RURAL AREA

GOAL: Albemarle’s Rural Area will have thriving farms and forests, traditional crossroads communities, protected scenic areas, historic sites, and preserved natural resources.

Source: Albemarle County Community Development 2010
Albemarle County envisions a community with abundant natural, rural, historic, and scenic resources • healthy ecosystems • active and vibrant development areas • a physical environment that supports healthy lifestyles • a thriving economy • and exceptional educational opportunity for present and future generations.

Rural Area

Introduction
Farms and forests, mountain and valley views, historic buildings and sites, and abundant natural resources are among the most valued aspects of Albemarle County. These features are all part of the Rural Area, which makes up 95% of the County’s land area and gives Albemarle County its distinctive character. This area, made up of 690 square miles, also provides a majority of the County’s wildlife habitat.

Albemarle County is committed to preserving its rural heritage. The County encourages residential development in the Development Areas where services and utilities are available and where such development will not conflict with agricultural/forestal and conservation of natural resources or other objectives for the Rural Area. These objectives are supplemented by the County’s long-standing policy that public infrastructure will be directed to the Development Areas. Minimizing the extension of water and sewer public infrastructure helps avoid suburbanization of the Rural Area.

Features expected in the Rural Area include:

1. A strong agricultural and forestal economy with large unfragmented parcels of land on which owners can produce their goods, have opportunities to gain value from processing their own produce, and have access to local markets;
2. Protected natural resources, which include mountains, hills, and valleys, healthy streams and sustainable supplies of clean groundwater, and diverse, interconnected areas of viable habitat for native wildlife;
3. Protected historic structures, archaeological sites, and other cultural resources;
4. Rural and historic landscapes that enhance the visitor’s experience;
5. Crossroads communities that provide support services and opportunities to engage in community life;
6. Distinct boundaries between the Development Areas and buildings and sites that are clearly rural; and
7. Well-informed citizens who understand the cultural, economic, and ecological aspects of the Rural Area.

In their entirety, these features help demonstrate the diversity of rural land uses in, and the importance of, the Rural Area for...
the County as a whole. The features are interrelated, and it is difficult to separate one feature from another. For example, in order for tourism to thrive, natural and historic resources must be preserved. For agriculture to be successful, land ownership must be relatively unfragmented and agricultural soils must be available. Farmers and other residents of the Rural Area need historic crossroads communities not only as places to find basic support services, but also as centers of community life. Because these features are so interrelated, it is essential to recognize that decisions about any of the features will affect the Rural Area as a whole.

**Land Use Plan for the Rural Area**

The Land Use Plan for Albemarle County is shown in Figure 1. All of the land shown in white is designated as the Rural Area, with the uses that are described in this Chapter of the Plan.

Agriculture, forestry and conservation play an important and longstanding role in the environment, heritage and economy of the County and these are the preferred land uses in the Rural Area. These land uses have a mutually supportive relationship, and all three provide great value to the community-at-large, including the City of Charlottesville. Some of the benefits include the proximity of rural land, local agricultural enterprise, and the salutary contributions of the conservation lands to a clean and abundant water supply, clean air, scenic landscapes and preservation of wildlife habitat, all of which are fundamental to a healthy and diverse biological community and strong local economy.

New homebuilding is not desired in the County’s Rural Area because it undermines the preferred uses. It can also cause rural landowners to feel financial pressure to subdivide their land. The County is interested in helping property owners find ways to keep properties intact rather than subdividing.

Policy and Zoning Ordinance changes are recommended to promote the County’s preferred uses for the Rural Area, including supportive uses for agriculture, historic preservation, tourism, crossroads communities, and strengthening land conservation initiatives. The strategies discussed in this Chapter all share the goal of helping to keep the Rural Area rural.

**Consideration of New Uses in the Rural Area**

This Chapter recommends consideration of a few new land uses in the Rural Area, including supportive uses for agriculture, tourism, and crossroads communities. The County recognizes that a delicate balance exists between providing more opportunities for supporting rural uses and allowing so many of them that the Rural Area features are lost. Frequent tour buses along County roads can cause rapid deterioration of narrow gravel roads. Excessive noise can interfere with a horse or cattle operation.

It is important that any change take place slowly with enough time to evaluate potential impacts. Analysis of the impacts of the recent Zoning Ordinance changes should be conducted before adopting new zoning regulations. Policies, programs and regulations that address only one aspect of the Rural Area to the detriment of others should be avoided or, where already in place, revised. Only by prudent and thoughtful decision making will the Rural Area resources be preserved while encouraging uses that benefit the economy.
Criteria for Review of New Uses
As new uses are proposed in the Rural Area, it is essential that they be able to meet the following standards. New uses should:

- relate directly to the Rural Area and need a Rural Area location in order to be successful, (e.g., a farm winery has to be located in the Rural Area and would be unlikely to succeed in the Development Areas);
- be compatible with, and have a negligible impact, on natural, cultural, and historic resources;
- not conflict with nearby agricultural and forestal uses;
- reflect a size and scale that complements the character of the area in which they will be located;
- be reversible so that the land can easily return to farming, forestry, conservation, or other preferred rural uses;
- be suitable for existing rural roads and result in little discernible difference in traffic patterns;
- generate little demand for fire and rescue and police service;
- be able to operate without the need for public water and sewer;
- be sustainable with available groundwater; and
- be consistent with other Rural Area policies.

Most importantly, the success of the use should be related to its rural location. For example, a farm winery where most of the grapes are grown onsite is a Rural Area use. A standalone wine store that sells wines from all over the world is a commercial use that belongs in the Development Areas. A department store distribution center located near an interstate interchange should be in the Development Areas, but a storage and distribution facility for locally produced agricultural products could be located in the Rural Area.

Performance standards will be needed for any new uses to ensure that the size, scale, and location of the new commercial uses recommended for the Rural Area are appropriate. It is of prime importance that the appearance and function of new uses blend and not detract from the key features of the Rural Area. New uses should not overwhelm an area in terms of their function or visibility.
Page intentionally left blank.
Figure 1: Generalized Land Use Plan

- Development Areas
- Primary Roads
- Secondary Roads
- Major Water Bodies
- Major Streams

* See Individual Master Plans for Detail and Actual Land Use Designations and Descriptions
Objective 1: Support a strong agricultural and forestal economy.

Agriculture and forestry are two important and long-standing land uses in the County’s Rural Area, although characteristics of both industries have changed over time. Tobacco was an important crop in the Colonial era, but soon led to soil depletion. Fruit and orchard production have been and continue to be features of Albemarle’s agricultural production, with grape-growing and winemaking becoming more important. Beef cattle production, dairy farming, and raising of grains and grasses to support these animals are prominent activities. Managed forests and timber harvests continue to be important.

Horse farming and equestrian activities are another longstanding agricultural use in Albemarle County. Horse farming is a term inclusive of any or all of the activities of horse breeding, boarding, training, and riding lessons.

Agricultural and Forest Soils

As indicated in Objective 1, retaining continuous land holdings for agricultural uses is of prime importance because of the soil attributes of the land. Many soils in the Rural Area are especially suitable for agricultural and forestal uses, such as crop and timber production. In Albemarle County, there are three major categories of soils for agriculture that have been identified by the Natural Resources Conservation Service:

- Prime farmlands (suitable for cultivated crops and alfalfa hay in Albemarle);
- Locally important farmlands (suitable for alfalfa, mixed hay, and pasture in Albemarle); and
- Unique farmlands (suitable for orchards and vineyards in Albemarle).

The individual soil types included in these groups can be found at the link provided Reference Documents. The Natural Resource Conservation Service has also defined the following high quality silvicultural (forest) productivity classes:

- Hardwoods I (suitable for commercial production of Northern Red Oak, White Oak, Black Oak, Yellow Poplar, and Ash);
- Hardwoods II (suitable for commercial production of Chestnut Oak, Hickory, Scarlet Oak, and Southern red Oak); and
- Soils suitable for commercial production of Loblolly Pine and Virginia Pine, Sycamore, and Black Walnut.

