



PURPOSE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The purpose of the City of Poquoson's Comprehensive Plan is to guide decisions on land use and development for the physical development of the City to promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the City of Poquoson. Important aspects of the Comprehensive Plan which need to be referenced are new development and redevelopment, density of residential areas, future road and utility improvements, and location of potential community facilities. The Comprehensive Plan intends to provide direction for the community the next 20 years and to set goals by which policies should follow to achieve these goals.

Since the plan is intended to guide decisions with land use and development, ALL interested parties should review this document when determining a property's potential use, from potential developers to the individual property owner. This document has been created to demonstrate the desired pattern of development and conservation throughout the city. The Comprehensive Plan is created from the collaboration of the community, the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC), City of Poquoson Council, boards, commissions, committees, and City staff.



THE AUTHORITY TO PLAN

The State of Virginia requires each locality to prepare and adopt a [comprehensive] plan for the physical development of their land and to review that plan at least once every five (5) years to determine whether or not amendments or revisions to the plan are necessary.¹ According to the Code of Virginia:

¹ The Code of Virginia Title 15.2, Chapter 22, §15.2-2223 and §15.2-2230.



“...[t]he comprehensive plan shall be made with the purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development of the territory which will, in accordance with the present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants.

The comprehensive plan shall be general in nature, in that it shall designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of each feature shown on the plan and shall indicate where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, widened, removed, relocated, vacated, narrowed, abandoned, or changed in use.”

Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia references the legal status of the plan and specifies that once the plan is approved and adopted, it controls the location, character and extent of the features shown on the plan. Future development must be based upon proposals that are “substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof.”



“Building a Sustainable Community”

VISION

The vision for the City remains constant since the last comprehensive plan. Community leaders, citizens, elected officials, Planning Commission, committee members, City employees and planning professionals involved in the development of the Comprehensive Plan conceive the vision for the City of Poquoson as this statement - *“Building a Sustainable Community”*. This vision statement is not only a sound planning principle but it connects the many objectives and functions of the city government towards a central goal. Keeping this goal in mind, the City can continue to advance towards a sustainable community which provides: financial stability, retention of citizen disposable income, attraction of outside investment and spending, better circulation for mobility, improved transportation, enhanced recreation and amenities, increased quantity and quality in commercial goods and services, and low tax rates. Obtaining these characteristics translate to a better quality of life for the City’s residents; and, of course, this is the ultimate goal of the Comprehensive Plan.

Different studies, data collection and analyses conducted in the update of the Comprehensive Plan demonstrate that the City of Poquoson is a bedroom community to the larger Hampton Roads localities on the Peninsula, and due to its current state and location, is projected to remain



this way. This fact constrains the City's ability to attract large businesses that offer a large number of employment opportunities and commercial businesses that offer goods and services to the citizens. The effect is the City has a disproportionate ratio of citizens to employment opportunities and a disparity in the percentage of revenue collected from its residents compared to the amount of disposable income. However, the advantage of being a bedroom community is that the City has a large market area to overcome these obstacles and a character unique to Poquoson. Addressing these issues will lead Poquoson to become a sustainable community.



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY

While the State of Virginia requires each locality to prepare a Comprehensive Plan, the State establishes the legal status of the Comprehensive Plan as an advisory document to serve as a guide and one of many factors to consider on zoning decisions. It is not a regulation like the zoning ordinance or other regulatory documents. The Plan guides decisions of the governing body, Planning Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals and the City government by providing the vision, goals, objectives and implementation strategies. However, the fact that the Comprehensive Plan is advisory does not mean the recommendations and findings can be cast aside. Again, Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia references the legal status of the Plan and specifies that once the Plan is approved and adopted, it controls the location, character and extent of the features shown on the Plan. Future development must be based upon proposals that are “substantially in accord with the adopted comprehensive plan or part thereof.” While the Comprehensive Plan is one of many factors to use in zoning decision making, it may be arguably the most important factor.

