

Durham's New Comprehensive Plan Frequently Asked Questions

1. *What is the Comprehensive Plan?*

The Comprehensive Plan is Durham's strategy for how we manage growth and development over the next 5, 10, 20 years. The Comprehensive Plan decides what can be built where in Durham. It decides what size and kind of homes can be built in what part of the City and County, where schools and businesses can be built, and where streets can run through. The plan will have strategies on where and how development can happen. It will also guide how the City and County should provide public buildings, amenities, and services to support future growth.

2. *What are the limitations of the Comprehensive Plan?*

While the name "Comprehensive Plan" might make you think that this plan can do anything and everything – there are actually a few key things that Comprehensive Plans are most effective at. The Comprehensive Plan is a *Land Use plan*, meaning that it's mainly focused on how land is used and what is built on that land. The vast majority of land in Durham is privately owned, and almost all new development in Durham is built by private property owners and developers. When a property owner wants to build something new on their property, the Comprehensive Plan, along with other tools, like zoning, are effective ways to set guidance and regulations for how that development should happen. The Comprehensive Plan doesn't have the ability to immediately change everything or require that private property owners make significant changes to their property – it is not law. Instead, the Comprehensive Plan provides guidance or a vision for how Durham residents want to see changes over time.

3. *What will be included in the full Comprehensive Plan?*

YouTube video: What are the Pieces of the Comprehensive Plan? https://youtu.be/bbq1eaZo_Tk

Guiding Values and Community Goals and Objectives

- Guiding Values: During the year and a half of engagement that shaped the Community Goals and Objectives of this Comprehensive Plan, residents often spoke about wanting to live in a community where we invested in and acted upon our values. Several key values emerged: Equity, Accountability, Accessibility, and Wellbeing. These values form the foundation of all goals and objectives in this Comprehensive Plan and are deeply connected to each other. These guiding values reflect our commitment to uphold the values we heard our residents care most about.

- Community Goals and Objectives: To write a new Comprehensive Plan we started by listening to resident perspectives on what Durham’s future goals and objectives should be. These goals and objectives have guided how the plan is written, what recommendations are included in the plan, and have also guided decisions for new development that is happening during the plan’s development. The Community Goals and Objectives for the Comprehensive Plan were adopted by the City Council on June 21 and the Board of County Commissioners on June 28. Use this link to view the adopted Community Goals and Objectives: https://bit.ly/Durham_Goals. They include nine big picture goals for our community’s future and 33 objectives to work towards those goals.

Place Type Map and Place Type Guide

- The Place Type Map will replace the 2005 Future Land Use Map. A future land use map (FLUM) is a map found in the Comprehensive Plan, which guides future development in a community. Durham’s FLUM was created based on the community’s vision from the 2005 Comprehensive Plan and is used to determine where and what type of development should occur where in Durham. The designations on this map identified future uses and densities.
- The Place Type Guide is a key for using and understanding the Place Type Map. The Guide describes the character of different places we want to see in our community in the future. It includes descriptions of the desired types of housing or mix of different uses, the types of green space envisioned, how people will be able to access and move around the site, and how services like water and sewer will be provided, rather than just use and density. The different place types described in the Guide are then mapped to each piece of land in the City and County of Durham. Use this to link to view the draft Place Type Guide (PDF download) that was shared for community input from October 2021 to January 2022: https://bit.ly/Durham_PTG.
- The Place Type Map shows which types of places our community would like to see on land within our community. Consideration of a specific place type for a parcel of land included review of existing uses, policy ideas about how our community wants or needs to grow, and how different place types can work together to form more complete communities, providing residents better access to things they need. Use this link to view the draft Place Type Map (interactive digital map) that was shared for community input from October 2021 to January 2022: https://bit.ly/Durham_PTM.
- The Place Type Map and Guide are currently being revised by staff to incorporate input from the community during the engagement on these tools. Updated drafts of these tools will be included when the full draft plan is publicized for community input.

Policies, Action Items, and Implementation

To make the Community Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan a reality in Durham, we need a plan for how to achieve them and who is responsible.

The policies are written recommendations to help Durham work towards our community’s vision. The policies guide decision-making to be in alignment with the Community Goals and Objectives.

The Action Items and Implementation framework will determine how we will enact these policy recommendations. These items will get into greater specificity of both how work will happen and who will be responsible.

4. What is the general timeline for development of the new Comprehensive Plan?

The project began with Listening and Learning engagement in the Fall of 2019. The plan was expected to take three years to complete. With the pandemic in March of 2020 the work of developing the plan and engaging the community has been more challenging and has impacted the overall timeline. Staff anticipates that the full draft plan will be shared with the community later this year and hope to begin the public hearing and adoption process this winter - later 2022 or early 2023. Below shows a general timeline for the project components.