Maps of important agricultural soils and important forestal soils are found in the Reference Documents accompanying this Plan. They show the extent of highly productive soils in the County. Areas not shown as having important soils on this map are usually limited in their productivity due to steep slopes, wetness, or other factors. Even in parts of the Rural Area where agricultural and forestal activities no longer take place, the extent of soils suitable for farmland and forests represents opportunities for these activities to once again thrive.
**Strategy 1a:** Continue to promote use of Rural Preservation Developments (RPDs), conservation easements, and Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs) programs, if developed, to help preserve agricultural and forestal soils and to increase the acreage of productive soils for agriculture and forestry.

It is important that existing programs be continued to help retain agricultural soils and to keep landholdings intact. Strategies in Objective 3 identify ways in which RPDs and conservation easements can help limit residential development in the Rural Area. Strategy 3g suggests further exploration of TDR programs. These strategies can be used to retain the most important features of agricultural and forestal land, which are soil and water. For success in agriculture and forestry, lands with the most productive soils must be recognized and preserved for those uses.

**Agriculture**

The face of farming nationwide has been changing for decades. Many small family farms have been absorbed by larger farms or subdivided into residential lots for development. This has reduced the overall number of farms in the country and caused the remaining farms to drop into smaller size classes.

In 2012, the Federal Census of Agriculture identified 896 farms in Albemarle County (counting only those with at least $1,000 in gross income), with a total of 168,877 acres or approximately 36 percent of the land in the County. From 2007 to 2012, the total acreage in Albemarle County farms grew by over 10,000 acres. This 6% growth in overall acreage may represent a real increase or it may be an effect of more persons reporting on their farm acreage.

An increase was also seen in the number of very small farms (< 10 acres) and medium sized farms (50–179 acres). If this increase is real and not due to increased reporting, the increase in smaller farms may be due to the development of either specialty farms, such as producing goat milk soap or an increase in small farms that concentrate on local markets. The Piedmont Environmental Council lists 70 farms in the County that sell products to local consumers. The barograph in Figure 2 shows the change in acreage and numbers of farms over the last 20 years. The pie chart in Figure 3 shows that most farms in Albemarle County are in the range of 50 – 179 acres.

It should be noted that the Census of Agriculture relies on self-reporting and may not be accurate in terms of actual numbers of farms and farming operations. It is used, however, as a proxy to measure change. If it truly represents the face of farming, then the number of very small farms and medium sized farms is growing.

**Strategy 1b:** Continue to promote farming and forestry activities in the County by retaining Rural Area zoning on Rural Area designated land.

The County does not have a direct role in farming and timbering activities of property owners; however, it can promote and assist in making opportunities available to continue farming and timbering. The most significant way is to retain Rural Area zoning on Rural Area land. In so doing, the County can ensure that sufficient land area is available for farming and timbering activities now and in the future.
**Strategy 1c:** Establish active support of agricultural land uses through the creation of a Rural Support Program position that provides agricultural assistance, community education, marketing strategies, information on agricultural support businesses, and information about alternative agricultural uses.

Since 2008, the County has been actively working to assist local farmers in marketing their products. Changes to regulations on farm sales, farm stands, and farmers markets have provided more opportunities for small farming operations to market their products and to increase product diversity.

**Figure 2: Farms by Acreage in Albemarle County 1992 - 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>&lt;10 acres</th>
<th>10 - 49 acres</th>
<th>50 - 179 acres</th>
<th>180 - 499 acres</th>
<th>&gt;500 acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>359 Farms</td>
<td>68 Farms</td>
<td>292 Farms</td>
<td>151 Farms</td>
<td>76 Farms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture 2012

**Figure 3: Number of Farms by Acreage 2012**

- 359 Farms <10 acres
- 292 Farms 10 - 49 acres
- 151 Farms 50 - 179 acres
- 68 Farms 180 - 499 acres
- 76 Farms >500 acres

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture 2012
The County coordinated an Agri-business Marketing Conference early in 2013 to bring producers of non-traditional agricultural products together with resources and regulatory agencies. The County has also participated in marketing locally grown products and has provided business and tourism assistance to wineries and for non-traditional farming and farm products. County activities to help start-up businesses and market locally grown products should be continued in order to support more farming activities.

In addition to support for locally grown products, wineries, and non-traditional farming, responsibilities of the Rural Support Program position might include:

- Educating citizens about the benefits and the potential conflicts of living in proximity to agricultural industries as part of encouraging appreciation of the Rural Areas and promoting the importance of agricultural resources;
- Seeking supplementary public and private funding sources for the ACE program;
- Participating in the Farm Tour as an educational tool;
- Coordinating agricultural education in the classroom, such as implementing a farm day for children;
- Coordinating with the Schools Division to encourage and promote agricultural-related vocational education programs from middle school onward;
- Promoting the preservation of important soils for agricultural and forestry use, in conjunction with the Cooperative Extension service; and
- Promoting the protection of Albemarle County’s forests as a resource base for its forestry industries and for resource protection.

Funding and developing the Rural Support Program could raise awareness of the importance of agriculture to a higher level. It would also provide an opportunity for other County staff to work on increased business assistance to other targeted agricultural activities, such as wineries, cideries, and specialty farms. This strategy is also discussed in Chapter 6 - Economic Development - because of the importance of agriculture to the local economy.

**Strategy 1d:** Continue to assist Rural Area property owners to diversify agricultural activities, including helping to connect local farms with local consumers.

The local foods movement has become very strong in Albemarle County. Food produced in the County benefits Charlottesville residents as well. Historically, the most common livestock activities in the County have been raising cattle for beef and dairy production. Fruit and hay have been the prominent crops and in recent years, agricultural activities have diversified. Figure 4 shows the variety of agricultural products currently produced in the Rural Area:
Figure 4: Locally Produced Agricultural Products 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meat, Fish, and Poultry</th>
<th>Fruit and Fruit Products</th>
<th>Other Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>Cow’s milk, cheese, cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>Peaches</td>
<td>Goat’s milk, cheese, soap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>Blackberries</td>
<td>Seasonal produce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Raspberries</td>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duck</td>
<td>Blueberries</td>
<td>Herbs, herb teas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Strawberries</td>
<td>Eggs and honey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trout</td>
<td>Pears</td>
<td>Grasses and grains for livestock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catfish</td>
<td>Apricots</td>
<td>Seeds and dried beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshwater Shrimp</td>
<td>Plums</td>
<td>Sauces and relishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jams, preserves, and pies</td>
<td>Spreads such as pesto, salsa, and hummus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Piedmont Environmental Council 2013

Work done by the County’s Office of Community and Business Partnerships with local agriculture has changed the role of the County in economic development. The County has partnered with several organizations and contributed money to organizations that promote diversity in agricultural activities. This work should be continued by a Rural Support Program specialist who can take this important activity to another level to promote local food growth and consumption while the County’s Economic Development professionals can concentrate on business development in the Development Areas.

**Strategy 1e:** Continue to provide support to wineries, cideries, and farm breweries as part of the County’s agricultural support activities.

Viticulture, the production of grapes (especially for wine making), is an example of a form of agriculture that has been very successful on smaller parcels. (In Virginia, a 20-acre vineyard is considered large and a 5-acre vineyard is more common.) Farm wineries, licensed by the Commonwealth to produce fermented beverages from their produce, are a growing part of the local agricultural economy. Producing wine from fruit grown on their land and on other local farms can enable landowners to recoup the large initial investment by selling their value-added products, rather than raw fruit.

Since 2003, and partly as a result of State Code changes for events at farm wineries, 22 new farm wineries have opened in Albemarle County for a total of 31 farm wineries. In 2014, Albemarle produced 1316 tons of grapes for wine and was the leading grape producer for wine in the State. Figure 5 shows the change in grape production in Albemarle County and Virginia over the last ten years.