Once the Comprehensive Plan is adopted, the conclusion is that the Comprehensive Plan provides recommendations and findings that are in the best interests of the public and represents the intent of City government. The Comprehensive Plan becomes a reference to achieve the desired outcomes. There is an adage that states the Comprehensive Plan serves as a road map to the respective locality's future. A road map details the routes that must be traveled in order to reach your destination. In the same fashion, the Comprehensive Plan guides the development of policies and regulations necessary to influence the direction and character of growth desired for the City of Poquoson.





AMENDMENTS TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

In an ideal world, the Comprehensive Plan would consist of clairvoyant foresight and perfect projections to guide governing actions for a community that never experiences change. But reality is that the future cannot be predicted and that change is inevitable; therefore, occasionally circumstances arise that may differ from what is found in the Comprehensive Plan. When these occur, interpretations of case law pertaining to comprehensive plans recommend the Comprehensive Plan be amended in order to manage change and maintain the integrity of the Comprehensive Plan. Such circumstances that could require amending the Comprehensive Plan are unforeseen issues, new interests of the community, a development proposal that deviates from recommendations, implementation of additional or new regulations, or an intensification of existing issues or regulations.

Generally, there are two types of Comprehensive Plan amendments: those initiated by the City of Poquoson and those initiated by a private party. While the Comprehensive Plan is a thorough analysis of the city as a whole, it is not all inclusive. New state regulations imposed on the City, special topic reports, new studies and analyses, and plans adopted in the future are examples of Comprehensive Plan amendments initiated by the City. Typically, a Comprehensive Plan amendment initiated by a private party is requesting a change in a future land use designation for a property.

At adoption, future land use designations shown in the Comprehensive Plan are considered as the best interest for the community's health, safety, welfare and sometimes convenience. It is prudent for proposals and requests contrasting from the adopted future land use designations apply to amend the Comprehensive Plan for consideration by City Council. Applications to amend the Comprehensive Plan may require amending maps, text or both. A review of case law interpretations pertaining to comprehensive plans recommends decisions to amend the Comprehensive Plan occur before the rezoning decision. However, since the Comprehensive Plan serves only as a guide in the State of Virginia, it is not required that land only be rezoned or permitted in accordance with it. Applications to amend the Comprehensive Plan must present compelling arguments demonstrating the benefits the proposal will provide the City of Poquoson as compared to the current designation. Council will utilize State regulations, City ordinances, as well as the applicant's argument when considering the application.





ORGANIZATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Each chapter of the Comprehensive Plan represents an essential element to community planning, and some chapters are large enough to be divided into sections which consist of sub-elements. Sub-elements are more specific and detailed areas of the respective element that allows a more in-depth study and plan of this topic. At the conclusion of each chapter and section, a list of goals, objectives and implementation strategies are listed for adoption. Each list represents a level of specification to achieve the vision; the Plan hierarchy is as follows:

- Vision- guiding principle for which the Plan is devised to achieve;
- Goals- broad benchmarks that must be met in order to attain the projected vision;
- Objectives- specific tasks or issues that progress the community towards meeting goals; and
- Implementation Strategies- courses of action giving direction to accomplish objectives.



PLANNING PROCESS

Poquoson's Comprehensive Plan update process involved two parallel work efforts:

- A **public participation** element comprised of public input meetings designed to inform City residents while soliciting their views for the future; and
- A **technical planning** element that included the collection and analysis of background data needed to form planning and development recommendations used to create goals, objectives and strategies for the final Comprehensive Plan document.

In January 2004, the Poquoson City Council approved a methodology for updating the Comprehensive Plan. This methodology called for the creation of two groups each responsible for accomplishing one of these work efforts. The first group, the Community Participation Team, was composed of five members of the Planning Commission and six members from the



community at large. It was responsible for encouraging, facilitating, and reporting citizen participation in the planning process. The second group, the Comprehensive Plan Development Steering Committee, was composed of five members of the Planning Commission, one member of the Community Participation Team, one member from the Industrial Development Authority, and one City Council representative. The Steering Committee was responsible for reviewing citizen input generated by the Community Participation Team. The Steering Committee also identified issues, reviewed technical data, offered strategies and policies for the future and made a final recommendation to the full Planning Commission on the Comprehensive Plan update.

