Section 4
BUILDING THE MASTER PLAN

A Master Plan should be developed for each of the Development Areas. Created through a collaborative effort, the Master Plan will define the vision for the Development Area, establish how and when future development will take place, and show where and how public infrastructure will be provided. It should articulate design elements and architectural features important to future development of the area. This Master Plan should incorporate the principles of the Neighborhood Model in order to guide the development of attractive and sustainable urban neighborhoods, communities, and villages that will maintain a high quality of life in the County.

There are eight steps to building a Master Plan:

1. **Conduct a Community Visioning** process to develop goals and visions for the Development Area.
2. **Assemble a group** of residents, property owners, County officials, community leaders, developers and lenders who will develop the Master Plan based on the vision of the community.
3. **Identify existing conditions and features**, including mapping the natural and man-made landscape.
4. **Identify** existing neighborhoods and locate the neighborhood **Centers**.
5. Review and **assess relationships** of existing neighborhoods to the undeveloped properties and properties available for redevelopment.
6. **Decide what is desired** for the undeveloped properties and the Development Area.
7. **Create** a detailed **Development Area Master Plan**.
8. **Provide** implementation **strategies**.
1 **STEP ONE: THE COMMUNITY VISIONING PROCESS**

The Community Visioning Process is the first step to knowing what residents and property owners want for their Development Area. There are many participatory methods of helping participants articulate their visions for a community. The method chosen must reflect a process that is collaborative, participatory, proactive, and goal oriented. It must be representative of all of the stakeholders in each Development Area and it should rely on the Development Area goals already expressed in the Land Use Plan of the County rather than “starting from scratch.” Design and facilitation assistance should be provided to the committee. For example, the “charrette” or “design workshop” was used very effectively by the DISC in the Towers Property, Crozet, and Pantops studies developed in 1998. These workshops are documented in reports available from the Department of Planning and Community Development. Other participatory planning and design tools are also available.

2 **STEP TWO: ASSEMBLE A GROUP OF RESIDENTS, PROPERTY OWNERS, COUNTY OFFICIALS, AND COMMUNITY LEADERS WHO WILL DEVELOP THE MASTER PLAN BASED UPON THE COMMUNITY VISION.**

The group developing the plan should be committed community residents and property owners from the Development Area assisted by professional planners and designers. Essential to the success of the process is the commitment of other community leaders who are familiar with the County’s land use policies and overall County issues. Participation by the Supervisor and the Planning Commissioner who represent the Development Area is advantageous to the process. County staff from the Engineering Department, the Zoning Department, the Schools Division, and Fire and Rescue should assist the committee along with representatives of VDOT. The group should commit to participate for a minimum of one year to develop the plan.

3 **STEP THREE: IDENTIFY EXISTING CONDITIONS AND FEATURES**

Step Three is the identification of existing conditions and features. Base maps should be provided to the Committee that show natural features, such as slopes, streams, forested areas, floodplain, and wetlands. The base maps should also show existing constructed features, such as streets, schools, major areas of civic interest, commercial developments, and employment centers. Planned infrastructure improvements should be mapped as well as existing zoning and Comprehensive Plan designations. Familiarization of the area through site visits will enhance the committee’s knowledge of the Development Area.

**Natural features:** Natural features include both areas that are undevelopable by statute, such as wetlands and floodplains, as well as other significant areas such as forested areas, slopes greater than 25% and significant stream valleys, as identified on the County’s Open Space Plan. Significant viewsheds also should be identified at this time. Enough detail should be provided so that the committee can understand and choose the features that are essential to the quality of life in the Development Area and the features that may be modified to help achieve the vision for the Development Area.

As part of understanding and analyzing the importance of the natural features, the committee should explore the area on foot. Perennial and intermittent streams and the quality of these riparian areas should be noted. The committee should record the locations of deciduous and pine forests. They should note those areas of exceptional physical beauty that should be preserved, including swales, meadows, or significant stands of trees. They should note the areas that would be difficult to develop, including significant stream valleys and slopes.