Figure 5: Grape Production in Tons in Albemarle County and Virginia 2005 - 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albemarle</td>
<td>904</td>
<td>1,116</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>1,442</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>971</td>
<td>1,223</td>
<td>1,013</td>
<td>1,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>6,200</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>6,556</td>
<td>7,749</td>
<td>7,532</td>
<td>6,863</td>
<td>8,039</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services 2005 – 2008
Virginia Wine Board 2009 – 2014
Like wineries, cideries and farm breweries can use Albemarle County’s fruits and grains for production of fermented beverages. Larger areas typically are needed for growing apples, pears, and grains than for growing grapes. At present, there are 3 cideries and no farm breweries in the County, but both have potential to increase local agricultural production.

These businesses generally rely heavily on their tasting rooms to produce enough sales to be profitable, which in turn keeps the farm property in rural use and protected from development. Wine and cider production are significant agricultural activities using local crops. Farm breweries, where small amounts of agricultural products, including barley, other grains, hops, or fruit are processed into beer, are also agricultural uses that could be located in the County and use local crops. Events at these locations and their impacts on neighboring properties and the Rural Area are discussed later in this Chapter.

**Strategy 1f:** Study ways in which the County can better support the local horse industry.

In March 2011, the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service conducted an economic analysis of the horse industry in Virginia. The results were significant and showed the previously hidden economic benefits of this industry to Albemarle County. Typical activities range from breeding, training, and boarding to recreational pursuits, such as racing, showing, and other competitions. According to the Cooper report, *The Economic Impact of the Horse Industry in Virginia* by Terrance J. Rephann:

> Over the past several decades, the intensity, scale and scope of these activities have increased rapidly in Virginia. Horse ownership has become more popular and venues offering opportunities for racing, showing and trail riding have spread across the commonwealth. As a result, the horse industry has come to play a more visible role not only in agriculture but tourism and recreation as well. The spending in these sectors, in turn, supports numerous other industries.

At present, most of the activities in Albemarle relate to breeding, training, and boarding; however opportunities exist to grow this industry even more. Further study is needed to determine the extent to which the County should take advantage of this growing industry.

**Forestry**

Forestry is another important component of the Albemarle economy. Managed well and logged in a sustainable manner, tree farms provide a renewable resource for income to landowners, taxes to the County, and timber products for many other users. Trees and forests provide many natural resource benefits prior to and after harvesting. Trees provide soil stabilization, water resource buffers, air filtering, and add to the beauty of the County. Diversification of species is beneficial to plant and wildlife habitat. Both hardwood and pine are harvested in the County. Figure 6 summarizes recent timber harvests in the County.

Timber production occurs at different levels - from tree farmers who manage timber stands through selective cuts and plantings to planting and harvesting single species to one-time harvesters. Important aspects of timber production are managing harvests to prevent erosion and replanting to ensure diversity of species. Irresponsible logging can result in a combination of compaction, puddling, rutting, burning, erosion, and displacement of species. These activities can be avoided with proper planning, equipment, and attention by landowners and loggers.

As with agricultural production, fragmentation of land ownership and the creation of smaller parcels reduce the economic viability of forestry operations. The increasing number of residences in the Rural Area also increases the likelihood of nuisance complaints, such as noise and logging trucks on narrow roads, against...
typical forestry operations. The County considers forestry operations a normal part of the rural landscape and does not regulate noise or traffic generated by these uses.

Figure 6: Timber Harvested in Albemarle County 2009-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pine Harvest Volume</td>
<td>10,344</td>
<td>6,349</td>
<td>5,574</td>
<td>3,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Million Board Feet)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardwood Harvest</td>
<td>5,576</td>
<td>5,428</td>
<td>3,824</td>
<td>4,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volume (Million</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board feet)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Harvest Value</td>
<td>$1,780,363</td>
<td>$1,285,857</td>
<td>$965,059</td>
<td>$2,218,432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardwood Harvest</td>
<td>$1,011,773</td>
<td>$1,148,680</td>
<td>$862,034</td>
<td>$1,001,924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Value</td>
<td>$2,792,137</td>
<td>$2,434,537</td>
<td>$1,827,093</td>
<td>$3,220,356</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Virginia Department of Forestry
Note: A board foot is the volume of a piece of wood 1 foot long x 1 foot wide x 1 inch thick (144 cubic inches)

**Strategy 1g:** Continue to promote retention of forest soils in conjunction with preservation developments and provide contacts with the Department of Forestry, who oversees timbering operations.

The State Department of Forestry oversees timbering operations and ensures that erosion and sediment control plans are filed, sites are inspected, and harvest management takes place. The County’s role is restricted to promotion of conservation easements, use value taxation, Agricultural/Forestal (Ag/For) Districts, and use of RPDs to preserve forestal land, as discussed above.

Educating forestal property owners on the importance of biodiversity and good logging practices will help retain forest soils. The County can collaborate with the State Department of Forestry on ways to help educate property owners. Discussions with State foresters may help the County improve the outcome of timbering activities that also promote other County goals for water protection and economic development.

There are some potential conflicts in the County’s policies for the Rural Area, including the support of commercial forestry and the protection of forests to maintain water quality and habitat value. Both of the approaches to forest management are part of the rural landscape.

It is important to find the right balance between harvesting timber and habitat conservation/preservation. Conservation programs are the most appropriate tools for habitat preservation because the County cannot regulate the locations chosen for timber cutting. Once the most important forests for habitat and water quality protection have been identified, the County will need to implement forest conservation on these important sites, while striving to prevent threats to commercial forestry operations on other forest land.
**Strategy 1h:** Change zoning regulations to permit appropriately-scaled collection and distribution facilities for local agricultural products in the Rural Area. Consider allowing these uses by-right.

Marketing local foods and agricultural products depends on the availability of local distribution facilities such as warehouses for locally grown produce and meat. These facilities would need to be located on major roads that can support the additional truck traffic. Facilities located in Entrance Corridors would also need to meet Entrance Corridor Guidelines. The County should amend the Zoning Ordinance to help support the marketing of local food and agricultural products with small distribution centers. These centers can help connect farms to consumers and provide more opportunities for agricultural uses to thrive in the Rural Area. Large commercial distribution centers such as department store warehouses are not appropriate in the Rural Area.

**Strategy 1i:** Clarify the difference between home occupations and other uses that are listed in the Zoning Ordinance.

Home occupations are permitted in both the Rural Area and the Development Areas. In the Rural Area, home occupations can provide income for a rural resident whose business supports a strong agricultural and forestal economy without the need to find a business location. Uses not permitted in the Rural Area zoning district are not considered appropriate for the Rural Area. However, the distinction between uses prohibited in the Rural Areas zoning district and uses that could be allowed by home occupation permit if performance standards are met is not clear. This inconsistency creates confusion and frustration for residents and staff. Clarification will make it easier for applicants and staff to understand expectations and more easily process applications.

**Strategy 1j:** Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow landscape services and storage of landscape materials in the Rural Area.

Nursery production that does not have a retail component is considered a Rural Area use because trees and shrubs require room to grow. Growing trees and shrubs is supportive of an agricultural and forestal economy. However, a service occupation related to landscaping with trees and shrubs is currently considered a Development Areas use. In the Zoning Ordinance, storage of landscape materials represents a contractor’s storage yard and not allowed in the Rural Area Zoning District. In recent years, discussion has taken place on whether storage yards for landscape materials are more appropriate in the Rural Area than the Development Areas due to the large outdoor storage component of material and equipment. As part of the zoning text amendments being considered for the Rural Area, this issue should be discussed and clarified. Outdoor storage of landscape materials may be appropriate for the Rural Area, as many features are similar to other Rural Area uses.

**Objective 2:** Protect and preserve natural resources, which include mountains, hills, valleys, rivers, streams, groundwater, and retain continuous and unfragmented land for agriculture, forestry, biodiversity, and natural resource protection.