5. How does the Comprehensive Plan get used?

There are three main ways the plan is used:

- To guide decisions by local elected officials on new development proposals like annexation or zoning map change requests, for example if a property owner wants to change what is allowed to be built on their property (zoning map change).
- To determine the focus of the Planning Department’s work, or to establish the department’s work program each year, for example updating the rules for development that are in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) or identifying areas of the community where further land use studies are needed to determine how future development should occur.
- To guide the work of other departments and agencies in the community, for example determining where new water and sewer lines should or should not be extended or where new schools should be planned.

6. Can local government stop the City from growing? If not, how does it manage growth that does happen?

Local government does not have a way to stop people from being born in Durham or moving into Durham from outside. Per the US Census, between 2010 and 2020 Durham County’s overall population increased by about 57,000 people. Local government must make plans and use strategies to manage the continual growth of the Durham community. There are many ways that the City and County manage growth. Land use planners, like those in the Planning Department, use growth management strategies to guide and plan for this growth. The Comprehensive Plan outlines a series of growth management strategies to be used in the coming years.

The limitations of well-water and sanitary septic systems mean that only so much development can be supported by wells and septic systems. For example, a single septic system needs at least an acre of land to support a single house. For property owners and developers who want to develop their property with larger numbers of houses, or other kinds of development, the only feasible way to get higher density development is to hook their development up to city water and sewer lines. How, where, and when the City decides to extend these water and sewer lines to accommodate new development is one of the most effective growth management tools the City has. The Urban Growth Boundary is a proposed boundary included as part of the new Comprehensive Plan that indicates what parts of the County could have water and sewer (and other City services like trash collection) extended to them. As new water and sewer lines are built out, higher density development follows close behind.

7. *What did the past Comprehensive Plan say about expanding the city limits?*

In 2005, the existing Comprehensive Plan was adopted by both the City Council and the Board of County Commissioners. That plan included the Suburban Tier in its Future Land Use Map (PDF download link: <https://www.durhamnc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1171/Future-Land-Use-Map-PDF>). The Suburban Tier was the line that designated where city services like water and sewer would not expand beyond. Since 2005, many areas within the Suburban Tier have been annexed into the city and new development has occurred there. This new development is in-line with what the 2005 Comprehensive Plan envisioned.

8. *What does the proposed Comprehensive Plan say about expanding the city limits?*

The Planning department has heard concerns from many people about city expansion into more rural parts of the county. In response to these concerns, the Urban Growth Boundary (previously called the Suburban Tier) proposed in the new plan is being reduced by a total area of roughly 13 square miles from what was included in the last plan. This means that roughly 13 square miles of land that was previously planned for eventual incorporation into the city and to be served by City water and sewer is now being planned to remain in the County only. A draft map showing the proposed Urban Growth Boundary and revised Future Growth Areas (described in question 10 below) is attached.

9. *How will the city limits expand in the future? Where?*

The proposed Urban Growth Boundary in the new plan extends beyond the existing city limits. This means that expansions of the existing city limits, up to the edge of the Urban Growth Boundary, would be in-line with the proposed plan and are expected. So yes, the existing city limits will very likely continue to expand from where they are today, up to the proposed Urban Growth Boundary. The vast majority of annexation requests (which is when a property owner requests for their property in the County to become part of the City), come from the private market when a property owner wants to connect to City water or sewer. The nature of private land ownership means that the Planning Department doesn't know for sure exactly which properties will request to be annexed, in what order, or when. When an annexation request is submitted, the Planning Department will present the proposal to the Durham City Council, who will make the final decision on whether to annex the property or not. When making this decision,

City Council will look to the Comprehensive Plan for guidance. Because of recent changes in state law, it is extremely unlikely that the City would involuntarily annex any property.

10. How will the city coordinate infrastructure and new development?

The draft Place Type Map includes a new concept called a *Future Growth Area*, which is an area inside the UGB (and inside the current Suburban Tier) where critical infrastructure, such as fire stations and sewer capacity, is *not* currently available. More intense development is *not* recommended in these areas until the City and/or County has adequately funded the needed infrastructure. Future Growth Areas are *not* areas where development will be focused toward, and instead are areas that will largely stay as is until the appropriate infrastructure is funded.

