

Comprehensive Plan Amendment 02-22

Text amendment, page 45 PLANWake

~~Activity Centers~~ Multi-Use Districts

In the area planning process, Wake County, area municipalities, and residents have cooperatively identified “~~activity centers~~ multi-use districts.” These ~~activity centers~~ multi-use districts are the places stakeholders have felt are most appropriate for commercial and mixed-use development to occur. Typically, these ~~activity centers~~ multi-use districts are located at the intersections of major or moderate sized roadways. In many instances, the ~~activity center~~ multi-use district is centered around a location that is or has historically been a commercial use. A good example of this would be an older gas station or community store that historically served the needs of the area population.

~~Activity centers~~ Multi-use districts are intended to play two primary roles. The first, as noted, is to identify the most appropriate location for commercial development to help serve the daily needs of the surrounding neighborhoods. In this role, the ~~activity centers~~ multi-use districts are used by the County to guide decisions on rezoning requests and development permits. In this role, the County is primarily concerned with how a proposed use fits and serves the existing population. The second role of the ~~activity center~~ multi-use district is to preserve opportunity areas for commercial development to occur and expand as the municipal areas expand to accommodate continued population growth. To serve this role, the ~~activity center~~ multi-use district policy provides guidance on the intended maximum size of each ~~activity center~~ multi-use district category. In this role, the County is primarily concerned with how a proposed use would serve the needs of a future population.

~~Since adoption of activity center policy, the disconnect between the policy intent and the built environment outcomes has grown, including alignment with public infrastructure and investments. First, commercial uses that were originally developed in the county are not later being incorporated into the municipalities. Second, the types of uses constructed in the activity centers, although permitted, do not meet many of the activity center goals, specifically goals on mixed uses and connectivity. Last, the activity center policy does not appropriately address differences between development in areas anticipated to be future municipal areas and areas expected to remain in the County’s jurisdiction.~~

~~To address these concerns PLANWake will change the use of the activity centers. Where activity centers are located within areas classified as Walkable Center on the Development Framework Map, the goals, objectives and policies of Walkable Center shall supersede the activity center designation. Where activity centers are located within areas classified as Community or Community Reserve on the Development Framework Map, the municipal comprehensive plan shall supersede the activity center designation. Activity centers shall still apply in areas classified as Rural on the Development Framework Map. These areas should be developed as guided by the most recent and applicable area plan and the Wake County Unified Development Ordinance. Activity Center designations in the Rural areas will be revisited as the area plans are updated.~~

New text shown in green below

Purpose/Approach

To align multi-use districts with the intentional growth framework set out in the Wake County Comprehensive Plan (PLANWake), the county will take a two-tiered approach with multi-use districts.

Rural Multi-Use Districts are multi-use districts designated as Community Reserve or Rural on the PLANWake Development Framework Map. These areas are intended to either remain in county jurisdiction in perpetuity or are not intended to become municipal in the foreseeable future. Non-residential development will occur on well and septic or private utility and will be small scale in nature, especially within water supply watershed areas.

Rural multi-use districts could contain shopping, services, recreation, and small-scale office and institutional uses needed to meet the day-to-day needs of the neighborhood. Examples are grocery or convenience store, pharmacy, restaurant, medical or dental practice, insurance agency, law firm, small neighborhood business office, bank, school, daycare, church, park, and civic club. Rural multi-use districts will serve surrounding farm and forestry uses and could contain small-scale food processing, cottage industry, or veterinary office. Service station and dry-cleaning uses would be appropriate in rural areas outside of the water supply watersheds. A full list of allowable uses can be found in Section 4-11 of the UDO. Underlying zoning will determine the uses allowed in the multi-use districts; a rezoning or a special use permit may be needed to achieve certain uses.

Municipal Multi-Use Districts are multi-use districts designated as Community or Walkable Center on the PLANWake Development Framework Map. These areas are intended to be annexed and served with municipal public utilities in the future. Multi-use districts in these areas generally align with municipal plans for development. The goal of development that occurs in the county jurisdiction is to harmonize with future expected municipal development.

