



Planning, Development & Inspections

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To: Wake County Board of Commissioners
From: Akul Nishawala, AICP - Planner III
Subject: Comprehensive Plan Amendment #01-25
Date: November 3, 2025

Request

Recommend adoption of the Eastern Wake Area Plan as an amendment to PLANWake, the Wake County Comprehensive Plan; and recommend amending the PLANWake Development Framework Map.

Applicant

Wake County

Location

The Eastern Wake planning area is in the northeastern portion of Wake County and borders Nash, Franklin, and Johnston Counties. The plan area is adjacent to five Wake County municipalities: the City of Raleigh; the Town of Wake Forest; the Town of Rolesville; the Town of Wendell, and the Town of Zebulon. A significant feature in this area is the Little River Water Supply Watershed, which is designed to protect the City of Raleigh's planned future Little River Reservoir through an interlocal agreement or ILA.

Background

Wake County's comprehensive plan, PLANWake, was adopted in 2021 as a tool to manage the substantial growth that the county has and will continue to experience. The plan articulates the new vision for the greater Wake County community—one that will build off recent planning advancements made through the Wake Transit Plan, the Wake County Affordable Housing Plan, the Wake County Greenway System Plan and others to account for the next wave of growth in a manner that enhances quality of life for all residents. This new course directs growth to existing towns, supports the development of connected and walkable transit-supportive centers and works with rural landowners to protect important open spaces, farms and forests.

To meet the goals set forth in PLANWake, numerous Wake County policies and documents had to be updated or overhauled as part of the implementation process. One such example is adoption of area plans encompassing the unincorporated areas of Wake County. These area plans are designed to provide more localized land use decisions, analysis, and public engagement. The Eastern Wake Area Plan is the fifth of seven area plans that will replace the current area land use plans.

Analysis

Eastern Wake Area Plan

Municipalities have grown significantly over the past 20 years, either through annexation or expansions of extra-territorial jurisdictions. This growth has resulted in the considerable reduction of Wake County's planning jurisdiction, which rendered the former area land use plan geographies obsolete, and its policies outdated. The new boundaries for the area plans represent the logical and updated geographic groupings of the remaining area. Additional considerations such as watersheds, rights-of-way and U.S. Census block groups contributed to the updated area plan boundaries.

While PLANWake will continue to serve as the overarching vision for the county, the area plans can and should be used as an opportunity for local land use planning decisions, identify needs for an area, and adjustments to the growth development framework map.

The Eastern Wake Area Plan is the culmination of a months-long process to conduct research, analysis, and outreach to implement the vision and goals of PLANWake in a localized manner. Wake County planning staff took this opportunity to reassess its past policies and methods and employed new tactics and avenues to create a long-term planning document.

Carrying on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, planning staff harnessed virtual or online methods to interact with the community and garner feedback throughout the process. Along with a central website and social media posts, staff utilized an online platform that was able to capture feedback from the public in an engaging and interactive way. Since May 2025 and over two rounds of engagement, 1,040 unique users visited the plan's online engagement platform and 189 of them interacted with it, meaning they either commented or completed a survey. Additionally, the site received 1,633 total visits, 162 survey responses and 62 comments.

Staff held one virtual and two in-person meetings within the study area. The virtual meeting was held on March 6, 2025, and the in-person meetings were both held at the Wake County Eastern Regional Center in Zebulon on April 16, 2025, and June 26, 2025. The information and conversations during these events directly contributed to Eastern Wake's content and overall direction.

The City of Raleigh's future Little River Reservoir is in the planning area and is one of several potential drinking water resources that the city identified for itself and its partners over 30 years ago to address the projected population growth we're now experiencing. While the need to construct the reservoir has not yet presented itself, the need to protect the water supply watershed has remained constant over the years. In this vein, Raleigh, Wake Forest, Wendell, Zebulon and Wake County entered into the Little River Reservoir Water Supply Watershed Inter-Local Agreement (ILA) in 2008. The ILA's intent is to protect the water quality of the future reservoir by restricting the type and intensity of development within the watershed. Further, any proposed changes within this area must be agreed upon by all parties. These restrictions have spared the Eastern Wake area from much of the county's fast-paced growth and preserved the last vestiges of its former agricultural past.

An important aspect of the Eastern Wake Area Plan is the "Agriculture" land use classification. This designation was first introduced in the previously adopted Lower Swift Creek Area Plan. The Agriculture & Forestry designation is unique in that it specifically calls out farming practices as the

primary and intended long-range use instead of utilizing a passive term like rural to describe the area. Much of the feedback staff received were from the agricultural community who expressed their desire to continue farming their land into the future and not to sell to developers. This is underscored by the Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VADs), Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVADs), and conservation easements in the area as well as the overall interest and support of these programs by local landowners.

PLANWake Development Framework

Along with the adoption of the Eastern Wake Area Plan, staff recommends an amendment to the PLANWake Development Framework map to reclassify 43 acres in the from Rural to Community.

Staff included municipal planning staff (i.e., Raleigh, Wake Forest, Rolesville, Wendell, and Zebulon) in the updates and development of the Eastern Wake Area Plan throughout the process.

Findings

- 1. The Eastern Wake Area Plan is consistent with the goals and visions set forth in PLANWake.**
- 2. The Eastern Wake Area Plan received input from residents, municipal partners, and stakeholders.**
- 3. The Eastern Wake Area Plan provides an update to the existing area land plan policies, development framework map, and land use designations.**

Staff Recommendation

That the Board of Commissioners adopt the Eastern Wake Area Plan as an amendment to the Wake County Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake, and amend the Development Framework map.

Planning Board Recommendation

The Planning Board recommends that the Eastern Wake Area Plan be adopted as an amendment to the Wake County Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake, and that the amendment to the Development Framework map also be adopted.

The Planning Board unanimously voted to recommend approval on October 1, 2025.