Section 1

**INTRODUCTION**

Development Area Planning and DISC

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Planning for Growth in Albemarle County

Albemarle County has arrived at a critical moment in its history. The natural beauty of its landscape, combined with the area’s depth of cultural resources, excellent schools, strong economy, and the charm of downtown Charlottesville, attracts increasing numbers of new residents and businesses each year. Increasing large-lot land development in the rural and urban areas of the County, however, threatens to diminish many of the same qualities that have made the County such an attractive place to live and work. The pace of development combined with a low-density suburban form of development has begun placing great strain on roads, schools, and utilities. The demand for housing threatens the scenic beauty and health of the County’s urban and rural areas.
Goals for Neighborhoods in the Development Areas

Developed by the Development Areas Initiatives Study Committee (DISC) from 1997 to 2000 to augment the goals of the 1996 Land Use Plan, the goals for the Development Areas are as follows:

- **Centers** – Neighborhoods within the Development Areas will have centers or focal points for congregating. These may include schools, parks, places of worship, civic centers, or small commercial and social areas. Such features will be an easy walk for most residents in the neighborhood.

- **Open Space** – Each Development Area will offer opportunities for public and private outdoor recreational areas for active and passive recreation.

- **Network** – A network of streets, bikeways, pedestrian paths, and bus routes will connect new neighborhoods as well as existing residential areas and nonresidential districts.

- **Mixed Uses** – Neighborhoods will contain a true mix of uses, including residences, shops, and places of employment, as well as civic, religious, and cultural institutions.

- **Building Placement and Scale** – Consideration will be given to massing, height, setbacks, and orientation of buildings so that these characteristics enhance the public realm. In particular, garages will be less dominant at street view than houses.

- **Alleys** – Where topography permits, alleys will provide rear access to parcels, allowing for and facilitating the provision of garages and utilities to the rear of houses.

- **Relegated Parking** - Parking for the automobile will not result in an excessive amount of paved area; parking on the street will be the norm, and parking lots will be provided to the rear and/or sides of buildings.

- **Variety of Housing Types** – Each neighborhood will possess a variety of housing types accommodating a range of incomes. Affordable units will be dispersed throughout the Neighborhood and will be visually indistinguishable from other units.

- **Appealing Streetscapes** – As the fundamental element of public space within the neighborhood, the street will make the neighborhood inviting with street trees and landscaping. Sidewalks or paths that connect houses to each other and to centers and common areas will be the norm. Walks will connect sidewalks to front doors and main entrances.

- **Transportation Options** – Convenient routes for pedestrians, bicyclists, and buses and other transit including light rail will augment the street network. Public transit stops will be located within each Development Area. Walking to them will be safe and convenient. Waiting for transit will be comfortable and a normal part of activity in the Neighborhood Center.
The Neighborhood Model and Master Planning

This document is a part of the County’s Comprehensive Plan. It supports a change in the form of urban development from what currently exists. It recognizes that, if the Development Areas are to be the primary areas receiving residential growth, density must be increased to at least the low end of the density scale that is recommended in the Comprehensive Plan. To achieve that density, the form of development must change and that form must be more urban and less suburban. The proposed form is described here as the Neighborhood Model.

Another key element is that growth in the Development Areas be guided by a master planning process. Also included in this part of the Comprehensive Plan are descriptions of innovative design tools for creating more urban livable neighborhoods. Master Planning and ordinance revisions require time for writing, adoption, and implementation. As a result, there will be a time lag between the adoption of this document and its full implementation. It is intended that the parts of this Plan which do not require a Master Plan or ordinance revision, including, but not limited to, the 12 principles as described in the following chapters, will guide a new form of development for the County's designated development areas.
Section 2

BUILDING IN THE DEVELOPMENT AREAS:
The Neighborhood Model

Changing the Form of Development

Achieving Albemarle County’s dual goals of preserving its rural area and creating livable communities in its designated Development Areas will require a new form of development that is ultimately more urban. If the countryside is to remain beautiful and productive, the bulk of new development must locate inside the Development Areas. But these areas will not attract the needed share of development unless they are appealing and functional and offer a high quality of life for a broad spectrum of the population. The form of new development strongly influences the desirability of more dense places. Consequently, short-term efforts by the County will be concentrated on changing the form of development; long term efforts will promote the densities in the Comprehensive Plan. The principal vehicle for effecting this change in development practice for undeveloped sites and places where development has already occurred will be the Neighborhood Model. The Neighborhood Model is proposed here as the building block for achieving this goal for the Development Areas.
The Neighborhood Model: Building Block for the Development Areas

The Neighborhood Model - What It Offers

The Neighborhood Model seeks to change the form of development from a pattern of sprawling, isolated buildings to a more compact and interconnected design.

