovative, affordable housing on public and institutional properties such as schools, libraries, places of worship, and colleges. Particularly providing affordable, quality housing for teachers and staff.

Co-housing and other creative housing types:

H.03: Allow and incentivize housing of varied unit types, heights, and densities in all neighborhoods, prioritizing homes that are affordable and accessible to those with the greatest need. This housing variety should include accessory dwelling units, garage apartments, tiny homes, and middle-density housing (such as

duplexes, triplexes, townhouses/row homes, or small apartment buildings), and should, through size and form, respect existing neighborhood character.

H.07: Create strategies that reduce the cost of affordable housing, through innovative technologies (such as prefabricated or modular housing, or tiny homes); reuse of existing structures (such as conversion of hotels, offices, or retail spaces); creation and use of public subsidies; and reduced process or regulatory barriers.

Sample draft action items:

- Review and revise existing policies, programs, and regulations to remove barriers and create support for innovative, energy efficient, and creative housing options, such as multi-generational housing that supports large family structures, single room occupancy, shared housing, co-housing, senior care homes, and cooperative housing.
- Allow and create more diverse housing/shelter styles that utilize alternative ownership options (rather than traditional mortgage-based single-family), including shared and cooperative housing models.

Immigrants and refugees:

N.08 Focus public funds and publicly supported programs for historic preservation on telling BIPOC histories that have gone untold, and on physically preserving and memorializing them. Strive for a more inclusive telling of our history, including indigenous and pre-colonist histories, rural histories, immigrant and refugee histories, and Black histories (including the contributions of enslaved persons within our community), through preservation of relevant buildings and sites, placement of neighborhood identification signs and public art, educational signage in relevant locations, and other means.

Staff added language specifically naming support for immigrant and refugee communities through revisions.

The draft policies and maps can be found at the following link:
<https://engagedurham.com/27/Comprehensive-Plan>

Attachments

Attachment A, Rural Frequently Asked Questions
Attachment B, Urban Growth Boundary Changes