

Excerpt of Planning Board Minutes

October 5, 2022

Comprehensive Plan Amendment CPA-03-22 - Presentation by Akul Nishawala, Planner III

Mr. Nishawala began his presentation by refreshing the Board on the Lower Swift Creek (LSC) Area Plan, which 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.

Wake County's comprehensive plan, PLANWake, was adopted in 2021 as a tool to manage the unprecedented growth in Wake County. 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.

Mr. Nishawala indicated that 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 LSC Area Plan is the first of six area plans that will replace the current area land use plans.

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County's planning jurisdiction, which rendered the former area land use plan geographies obsolete, and its policies outdated.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.

Mr. Nishawala pointed to several slides showing the LSC Area Plan, noting that out of the 20 parcels identified as farmland, all but one intended to continue using their property for farming. He pointed out the proposed multi-use districts located on Ten-Ten Road, Benson Road, Cleveland School Road, and White Oak near I 540. The County has also included a new agriculture and forestry land use area, currently at 48 parcels (1905.12 acres). Mr. Nishawala also noted the light industrial use areas between 70 and 540 and to the north near Benson and Cleveland School Road and while construction of I 540 means the loss of some agricultural areas, Wake County is making the effort to maintain them where possible.

He also pointed out Bike / Ped improvements being made at various locations along 540 and Wake County has been working with the Town of Garner to ensure Right-of-Way construction per traffic studies conducted by the NCDOT. Pedestrian and Bike Crossings and Right-of-Ways are a priority to be included in the LSC plan.

The LSC 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.

Mr. Nishawala noted that 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 are developed had a direct influence on the LSC Area Plan. 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.”

Mr. Wells opened the floor to Board questions.

Board Discussion

Mr. Kadis asked about the forestry and agriculture area and if that was considered a separate distinction from the voluntary agriculture district (VAD) or enhanced voluntary agriculture districts (EVAD) areas. Mr. Maloney responded that an active forestry operation could be in the VAD or EVAD program. The landowner is not obligated to join the VAD or EVAD program and the voluntary programs are conditional based on the enhanced status. Mr. Adams added that the size constraints of the VAD and EVAD can also impact the decision of a landowner to join. Mr. Kadis asked for clarification about how rigid the LSC Area Plans are if a landowner decided to rezone their property. Mr. Nishawala replied that these recommendations are not set in stone and that the owner would need to apply for a land use amendment and work with staff to present their case.

Mr. Wells opened the floor to public comment.

With no further questions from the public Mr. Wells closed public comment

Board Motion #1 – Adoption of the Statement Consistency in CPA-03-22

Motion was made by Mr. Jenkins that the Planning Board recommend that the Board of Commissioners adopt the Lower Swift Creek Area Plan as an amendment to the Wake County Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake, and that the text amendment to page 44 of PLANWake also be adopted.

The motion was seconded by Dr. Kolappa and was adopted unanimously.