

# *Strategic Directions That Define Our Future*

*Albemarle County's Strategic Planning Process is the cornerstone of our service and operations delivery. We believe that before we can allocate our available resources, we must first understand the needs and desires of county residents and the factors that will affect us in the future. Working in partnership with citizens and the Board of Supervisors, we develop goals and objectives to respond to community priorities and create strategies that define actions and identify resources to attain our goals. Our Strategic Plan helps us assure that our efforts are purposefully designed and focused to meet the present and future needs of the county.*

## ***Why a Strategic Plan?***

Albemarle County is a community in transition, with challenges and opportunities presented by our continued growth, urbanization, and diversity. Albemarle County government has for several years been engaged in a strategic planning process that guides the alignment of our resources with customer needs and expectations so that we can respond effectively to the opportunities presented by our changing circumstances.

With the priorities set, the operations of the County are being reviewed and redirected to bring the strategic vision to life. Specific actions, programs, capital purchases, staffing requirements and funding levels are developed in response to the needs identified in the strategic plan. Critical decisions regarding resource allocation during the budget process are evaluated for consistency with and support of the identified strategic priorities.

During the past year we have taken significant steps to identify and respond to the strategic priorities that are critical to the character and future of Albemarle County.

## ***Citizen Input is the Cornerstone***

We began with an extensive survey of county residents in April, 2001, to get objective and balanced feedback about what is important to our citizens as we make choices about how to move forward. These valuable responses are the basis for all our strategic planning and will continue to be the benchmark against which we measure our efforts. The vision, mission and strategic themes that have emerged all build on the strengths that our citizens appreciate and value about the community in which they live. The survey, conducted by the UVA Center for Survey Research, revealed strong fundamental beliefs about and desires for our community's future.

In order to keep citizen feedback as the foundation of our continuing strategic planning efforts, we are preparing for another comprehensive survey of county residents in April of this

year. The Center for Survey Research will again contact citizens by telephone to ask about community needs, issues and priorities as well as satisfaction with county government services and operations.

During the last survey, what we learned from our survey contributed very significantly to the goals and objectives developed for the Strategic Plan. Some highlights of the survey are below.

### **Rating Quality of Life**

#### **Albemarle County residents are very positive about the County as a place to live.**

When asked to rate the quality of life in Albemarle on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), the average rating was 8.10. 73% of our citizens rated the County's quality of life an 8 or better, with 18% giving a rating of 10.

Those residents who rated the county a "10" were asked what were the main things they liked about Albemarle County. Top responses included:

- beauty of the landscape.
- casual lifestyle
- the hospitals
- the people
- the proximity of the University of Virginia.
- A quiet rural area combined with cultural opportunities more typically available in urban areas

### **Ranking Strategic Priorities**

#### **When asked about how to maintain those characteristics that make the County so desirable, residents named these values as their top priorities:**

- good public education
- fire and police service
- water quality in reservoirs, streams and wells
- services for the elderly
- protected natural resources and open space
- protected farmland and forested land

### **Trust and Satisfaction with Services**

**Compared with national data about trust in local government, Albemarle County is far stronger.**

**About 85 percent of citizens are satisfied overall with the value they received from Albemarle County for their tax dollar.**

- About **68 percent** of our respondents said they trusted the Albemarle government to do what is right most of the time or just about always. About **31 percent** said they could trust the government only some of the time. Nationally, about **49 percent** of citizens say they trust their local governments most of the time or just about always.

- About **85 percent** said they were satisfied overall with the value they received from Albemarle County for their tax dollar.
- Considering the interaction of taxes and services, **two-thirds of our respondents (67.5 percent)** favored keeping taxes and services at their current level.

## *The Board of Supervisors' Critical Role in Strategic Planning*

Members of the Board of Supervisors have been active and engaged partners in the development and implementation of our Strategic Plan. They have held two strategic planning workshops over the past two years to review data on current and future conditions and to discuss results of the citizen survey and their own reactions to critical issues facing Albemarle County. From those workshops has emerged a vision and a mission for county government to encompass shared beliefs and desires for the future of our community as well as specific goals to guide our efforts. The Board closely monitors the progress of the plan through quarterly reports and discussions with staff. We are currently in the process of developing specific plan outcomes that will help us to provide objective and quantitative measurements of our accomplishments.

