



Date: August 3, 2026

To: Claudia Hager, County Manager
Through: Maurice Jones, Deputy County Manager
From: Sara M. Young, AICP, Planning & Development Director
Subject: Comprehensive Plan Amendment - A2500002 Evaluation and Assessment Report Policy Changes (EAR)

Executive Summary

Staff has prepared the first Evaluation and Assessment Report (EAR) of the Comprehensive Plan. This phase of the EAR contains staff recommendations for amendments to policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed amendments aim to provide clarity, reduce inconsistencies, and refine the existing Comprehensive Plan Consistency Review document that is currently included with packet materials for zoning map change and annexation requests.

Background

Paragraph 3.4.11 of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) requires that the Planning & Development Department conduct an Evaluation and Assessment Report (EAR) of the Comprehensive Plan every two years. Since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in October 2023, staff has had an opportunity to apply the policies to zoning map change and other planning processes and requests. This has provided staff an opportunity to assess any ambiguities and inconsistencies in the policy wording. The vast majority of the proposed changes are technical in nature. Additional information and context are provided in the Issues section.

Staff began work on Phase 1 of the EAR in summer 2025, presenting an introduction to JCCPC in August 2025. The Planning Commission heard the proposed changes at its meetings in October and November 2025 and January 2026. The Planning Commission recommended that the Board of County Commissioners and City Council adopt the proposed changes on a seven to four vote at its January 2026 meeting. Since then, JCCPC directed staff at their April 2026 meeting to work with a subcommittee to discuss and provide feedback on the proposed policy changes. The result of this meeting was presented to JCCPC at the June 2026 meeting, where staff was given guidance to proceed to City Council and the Board of County Commissioners.

Issues and Analysis

As stated above, staff has had an opportunity to work with the policies adopted in the 2023 Comprehensive Plan through the Comprehensive Plan Consistency Review document. In an effort to create an efficient Comprehensive Plan Consistency Review that better evaluates rezoning and annexation requests, staff evaluated the policies to assess their value and impact during development case review. Three types of policies were analyzed during this process:

- “D” policies, which are policies identified in the Comprehensive Plan as being directly related to development, including identifying policies that may not be indicated as such currently but should be;
- Annexation policies; and
- Place Type policies

Attachment A is a listing of all of the proposed changes to wording of Comprehensive Plan policies and whether or not each policy should continue (or begin) to be reviewed as part of staff review of zoning and annexation applications. Policies that were found to be redundant, difficult to apply on a case-by-case basis, or consistently not applicable are recommended for removal of the (D) designation. These policies would remain in the Comprehensive Plan but no longer be included in the Comprehensive Plan Consistency Review. Any policies suggested for removal due to being consistent with UDO standards are included in the table at the end of Attachment A for reference. Additionally, policies that have not previously been included, but would add value to the Comprehensive Plan Consistency Review, have been recommended to add the (D) designation.

Many policies received suggested changes that reflect the experience of the policy being applied to rezoning and annexation cases and oftentimes help clarify the applicability or the intention of the policy. There have also been changes to the commentary as to how staff applies the policy. While this commentary is not a part of the Comprehensive Plan and not required to be adopted by the elected bodies, it ensures fair administration of the policy and informs how the policy is being applied. For several Place Type policies, staff is suggesting commentary where there previously was none.

There was significant public interest in the proposed changes, and many have gone through several iterations based on comments made by boards such as the Durham Open Space and Trails (DOST) Commission and a JCCPC sub-committee, community groups such as Preserve Rural Durham, and other advocates. The resulting proposed changes are largely technical in nature and reflect the incorporation of community concerns.

Staff Contact

Peyton Burgess, AICP, Senior Planner, Peyton.Burgess@DurhamNC.gov

Attachments

Attachment A: Comprehensive Plan Consistency Review with EAR Track Changes

Attachment B: Comprehensive Plan Consistency Review with EAR Clean Version