

A Comprehensive Approach to Controlled and Sustainable Growth

Introduction and Background

In 2006 Iredell County was in the midst of the fastest period of growth in its existence. From 1995 to 2006 the County grew at a rate of over three percent per year. The bulk of this growth had taken place in the southern end of the County around Mooresville and Lake Norman, thus compounding the problem. The repercussions have been clogged roads, overcrowded schools, and poor air quality.

That year the County began the development of the “Iredell County Growth Report”. The County Planning Board, along with Planning Staff, was tasked with developing a proposal to deal with the problems brought on by relatively unregulated, uncontrolled growth. The group met numerous times over a four month period and held numerous hearings to listen to the concerns of the citizens and local interest groups. At the end of the process the report was completed and submitted to the Board of Commissioners.

Contained within the report were growth management strategies geared toward dealing with the issues that had been voiced by the public. It was presented to the Board of Commissioners and the next step was implementation. In the early winter of 2007 and again in the summer of 2007 the planning staff met with the County Commissioners and the Planning Board to establish and prioritize the goals and strategies to make these growth management policies a reality. After strategizing at their summer retreat the staff was given the go ahead from the Commissioners to pursue the implementation of the report.

This directive from the Commissioners set into place a work program that has taken place over the last eighteen months and which has included both immediate stop-gap measures and longer comprehensive solutions to the problems brought before the Commissioners. Although this program is still under way, significant goals have been met, and major policy changes have been made. When completed, Iredell County will have a comprehensive, sustainable approach to future development.

Program and Approach

At a joint planning meeting in the summer of 2007 a work program was established that would address the results of the growth study in two categories: short term and long term. There was tremendous political pressure to move on the results of the study, however many of the issues were long term in nature. It was decided that we would address the short term issues by re-writing the subdivision ordinance. Most of the core issues could logically be addressed through that document while the bigger picture problems would be addressed through other projects. The following is a breakdown of the short and long term initiatives that have taken place and contributed to the County addressing its growth needs.

Short Term Project Implementation

Subdivision Ordinance Rewrite (completed in 2008)

In September of 2007 the County began a comprehensive rewrite of the Subdivision Ordinance, which had not been done since its inception in the 1980's. This was done in an effort to put regulations in place to deal with the immediate problems that were facing the county and

ensure that the same problems did not continue to occur. The process was to be transparent and open to the public. Toward the latter end of the project public information sessions were held with local developers, surveyors and interest groups. The County made every effort to bring these groups into the fold since this ordinance was fundamentally different than the original.

Regulations were put into place that not only addressed immediate problems, but focused also on sustainability. In an effort to decrease the impact on the local water table and water quality, the County required mandatory water line connectivity when proximate to existing lines and stream buffers for all perennial streams. Public safety was addressed through fire suppression measures, and traffic impacts were addressed through mandatory traffic impact analyses for larger subdivisions, connectivity requirements, and right of way preservation. The project was completed in early 2008.

Demographic Forecast (completed in 2008)

Also in the summer of 2007 the County began working a county-wide demographic forecast. This project was completed in February, 2008 and presented population and housing forecasts between 2008 and 2015. This was a joint project that incorporated Statesville, Mooresville, and Troutman, as well as the Iredell-Statesville and Mooresville Graded School Districts into the study as partners with Iredell County. The objective of this project was to provide accurate population predictions to each entity to help them prepare for future growth. This has helped each agency in forecasting for utilities, student enrollment, public facilities allocation and planning, economic development, comprehensive planning, and school location. This is a fundamental tool that has been used by entities other than the original partners and is the basis for many local and regional decisions.

Perth Road Study (completed in 2008)

The Perth Road Study addressed one of the fastest growing areas of Iredell County. Substantial residential growth has been occurring along this farm-to-market road and is quickly overburdening the infrastructure. A study was developed for this area and essentially all of the recommendations centered on keeping it residential and keeping traffic moving. This study was completed prior to the adoption of the Subdivision Ordinance and considerations of this area were taken into account when developing the ordinance. Some of the recommendations and goals of this study centered on the core concepts discussed at the Joint Planning Meeting in 2007; intergovernmental cooperation, interconnectivity, and the protection of natural resources.

When this project was opened up to the public the meeting was attended by over 100 people. This is a very high number considering the relatively small area. Surveys were completed by the majority of those in attendance.