Public Participation

Public participation is based on the premise that community planning begins with open communication and the exchange of information and ideas. With this exchange, a Comprehensive Plan could be created to develop effective actions for the future while having broad public support.

The Community Participation Team

City Council appointed a Community Participation Team responsible for encouraging citizen participation in the update process. The team met on a regular basis from April through August of 2004, and designed public involvement programs, monitored outreach efforts, and evaluated the results of public input meetings. It also led a highly publicized, community-wide effort to involve citizens in planning their future and the future of the City.

Citizen Outreach Efforts

Throughout the Comprehensive Plan update process, a variety of methods were used to maximize citizen participation in the planning process. Prior to the beginning of the public input sessions, flyers announcing the meetings was distributed widely to area school students, church organizations and civic groups. Volunteers also traveled throughout the City placing flyers in store windows and other highly visible locations. In February 2004, the Daily Press and the Poquoson Post printed advertisements for the Public Group Discussion Sessions to notify the public of the Plan update.

Volunteer Citizen Facilitators & Note Takers

On February 16, 2004 fourteen citizens participated in a training session in preparation for the public input sessions. These citizens were trained to facilitate and take notes during small group discussions at two public input sessions held later that month.



Public Group Discussion Sessions

On February 19, 2004 the first public group discussion was held at Poquoson High School. Forty-seven of Poquoson's citizens participated in the session. At this session, citizens were given an overview of the comprehensive planning process and a summary of expectations for that evening's meeting. Citizens were also asked to provide their vision for the ideal Poquoson of the future. During the meeting, citizen participants were divided into small groups (less than 15 members) and trained citizen facilitators led each group through a forty-five minute session. Citizens were encouraged to voice their opinions, likes, concerns, and their outlook for the future on each of the following topics:

- *Parks and Recreation*
- *Public Facilities/Services (Library, Fire, Police, Solid Waste, etc.)*
- *Infrastructure (Streets, Sidewalks, Bikeways, Sewer, Water, Drainage)*
- *Education/Schools*

On February 26, 2004, the second public group discussion session was held at the Poquoson High School with forty-one citizens in attendance. Citizens were encouraged to voice their opinions, likes, concerns, and their outlook for the future on each of the following topics:

- *Environment*
- *Land Use*
- *Taxation*
- *Comments On Other Issues*

Trained citizen notetakers recorded citizen comments during each small group session and forwarded their completed notes to staff for typing and, ultimately, review by the members of the Community Participation Team. The public group discussion sessions concluded with a sixty-minute summary. The summary, conducted by the small group facilitators, summarized the points of general consensus reached during the evening's small group sessions.

First Citizens Opinion Survey

On March 29, 2004 the Community Participation Team developed a "Citizen Opinion Survey" to gather additional citizen comments for the Comprehensive Plan Update Process. The self-administered four-page survey asked for citizen comments on a variety of key issues facing the City. Each Poquoson household (over 4,100) was provided a copy of the survey for their input. The City also utilized the survey as an opportunity to gauge citizen opinion of essential city services such as fire, rescue and police. The survey could be mailed in by the respondent and the City dispersed dropboxes throughout the City as a means for collection of surveys. In total, over 613 surveys were returned for a 15% response rate.

Distribution of Public Comments

All public comments and session notes, were subsequently typed, edited and bound. The citizen opinion survey results were also tallied, summarized and bound. Copies of all the citizen comments were made available for citizen review at the Poquoson Public Library and the City Manager's Office.



Consideration of Public Comment

City Staff compiled the citizen comments generated during the public group discussion sessions and the citizen opinion survey and distributed them to the Community Participation Team and the Steering Committee. Both teams met in a joint session on June 24, 2004 and considered the results from previous meetings, the public group discussion sessions and the results of the survey. After the committees reviewed the information and concluded their discussion, Staff capitalized on the opportunity to utilize this session as the initial goal setting session. The Goals, Objectives, and Strategies were compiled into a draft document by City Staff for consideration at the July 29th, 2004 meeting.

