Chapter 13. Area Plans

Goal:
Develop area plans in partnership with the community that help translate Legacy 2030 policies on a community level.

Introduction
The City-County Planning Board prepares area plans in an effort to interpret Legacy 2030 in precise terms that can be followed at a local level. Area plans analyze the existing characteristics, trends, problems, and opportunities of specific areas of the city and county, then make recommendations for future land use, transportation, community facilities, historic resources, economic development, and environmental protection. While area plans do not change zoning, they do serve as guides for the Planning Board and elected officials to use when making zoning, public investment, and other planning decisions.

Since 2001, City-County Planning staff has completed 16 area plans with the assistance of citizens’ advisory committees. Additionally, some of the towns in Forsyth County have completed or updated their own plans, which serve as the area plans for those portions of the county. Upon adoption, each area plan becomes part of the Legacy Plan. While the area plan program seeks extensive involvement on the part of residents, property owners, businesses, and institutions, the Planning Board has the responsibility to assure that each area plan is consistent with the broad public interest and with other elements of the Legacy 2030.

Accomplishments since 2001
All area plans for Forsyth County are complete, including six small municipality plans, seven urban area plans, and seven suburban area plans. Additionally, a number of topical plans have been completed in this period, including the Greenway Plan, Parks and Open Space Plan, Trends Report, Updated Industrial Site Study, Architectural Survey Update, Streetcar Feasibility Study, Comprehensive Bicycle Master Plan, Sidewalk and Pedestrian Facilities Plan, Collector Street Plan, and a number of comprehensive transportation plans. All the topical plan recommendations are used as a resource for recommendations in area plans. In turn, area plans provide neighborhood-level input for topical plans.

What the 2001 Legacy Plan says about Area Plans…

| An accelerated process for preparing area plans is needed so plans can be prepared for all sectors of the county |
| High priority should be given to preparing a plan for the Union Cross/Abbots Creek Area |
| There is a need to pay particular attention to development that could be facilitated by the Northern Beltway, especially at intersections with other roads |
| Identify locations and design guidelines for community and neighborhood activity centers |

In addition to individual plan documents, area plan accomplishments and materials include the following:
- Area Plan Citizen Handbook
- Informational area plan handouts
- Implementation/status report
- Signs posted in neighborhoods
- A standard web page for each plan

The area plans completed by City-County Planning staff have had similar plan processes using a citizens’ advisory committee. Each area plan takes about one year to complete. All citizens, property owners and institutions in an area are invited to participate in creating a vision for their future. The citizens’ committee then works with staff on setting out a strategy to achieve the vision. Detailed area plan documents have then been prepared for each plan.

Objectives and Action Agenda
With all 16 area plans, except the Rural Area, completed and a new cycle of planning ready to begin, we have an opportunity to improve and refine the area plan program. Changes to plan content and focus, how the documents are published, citizen participation, and the internal planning process will better implement Legacy 2030.
Objectives, Policies, and Action Agenda

Objective 1: Plan Content and Focus

Focus the area plan program on neighborhood-level planning issues. Use topical plans for systemwide issues, such as economic development or greenways.

At one time, area plans were the main way the City and County publicly updated and sought input for greenways, economic development issues, park facilities, sidewalks, environmental issues, and other recommendations. Currently, many of these elements are instead being developed in topical plans and processes, like the Greenway Plan, the Parks and Open Space Plan. This approach allows these topics to be considered and thought through on a systemwide level, which allows for more consistency in planning. While area plan and topical plan processes should continue to work collaboratively to identify community needs, area plans should concentrate specifically on activity centers, corridors, RUCAs, gentle density, and neighborhood issues.

13.1.1. Area Plan Input
Set up a system for area plan input to be shared with City/County staff leading topical plans including:
- Long Range Transportation Plan
- Collector Street Plan
- Pedestrian Plan
- Bicycle Plan
- Greenway Plan
- Parks and Open Space Plan

13.1.2. Topical Recommendations
Reflect topical plan recommendations in area plans; forward citizen concerns and input on these topics and address them in topical plan processes.

13.1.3. Area Plan Scope
Create an area plan process that concentrates specifically on activity centers, corridors, RUCAs, gentle density, neighborhood issues, and other identified needs.

13.1.4. Legacy 2030 Policies
Use policies identified in Legacy 2030 to guide public discussion and area plan recommendations.