Most of the County’s mountains, hills, valleys, and streams are located in the Rural Area. These resources are as much a part of the Rural Area as farms and forests. Similarly, the Rural Area also contains the largest variety of vegetation and wildlife species, which are dependent on water and other Rural Area natural resources. Preserving the natural landscape is therefore a key recommendation for the Rural Area.
Specific recommendations for preserving these important features are found throughout the Natural Resources Chapter of this Plan.

An essential part of this Objective is connectivity. When land is divided for residential development, it becomes fragmented which affects agricultural production, can prevent the viability of many Rural Area uses, and reduce the diversity of flora and fauna by breaking up habitats and corridors, which, in turn, starts to reduce biodiversity and results in fewer native species.

Albemarle’s Rural Area contains many large tracts of undivided land. Of the 16,993 parcels zoned for rural uses in the Rural Area, only 40 are over 1000 acres in size. About 70% are less than 10 acres. Many of the larger parcels are used for farming and forestry, and some are used strictly for natural resources protection. Several are owned by public agencies including the National Park Service, RWSA, the City of Charlottesville, UVA, and Albemarle County. These large parcels provide continuous and unfragmented land which is important for habitat and conservation of environmental resources. The single most important way to preserve continuous and unfragmented land for agriculture, forestry, biodiversity, and natural resource protection is to maintain rural uses and avoid residential development. The strategies below show ways in which the County supports owners in keeping their large parcels in the Rural Area intact.

**Strategy 2a:** Direct residential development to and continue to make the Development Areas more livable, attractive places.

The preferred location for new residential development, except where it directly supports agricultural uses is in the Development Areas. Even with the County’s efforts to direct development into the Development Areas, house building still occurs in the Rural Area. Presently, there are 24,378 parcels in the Rural Area and 18,451 dwellings. Many of these dwellings are located in large-lot subdivisions which have a suburban look and feel. Other dwellings are on large farm properties or on scattered smaller lots.

Using Rural Area land for residential uses is not the preferred use because it results in loss of agricultural and forestal land and open space. It can also create conflicts between residential uses and agricultural activities. Livestock produces odors and noises. Application of fertilizer, especially manure, on crops can produce smells that are offensive to non-farming residents, especially when those residents are entertaining outdoors. Loud noises from outdoor events at residences or other non-agricultural activities can affect livestock. Uses in the Rural Area can be unattractive and hunting activities unacceptable to residents expecting a pristine residential experience. The Rural Area is a home for those whose rural business is there. It has more than scenic mountains and valleys that provide a beautiful place to live. The strategies articulated below are designed to help strike a balance between the residential property rights of Rural Area landowners and the desire of the overall community to prevent suburbanization of the Rural Area.

Because “living in the country” is attractive to many people, it is important that prospective residents understand the different purposes of the Rural Area and the Development Areas. If the Development Areas are attractive and affordable, some, hopefully most, of the persons considering living in the Rural Area will choose the Development Areas instead. **It is also important that residents thinking of living in the Rural Area understand**
the County’s policy for public service delivery. The Development Areas are the places where water and sewer service is provided, along with quick police, fire, and rescue response, and road improvements. Persons living in the Rural Area should not anticipate levels of public service delivery equal to services provided in the Development Areas, including road improvements (see policies in Transportation Chapter). The Development Areas Chapter discusses ways to make the Development Areas more livable.

**Strategy 2b:** Provide information to property owners in the Rural Area on alternatives to subdividing their land, including donating conservation easements and use value taxation.

Residential development in the Rural Area is not prohibited, and current estimates suggest that an additional 45,000 (theoretical) new lots could be created in the Rural Area. (The term theoretical means that it has not been verified that all of these potential lots would conform to zoning and subdivision requirements.) Creation of even a fraction of these lots would have serious implications for the viability of agriculture and timbering, as well as for successful resource conservation and protection. Figure 7 provides historical information on single-family detached construction in the Development Areas as well as the Rural Area.

This table illustrates that permits for an average of 426 single-family dwellings per year were obtained over the last 20 years. This average is higher than that of just the last ten years, which was 303 units per year. Of those 303 units, an average of 159 were permitted each year in the Rural Area -- an average of 51% of all single-family dwellings. The average number of Rural Area permits for single-family homes over the last five years (107 units/year) is lower than the prior five years (227 units/year), due in large part to the recession. Building permits for single-family homes in 2013 were less than half of the number issued in 1999. As mentioned earlier, new residential development is encouraged in the designated Development Areas rather than the Rural Area. However, there are and will continue to be individuals who want to live in the Rural Area.

One important way to prevent suburbanization is to provide ways for property owners in the Rural Area to keep their properties intact. Provision of information to residents is the first step in helping rural property owners know about alternatives to subdividing their land. County staff, realtors, farmers, and elected officials can all help provide information on alternatives to subdivision of rural land. When subdivision cannot be avoided, careful design can help reduce fragmentation (see Strategy 1c below). Recommendations found later in this Chapter include information about a Rural Support Program Specialist who could provide outreach to property owners on conservation easements, use value taxation, and other alternatives to land division and development in the Rural Area.
Figure 7: Building Permits for Single-Family Detached Residential Units 1994-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Development Area (DA)</th>
<th>% DA</th>
<th>Rural Area (RA)</th>
<th>% RA</th>
<th>Total SFD Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg.</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Albemarle County Albemarle County Geographic Data Services 2013

**Strategy 2c:** Continue rural conservation programs such as Agricultural/Forestal (Ag/For) Districts and use value taxation as incentives for owners to avoid subdividing for residential uses.

Agricultural and Forestal (Ag/For) Districts are voluntary conservation districts that were established by the Commonwealth (Virginia Code § 15.2-4301) “to conserve and protect and to encourage the development and improvement of agricultural and forestal lands for the production of food and other agricultural and forestal products...” and “...to conserve and protect agricultural and forestal lands as valued natural and ecological resources which provide essential open space for clean air sheds, watershed protection, wildlife habitat, as well as for aesthetic purposes.”

By establishing an Ag/For District, property owners agree not to convert their farm, forestland, and other open space lands to more intense commercial, industrial or residential uses. In return, the County and Commonwealth agree not to take actions or make infrastructure investments that will place new
infrastructure (such as roads) on District land or make land use decisions that could negatively affect agricultural uses in the District.

Albemarle County currently has 26 Ag/For Districts covering approximately 70,712 acres. For many years, the total acreage of the districts was gradually declining. However, it has recently begun to increase again due to Rural Area residents’ interest in using Ag/For District membership to qualify for use value taxation. Properties of sufficient acreage that are in a Ag/For District can qualify as open space to be eligible for use value taxation without meeting the management and production requirements of the other use value categories.

Use value taxation (often called “land use tax”) allows property to be assessed under one (or more) of four categories: real estate devoted to agricultural use, horticultural use, forestry use, and open space use. The purpose of this program is to support rural uses of the land by not taxing land at full assessed value. If the land were assessed at full value, taxes would be much higher, which could significantly increase pressure on owners to subdivide the land into smaller parcels for sale in order to pay taxes. Use-value taxation encourages owners to keep their land in agriculture, horticulture, forestry, or open space. The County also has reduced the tax rate for land in conservation easements; however, both use-value and conservation easements cannot be used at the same time to reduce tax obligations.

**Strategy 2d:** Continue to promote conservation easements to provide a financially attractive way for landowners to protect family farms in Albemarle County and their unique open space resources, to provide an opportunity for landowners to voluntarily sell a conservation easement to a public agency to be held in trust for perpetuity, and to preserve important features of the Rural Area for all.

Conservation easements (also referred to as open space easements) are legally enforceable agreements to preserve land. A property owner voluntarily restricts uses on a property to a level mutually agreed upon by the owner and the organization holding the easement. Holders of easements in Albemarle include Albemarle County, the Albemarle County Public Recreational Facilities Authority, the Nature Conservancy, the Piedmont Environmental Council, the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF). The current total acreage in conservation easements is approximately 86,448, which is 18.6 % of the County’s land area. VOF holds approximately 63,630 of those acres and is the largest easement holder in the County. A map showing the locations of existing conservation easements and Rural Area parks is found in Figure 9.