Comprehensive Plan Development Steering Committee Review

As the initial public input segment drew to a close, the Steering Committee geared up for its deliberations. Beginning on July 29th of 2004, the Steering Committee began meeting to develop the draft elements of the Comprehensive Plan using the Goals, Objectives, and Strategies compiled by City Staff from the June 24th, 2004 meeting. Each Committee meeting was advertised and open to the public. This provided additional opportunities for citizens to voice their opinions, suggestions, or visions for the future. All written material reviewed by the Committee was made available at the Poquoson Public Library and the City Manager's Office for citizen review.

Remembering Jody

The City of Poquoson lost a good friend and a dedicated City employee with the unexpected passing of Joseph W. "Jody" Hollingsworth on Wednesday, September 22, 2004.

During Jody's tenure as the Director of Planning and Community Development, Poquoson enjoyed a sustained period of productive residential and business growth. His commitment to and love for Poquoson was evident throughout his seven (7) years of service to the City. Jody worked tirelessly to assure that Poquoson's Comprehensive Plan reflected sensible, planned growth, which would benefit residents for generations to come.

The breadth of Jody's work on behalf of Poquoson is matched only by the numerous friends he cultivated along the way. Pleasant and engaging, he always had time for his co-workers and for Poquoson residents who frequently called on him for city information. Preferring the lost art of conversation over impersonal e-mails, Jody will be remembered as much for his insightful wit and personal concern for others as for his laudable professional accomplishments.

Those who were fortunate enough to know Jody will miss him dearly. The City of Poquoson celebrates his life, mourns his passing, and pays tribute to his commendable City service.²

² The City of Poquoson, VA; 2004 Annual Report.



Second Citizens Opinion Survey

In the fall of 2006 another survey was distributed to gather additional citizen comments for the Comprehensive Plan update process. A group of citizens assisted in the development of the 2006 survey. The survey was self-administered, only two pages, and asked for citizen comments on a variety of key issues facing the City. This time, every box holder within Poquoson (4,932) was provided a copy of the survey for their input. The survey included a postage paid return envelope, and this was the only way for the survey to be returned. As a quality control measure, surveys returned in any manner other than this envelope were discarded. A total of 2,008 surveys were returned for a 41% response rate. Considering that no follow-up mailings were administered, the Community Participation Team was pleased with the response rate, and felt the survey results would therefore be a good sampling of citizen opinion.

Assistance from the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission

The update to the Comprehensive Plan reconvened in 2006, where City Staff reviewed and accepted the final deliberations of the Community Participation Team and used the citizens' comments to develop the Plan's goals, objectives and strategies. The Comprehensive Plan was outsourced to the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) for technical planning assistance and a draft was delivered in August of 2006. Technical planners of HRPDC prepared a Comprehensive Plan with the most recent data and trends, and provided projections and analysis for the City's consideration. The public was presented the draft and encouraged to comment on the document in Public Input Sessions.

Public Input Sessions

Public Input Sessions were held on each of the draft elements with a member of the Planning Commission assigned to each chapter. The public input sessions took place according to the following schedule:

2006

Oct. 12th

- Introduction
- Population
- Housing

Oct. 19th

- Education
- Economics

Oct. 26th & 30th

- Environment

Nov. 2nd

- Transportation
- Parks & Recreation

Nov. 9th

- Community Services
- Utilities

Nov. 16th

- Environment
- Land Use

Each element listed above contained background material, technical data, citizen input, and a statement of goals, objectives and strategies for each topic. The City Clerk recorded comments during each public input session which was displayed on a projection screen for visualization and prompt consensus. The completed notes were forwarded to Planning Department staff for revision of the Comprehensive Plan.





BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The final draft plan text was written based on the Committee’s deliberations, comments from the public input sessions, and technical analysis of the information at hand. City Staff remained cognizant of the public comments during the Plan’s review, and analyzed the information provided in the Plan to determine the information’s accuracy, significance and applicableness. Where necessary, City Staff made revisions to the information with guidance from HRPDC. The City staff analysis of the draft Comprehensive Plan combined public participation comments with the vision of the City, and utilized the technical data and information to create realistic implementation strategies.

On July 7th, 2008; City Planning Staff delivered the Final Draft of the Comprehensive Plan to the Planning Commission. Before formally considering the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission held worksessions with members of the Comprehensive Plan Community Participation Team and the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee to become familiar with the newly prepared document according to the following schedule:

2008

July 7th

- Presentation of Comprehensive Plan

Aug. 27th

- Introduction
- Chapter 1 - Background
- Chapter 2 - Population
- Chapter 3 -Housing
- Chapter 4 -Economics

Sept. 15th

- Chapter 5 – Natural Resources
- Chapter 6 - Community Services & Facilities

Oct. 15th

- Chapter 7 – Infrastructure
- Chapter 8 - Land Use



Public Informational Sessions

On December 1st and 3rd, 2008, the Planning Commission held public informational sessions to allow the public to comment on the final draft of the Comprehensive Plan before their formal consideration of the document. The Daily Press and the Poquoson Post printed advertisements for the Public Informational Sessions to notify the public of their opportunity to comment on the Plan update. Planning Staff also traveled throughout the City placing flyers in store windows and other highly visible locations to advertise the public meetings. The meeting was also advertised on the City's webpage and cable channel.

Links to the final draft version of the 2008-2028 Comprehensive Plan were posted on the City's website as well as an email account specifically dedicated to receive comments regarding the Comprehensive Plan. A copy of the Comprehensive Plan was kept at the circulation desk in the library for public viewing with a sign notifying patrons that the Comprehensive Plan is available for their review.

Final Worksessions

On February 19, 2009, the Planning Commission held a worksession on the Final Draft of the Comprehensive Plan discussing the comments from the Public Information Meetings and providing Staff direction for revisions. Staff made revisions to the Final Draft of the Comprehensive Plan and forwarded the finalized document to the Planning Commission for their consideration at a regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting on April 20th, 2009 which included an advertised public hearing. Prior to the meeting, the Planning Commission held a worksession to review the changes made to the Plan, which Staff documented in an memorandum to the Planning Commission.

Recommendation and Adoption

On April 20, 2009, the Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Comprehensive Plan to gather public input before consideration of the plan. After doing so, Planning Commission recommended City Council adopt the Comprehensive Plan as the City of Poquoson's official Comprehensive Plan. Following the Planning Commission's recommendation, City Council held a public hearing on July 27, 2009 for the Comprehensive Plan and adopted the Comprehensive Plan as the City of Poquoson's official Comprehensive Plan on September 28, 2009.

In all, several opportunities were made for citizens to provide comments and thoughts with regards to the City's Comprehensive Plan.





PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Plans are only as good as the desire to implement them. Without implementation the Plan is just that, a plan. Section 15.2-2224 of the Virginia Code identifies several methods and tools available to local governments for the implementation of the comprehensive plan, including a zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance, capital improvements program, and zoning maps. It is important that regulatory documents reflect the purpose and intent of the Comprehensive Plan so that the Planning Commission and governing body may influence and shape growth of the community effectively.

The Comprehensive Plan is a “working” document and should remain current to specify what is desired by the City. Whenever new plans or studies are developed and approved by the City, the plans should be amended to the Comprehensive Plan. Concurrently new policies and ordinances should be developed to reach the desired results. Any deficiencies in the ordinances should be revised to prevent undesirable uses or poor site development within the City. New issues or topics that arise may require new ordinances or regulations to be developed; therefore, it is crucial for not only the policies and regulations to remain current, but also decision makers and staff should stay abreast of their practice through training and continued education regarding arising issues as well as their duties and responsibilities.

