

OPEN SPACE PLANNING

ALBEMARLE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Open Space Planning

The Open Space and Critical Resources Plan

The Albemarle County Open Space and Critical Resources Plan was adopted as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan on July 15, 1992. It is referred to as the Open Space Plan, and is contained in a separate document, along with the Concept Map and the Development Area Maps. The Concept Map from the Open Space Plan is also included in this chapter. This Comprehensive Plan update will revise the following provisions of the 1992 Open Space Plan:

- Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives and strategies for: sustainability; natural, scenic, and historic resources; agricultural and forestry resources; and open space planning. Many of the goals, objectives and strategies of this Comprehensive Plan have been revised from those which are referenced in the Open Space Plan.
- The list of Mountains identified in the Open Space Plan by contour elevation and the corresponding Mountains as delineated on the Concept Map. The revised list is included with the section on Mountains, page 108.

Open Space Plan Summary

OBJECTIVE: Protect the County's open space for its environmental, aesthetic, cultural, agricultural/forestral and recreational value.

The purpose of the Open Space Plan is to guide efforts to plan for and protect open space in the County in a comprehensive and integrated fashion. Open space is important to protect and utilize for its environmental, aesthetic, cultural, agricultural/forestral, and recreational value. Open space can be protected using appropriate voluntary, cooperative, public and private efforts, as well as regulatory measures.

The Open Space Plan consolidates all currently available information regarding natural, scenic, historic and agricultural/forestral resources in the County in order to identify the most important areas to protect as open space. It identifies four major systems of open space that extend across the boundaries of the Rural Area and the Development Areas: Major Stream Valleys, Important Farmlands and Forests, Mountains, and Cultural Resources. This information is shown on maps at two scales:

- The Open Space Concept Map is a reference map of resources for the entire County. It is intended to serve two functions: to guide open space decision-making in the County as a whole, by identifying major open space systems which are the most important open space lands to protect; and to provide a starting point for the ongoing identification and protection of Rural Area open space resources.

- The Development Areas Open Space Maps are specific maps which delineate important open space within the designated Development Areas. They are to be used as the primary guide for the protection and acquisition of open space within the Urban Area Neighborhoods, the Communities, and Villages.

The Plan also proposes an additional study of Rural Area resources, called a Critical Resource Inventory, which would supplement the information shown on the Concept Map. The inventory would represent the rural equivalent of the detailed Development Area Maps.

Strategy: Use the Open Space Maps to guide open space planning decisions and to identify and protect significant resources as development occurs in the Development Areas and Rural Area. (See Open Space Plan Implementation Section for procedure.)

Critical Resource Inventory

OBJECTIVE: Continue to plan for open space and significant resource protection by completing the Critical Resource Inventory.

An inventory of significant natural, scenic, and historic resources, predominantly in the Rural Area, is needed in order to complete the Open Space Plan. A Critical Resource Inventory would supplement the information on significant resources currently available for both the Rural Area and the Development Areas. Significant resources that require further study, identification and mapping include:

- Biological resources;
- Historic and archaeological sites;
- Agricultural and forestry lands; and
- Scenic roads and streams.

Biological resources include plant and animal communities and their habitats. This category also may include natural areas, old growth forests, and rare, threatened, and endangered species of plants and animals. An inventory of biological resources is discussed on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Historic resources surveys and inventory are discussed on page 138. Archaeological sites have not yet been comprehensively studied and located.

Agricultural and forestry resources are discussed on page 77. More specific mapping of agricultural and forestry resources, and historic and archaeological resources may be accomplished when a Geographic Information System becomes available.

Scenic roads and streams need to be further studied and identified. They are discussed beginning on page 128.

Map 2-12 Open Space Concept Map

A Geographic Information System (GIS) would facilitate identification of resources on a County-wide basis. A GIS could be used to generate overlay maps and allow a more accurate assessment of detailed information such as critical slopes and soils, and parcel-based information, such as agricultural/ forestal districts.

Following completion of the inventory, the Concept Map and recommendations of the Comprehensive Plan should be amended to reflect the additional information.

Strategy: Implement a geographic information system (GIS) to facilitate identification of significant resources on a County-wide basis, and to generate overlay maps which would allow a more accurate assessment of these resources.

Conservation Easement Program and Public Lands

OBJECTIVE: Through conservation easement, purchase or donation of fee simple or development rights, promote protection of those important open space lands which cannot be adequately protected through regulation.

OBJECTIVE: Identify open space areas suitable for public access or recreation. Promote the use of significant natural or man-made corridors as linear parks to provide a unique recreational opportunity.

Voluntary donation of conservation easements is an excellent method of open space and natural resource protection. The landowner who donates a conservation easement permanently protects the land, while retaining ownership and enjoyment of the property. In many cases a conservation easement may provide estate planning benefits. There is no public access to conservation easement properties. The public benefits because areas with important open space resources are permanently protected without additional regulation, and without cost to the County. Any loss in taxes is offset by the reduced need for services.

Purchase of development rights (PDR) is similar in effect to a conservation easement except the development rights are purchased from willing landowners by a county or other entity. Resources are identified for protection based on the Comprehensive Plan. The success of a PDR program is limited by available funds, which may be obtained from various sources. The landowner retains ownership, and the property is protected in perpetuity. The County's appointed PDR Committee has made recommendations regarding implementation of a PDR program. The County's PDR program is called ACE (Acquisition of Conservation Easements.)

In some cases, fee simple purchase is a preferred alternative, when public ownership and access is warranted, as in a public park. The County currently owns in fee simple the Preddy Creek tract

that could be opened for public access. The Preddy Creek tract should be evaluated as a potential natural area for public enjoyment of natural history and passive recreation. (Also see Parks and Recreation Recommendation, page 153 of Land Use Plan.)

Strategy: Actively encourage and facilitate the donation of voluntary conservation easements consistent with the Open Space Plan. Conservation easements should be donated to the Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF). If not acceptable to VOF, the easements should be donated to the Albemarle County Recreational Facilities Authority.

Strategy: Utilizing the Albemarle County Recreational Facilities Authority, provide information to the public regarding the benefits and means of protecting open space through conservation easements and other voluntary techniques.

Strategy: Pursue a purchase of development rights (PDR) program as recommended by the PDR committee.

Strategy: Pursue enabling legislation to permit a density transfer program or Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.

Strategy: Utilizing the Albemarle County Recreational Facilities Authority develop a County acquisition program. The Authority should investigate methods of acquisition and methods of funding acquisitions and long term management costs. Pursue legislation as necessary to implement open space funding measures. (Such as a transfer tax or impact fees.)

Strategy: Use the Composite Maps to guide acquisition in the Development Areas. When the Critical Resource Inventory is completed, expand the program to include important Rural Area open space.

Strategy: Coordinate public and private acquisition programs for open space lands to avoid duplication of efforts.

Strategy: Due to the regional nature of the proposed greenway corridors and the regional use of certain existing parks, evaluate a regional approach to parks/open space management.

Strategy: Further study the following areas for open space/recreation potential:

- **Urban Area:** Potential park In Neighborhoods 4 and 5, possibly along Biscuit Run or opposite Azalea Park;

- ***Hollymead:*** Potential park in the area northeast of the Route 29/Route 643 intersection;
- ***Crozet:*** Potential park in the area northwest of the proposed Lickinghole Creek basin and the area along Powell's Creek and adjacent to Orchard Acres;
- ***Earlysville:*** Potential park in the area within Earlysville Forest designated for recreation;
- ***Rural Area:*** Potential natural area for passive recreation on the Preddy Creek tract.