

## Town's land plan balances growth and scale

### Town officials look to concentrate future development in Town Center, not rural areas.

By Meghan Cooke

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Officials are close to finishing a Harrisburg land-use plan that would concentrate future development around the Town Center and maintain low-density housing in some rural areas.

At several meetings this year, planners have sought input from residents to help develop the plan for a 26.5-square-mile area in Harrisburg. The area is roughly bordered by the Mecklenburg County line to the west, Lower Rocky River Road to the south and Concord's jurisdiction to the northeast.

The plan unveiled Wednesday at a meeting at the Harrisburg branch library is the result of several drafts and alternatives, which were based on ideas from consultants and suggestions from residents.

The plan is meant to look ahead as far as 2030. Leaders will use it to make decisions about new development and school construction.

The plan also will be used as a guide as local leaders make decisions about rezoning. The land-use plan used now was adopted in 2001.

The new plan calls for more development around the Town Center, which town officials hope to make the symbolic center of town. Medium-density housing - three to four homes per acre - is proposed around that area.

"It's got potential," Harrisburg town councilman Jeff Phillips said of the plan.

At Wednesday's meeting, Phillips examined maps that showed the outline of the proposed Carolina Thread Trail, a regional network of greenways and trails. He said he hopes the trail can connect to sidewalks that lead into Town Center.

Project manager Meg Nealon of LandDesign, the planning firm hired by the county, said in land-use plan meetings in February that a long-range plan must maintain a balance between residents' desire to preserve Harrisburg's small-town feel and the growing population's need for access to small-scale retail.

"I don't mind cows in my back yard, but I don't want condominiums," Glen Moses said at the meeting last week.

Moses lives near the proposed Village of Blume, a controversial development project on about 360 acres near Rocky River and Hickory Ridge roads. The development has drawn criticism from residents who argue the neighborhood would add traffic congestion to the area and damage the town's rural scenery.

The proposed land-use plan reflects residents' desire to conserve that scenery, Nealon said last week, pointing to the southern portion of the area, which is slated to have one to two homes per acre.

The plan would keep jobs and light industrial development along N.C. 49.

One alternative plan considered earlier this year called for development to be slowed around flood-prone spots near Pharr Mill Road so as to not exacerbate flooding. The proposed plan calls for no change in the residential density of that area. Nealon said a recently adopted stormwater ordinance should help alleviate those problems.

The Town Council recently adopted new stormwater fees of \$4.64 per month for single-family homes and \$4.64 per equivalent residential unit on nonresidential property within town limits. The fee, which went into effect July 1, will pay for a federally mandated stormwater program and improve drainage in Harrisburg.

Many who attended the meeting last week expressed concerns about related issues, particularly the N.C. Department of Transportation's plans to add a second track along a 12.2-mile stretch of the existing railroad, which runs parallel to N.C. 49 in Harrisburg. The project includes the closing of several grade crossings and the construction of bridges to replace them.

Ann Stayer said she's worried the second track will add more noise and danger around her family's farmland off Shamrock Road.

"I want my land to be used for agriculture," she said.

Next, Cabarrus County and Harrisburg planning and zoning boards will review the plan. They will make recommendations to the county Board of Commissioners and the Harrisburg Town Council, each of which will hold public hearings on the plan.

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