



Planning, Development & Inspections

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To: Wake County Board of Commissioners
From: Akul Nishawala, AICP - Planner III
Subject: Comprehensive Plan Amendment #03-22
Date: October 17, 2022

Request

Adopt the Lower Swift Creek Area Plan as an amendment to PLANWake, the Wake County Comprehensive Plan and amend the text on page 44 of PLANWake.

Applicant

Wake County

Location

The Lower Swift Creek Area Plan is located southeast of the Town of Garner and along the Johnston County line. The plan has two distinct areas—the northern portion is bounded by US 70 and I-40; and the southern portion is bounded by Rand Rd, Ten-Ten Rd, Benson Rd, and Swift Creek.

Background

Wake County's comprehensive plan, PLANWake, was adopted in 2021 as a tool to manage the unprecedented growth that the county's 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 (applications) analysis and public engagement. The Lower Swift Creek (LSC) Area Plan is the first of six area plans that will replace the current area land use plans.

Analysis

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obsolete, and its policies outdated.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 Lower Swift Creek 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.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting the conventional methods of public outreach, such as in-person meetings or canvassing, planning staff mostly 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 February 2022, 791 unique users visited the plan's online engagement platform and 156 users interacted with it, meaning they either commented or completed a survey. Additionally, the site received 2,467 total views, 158 survey responses and 51 comments.

The future NC 540 is currently in construction and will bisect the LSC area. This new highway will bring greater automobile access to residents of the area but will also change the landscape and travel networks significantly. A focal point of the LSC Area Plan was to find a way to leverage this investment in a way that can benefit residents and help manage the type of growth that this project will inevitably spur. The recently adopted PLANWake amendment to adopt new guidelines regarding how and where multi-use districts (formerly known as activity centers) are developed had a direct influence on the LSC Area Plan and its multi-use districts,

As part of the adoption process, planning staff additionally recommends the following text amendment to the bottom of page 44 to inform readers of the new area plan's existence.

“NOTE: On October 17, 2022, the Wake County Board of Commissioners adopted the Lower Swift Creek Area Plan as an amendment to PLANWake as part of the process to update its area land use plans.”

Findings

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

Staff Recommendation

That the Board of Commissioners adopts the Comprehensive Plan Amendment 03-22 as presented.

Planning Board Recommendation

Planning Board recommends that the Lower Swift Creek Area Plan be adopted as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake, and that the text amendment to page 44 of PLANWake also be adopted.

The Planning Board unanimously voted to recommend approval on October 5, 2022.