## *What We Believe*

**VISION:** *Albemarle County . . . a quality community that preserves our natural resources, rural character and visual beauty and promotes learning, safety, affordability, cultural diversity, civic engagement and economic opportunity to create a desirable place to grow up, raise a family and grow old for present and future generations.*

**MISSION:** *To enhance the well-being and quality of life for all citizens through the provision of the highest level of public service consistent with the prudent use of public funds.*

**VALUES:** *Integrity Innovation Stewardship Learning*

We have translated our shared vision, mission and values into four strategic priorities and are concentrating our resources and energy towards achieving results in those areas. This focused and defined approach is particularly critical in a time when resources are limited and some programs and services may see reductions or complete elimination.

- *Provide High Quality Educational Opportunities for Citizens of all Ages*
- *Protect the County's Natural, Scenic and Historic Resources*

- *Enhance the Quality of Life for all our Citizens*
- *Serve the Public Efficiently and Effectively*

## *How our Plan Makes a Difference for the Community*

As we review our activities and initiatives from 2003, we see substantial and measurable progress towards each of these strategic themes that we believe responds to the directions established by our citizens in the survey. The following are some highlights . . .

### ***P*** *Provide High Quality Educational Opportunities for Citizens of all Ages*

*Our citizens clearly identified quality education as the community's number one priority during our survey. Our schools continue to be widely recognized for the excellent learning environment they provide to our students and for the outstanding preparation they give for success in life beyond school. We also actively promote learning opportunities for citizens of all ages and all backgrounds as part of our commitment to the overall educational environment of our county.*

"The primary mission of Albemarle County Public Schools is to provide and promote a dynamic environment for learning through which all students acquire the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to live as informed and productive members of society."

The **average size** of elementary (19.95), middle (20.56), and high school (20.53) core content classes is within the Division's standards, and well within the Standards of Quality expectations as well.

In 2003, **24 out of 25 Albemarle County schools** met Virginia's 2006-07 requirements for full accreditation in all four core academic areas.

The **percentage of second graders reading on or above grade level** has steadily increased in the past seven years. For continued improvements, the School Board has authorized a literacy initiative from grades K-12.

County students **consistently perform above state and national averages** on the Stanford Achievement Tests (Stanford 9)

The Albemarle County Class of 2003 posted an **average combined Math and Verbal SAT score of 1096**. An all-time high of 81 percent of graduates took the SAT in 2003.

The **annual dropout rate** is less than one (1) percent, compared to the state dropout rate of two (2) percent.

Students enjoy a **student-to-computer ratio of 5:1**. Every classroom in the division is connected to both a building-level network and County-wide network. Division-wide services include access to E-mail, Web hosting, shared database applications, and the Internet, making Albemarle County Schools one of the most plugged-in school divisions in the Commonwealth. The use of technology in schools greatly enhances teaching, assessment, and school management.

The public is invited to attend and participate in School Board meetings held the second and fourth Thursdays of each month, unless announced otherwise. Meeting times and agendas are available through the Clerk of the School Board at 434/972-4055 or on the website, <http://k12.albemarle.org>.

## ***P*rotect the County's Natural, Scenic and Historic Resources**

*Protecting the resources that shape our rural character is a critical issue for citizens, particularly as those resources define many of the most positive and appreciated attributes of our community. Many of the county's most visible and broad-reaching initiatives are focused on the ultimate goal of rural area protection, as demonstrated by examples of last year's significant accomplishments in this strategic focus area:*

Acquired easements on five new properties in the rural area of the county, marking the completion of the second round of the **Acquisition of Conservation Easements**, or ACE, program. With these second round acquisitions, the county will protect 1,157 acres, eliminate 51 potential development lots, and protect 284 acres of prime farmland in rural Albemarle.

Received a **\$22,500 donation from the Piedmont Environmental Council** to help purchase conservation easements in the Southwest Mountains Rural Historic District, helping to protect the setting for one of the largest concentrations of historic resources in the County and ridgelines visible from Routes 20 and 231, state scenic byways.

Continued work on the **Rural Area Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan**, which brought together residents in four separate meetings in different geographical areas of the County to provide thoughts and insights into critical rural issues. The proposed chapter is being reviewed by the Planning Commission in preparation for a public hearing this spring.