13.1.5. Design-Focused Studies
Use design-focused studies as a tool for solving problems where appropriate.

13.1.6. Growth Management Areas
Continue to emphasize the importance of the Growth Management Plan and Growth Management Areas in the area plan process.
Objective 2:
Plan Document
Make area plan documents more user-friendly.

Current area plan publications are extremely detailed, typically running close to 100 pages. They contain existing conditions, Legacy policies, recommendations, implementation measures and standardized appendices. By printing the most important parts of area plans and publishing background information and general policy recommendations online, we have the opportunity to provide a more user-friendly product that is informative but less expensive to print.

Objective 3: Plan Participation
Revise the area plan process to foster greater citizen participation and awareness of the process.

Traditionally, area plans have been developed with a volunteer citizens’ committee. However, this typically year-long process often has many challenges, including keeping a committee together over the entire planning period, helping citizens get informed about issues if they join the process late, getting a diverse group of citizens to participate, providing information to help citizens understand the process, and making the general public aware of the process.

Action Agenda

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<tr>
<th>13.2.1. Area Plan Brochures</th>
<th>For each area plan, create a foldout brochure that is easy to read and inexpensive to reproduce.</th>
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<td>13.2.2. Online Documents</td>
<td>Create an online document for each area plan that contains more detailed information than the foldout brochure.</td>
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<td>13.2.3. Area Plan Publishing</td>
<td>Focus on information that is specific to each plan in the brochure; put general policy recommendations online.</td>
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<td>13.2.4. Area Plan Web site</td>
<td>Create a user-friendly area plan web site with links to individual area plans.</td>
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<td>13.2.5. Up-To-Date Information</td>
<td>Create an online system to keep area plan information and maps up to date; move toward area plans being living documents.</td>
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<td>13.2.6. Implementation and Status Reports</td>
<td>Publish the implementation schedule and status report online for each area plan.</td>
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</table>
13.3.1. Citizen Participation Use a citizen participation process for each area plan update.

13.3.2. Neighborhood Specialists Work closely with the City’s neighborhood specialists to identify citizen issues and possible stakeholders in all parts and neighborhoods of an area plan area.

13.3.3. Public Outreach Continue to use neighborhood and business groups, citizen address inventories, neighborhood association contacts, including former citizen advisory committee members, the development community, elected officials, fliers, institutional contacts, zoning case participants, and other sources to facilitate involvement in each area plan update process.

13.3.4. Informational Materials Create materials that inform citizens how the area plan update process works, how they can participate, and other pertinent information; share these materials at meetings and on the web.

13.3.5. Citizen Manual Revise the citizen manual for area plan update participants. Consider a shorter, less expensive citizen manual format that can be given to any person interested in the plan process. Provide information about topical plans in the manual.

13.3.6. Shorter Planning Process Design a process for area plan updates that is considerably shorter than the previous area plan process, using what is already in place as a starting point.

13.3.7. Pre-Planning Meetings Consider holding pre-planning meetings with citizens to better define issues before initial staff work begins to collect information specific to the expressed needs of the community.

13.3.8. Area Plan Signs Continue to post area plan signs as an outreach tool.

Objective 4: Internal Plan Process
Further refine the area plan program as it enters its next phase.

An area plan program was put in place after the adoption of the 2001 Legacy Plan, which brought consistency among all plans in terms of their processes, map rules, formatting, and style. The program can still benefit from further refinement.

13.4.1. City and County Involvement Increase involvement by other City and County staff in the area plan process as important team members.

13.4.2. Consistency Provide consistent nomenclature, land use designations, and map rules for all area plans.

13.4.3. Plan Boundaries Consider using existing area plan boundaries (Map 13-1).

13.4.4. Recommendation Criteria Develop clear criteria for land use recommendations and publish criteria online.

13.4.5. Work Manual Amend the work manual for area plan leaders and staff.

Action Agenda continued in two pages
### Action Agenda

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<tr>
<th>13.4.6. Area Plan Schedule</th>
<th>Work with the Planning Board to set a schedule for the next round of area plans. Update as necessary.</th>
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<tr>
<td>13.4.7. Coordinate Across Municipalities</td>
<td>Work with smaller municipalities on plan and policy coordination where plan areas are contiguous to or include their jurisdictions.</td>
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<td>13.4.8. Design Standards</td>
<td>Compile design standards from current area plans and create a future design strategy for future area plans.</td>
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<td>13.4.9. Implementation Schedule Chart</td>
<td>Consider redesigning the implementation schedule chart to contain only specific policies and actions, not ongoing policy recommendations.</td>
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<td>13.4.10. Most Important Recommendations</td>
<td>As part of a focused implementation strategy, list and promote the five most important recommendations in each area plan.</td>
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### Area Plan Actions from other Legacy 2030 Chapters