**Strategy 2e:** Strengthen the Acquisition of Conservation Easements (ACE) Program by providing a stable dedicated funding source and staff resources for administering the program.

Albemarle County demonstrated its commitment to voluntary land conservation by creating the Acquisition of Conservation Easements (ACE) program in 2000, which acquires conservation easements to preserve the land’s rural character, whether in agriculture, forest production, or conservation. The program is designed to set priorities for purchases of easements from landowners with lower incomes, whose land is more likely to be under threat of sale for residential development. The landowners retain ownership of the properties. Accomplishments of the program can be seen in Figure 8.
The success of the program can most clearly be seen in the number of development lots eliminated: 459. The elimination of rights to build on these development lots means that 459 fewer houses could be constructed on rural land. Conservation easements purchased by the County have had the desired impact of reducing the land available for residential development while compensating property owners for that value.

It is important to note that for conservation easements to be effective in the long term, compliance with their terms must be monitored and enforced. Therefore this approach to conservation requires a long-term commitment to staff and fund easement programs. Although most easements are held by non-County organizations, the County holds or co-holds a significant number of easements and needs to build its monitoring capacity.

Initially, the County funded the program at $1,000,000 per year for the first three years. Since that time funding has varied but has significantly decreased in recent years. This means that the County has fewer ways to help farmers put conservation easements on their property. In addition, when the program began, there was an expectation that staff resources would be available to monitor easements regularly. With budgetary changes in the County, monitoring easements has been challenging because the demands of development review take precedence. Additional staffing could help to strengthen this program.

**Strategy 2f:** Continue to provide staff support to the Public Recreational Facility Authority (PRFA).

The Albemarle County Public Recreational Facilities Authority (PRFA) is appointed by the Board of Supervisors and functions as a conservation easement holder. The PRFA began as a body to hold conservation easements on the preservation tracts of clustered subdivisions (Rural Preservation Developments), but has expanded its role to hold donated conservation easements and to co-hold most of the easements acquired by the ACE program. Consideration should be given to reviewing the standards for accepting easements so that they are more similar to expectations for land use to participate in Ag/For Districts.

The number of PRFA-held easements has steadily increased, but staff support has not. This creates difficulty in monitoring easements. As indicated for the ACE recommendations, in order to ensure that conservation easements are acquired, managed, and inspected, it is essential to fund staff for this program.
Page intentionally left blank.
Strategy 2g: Assess how a program for the transfer of development rights might be designed to redirect development potential from sections of the Rural Area with high-value natural and cultural resources to locations outside of the Rural Area.

One tool that has been discussed for many years and is now enabled in the Commonwealth is called transfer of development rights (TDR). Typically, a right to develop land in one area would be extinguished in exchange for a right to development land more intensively in another area. Areas in which development rights are extinguished are called "sending zones.” Sending zones are places where residential development is not the desired use of a locality. Places where development is desired are called "receiving zones". With TDRs, there are buyers and sellers of rights to develop land. Owners of property in receiving zones who wish to develop land more intensively than otherwise allowed purchase those rights from the owners in sending zones.

To be a successful part of the County’s growth management strategy, receiving zones for density need to be identified. The sending zones should have high value environmental resources that would be permanently protected. The County reviewed this option several years ago. Difficulties in reconciling goals for receiving areas with goals for the Development Areas caused the Board problems, so a TDR program was not pursued. It is possible that TDR program could be developed that is complementary to the Development Areas rather than conflicting. More study is needed, however. Information on past actions for TDRs may be found in the Reference Documents.

Strategy 2h: Work with property owners who are proposing subdivision of rural land in both conventional and Rural Preservation Developments (RPD) to make "development right" lots as small as possible and large lots (21+ acres) as large as possible to reduce impacts of forest and habitat fragmentation in the Rural Area.

The zoning ordinance requires that new lots in the Rural Area be a minimum of 21 acres. However, a fixed number of smaller “development right” lots (five per parcel) were allocated in 1980. These lots must be at least two acres in size and must not use more than 31 acres in total. When the land is subdivided, development right lots are often significantly larger than two acres, which means they convert more Rural Area land to non-rural uses and accelerate the change from rural to suburban land use patterns.

The illustration in Figure 10 shows two examples of conventional subdivision development. In each example, 73 acres is subdivided into the maximum number of lots allowed - seven lots. The minimum size of each development right lot is two acres, and these lots range in size from 3 to 11 acres. The total acreage also meets the 31-acre rule. In the image on the left, the subdivider has chosen to use the minimum 21 acre size as the maximum for the non-development right lots. This arrangement has allowed for 42 acres of larger more rural-scale lots. In the example to the right, the subdivider has chosen to make all of the development right lots four acres. The remaining acreage in larger lots is 53 acres, resulting in a much less fragmented development pattern. If all development lots were no larger than three acres, then the remaining unfragmented acreage would be 58 acres.
The illustration in Figure 11 shows alternatives for a RPD, which is an alternative form of rural subdivision that permits the “clustering” of the development right lots. All but one of the potential lots that would be possible in a conventional development are developed as a contiguous group of small lots. The remaining lot, called the “preservation tract,” can have a dwelling, but is placed under a conservation
easement to protect resources and to prevent any future reduction in its acreage. This form of subdivision reduces the amount of land converted to residential uses and helps to reduce fragmentation. However, current RPD regulations allow the development right lots to average six acres in size, which diminishes the size (and therefore effectiveness) of the preservation tract.

In Figure 11, the example on the left shows the effect of this approach. Lots are large and the preservation tract is barely over the four acre minimum size. On the right, a three acre maximum for lots has increased the preservation tract to 55 acres. A 2-acre maximum would create a 61-acre preservation tract. At present, staff can encourage applicants to make the development lots as small as possible, but the County has no requirements for the maximum size of a development lot.

**Strategy 2i:** Encourage connectivity of conservation land wherever feasible.

When subdivision occurs in the form of a Rural Preservation Development, opportunities may exist to locate the preservation tract adjacent to other conservation easements, thereby making larger blocks of connected land. When setting priorities among conservation projects, the County should place particular value on sites adjacent to other protected land. The most important way to promote connectivity is for staff to provide information on the variety of alternatives when property owners seek to subdivide their land. The County cannot require connectivity, but it can encourage subdividers to consider it. More information on biodiversity and recommendations to protect biodiversity are found in the Natural Resources Chapter of this Plan.

**Strategy 2j:** Consider modifying the zoning regulations for residential development to help achieve Rural Area objectives without reducing residential development rights.

Over the past thirty or more years, the County has indicated its desire to reduce residential development in the Rural Area. Different strategies have been tried without success; however, options to reduce the impacts of suburbanization of the Rural Area should continue to be explored. Such activities would help reduce the amount of fragmentation currently taking place. They could also result in greater preservation of ag/forestal soils, steep slopes, water, scenic, and historic resources on rural properties.

Three possibilities to consider are:

- Allow for RPDs with more than 20 lots by right;
- Set a maximum size for the development lots in RPDs to allow for larger preservation tracts and better limit the area impacted by residential development; and
- Make RPDs the required form of development and conventional lots the exception.

Until 2004, the County permitted RPDs up to 20 lots by right and allowed RPDs of more than 20 lots by special use permit. In 2004, State law was enacted that prohibited localities from requiring special use permits for clustered subdivisions. This created a situation in which it became impossible for parcels with the potential for more than 20 lots to be developed as single RPDs, thus encouraging the use of by-right development patterns. New design standards that address concerns over large RPDs (largely to do with water and septic capacity, as well as the potential for moving development potential from unbuildable by-right lots to buildable clustered lots) should be developed so that the County can once again permit these larger RPDs. RPDs, like any other development in the Rural Area, should not become
a justification for extending public services to the Rural Area. Provision of public services encourages rather than discourages residential development.