After exploring the undeveloped parts of the Development Area, the committee should develop a priority list indicating the areas that should be preserved and the areas that could be modified to
help achieve the other goals for the Development Areas. While the County promotes a higher level of environmental preservation in its Rural Areas, it does not desire to ignore critical environmental features in the Development Areas. Indeed these features can and should be preserved and made into amenities serving the residents and businesses nearby. These features also help provide the unique identity of neighborhoods.

**Existing and Planned Facilities and Infrastructure:**
Existing and planned facilities and infrastructure include roads and road improvements, water and sewer lines, schools, parks, libraries, police and fire stations, and the like. The County’s current plans for improvements should also be shown. Later in the process, after completing the proposed Master Plan, a new map indicating proposed improvements to the existing infrastructure can be completed.

**Existing Zoning and Comprehensive Plan Designations:**
Maps should be provided of existing zoning and Comprehensive Plan designations. The zoning maps indicate current regulations in place for properties and should be available as references. The zoning designations are not set in stone but will need to be analyzed when implementation strategies are developed for the Master Plans. It is anticipated that the zoning designations will change after the Master Plan process occurs. Therefore, it is important to know what the existing designations are and what it will mean to change these designations.

The Comprehensive Plan designations represent the work of citizens and County elected and appointed officials as part of the 1996 Comprehensive Plan rewrite. They are the starting point for the creation of more detailed Development Area Plans. The goal of the Master Planning process is to modify and refine these maps to reflect anticipated uses that would support the Neighborhood Model.

### STEP FOUR: IDENTIFY THE EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS AND LOCATE THE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS.

In order for a community to plan what it wants for the future, it must know what it has and clearly articulate its most valuable features. At this point, the committee creating the Development Area plans will have identified its most important natural features. Step Four calls for identifying valuable built features, including existing neighborhoods, shopping centers, civic centers, areas of employment, and parks. Using this map of built features and their own knowledge of the Development Area, the committee then can delineate neighborhoods and locate the “Centers.”

As described in the Transect in Chapter 3, “Centers” are focal points. They are places where people congregate, work, and play. Existing centers may be parks, shopping areas, places of assembly, places of worship, promontories, and employment centers. Centers may be areas with known redevelopment potential, such as abandoned shopping centers, railroad stations, or other prominent features. Centers are also places that have a combination of any of these features in close proximity to one another.

After locating the Centers, the Committee’s task is to find the corresponding neighborhood to the Center. To start the process, the committee should draw a circle around the neighborhood center with a radius of ¼ mile (a five-minute walk) to ½ mile (when the circle surrounds a rail stop). It is important to note that the circle will not be a “perfect” ring. It will be shaped by the existing physical features, such as roads and buildings. It also will be shaped by natural features, such as rivers and ridge lines.

The resulting delineation of a neighborhood will include many developed areas as well as undeveloped properties. In fact, one goal of the Master Planning process is to integrate the Neighborhood Model with existing developed areas. For undeveloped areas in which no center is present, drawing a circle with a 1/4 to 1/2 mile radius is important for the next step.
Once the existing centers have been located and the five-minute walk zones identified, relationships of undeveloped areas to developed areas will start to emerge. As stated earlier, the Center is the focal point for the neighborhood. Ideally, it is where a mix of uses and the highest density and intensity of development would occur, although a Center could also be a park or natural area where people congregate. Outside the center the uses may be mixed or may be residential.

If one applies the transect, a continuum of density working out from a high-density center will occur. The end result, though, will not be a “neat circle” because the particular circumstances on the ground need to be reflected. For example, a neighborhood might have no Fringe zone or only a limited one, either because it abuts other neighborhoods or has environmental features that would preclude Fringe designation. A neighborhood may abut the City of Charlottesville or the Rivanna River or it may lie next to an existing high-density commercial area.