The Neighborhood Model:

1. Accommodates walkers, bikers, and public transportation so that mobility can be a reality for the elderly, the young, and those with limited access to automobiles.

2. Makes open space integral to overall design so that residents and workers can walk to a public park, experience preserved natural areas, and enjoy public gathering places.

3. Keeps buildings and spaces at a human scale so that street views are attractive and pedestrian friendly.

4. Incorporates varying densities and gradually allows for an overall increase in density in the Development Areas to meet the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

5. Contains a mixture of residential and non-residential uses so residents have convenient access to work, to services, and to entertainment.

6. Requires interconnected streets within developments and between developments so that pedestrians can walk easily to many destinations, traffic has alternative routes, and car trips are reduced in number and length.

7. Moves off-street parking out of sight and encourages on-street parking.

8. Mixes housing types and markets so that the full range of housing choices is offered within the neighborhood.

9. Emphasizes re-use of sites.

10. Adapts development to site terrain so that natural topography can be preserved.

11. Maintains a clear boundary between Development Areas and Rural Areas.

12. Provides for neighborhoods to have a designated center to bring diverse and continuous activity to a neighborhood.
Why Change the Form: Density by Design

A minimum level of density, particularly in the Center areas, is essential to deliver the sense of community and the many amenities and cost efficiencies offered by the Neighborhood Model. In addition, only such a density will allow for preservation of the rural areas as population continues to grow.

Tying Density to Quality of Life
In keeping with the County’s Land Use Plan, the Neighborhood Model anticipates an increase in density in the Development Areas from the current level (less than 4 du/acre) to a range between 3-6 du/acre (neighborhood density) and 6-34 du/acre (urban density).

Design is especially important with higher densities. A well-designed multi-unit project can fit in with neighboring buildings and provide privacy and quality to residents. In an urban setting, it also can offer the convenience of parks, shops, schools, services, and entertainment in walking distance. With an urban form, a variety of uses can co-exist and provide many useful places to go in a small area. Most of the advantages of community are not available without critical mass, at least in the center areas.

Urban Density Can
- provide capacity to absorb the bulk of new residents
- make possible pedestrian-oriented communities
- serve a broader population
- allow more efficient delivery of public services

Potential Advantages of Well-Designed Density
- a variety of choices in housing, shopping, transportation
- convenience to services, entertainment, and recreation
- opportunity for more community life
- amenities such as parks and neighborhood cafes
- less time driving because of shorter trips, combined errands and walking opportunities
- potential savings in taxes
- a reduction in pressure for rural development

The Neighborhood Model requires an overall increase in density in the Development Areas over time. The overall effect should be an increase in appeal and livability of the Development Areas.

Figure 2:4 (right) Plan of downtown Charlottesville showing Queen Charlotte Square (in black) The residential density for this project is 33 du/acre. If the commercial area were developed as condominiums, the equivalent density would be 50 du/acre. Plan courtesy of Daggett and Grigg Architects.

Figure 2:5 (above) Redevelopment in downtown Charlottesville at Queen Charlotte Square. 36 dwelling units and 20 office condominiums sit comfortably on a 1 acre parcel. 82 parking spaces sit on an outdoor parking deck and within a garage. Photo courtesy of Daggett and Grigg Architects.
Principles of the Neighborhood Model

This vision of how the Development Areas should develop is the Neighborhood Model. Embodied in the model are 12 principles, which emerged from the Land Use Plan and the goals for the Development Areas.

The following pages illustrate the 12 principles of the Neighborhood Model. Section 3 (the Transect) presents one conceptual basis for how the pieces of development can fit together according to these principles. Section 5 contains specific approaches for applying these principles.

Principles of the Neighborhood Model:

1. Pedestrian Orientation
2. Neighborhood Friendly Streets and Paths
3. Interconnected Streets and Transportation Networks
4. Parks and Open Space
5. Neighborhood Centers
6. Buildings and Spaces of Human Scale
7. Relegated Parking
8. Mixture of Uses
9. Mixture of Housing Types and Affordability
10. Redevelopment
11. Site Planning That Respects Terrain
12. Clear Boundaries with the Rural Areas