A second possibility for zoning changes would be to set a maximum lot size in RPDs for development right lots that are less than 21 acres. In RPDs, setting a maximum lot size would result in the creation of larger preservation tracts. Consideration could also be given to setting a maximum lot size for development right lots in conventional developments to help achieve a similar result without reducing development rights. Another possibility would be to retain the existing allowances for conventional development, but allow that type of development as the exception, rather than the rule.

It should be noted that changes to the Zoning Ordinance related to RPDs need to be addressed carefully. State Code may mandate additional requirements that would affect the attractiveness of this option. If such is the case, the County may alternatively wish to approach the General Assembly about an exception for Albemarle County.

Objective 3: Protect the County’s historic, archeological, and cultural resources.

Most, but not all, of the County’s historic, archeological, and cultural resources are found in the Rural Area. Some of these sites include Monticello, Ash Lawn-Highlands, Pine Knot, and the Journey Through Hallowed Ground. Many properties in the Rural Area are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Historic features of the Rural Area contribute to the value placed by residents and visitors on Albemarle County. Historic buildings and sites also provide opportunities for tourism, which is discussed in the Economic Development and Historical, Cultural, and Scenic Resources Chapters of this Plan, as well as in the next section.

**Strategy 3a:** Promote reuse of historic structures that support agricultural and forestal uses in the Rural Area.

While valued by residents and tourists alike, historic buildings and sites can sometimes pose challenges for owners. Large farmhouses and historic mansions can be expensive to maintain and, at times, additional income is needed to ensure that historic buildings do not fall into disrepair. Historic buildings and sites can be maintained for their original use, such as a home, or converted to income producing properties, such as a restaurant at a crossroad community or a bed and breakfast. Care is needed when a building converts from one use to another to ensure that the historic integrity of a site is retained.

**Strategy 3b:** Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow for restaurants in historic buildings, as defined in the Historic, Cultural and Scenic Resources Chapter of the Plan, in crossroads communities.

Restaurants, as a rule, are most appropriate in the Development Areas where public water and sewer is available and streets and parking lots can handle traffic generated by a successful business. However, in the Rural Area, a small restaurant in an existing historic building may be appropriate in a crossroads community to serve the nearby community. Expansion of a historic building for such a use may be acceptable if the size and scale of the addition retains the integrity of the historic resource and will not generate demands for public water and sewer. Building new structures for restaurants is not considered appropriate in the Rural Area.
Strategy 3c: Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow for artist residencies in historic buildings, as defined in the Historic, Cultural and Scenic Resources Chapter of the Plan.

An artist residency is a facility where individuals are provided time and space to create art within a unique geographic and cultural context. Meals, lodging, and private studio space are provided on-site to support uninterrupted creative work lasting from a few weeks to a few months. The purpose of artist residencies is to promote art as a critical cultural and societal resource. Participation in an artist residency is by invitation only. Artist residencies are neither commercial endeavors nor tourist destinations. They may be appropriate in the Rural Area if they can meet goals for preservation of historic structures and other Rural Area goals such as natural resource conservation.

Additions, alterations, and construction of additional buildings may be approved for artist residencies, provided that the architectural and historic integrity of buildings and the site is retained. New construction should be compatible in appearance with the historic buildings, and the site should not be overwhelming in size, scale, and massing. New construction for residence halls is not appropriate as it would prevent reversion to a by-right use in the Rural Area. Artist residencies should only be available by special permit and consideration should be given to locations in or near crossroads communities or Development Areas.

Objective 4: Promote rural and historic landscapes that enhance visitors’ experience and give historic sites as authentic a setting as possible.

Tourism is a vital part of Albemarle County’s economy. Within the confines of the existing goals for the Rural Area, tourism provides for economic vitality and is a benefit to the County. Agriculture, historic and scenic preservation, and the maintenance of rural character help to create authentic rural places. It is important that care be taken with tourist activities so that they do not overwhelm or negatively affect the very resources that make rural Albemarle attractive to residents and tourists.

Events
The most significant area of tourist growth to take place in recent years is with Rural Area events. Events at farm wineries, such as weddings, have become commonplace and can be profitable for owners; however, festivals and concerts at farm wineries also are allowed under County regulations. For farm wineries and cideries, farm breweries, and bona fide agricultural operations, up to 200 attendees are allowed per event, by-right. Larger gatherings require special permission to ensure that negative impacts do not result from large gatherings of people and their activities. A special use permit is also required for temporary events for nonprofit organizations and for special events in which there is a profit-making aspect. In the case of the latter, a maximum of 150 attendees is allowed; however, allowance for more than 150 persons can be approved as part of the special use permit. It is important that events at farm wineries are secondary to the agricultural use.

Strategy 4a: Continue to require special use permits for events at farm wineries, farm breweries, and bona fide agricultural operations for over 200 persons and for other events in the Rural Area for over 150 persons. These special events should promote or support agricultural production or a uniquely rural activity, such as a County fair, and be limited to once or twice per year.

Sometimes, requests for larger, more frequent events at farm wineries, farm breweries or farms must be evaluated. To date, the County has approved some of these requests when an occasional larger event is appropriate. Frequent or regular large events are not appropriate in the Rural Area. This is
because of impacts on nearby and adjoining Rural Area properties and Rural Area roads. At places other than farms and farm wineries, the County has been fairly consistent in allowing groups larger than 150 persons on an occasional, but not regular basis. The County should continue to evaluate individual requests on a case-by-case basis with preference given to occasional rather than regular large events.

**Outdoor Recreational Activities**

Outdoor recreational activities are one of the ways local residents and visitors enjoy the Rural Area. The Appalachian Trail, Shenandoah National Park, and County lakes and beaches are but a few of the public spaces available for outdoor activities. More information on parks and recreational activities may be found in the Parks and Recreation, Greenways, Blueways, and Green Systems Chapter. Private recreational facilities are also present in the Rural Area.

**Strategy 4b:** Review the zoning regulations related to recreational uses to see whether updates are needed to better reflect rural recreational activities that should be available by special use permit in the Rural Area.

Rural recreational uses are activities that need a Rural Area location in order to be successful. The County’s Zoning Ordinance currently lists “swim, golf, tennis or similar athletic facilities” as one category of recreational special use available in the Rural Area. These uses were adopted into the Zoning Ordinance in 1980 before distinctions between Rural Area and Development Area uses were as distinct as they are today. Two issues exist with the current regulations: (1) the category is not reflective of the types of recreational uses that need a Rural Area location for success; and (2) the current listed uses may no longer be viewed as acceptable in the Rural Area.

Uses that need a Rural Area location to thrive are uses typically not found in more urban areas. Canoe liveries, day camps, and campgrounds are existing special uses available for recreational activities in the Rural Area. In recent years, interest has been expressed in commercial mountain biking, cyclocross, zip lines, and rock climbing activities. These uses or uses with their characteristics are not directly addressed in the Zoning Ordinance. Consideration should be given to further defining outdoor recreational uses that are most appropriate. In addition to the need for a Rural Area location, one of the most important considerations should be the impacts of rural recreational uses.

The current list of recreational uses allowed in the Rural Area should also be included in review of the regulations. Clubs for swim, golf, and tennis have many suburban characteristics and typically are located in or adjacent to the Development Areas. A Development Area location is more accessible to and compatible with nearby residential uses where sidewalks and road improvements are expected. Consideration should be given to removing these uses from the list of available special uses in the Rural Area.

**Lodging**

Another significant aspect of tourism is transient lodging in the Rural Area. In 2012, County staff estimated 230 rooms available for lodging in the Rural Area. This includes Keswick Hall (48 rooms), the Clifton Inn (17 rooms), Farmington (40 rooms), and approximately 125 rooms in homes as rental cottages, bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), and guestrooms. Generally, new hotels, motels, inns, and retreat centers are not considered to be appropriate in the Rural Area due to their water requirements, wastewater needs, and traffic impacts. However, more study is needed of smaller scale rural lodging activities that may provide
needed tourist accommodations in the County. Rental homes and guest rooms are also present in the Development Areas.