The transect may be useful to help identify the relationships that future development will have to existing neighborhoods and physical features. For instance, if a small undeveloped parcel sits between a center and a low-density residential area, the future use of the small undeveloped parcel might be a medium-density residential and mixed-use area or a General Area. Where an under-used shopping center might exist, the future use of this shopping center might be proposed as a high-density mixed-use development.

Once the centers are identified and relationships start to emerge, the committee will create the Development Opportunities Map. This Map contains the circles that show potential for new neighborhoods based on the Neighborhood Model. The majority of circles will have a 1/4-mile radius (a 5-minute walk from center to edge) and will be located according to existing development patterns or terrain.

Sometimes an area will not support residential uses. In this case, instead of a neighborhood, a “special district” will be formed. The Charlottesville-Albemarle Airport, for example, may be designated as a “special district” and therefore would not have a 5-minute walk zone for residences.

With existing neighborhoods, it is important to propose relationships to undeveloped properties that retain the quality of life in the existing neighborhoods. The flexibility of the “special district” as well as the variety of types of centers will allow a number of unique circumstances in a Development Area to be accommodated. All of these issues can be expressed on the Development Opportunities Map.

Now the true “planning” begins. The group will have to discuss options for the undeveloped properties and come to consensus on how the developed and undeveloped properties should relate to one another. For example, what are the important characteristics of existing neighborhoods that should be preserved? Where are the places that should be enhanced as focal points or centers of civic activity? How should existing and future neighborhoods be connected? What types of corridors should be retained and improved? Where should natural features be saved and where are places that those features may be modified? What should the Fringes look like? What density of development can reasonably be accommodated given the existing neighborhood and the infrastructure improvements needed to support new development?

What is the maximum population that the Development Area can and should support? What design features are important to the Development Area?

These questions should be debated in the framework of the Neighborhood Model, keeping
in mind the 12 principles expressed in Section 2. The group also should consult Section 6, which presents specific design approaches that meet these principles.

The result should be a draft framework for how the Development Area should be developed. It might show, for example, decisions that refine the Development Opportunities Map. It also might contain preliminary Development Area Statistics, proposing units of residential, retail, office, and other uses that can be accommodated (see example Figure 4:1 from the Pantops study). The result might be a bubble map expressing proposed ideas for the Development Area.

**STEP SEVEN: CREATE AND DETAIL A DEVELOPMENT AREA MASTER PLAN.**

Using the Development Opportunities Map as a base, the detailing of the Plan can begin. The level of detail for the Master Plan will depend on the group formulating the plan. For some Development Areas it may be appropriate to provide details of block layout; locate specific sites for civic, institutional, or religious buildings; and designate street and sidewalk types. For other Development Areas, general planning recommendations, perhaps working from the design approaches given in Section 6, may be enough.

The Development Area Master Plan should show the proposed land use or density for the Area as well as other features such as open space preservation, road, sidewalk, and path improvements, and facilities improvements. Sub-plans, such as a Development Area Land Use Plan, a Development Area Open Space Plan, and Development Area Circulation Plan, and Development Guidelines will provide detail for the Master Plan. Additional sub-plans can detail features such as block layout, right-of-way lines, sidewalks, street trees, and lot frontages. The level of detail will depend on the time the committee wishes to devote to the plan, how far out the committee is able to see into the future and the level of commitment of the stakeholders in the process. Figure 5:3 illustrates a potential buildout of part of the Pantops area after a Master Plan following the Neighborhood Model.

**Development Area Land Use Plan**

The Land Use sub-plan for the Development Area should be based on the Comprehensive Plan’s recommended land use. It will show the proposed land use and density in more detail. Most of the neighborhoods designated should not have special districts or specialized uses. Exceptions might be districts that acknowledge the unique nature of particular locations for meeting the distinct needs of certain uses.

