

Executive Summary

November 14, 1996

This Land Use Plan can be regarded as the Land Use component of a Comprehensive Plan. In addition to the Land Use Plan, the Comprehensive Plan will eventually include other elements addressing growth-related issues, including the Transportation Plan, Parks and Recreation Plan, Natural and Historic Resources Plan, Housing Plan, Economic Development, and Community Facilities Plan. As these and other plan components are completed or revised, they will be added or referenced to form the Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Cary.

This Plan presents the Town's declaration of its official policy with regard to the form and pattern of future development. It will be used to direct growth by serving as a reference guide when considering rezonings, annexation, subdivisions, and site plans. It will also be used to direct provision of public infrastructure and aid decisions for private sector investment.

Through a series of public meetings, the 20 person Citizen's Advisory Committee identified needs and desires of citizens with regard to their town. The Committee then developed nine goals and supporting objectives that residents wish the Town to achieve. The goals reflect the values of the community and have become the basis around which plan concepts were developed. The goals contained in the Land Use Plan are:

1. Maintain and enhance a strong sense of community;
2. Preserve and maintain Cary's attractive visual appearance;
3. Preserve Cary's environmental resources;
4. Manage Cary's growth and development to maintain and enhance Cary's high quality of life;
5. Provide adequate, high quality, and well-maintained public services, amenities, and facilities;
6. Provide a comprehensive multi-modal transportation system for Cary;
7. Support balanced, appropriate economic development;
8. Promote and sustain a progressive and positive planning process for Cary;
9. Proactively address Cary's housing issues.

In order to achieve these goals, this plan offers a new direction for the Town, and strives to foster "neighborhood and community activity centers," or "focus areas," in order to promote a pedestrian-friendly alternative to unattractive, inefficient strip development. These centers will include highly-connected, pedestrian-friendly commercial and office cores, surrounded by residential neighborhoods that support land uses within the focus area. Neighborhoods, connected by pedestrian walkways to the focus area, will transition from higher-density to lower-density housing as one moves outward from the core. The plan text describes these centers, and the accompanying Land Use Plan Map clearly shows their desired location.

The plan provides for flexibility in land uses. For example, while the proposed locations of activity centers are shown on the Land Use Plan Map, the Map does not specify the precise internal arrangement of the commercial, office, institutional, and high-density residential uses which make up the activity center. Instead, the Plan establishes guidelines that specify the size and design of developments.

The Town's aesthetic qualities are addressed with design criteria for the various planning pieces, such as activity centers, residential areas, and employment centers. Design criteria address such key issues as preservation and creation of larger open spaces and recreational facilities, preservation of forested areas, prevention of strip shopping center development and development of integrated transportation networks for pedestrian, bicycle, bus and possibly commuter train alternatives.

The Plan has a strong design focus in an effort to maintain and enhance Cary's attractiveness as a place to live and work. The general design guidelines have been written to ensure that the general public, landowners, and the development community understand the concepts that support this objective. These guidelines will be used as a basis for specific ordinances and guidelines necessary to carry out the general objectives of this Plan, ensuring that Cary remains an attractive place to live, work and raise a family.

New approaches to residential neighborhood design are provided as the Plan strives to preserve and enhance the Town's visual appeal and efficiency. These approaches include "Traditional Neighborhood Development" (TND), a design concept that includes relatively smaller lots and narrower streets than in conventional large-lot subdivisions. Also included as crucial design features are public open spaces that serve as the focal points for neighborhoods, homes gathered relatively close to streets, a highly-connected grid roadway system, street trees and other landscaping, and the possible inclusion of some small-scale neighborhood commercial activities. Such development patterns contribute to the creation of pedestrian-oriented centers and enhance the opportunities for transportation alternatives. "Cluster development," a method of preserving open space and rural land by gathering structures on the more developable portions of a site, is also presented as an alternative, chiefly in areas where forest resources and rural open space are threatened.

The Plan provides analyses of opportunities and constraints presented by the natural and built environments. These analyses include a consideration of such natural features as soils, slopes, water resources, and floodplains. In addition, the impacts on Cary's growth presented by Raleigh-Durham International Airport, Research Triangle Park, the regional transportation system, and other aspects of the built environment are fully considered. An analysis of current and future land use supply and demand are included in the Plan in order to establish the assumptions upon which the Land Use Plan is based.