Hired the county's first **Historic Resources Planner** to focus staff time and attention on historic protection and preservation efforts in Albemarle County.

Cosponsored the fourth annual **Farm Tour** which invited the public to visit two unique county farms— Mount Air, home of the famous eggmobile, and White Hall Vineyards, home of award winning Virginia wines, to enjoy demonstrations, hay rides, wine tasting and more in celebration of Albemarle's flourishing and varied agricultural and livestock economy.

Several major **groundwater initiatives** were completed or moved forward substantially, including completion of the county-wide groundwater availability and sensitivity study and the

Groundwater Committee's recommended program for groundwater assessment/standards prior to new development.

Developed a program to comply with initiation of a new state **storm water permitting system** which included six standards, including public education and outreach, regional stormwater education website went live in 2003.

Due to serious budgetary constraints, the county adjusted its **Curbside Recycling Program** so that plastic, glass, aluminum and steel containers are no longer be recycled at the Ivy Materials Utilization Center (IMUC) or as part of the County's Curbside Recycling Program. Recycling bins for paper products such as newsprint, magazines, and catalogues remain at the IMUC and will also continue to be accepted as part of the Curbside Recycling Program.

## ***E***nhance the Quality of Life for all our Citizens

*Our citizens expect and deserve the services and amenities that make the county a safe, enjoyable and caring community. We strive to provide fair and convenient access to human services within a secure and stable environment. We also seek to give our citizens meaningful and fun opportunities to enjoy their leisure. These highlights are a few of our most significant accomplishments in the quality of life area last year:*

The Porters/Yancey Neighborhood Revitalization Project in the Esmont area of Albemarle County was awarded **Virginia's Highest Award for Housing in 2003**, based on its status as a "housing development that is innovative in its concept and design and exceptional in meeting the needs of the targeted client population." The award was received by representatives from County Department of Housing, AHIP and Habitat for Humanity.

Albemarle received a **\$375,000 Community Block Development Grant** to build a community center at the Whitewood Village apartment complex to provide a meeting place for residents of the complex as well as space for a variety of community services such as job training and social services.

In response to Hurricane Isabel, social service staff created an **emergency disaster food stamp program** to distribute food stamps to citizens who had lost provisions as a result of storm damage, which resulted in the distribution of benefits to 1291 households (for a total of 4494 individuals and \$523,000 in assistance) during a nine-day period.

Experienced continued success in the **Bright Stars early intervention program** for four year-old children and their families that currently is active in five county elementary schools and served 78 children in 2003 with a variety of educational enhancement and health care services.

Actively supervised 93 cases in our **Adult Protective Services program** which investigate reports of abuse, neglect and exploitation of adults over 60 years of age and incapacitated adults over 18 years of age.

Added 25 acres to the Albemarle County Park system **with property acquisitions on the Rivanna River and adjacent to Crozet Park** that will add to the existing Greenway system and constructed a formal canoe access and paved section of greenway trail at Darden Towe Park in cooperation with the City of Charlottesville. Also received three grants totaling over \$40,000 to support the Greenway program.

Replaced poor lighting systems on **two softball fields at Piedmont Virginia Community College** with state of the art systems for community recreation use and lighted the **girls softball fields at Western Albemarle and Albemarle High Schools** for community and school recreation use.

Completed the county's first ever comprehensive **recreation needs assessment** to determine satisfaction with current facilities and services and to determine critical priorities for future park and recreation needs.

Coordinated clean up efforts at county parks and public areas after **Hurricane Isabel** and worked cooperatively with community partners to establish four storm debris collection sites for free public use in the weeks following the storm.

Established a new **sector/beat system for the police department** to redistribute patrol officers to respond more quickly to the county's urban areas, and which proposes a 1.5 officer per 1000 staffing ratio to meet recommended standards.

Albemarle's **Crime Rate has declined** for the third straight year, with a decrease of 8% from 2000 to 2001, a 12% decrease from 2001 to 2002, and an 8% decrease in 2003

Focused on traffic safety and DUI enforcement during the Christmas holiday season, with officers who worked **Operation Safe Holiday** making 180 traffic stops and writing 119 traffic summonses, 85 parking tickets, and thirty radar tickets.