Long Term Project Implementation

Comprehensive Plan (began in 2008 and currently under development)

In early 2008 the County began developing the 2030 Horizon Plan. This comprehensive land use plan puts significant emphasis on agriculture, farmland preservation, joint planning

concepts, transportation, and other issues addressing our county. Two primary issues have been the loss of farmland and the pressures on agriculture to remain a viable industry, and land use relationships between each town and the County. One of the solutions has been to establish Urban Service Areas outside of the municipalities where utilities are planned over the next 20 years. This availability and the willingness of the County to cooperate with the towns will hopefully pull development into those more manageable areas and away from prime farmland properties, thus decreasing the pressure to sell.

The Plan is currently under way and its adoption is anticipated in late spring or early summer of 2009. This is a truly regional project in that representatives of each municipality have been integrally involved and many of the recommendations of the plan will transcend jurisdictional boundaries.

Adoption of the Mooresville Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) (completed in 2008)

In 2008 Iredell County adopted the Mooresville CTP as part of the Iredell County CTP. This was meant to insure unanimity and correlation between projects that might span jurisdictional lines or which begin development with the county and end with the town. Traffic and transportation in the southern end of the county is difficult to address and a united planning front was needed.

Farmland Protection Plan and Enhanced Farmland Preservation Districts (completed in 2008)

The County currently has over 16,000 acres in voluntary farmland preservation districts. It has become increasingly apparent that the next step needed to be taken. The next step was to take the voluntary program to a higher level and conserve farmland for defined periods. The Enhanced program does just that, providing for ten year conservation easements on farmland. This will conserve some of the county's most desirable natural resources. In addition, the Count has also adopted a Farmland Protection Plan, which maps out ways in which economic development concepts can be applied to agriculture to ensure that it is a viable employment source and asset as the County continues to grow.

NC 3 Corridor Study (began in 2008 and currently under development)

This is a regional study that is being developed to address anticipated growth between two major employment centers, Lowe's Corporate Headquarters in Mooresville and the NC Research Campus in Kannapolis, and their associated spinoff development. This study has included Iredell County, Mooresville, Cabarrus County, and Kannapolis. The results of this study will be, among other things, a joint outlook on how transportation and land use will coexist along this corridor.

Exit 42 Land Use Study (completed in 2008)

In early 2008 the Iredell County Department of Planning and Development convened a varied group of agencies, including the Town of Troutman, NCDOT, Iredell-Statesville Schools, the Greater Statesville Development Corporation, and Iredell County Emergency Services to discuss growth around one of the fastest growing interchanges in the County. Over 100 land owners and developers were invited to hear an educational session put on by this group and then participate in a planning exercise that would then be used in the development of the Town of Troutman's Land Use Plan. The primary intent of the study was to educate the public and

bring forth a unified front for the new development that would be located in an area of multiple jurisdictions. Innovative and creative

Facilities Study (completed in 2008)

For the first time Iredell County has developed a comprehensive, proactive study of all public facilities. This study will be used to identify areas of need from a capital perspective. The population numbers forecasted in the 2007-2015 Demographic Forecast are the basis for the report. This will help the County to adequately plan for capital improvements further out than currently done.

Some will say that Iredell County has waited too long to address problems related to unrestrained growth. Some will say that the County has not done enough to stop the same problems from happening again. Many will disagree with new regulations that impact their property. However, in a realistic situation, it is best to address your problems by identifying those you can solve quickly and with immediate results, and those that you address over the long term, with systematic and long lasting effects. Iredell County has attempted to do just that. The County has a long way to go, as dealing with growth takes constant effort. Implementation of the 2030 Horizon Plan will be a long and likely arduous road, the achievement of significant standards always is. But by examining the work plan that the county has accomplished over the last two years it is obvious that the commitment is there and the county will continue to strive for a high quality of life for its residents.

Relationship Between Work Program and Award Criteria

Project	Innovation and Creativity	Program Successes and Sustainable Benefits	Commitment to Goals	Engagement of the Community	Contributes to Regionalism	Interaction with Public and Private Partners
Subdivision Ordinance		X	X			X
Perth Road Study			X	X		
Demographic Forecast	X				X	X
Comprehensive Plan	X		X	X	X	X
NC 3 Corridor Plan				X	X	
Cornelius Road Plan				X	X	
Exit 42 Citizen's Study	X			X	X	X
Mooresville CTP					X	X
Joint CTP	X				X	X
Farmland Protection Plan	X	X	X			X
Enhanced Farmland Districts			X	X		X