



## Planning, Development & Inspections

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**To: Wake County Board of Commissioners**  
**From: Akul Nishawala, AICP - Planner III**  
**Subject: Comprehensive Plan Amendment #02-24**  
**Date: December 4, 2024**

### **Request**

Recommend adoption of the Western 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 Western Wake planning area is in the southwestern portion of Wake County and borders Chatham and Harnett Counties. East of the area plan lie four of Wake County's 12 municipalities (from north to south): the Town of Cary, the Town of Apex, the Town of Holly Springs and the Town of Fuquay-Varina. The largest feature of the area plan is Harris Lake, which is also the site of the Harris Nuclear Plant.

### **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 Western Wake Area Plan is the fourth of seven area plans that will replace the current area land use plans.

## **Analysis**

### Western 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 Western 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 April 2024, 2,613 unique users visited the plan's online engagement platform and 140 of them interacted with it, meaning they either commented or completed a survey. Additionally, the site received 4,169 total visits, 80 survey responses and 119 comments.

Staff held one virtual and two in-person meetings within the study area. The virtual meeting was held on May 21, 2024, and the in-person meetings were held at the New Hill Community Center in New Hill on June 12, 2024, and the White Oak Foundation Center in Cary on September 11, 2024. The information and conversations during these events directly contributed to Western Wake's content and overall direction.

The predominant future land use of the Western Wake Area Plan is the Utility/Conservation classification. These are largely owned by Duke Energy and the United States Army Corps of Engineers and intended to serve as natural buffers between developed areas and the Harris Nuclear Plant, Harris Lake, and the Jordan Lake water supply watershed.

An important aspect of the Western 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.

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## PLANWake Development Framework

Along with the adoption of the Western Wake Area Plan, staff recommends two amendments to the PLANWake Development Framework map. The first is to reclassify 383 acres in the Friendship Community from Community to Rural. This is around Friendship Road between Old US 1 and US 1 and is an established residential community with large lots. Residents have made it clear to staff that they wish for things to remain as they currently are in terms of density and development. This amendment is also consistent with the Western Wake Area Plan's recommended land uses of Agriculture and one dwelling unit per acre in this area.

The second amendment is to amend a 36-acre parcel on Page Road from Rural to Community in order to reflect its annexation by the Town of Apex. As it is no longer in the county's jurisdiction, the parcel's Rural classification is inappropriate.

Staff included municipal planning staff (i.e., Apex, Cary, Holly Springs, and Fuquay-Varina) in the updates and development of the Western Wake Area Plan throughout the process.

### **Findings**

- 1. The Western Wake Area Plan is consistent with the goals and visions set forth in PLANWake.**
- 2. The Western Wake Area Plan received input from residents, municipal partners, and stakeholders.**
- 3. The Western 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 Western 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 Western Wake Area Plan be adopted as an amendment to the Wake County Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake, and that the amendments to the Development Framework map also be adopted.

The Planning Board unanimously voted to recommend approval on December 4, 2024.