Hired **five new emergency service providers** with a variety of fire and rescue backgrounds to join stations across Albemarle County. These firefighters and medics are providing increased skills and resources to the county's entire fire/rescue system and will allow for career staff at the Scottsville Rescue Squad for the first time in that station's history.

Graduated over 100 **Albemarle County fire and rescue workers** from a variety of intensive training programs. The graduates, consisting of both volunteer and career personnel from stations across Albemarle County, successfully completed courses in a variety of operational specialties.

### ***Quality of Life – A Special Focus on Urban Needs***

Our focus on quality of life has a critical two-pronged approach which recognizes the importance of protected rural areas as well as the need for vital, thriving urban areas to achieve our goals of a healthy and vibrant community. The Board of Supervisors stressed the critical nature of this

balanced approach by creating a specific goal during their most recent strategic planning workshop that focuses on addressing growth and urbanization challenges to create quality living and working spaces.

Our strong and active rural protection and preservation strategies are complemented by our efforts to create urban areas that offer safe and convenient lifestyle choices, attractive amenities, and to residents and business owners. Here are a few examples of how we responded to urban area needs last year:

- Continued progress on the Crozet Master Plan, which is under review by the Planning Commission and will be placed before the public for input and comment at a public hearing early this spring.
- Selection of the next urban area, the northern development area encompassing neighborhoods north of the city line on east and west sides of Route 29 North to Piney Mountain, to begin the county's second master planning process scheduled to be kicked-off in the fall of 2004.
- A Stormwater Master Plan was created for the county's development areas, including stream assessment data for over 100 miles of streams, recommended regional stormwater facilities, and a recommended stormwater financing plan.
- Approval of two major mixed use developments in the urban area of the County, Albemarle Place and Hollymead Town Center, which incorporate Neighborhood Model principles adopted by the Board of Supervisors to create attractive, pedestrian friendly residential, commercial and retail spaces.
- Infrastructure improvements like the Four Seasons sidewalk project, a new 3500 foot sidewalk along Four Seasons Drive in Albemarle County which extended an existing sidewalk at the intersection of Rio Road and Four Seasons to Commonwealth Drive to promote safe and convenient pedestrian access in this densely populated urban area.
- Creation of a new police sector/beat system which focuses attention on the more densely populated sections of Albemarle with the goal of achieving a five-minute response time for police calls in the urban areas.
- First full year of operation for the new Monticello Fire/Rescue Station, staffed by career and volunteer firefighters provide a range of fire fighting and medical expertise to the community, with particular emphasis on the growing population on the southern portion of the county's urban ring.
- Additional miles added to the county's Greenway and urban trail systems and infrastructure improvements to park and playground facilities to create quality amenities that provide a variety of passive and active recreational opportunities.

## **S**erve the Public Efficiently and Effectively

*This priority is an on-going, organization wide effort to transform the County into a highly-performing government that anticipates and responds to customers' needs by delivering public services better, faster, cheaper and when citizens need them. We are working to exceed citizen expectations with this committed approach to customer-focused government. The following are some of our most noteworthy achievements from last year:*

Began a **reorganization of the county's three development departments** to create greater focus on strategic priorities, to ensure greater clarity and consistency in review processes, and provide increased customer-focused service. The reorganization will combine the three existing development departments – Planning and Community Development, Building Code and Zoning Services, and Engineering and Public Works, into one functional group.

Created a **General Services Department** to manage capital projects, public infrastructure maintenance, and recycling/solid waste, including the construction and renovation of county schools, parks, courts, other public buildings, stormwater control projects, street lighting, sidewalks, E911 sign maintenance and county-maintained roadways.

Launched a **new website** that features improved navigation, expanded information and interactive features. . Key new features of the site include online job applications for county employment, a Forms Center with downloadable versions of county forms and applications, one click access to upcoming meeting agendas for Boards and Commissions, a comprehensive county calendar.

Created a new electronic news service, **A-mail**, to notify the public about services, programs, and events important to residents, visitors, businesses and the greater community. Also installed **two public access terminals** for free use by citizens in the County Office Building's Visitor Assistance Center.

Continued work on renovating the former Wachovia Operations Facility on Fifth Street Extended into a **new County government building** which will house the county's human services and public safety departments with planned full occupancy by the end of this year.