**Strategy 4c:** Study the nature of and extent to which transient lodging is currently taking place and consider whether policy and regulatory changes should occur to better accommodate this use. If such changes are determined not to be needed or appropriate, develop and implement a plan to bring errant operators of transient lodging into conformity with the County’s regulations in a timely fashion.

The quantity of historic buildings, multiple houses on large properties, and large estates in the Rural Area creates many opportunities for rural transient lodging. Such uses can provide additional income to help owners retain their land and thereby avoid pressure to subdivide. Current regulations for transient lodging allow for B&Bs in the Rural Area. The Zoning Ordinance states that a homeowner may have up to 5 guestrooms inside a home and up to 5 additional guestrooms in a second residential structure on the same property. A resident manager must live on the property and the second residential structure must comply with density standards of the County, as well as health and safety standards.

While there are a number of licensed B&Bs in the Rural Area, internet research shows that there may be many more B&Bs that have not been properly permitted. In addition, it appears that some of these B&Bs and guest lodges lack a resident manager. This can be problematic -- the chief concerns being that, absent an on-site manager, emergency situations cannot be quickly or appropriately addressed. Neighbors may not know whom to contact when a rental house is being abused. Some of the facilities advertise accommodations in excess of the number of rooms or buildings allowed by the Zoning Ordinance.

The City of Charlottesville studied this issue in 2014 to determine the extent to which transient lodging was occurring in City neighborhoods and its impacts to neighborhoods and on availability of affordable housing. The City is currently looking at these issues as well as potential revenue impacts for the City.

The County should undertake a similar study of both the Rural Area and Development Areas to decide if B&B and tourist lodging regulations should be changed in the County. The County might benefit from using the same research techniques to develop data for analysis. The County could also benefit by reviewing the issue in a broader community context than just at a County-level. In the Rural Area it is important to understand the extent to which new guest cottages or residences are being built for transient lodging or whether such facilities are helping to preserve historic buildings and sites. For the Development Area, the County will want to understand the impacts to neighborhoods when guest houses are operating with non-resident managers.

**Objective 5:** Recognize and support crossroads communities, which serve as rural-scale community meeting places and provide opportunities for residents to take part in community life.

Crossroads communities have been part of the local landscape for much of Albemarle County’s history and are still an important part of rural living. A study entitled “Survey of Historic Crossroads Communities,” completed in 2003, identified seven crossroads areas that have historically provided services for nearby residents. These crossroads communities are: Advance Mills, Batesville, Covesville, Free Union, Proffit, Greenwood, and White Hall. Other crossroads communities may also be appropriate to consider for a future designation. The 2005 Rural Areas Comprehensive Plan amendment identified the need for
enhancement of crossroad communities’ ability to provide basic services for rural residents. This recommendation still stands in the 2013 Comprehensive Plan.

**Strategy 5a:** Identify the geographic limits of a crossroads community by meeting with Rural Area residents.

Meeting with Rural Area residents who are familiar with the histories of the crossroad communities will help define the particular boundaries within which new supporting uses are appropriate.

**Strategy 5b:** Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow for small-scale, supportive uses in designated crossroads communities. Examples of such uses are country stores, offices, day care facilities, doctor/dentist offices, and public institutional uses, such as post offices.

Crossroads communities are intended to provide only essential goods and services for their immediate area. Therefore, they should be limited in size, with carefully delineated permissible uses. Reusing existing buildings, especially historic buildings, is preferable to building new structures. Such existing buildings would need to be renovated and reused at a scale that is appropriate for the area and that does not require additional infrastructure. Expansions of infrastructure, such as roads, water, or sewer, should not be provided to these crossroads centers.

Consideration should be given to allowing some of these uses by-right in existing buildings with performance standards such as square footage and architectural features that are reflective of historic and rural area uses to be established in the Zoning Ordinance. Residents of crossroads communities need to be involved in determining appropriate uses for those communities. It should be noted that this goal emphasizes providing greater support for existing Rural Area residents rather than encouraging or supporting new residential development in the Rural Area.

**Strategy 5c:** Consider amending the Zoning Ordinance to allow community centers and religious institutions at an appropriate scale in designated crossroads communities without legislative review in existing structures.

Community gathering places for residents of the Rural Area are somewhat limited. More of them can be found in urban and suburban areas. The size of such a gathering place plays a very important role. For example a fraternal lodge to serve a geographic area where fewer than 200 members are expected would be typical of a Rural Area use and appropriate in many locations. A fraternal lodge intended for 1,000 members would likely have a greater impact and need scrutiny in terms of location.

The Zoning Ordinance permits churches, community centers, and clubs in the Rural Area zoning district by special use permit. Community centers and places of religious assembly are considered to be supportive of local rural residents. The County should consider allowing some of these facilities without a special use permit if they are in existing buildings. Performance standards would need to be established and included in the necessary Zoning Ordinance changes. These uses should be viable with well and septic systems. It should be noted that this goal places emphasis on providing greater support for existing Rural Area residents rather than encouraging or supporting new residential development in the Rural Area.
Objective 6: Provide distinct boundaries between the Rural Area and the Development Areas.

Residents and visitors sense they are in the Rural Area and not the Development Areas when they are surrounded by a large number of agricultural uses, forests, and natural resources. Having a clear distinction between the Development Areas and the Rural Area is important in order to maintain a necessary environment for agriculture, as well as for tourism.

**Strategy 6a:** Promote use of Rural Area land up to the boundary with the Development Areas. Do not require transitional areas between the Rural Area and Development Areas.

Because the Development Areas covers only 5% of the total County land area, it is expected to have a density similar to the City. Wise use of the Development Areas necessitates building up to the boundary with the Rural Area. However, development is not expected to transition from a dense Development Area through a large lot suburban zone into the Rural Area. More guidance on the relationship of the Rural Area to the Development Areas at their joint boundary is found in the Neighborhood Model Guidance section in the Appendix to this Plan.

**Strategy 6b:** Develop rural design standards to be used in conjunction with site plans in the Rural Area, especially for parking lots, signage, entrance requirements, and landscaping.

This Plan identifies uses that support rural area residents, such as community centers and places of worship. It also recommends consideration of new uses that can support the agricultural and forestry economy. Some of these uses require conformity with current zoning standards for features such as parking lots, landscaping, pedestrian access, signage, and the like; however, site development plan standards are intended for the Development Areas. Rural standards are needed to help rural uses blend better into the rural landscape and function more appropriately as a rural use. They should be developed and adopted as part of the Zoning Ordinance.

Rural Interstate Interchanges
Interstate interchanges are included in this Section because they have the capacity to both reflect and detract from the rural nature of the County. For travelers on Interstate 64, views from the interstate may provide the only visitor experience and memory of the County. For those traveling on this highway, rural uses along the interstate reflect the rural character of much of Albemarle County.

Three and one-half rural interstate interchanges are located in the Rural Area; Crozet, Ivy, Black Cat Road, and the southern part of the Shadwell interchange. These interchanges are different in character and function from each other, as well as from interchanges in the Development Areas. The Ivy interchange is very rural with narrow winding roads in both directions. The Black Cat interchange has narrow winding roads in one direction and a connection to Route 250 East in the other direction. The Crozet interchange with Route 250 West is better developed as it provided the only east-west connection over Afton Mountain prior to the construction of I-64. It is still heavily travelled. The southern part of the Shadwell Interchange connects directly to Route 250 East and is also a heavily travelled area. Development adjacent to and dependent upon rural interstate interchanges is not served by public water and sewer nor is it intended to be served by public utilities. Interstate interchanges in the Rural Area should not be used as tourist destinations or tourist “stops” along Interstate 64.
**Strategy 6c:** Permit uses at rural interstate interchanges that support agriculture and forestry.

