

Charlotte County Comprehensive Plan, 2024 - 2029

I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Legal Basis for a Comprehensive Plan

Every community faces challenges when it comes to planning for the future and managing change. While the physical manifestations of change vary from time to time and place to place, one certainty in life is that change – whether we like it or not – does occur and things will not remain the same. Charlotte County faces unique challenges and opportunities including: a growing Amish community, the existence of the Virginia’s Heartland Regional Industrial Park just outside the Town of Keysville and the emergence of the solar energy industry placing significant development pressures on the County.

To help address growth and change, the Code of Virginia mandates that jurisdictions prepare a Comprehensive Plan to guide the physical development of their communities. The Code also mandates that localities periodically review the Plan to determine if it should be amended. The Code of Virginia, Section 15.2-2223, requires that local governments develop their Comprehensive Plan. A Comprehensive Plan is a document used for community assessment, identifying current concerns, forecasting future needs, developing policies, and implementing problem solving strategies. A Comprehensive Plan is developed by the Planning Commission and adopted by the governing body. Furthermore, Section 15.2-2230 of the Code requires localities to review their Comprehensive Plan every five (5) years at a minimum to determine if it is advisable to amend the Plan.

Title 15.2-2223

Comprehensive Plan to be prepared and adopted; scope and purpose.

The local planning commission shall prepare and recommend a comprehensive plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing body shall adopt a comprehensive plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.

In the preparation of a comprehensive plan the commission shall make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of the existing conditions and trends of growth, and of the probable future requirements of its territory and inhabitants. The 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 present and probable future needs and resources, best promote the health, safety, morals, order, convenience, prosperity and general welfare of the inhabitants.

Section 15.2-2223 further states that the Comprehensive Plan shall be general in nature in that it shall:

- Designate the general or approximate location, character, and extent of features shown on the plan, including where existing lands or facilities are proposed to be extended, removed or changed;
- Show the long-range recommendations for the general development of the territory and may include such items as the designation of areas for different kinds of public and private land use, a system of transportation facilities, a system of community service facilities, historical areas, and areas for the implementation of groundwater protection measures.

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In Virginia, the local Comprehensive Plan is a guide for the governing body to follow in making both long-range and day-to-day decisions regarding all aspects of community development. The governing body can exercise discretion in how strictly it interprets and follows the plan. However, the Code provides that the construction, extension or change in use of streets or other public facilities be subject to review and approval by the Planning Commission as to whether the general location, character and extent of the proposed facility is in substantial accord with the adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Plan, therefore, has great control over the construction of public facilities and utilities, as well as private land uses.

A Comprehensive Plan is an important document to a local government as it serves as a tool for community preservation and development. This Plan reflects the interests of public and private stakeholders with the assurance that the community's needs are identified and met accordingly. As a community's character evolves, the Comprehensive Plan adapts through the compilation of corresponding citizen input and assessments accompanied with other data sources.

B. Developing a New Comprehensive Plan for Charlotte County

The County's existing Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2017 and is in need of a comprehensive update to bring the Plan up to-date. In August 2021, Charlotte County contracted with the Commonwealth Regional Council (CRC) for assistance in updating the County's Comprehensive Plan. The process for updating the Plan took 18 months. In the early phases of the up-date, the CRC staff developed a public survey for the public to give input and participate in the process. The process included regular meetings between CRC staff and the Charlotte County Planning Commission, to review data and materials and develop/update goals, objectives and strategies. Once completed, the Plan was presented to the public for review and comment and then to the Charlotte County Board of Supervisors for adoption. This Comprehensive Planning Process addressed the major concerns of the County by identifying the fundamental, long-term goals for community development for the next five to 20 years. Furthermore, the Plan serves as a guide for setting policies for public facilities, utilities, and land use which the County will need to implement in order to achieve those goals.

C. Process for Plan Development and Adoption

The CRC assisted the Charlotte County Planning Commission in updating the Plan, gathering public comment, and presenting the Plan to the Board of Supervisors for adoption. The Charlotte County Comprehensive Plan includes seven (7) phases. The phases are as follows:

- Phases I and II: Collecting/updating/analyzing data, including:
 - Population
 - Education
 - Income
 - Commuting Patterns
 - Employment/Unemployment
 - Economic Activity
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Community Facilities/Services
 - Historical Sites
 - Natural Resources

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- Phase III: Evaluating current land use and updating the County's Future Land Use Map.
- Phase IV: Identifying/updating issues, and setting goals and prescribing actions.
- Phase V: Executive Summary.
- Phase VI: Public Hearing and recommendation for adoption by the Planning Commission.
- Phase VII: Public Hearing and adoption by the Board of Supervisors.

D. Overview of Methods for Identifying Issues

A range of issues, now and in the future facing Charlotte County, has been identified. Review and analysis of these issues by the public, the County staff, the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors provided the basis for establishing the planning goals and policies for this Comprehensive Plan. For a more detailed review of all the input received from the issue identification methods, please refer to the Appendix materials.

The major issues outlined in this Plan were identified through four methods:

1. **Community Meeting:** CRC staff held a community meeting on January 31, 2022 at the Charlotte County Courthouse. *The Charlotte Gazette* and *The Southside Messenger* ran stories about the meeting, and a flyer was developed for distribution to local businesses. Charlotte County also posted a notice for the meeting on its Facebook page. The sign-in sheet showed a total of 35 people in attendance at this meeting. Courthouse security conducted a headcount and counted 45 people in attendance at the meeting. Members of the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors attended the meeting, and it is believed that many of those individuals did not sign in. The input received from attendees proved useful in developing the survey instrument and updating the Plan.
2. **Citizen Opinion Survey:** CRC staff assisted the Planning Commission with the development and distribution of the survey instrument. Surveys were made available at government offices and businesses throughout the County, and an online survey instrument was made available on the County's website and Facebook page. Surveys were distributed on April 21, 2022, with a deadline of May 31, 2022 to submit completed surveys. *The Charlotte Gazette* and *The Southside Messenger* ran stories about the surveys. A total of 224 surveys were completed and returned.
3. **Research and Analysis of Available Data:** CRC staff collected and analyzed data on a range of aspects on the County. These elements included land use patterns, environmental features, transportation conditions, population growth trends and capital facility needs. Much of the information is contained in this Plan and has helped to further enhance the understanding of many of the issues identified by local citizens and by other efforts as outlined in this section.

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4. ***Meetings with the Planning Commission Working Committee:*** The Charlotte County Planning Commission worked with CRC staff in the development of this Plan. CRC staff held 16 meetings with the Planning Commission between November 2021 and September 2023. During these meetings, the Planning Commission reviewed citizen input along with technical information and contributed its own analysis of the issues presented. Charlotte County hired The Berkley Group, LLC, a consulting firm that has also served as the County's third-party reviewer for utility-scale solar development applications, to assist the Planning Commission with solar energy land use policy review and development. As part of this process, the Planning Commission held three solar land use policy work sessions with the Berkley Group and the CRC in early 2023.