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<th>3.2.3. Housing Variety</th>
<th>Use the area plan process as an opportunity to discuss gentle density and the benefits to the community of a variety of housing types.</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.1.8 Low-Impact Commercial</td>
<td>Create commercial zoning district containing only low-impact uses or retrofit existing district (from list used in area plan documents).</td>
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<td>4.2.1 Transit/Pedestrian-Oriented Development Locations</td>
<td>Continue to focus on the location and design of transit/pedestrian-oriented development in the area plan process.</td>
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<td>4.2.4 Mixed-Use Redevelopment</td>
<td>Use the area plan process to determine where older, underutilized commercial and industrial uses could be compatibly changed into mixed-use development.</td>
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<td>4.3.7 Revitalization Barriers</td>
<td>Identify barriers to revitalization of older commercial and industrial uses through the area plan process.</td>
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<td>4.5.5 Gentle Density Benefits</td>
<td>Use the area plan process as an opportunity to discuss gentle density and the benefits to the community of a variety of housing types.</td>
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<td>4.6.1 Map Maintenance</td>
<td>Maintain current versions of the Existing and Proposed Land Use maps through area plan fieldwork, zoning changes, and permitting activity. Set a schedule for map updates and post maps online.</td>
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*Area Plan Actions continued on next page*
Area Plan Actions from other *Legacy 2030* Chapters

### 6.3.1. Protect Industrial Opportunity Areas
Protect planned industrial areas by following the recommendations of the Planning Department’s industrial sites study, area plans, the *Southeast Gateway Plan*, the *Liberty Street Corridor Plan*, the *Downtown Development Plan* and other development guides.

### 7.1.3. Area Plans and Environmentally-Sensitive Areas
Use information from the Natural Heritage Inventory to monitor environmentally-sensitive areas and to recommend protection strategies when preparing area plans, approving development proposals and implementing publicly-funded projects.

### 8.2.5. Identify Healthy Living Needs
Use the area plan process to identify community needs related to healthy living.

### 8.3.3. Identification Process
Use the area plan process to identify areas in need of improvement.

### 8.4.2. Connectivity Issues
Review neighborhood connectivity issues near existing schools and parks through the area plan process.

### 8.4.6. Housing Variety
Use the area plan process to promote a variety of housing types, including those that cater to seniors within the same neighborhood.

### 8.6.2. Park Development
Prioritize areas for new park development based on: the lack of available parks and recreational facilities in identified areas; projected population growth; recommendations made in area plans; and feasibility.

### 11.1.1. Good Sites for Elderly Housing
Designate sites well suited for elderly housing through the area plan process.

### 11.1.2. Connectivity Improvements
Review and recommend improvements for the connectivity of housing to services and institutional uses through the area plan process.

### 11.1.3. Enhance Services
Make recommendations to protect and enhance urban schools, parks, institutional uses and other services through the area plan process.

### 11.2.6. Needs of Declining Neighborhoods
Continue to work with other departments to improve public infrastructure in declining neighborhoods and identify these needs in the area plan process.

### 11.2.8. Adaptive Reuse
Identify large buildings for adaptive reuse through the area plan process.

### 11.3.7. Targeted Infill Opportunities
Identify locations within the Urban Neighborhoods for targeted infill development and compatible redevelopment opportunities through the area plan process.

### 11.5.1. Diverse Housing Types
Ensure diversity of housing types by identifying sites for higher density residential uses in area plans.

### 11.7.5. Evaluate Through Area Plan Process
Evaluate identified activity centers for mixed-use development potential and neighborhood accessibility through the area plan process.

### 11.8.1. Redevelopment Locations
Identify potential locations for redevelopment along growth corridors for transit-oriented, high-density, mixed-use nodes through the area plan program.

### 11.8.2. Secondary Corridors
Identify secondary growth corridors as part of the area plan process.