Uses allowed by right in the Rural Area are appropriate at interchanges. Some uses allowed by special use permit may also be appropriate at interchanges because they provide a unique opportunity for agricultural goods to be transported to markets outside of the County. Size, scale, visibility, and function should all be considered for new uses allowed by special use permit. Traffic generated by such uses should be typical of agricultural uses and not large frequent trucking activities on rural roads.

**Strategy 6d:** Study the infrastructure challenges at the Shadwell interchange to determine the potential level and concentration of operations which are appropriate.

The Target Markets Report, further explained in the Economy Chapter and provided in the Reference Documents, identified the importance of agriculture and agribusiness in balancing the economy in the County. The study identified several local conditions that support both existing agribusiness expansion and attract new agribusiness:

- Growing demand for locally-produced and farm-fresh foods;
- The County’s demonstrated success with farm wineries;
- A positive growth outlook for select target sectors, which are described in the Economic Development Chapter of this Plan;
- Close proximity to large metro consumer markets (Richmond, Washington, D.C., Norfolk, Raleigh-Durham, and other places to the south); and
- Cost savings to processors seeking to be closer to customers.

Agribusiness location near interchanges could assist operations that grow ingredients, as well as those producing value-added foods. Supporting industries, such as local food producers, could also benefit from locations with easy access both to local farms and to transportation infrastructure.

To date, the Shadwell interchange is the only one that has been identified as able to support a greater intensity of use and higher concentrations of supporting uses related to agriculture and forestry. Unlike the other rural interchanges, one side of the Shadwell interchange is in the Development Areas, and the Rural Area (south) side has other active uses, such as a motel, an industrial park, and businesses, that are in very close proximity to the interchange. The Shadwell interchange is closer to the Richmond market for shipping than most of the other interchanges.

**Objective 7:** Provide information to citizens so they are well-informed and understand the cultural, economic, and ecological aspects of the Rural Area.

Rural Area residents enjoy a unique location, setting, and responsibility. As owners of land that is so greatly valued by the community, collectively their activities can affect the entire County. They may not be aware of programs that can preserve the rural character of the Rural Area or help them to find ways to avoid the need to subdivide their land for income. For the Rural Areas to remain rural, property owners need to understand all of the cultural, economic, and ecological aspects.
**Strategy 7a:** Inform existing property owners, realtors, and prospective property owners in the Rural Area that the Rural Area is not intended for residential development. Instead, emphasis is placed on stewardship of the land, retaining agricultural and forestal activities, protecting natural resources and maintaining unfragmented land to protect biodiversity.

Rural landowners typically value their land, but not all understand that having large, unfragmented areas of rural land is the key to Rural Area protection. Educating new residents continues to be essential to help them understand the County’s commitments to agricultural and agritourism activities in the Rural Area and which services rural residents can reasonably expect from the County. Another necessary area of education is providing information to property owners about the benefits of Agricultural/Forestal Districts, use value taxation, and alternative uses of land. Information on alternative uses of land may be found later in this chapter.

This Plan recommends that the County use speaking engagements, brochures, internet information, pre-application meetings, and outreach to realtors to help provide education on the purposes and goals for the Rural Area to existing and prospective residents. The County should actively encourage landowners to create or add their land to existing Agricultural and Forestal Districts. Staff should promote conservation easements and provide information on the benefits of use value taxation to landowners.

**Objective 8: Retain the character of Rural Area land located in Area B.**

Areas A and B, as shown in Figure 12, are joint planning areas of the City, the County, and UVA. Area A covers properties owned by UVA. Area B covers properties in the City and the County that are of interest to UVA because of their proximity to UVA or ownership by the University of Virginia Foundation. Information on planning activities for Areas A and B are provided in the Reference Documents of this Plan. Most of Area B is located within the Development Areas and the City. However, six Area B locations are in the Rural Area. They are shown on Figure 12.

The Introduction Chapter of this Plan describes the activities of the Planning and Coordination Council of the City of Charlottesville, UVA, and Albemarle County (PACC) and the importance of properties in Area B. Of all the Area B properties in the Rural Area, the Northridge property, the UVA Farm (former vivarium and incinerator property), and the Milton Airport have specific recommendations in this plan because their uses are atypical of other rural lands in Area B. At present, UVA and the UVA Foundation own properties in four areas which are identified with either “UVA” or “UVAF” on the map.
Figure 12: Rural Area Properties in Area B

- UVA Northridge
- UVAF Westover
- Redfields/Sherwood Farms area
- Property south of Route 53 and Blue Ridge Hospital site
- UVA Farm (former vivarium and incinerator property)
- UVA Former Milton Airport

Legend:
- Area A in Charlottesville
- Area B in Albemarle Development Areas
- Area B in Albemarle Rural Areas
- Development Areas
- Parcels
- Major Streams
- Primary Roads
- Secondary Roads

Albemarle Comprehensive Plan ADOPTED June 10, 2015

7.37
Page intentionally left blank.
**Strategy 8a:** Use the Milton Airport property for UVA research activities and for an indoor firing range for regional emergency personnel training.

The Milton Airport is located near the Glenmore development east of Charlottesville. This former airport was used during World War II and most recently used for research and a firing range for UVA police. Recently, the County approved the site for construction of an indoor firing range for City, County, and UVA law enforcement and emergency personnel, the current research uses and other UVA training activities are expected to continue on the site. The existing vegetative buffer along Milton Road between the site and adjacent residential property should be maintained.

**Figure 13:** Milton Airport Property on Map and Aerial Image of Remaining Airport

---

**Strategy 8b:** Continue to use the UVA Farm (former vivarium and incinerator site) on Route 20 South for UVA storage activities.

UVA owns 38 acres on Route 20 South (east of the intersection with Avon Street Extended) that was formerly used as a vivarium and incinerator. Known as the UVA Farm, the property is used for storage by various UVA entities, and should continue in that use.

**Figure 14:** The UVA Farm on Route 20 South
**Strategy 8c:** Continue to use the Northridge Medical Park properties for medical purposes associated with UVA.

The Northridge Medical Park is located Route 250 West and is shown in Figure 15. It provides general healthcare and laboratory services and is operated by the UVA Healthy System. The Northridge Properties should continue to be used for medical purposes associated with UVA.

![Figure 15: Northridge Properties and Image of Buildings](Source: Area B Map, 2015, University of Virginia Health System 2010)

**Strategy 8d:** Continue to use recommendations for Rural Area uses for those properties in Area B shown as Rural Area.

The Westover property and the Colonnades property in Figure 16 are also owned by the University of Virginia Foundation. The Westover property is split by the Development Area/Rural Area boundary, shown in the grey boundary line in Figure 16, with most of the acreage in the Rural Area. Faulconer Drive provides access near the Route 29/Route 250 Bypass. Recommendations for the Colonnades property, which is in the Development Areas, and the part of the Westover property in the Development Areas may be found in the Southern and Western Neighborhoods Master Plan in the Appendix. Recommendations for the Rural Area part of Westover are the same as for all Rural Area properties in the Comprehensive Plan.

![Figure 16: The Westover and Colonnades Properties west of Route 250 Bypass](Source: Area B Map, 2012)
The area shown on Figure 17 is the area on the west side of the grey line near the label for Redfields Subdivision. This land includes the Sherwood Farms development and a portion of the Redfields subdivision. Part of Redfields is developed with single family homes. Sherwood Farms is also developed as single family homes. Developed land is not recommended to change from its residential use. However, undeveloped land in Area B in the Rural Area is recommended for Rural Area uses, rather than residential subdivision, in keeping with this Comprehensive Plan.

**Figure 17: Area B Properties Near Redfields Subdivision**

The area south of the grey boundary line in Figure 18 is also part of Area B in the Rural Area. The two properties are owned by the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation and the Thomas Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District, respectively. They are also recommended for Rural Area uses in keeping with this Comprehensive Plan.

**Figure 18: Area Near Route 53 South of Old Blue Ridge Hospital Site**
Page intentionally left blank.