11. Why is so much development happening in the Southeast Durham Area?

The 2005 Comprehensive Plan recommended Southeast Durham as an area for residential growth, and several large developments such as Fendoll Farms and Carolina Arbors were approved and constructed as a result. To serve these and other proposed developments more efficiently, the City constructed the Southeast Regional Lift Station (SERLS) to provide sewer service to the entire area. Although the City paid to construct the lift station, a fee is paid for each new unit constructed in the area to reimburse the City. Because this sewer infrastructure is already in place, and the area includes large tracts of undeveloped land, Southeast Durham is seeing more development activity than anywhere else in Durham right now. At the request of Durham’s elected officials, Planning staff completed a Southeast Durham Focus Area study during the new Comprehensive Plan development. More information on that study and the recommendations that came from it can be found here: <https://engagedurham.com/southeast-durham-focus-area/>. The recommendations for this area were developed to be used while the new plan was being developed. Once the new plan is adopted, the new plan recommendations will cover the Southeast Durham area along with the rest of the City and County.

12. What does the new plan say about protecting the environment?

The need for enhanced environmental protections has been a strong and repeated theme from the community during the comprehensive planning process. The proposed plan includes the following elements designed to increase environmental protections:

- A policy that calls for placing at least 30% of the land area of Durham County under permanent protection, where development would not be allowed
- A policy calling for Durham to be carbon neutral by 2050, and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030
- Policies that call for enhancing development regulations to increase protection of floodplains, wetlands, stream buffers, and mature forests when development occurs
- Establishing an Urban Growth Boundary, beyond which water and sewer will not be extended, significantly reducing the development potential for land
- A Place Type map that shows parcels dedicated as Recreation and Open Space, meaning they are planned to have no, or minimal development, such as a park.
- Policies related to the need for preserving farmland to ensure access to healthy food

13. Is there a proposal to reduce the minimum lot sizes in Bahama and Rougemont?

There are Established Residential place types designated around Bahama and Rougemont, but only on land where residential in keeping with the Established Residential Place Type already exists. No expansion of these areas is envisioned or proposed with this plan. These areas are already zoned for residential with smaller lot sizes. Smaller lot size residential will not be expanded in areas that are outside the Urban Growth Boundary.

14. Does the plan envision extending water and sewer lines to Bahama or Rougemont?

No, these areas are envisioned to remain rural in the new plan. The Urban Growth Boundary is the edge of where City water and sewer will be extended. The northernmost area within the Urban Growth Boundary is the Treyburn area, which ends at Orange Factory Road. All land outside the Urban Growth Boundary is designated one of the following:

- Rural and Agricultural Preserve
- Recreation and Open Space
- Community Institution
- Established Residential
- Rural Village Center (or Rural Commercial)
- Resource Extraction (only in one location with existing stone quarry use)

15. What is the Rural Village designation in the plan? Where is it located and why?

Rural Village Center is a Place Type designated in the draft Place Type Guide. Here is the description of this place type:

Rural Village Centers are located outside of Durham’s Urban Growth Area and provide for the basic daily needs of the surrounding rural community. They often include small-scale gas stations, grocery stores, restaurants, or general stores. These businesses are typically freestanding rather than part of a shopping complex and are often located, along or at the intersection of major roads. Residents access Rural Village Centers primarily by car or on-demand transit service. These areas should have safe sidewalks, bike paths, and crosswalks for residents not using a car. Trees, large green spaces, cemeteries, and parks can be found in Rural Village Centers.

The Rural Village Place type has been designated in only a few places on the Place Type Map. These locations include Rougemont, Bahama, and eight other small designations, primarily at intersections of rural roads where existing commercial uses or zoning are located.

The name Rural Village is intended to convey small commercial uses within rural areas. Staff is working on a new name for this Place Type, perhaps Rural Commercial, to make clearer the intention behind the designation and make a clear distinction from how “Rural Village” was used in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan.

16. Where can I find information about new development proposals?

Community members can react to annexation petitions, zoning map changes, text amendments, and future land use map changes on this site:

<https://durham.mysocialpinpoint.com/growthmanagement/land-use-home/>

Questions about these types of new developments can be directed to:

LandUse@DurhamNC.gov.

17. How can I stay informed about the Comprehensive Plan?

Sign up for email newsletters to receive updates on the project in general and upcoming meetings and engagements. If you have any questions or ideas, share them by emailing: EngageDurham@durhamnc.gov

18. Where can I learn more about the Comprehensive Plan?

There are two websites that have background information on the Comprehensive Plan project so far.

- The first is <https://engagedurham.com/comprehensive-plan/>. This site includes information on the process and timeline for the project (including archived documents shared throughout the process), who has been involved, and what's coming next.
- The second is <https://durham.mysocialpinpoint.com/comprehensiveplan>. This site is used for online engagement during active engagement periods. In between engagement phases, the site also connects community members to information on the plan project so far.

Draft Map of Urban Growth Boundary and Future Growth Areas for Durham's New Comprehensive Plan