**Infrastructure**

Translating the Development Area Land Use Plan into statistics, as shown in Table 4:1, will be beneficial for infrastructure planning. The statistics indicate the minimum and maximum number of dwelling units and square footage of commercial and industrial uses that the Development Area can support. These statistics can help determine the capacities of existing facilities and services, and identify additional services that might be needed. The facilities and services should be planned in advance and efforts made to have development occur concurrent with them. A list of proposed infrastructure improvements should accompany the Development Area Master Plan.

**Open Space Plan**

Another sub-plan, the Development Area Open Space Plan should highlight proposed public and private greenspaces. It defines the natural corridors to be preserved and/or enhanced, and buffers to be retained or created. It illustrates the relationship of these buffers and natural corridors to the open space system of the Development Area as a whole. The plan also should show the location of other open spaces such as small neighborhood centers, civic spaces, and parks. Importantly, this plan lays out a vision for a greenspace system and identifies lands that will be necessary for the County to acquire or at least to reserve as the opportunity permits. In short, it requires the designation of certain lands to be left undeveloped.
Also of importance, the Open Space Plan provides the basis for an integrated system of open spaces, both natural and built, ranging from greenways to squares, and from school yards to pocket parks. Figure 5:4 shows an Open Space Plan for the Pantops Development Area.

A Civic Space Plan may be desired for the Development Area. It would show school and library sites and public facilities of prominence. Such a plan can help preserve suitable spaces for these public uses, even if no program for these spaces currently exists. This sub-plan may be combined with the Open Space Plan.

**Circulation Plan**
Another sub-plan, the Circulation Plan, should indicate present and proposed transit opportunities, major thoroughfares and connecting corridors, bikeways, and trails. Attention should be paid to existing corridors that will require improvements as well as new thoroughfares connecting neighborhood to neighborhood or to major corridors. Figure 5:5 shows a Circulation Plan for the Pantops Development Area.

**Development Guidelines**
The Design Approaches, outlined in Section 6 of this document, provide examples of patterns and guidelines that conform to the principles of the Neighborhood Model. Some of the guidelines will be incorporated into overall zoning ordinance changes that help to change the form of development in the Development Areas. Others may be used in the creation of each Development Area’s design guidelines. The guidelines will provide information to future developers on the quality of new development in accordance with a Master Plan. They will assure property developers, County officials and residents that future development in individual parcels will be consistent with the Neighborhood Model.

The committee creating the Master Plan may wish to produce a plan illustrating a hypothetical buildout of the Development Area using the Development Guidelines (See Figures 5:2 and 5:3). This plan would provide examples of housing and building types, appearance of centers, lot lines within blocks and roof plans of buildings to illustrate preferred development styles for residents and builders alike.

8 **STEP EIGHT: PROVIDE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES.**

Having determined what exists and what should be, the question becomes, “How do we get there?” An implementation strategy addresses these issues with a series of documents including any recommended zoning changes and capital improvement needs.

The Master Plan process envisions zoning and subdivision changes to facilitate a changed form of development and possibly new zoning categories in the Development Areas. Ideally, a “by right” process for approval can be made for proposals that are in conformity with the Development Area Master Plan. This strategy is very important to the success of the Neighborhood Model. A developer is much more likely to create a new neighborhood with characteristics desired by the community if he can do so “by right,” than if he has to rezone the property. However, issues of the concurrence of infrastructure and facilities must be balanced with the level of “by right” development.

Concurrence may require an initial public and private investment up-front to achieve middle and long-term savings. This situation is counter-balanced by better public service delivery and higher quality of life for all.

The Capital Improvements Plan (CIP), produced annually by the County, prioritizes the capital spending of the County. The Development Area Master Plan should play a significant role in developing the list of possible projects and prioritizing the most urgent. Of particular importance is the development of a CIP that provides concurrence between the construction of public facilities and the buildout of neighborhood plans.