Municipal multi-use districts may have uses permitted in rural multi-use districts, plus uses that provide goods and services needed less frequently than a daily basis. Examples are shopping malls, hotels, movie theatres, major cultural, educational, or entertainment facilities, car dealerships, and mid to large-size office parks or businesses

Because multi-use districts located in areas designated as Community or Walkable Center by PLANWake are intended to be developed at urban intensities in the future, any development that occurs while under county jurisdiction should mimic municipal design standards as closely as possible. The county will work with municipalities to apply development standards consistent with a municipality's plans and ordinances.

Insert new map here

Note on map: Parcel-based maps of MUDs are contained in county area plans.

Objectives

- Broaden the opportunities of citizens to live, work, learn, play, and obtain goods and services in the same neighborhood or community, rather than having to travel long distances on crowded thoroughfares.

- Concentrate basic goods and services and potential transit stops at key points, so as to conveniently serve neighborhoods, avoid strip development, and provide focal points for neighborhood and community activities.
- Promote multiple forms of connectivity so citizens may safely and conveniently walk, bicycle, (or use vehicles) to access shopping, services, and residential areas.
- Allow a variety of housing densities, ownership opportunities, prices, and building types that can compatibly co-exist in neighborhoods and communities.
- Encourage non-residential and residential areas to be compatible and physically integrated in terms of appearance, access, noise, and water and air quality impacts.
- Maximize the benefit of public investment in infrastructure and services.
- Maintain and enhance the quality of the existing environment.
- Foster uses that support rural lands and the rural economy in harmony with the surrounding character of the rural area.

General Policies

- Wake County Comprehensive Plan and Area Plan maps designate the locations of planned multi-use districts.
- Centers should be designated at significant road intersections or significant neighborhood or community focal points.
- Residents have had and should continue to have opportunities to offer input on multi-use district designations.
- An emphasis should be placed on residential compatibility; uses found incompatible with surrounding residences due to appearance, traffic, noise, odor, etc. should be excluded.
- Appropriate zoning districts are residential, office, institutional, general business, and highway district.
- Multi-use districts should meet all environmental standards as required in local, state and federal regulations.

Design Guidelines

Design guidelines provide a flexible means to promote multi-use district concepts. Developers of multi-use district uses should strive for conformance with design guidelines but may use alternative approaches that achieve the same intent. Multi-use district Design Guidelines place an emphasis on achieving safe and efficient access to thoroughfares, highly connected roads and paths, and visual compatibility of multi-use district uses with each other and with residential districts.

Application

- The Design Guidelines should apply to special use applications and conditional use rezonings involving commercial, office, or institutional uses.
- Special use applications and conditional use rezonings should be accompanied by site plans, texts, and graphics as needed to demonstrate their degree of conformity with multi-use district policies and design guidelines.

- For multi-use districts located in Community or Walkable Center areas on the PLANWake Development Framework Map, the guidance offers an approach for when municipal design standards would be appropriate.
- Developers may propose, and the County may accept, alternatives to guidelines when they would achieve the same intent.

Rural Multi-Use Guidelines

A residential scale and proportion should be encouraged in rural multi-use districts. Connectivity will focus on cross access within the district and low stress connections to abutting neighborhoods.

Several of the rural multi-use districts are within present or future water supply watershed areas. In water supply watershed, the total size of a multi-use district may need to be larger than 35 acres to provide enough impervious surface for a use to meet stormwater regulations and maximum impervious limitations based on the water supply watershed. Green stormwater infrastructure is strongly recommended. Potentially polluting uses should not be allowed in water supply watersheds such as gasoline storage and sales, auto repair, dry cleaning, and certain outdoor storage.

The R-80W zoning district, located within water supply watersheds, limit nonresidential use to 6% impervious surface. Given this restriction, Rural Multi-Use Districts should be discouraged in this district. Establishment of Rural Multi-Use Districts in water supply watershed areas should be concentrated in the R-40W zoning district.

Rural Guidelines	
Size	Up to 35 acres
Maximum Lineal Distance that Non-residential uses may extend along a roadway	2,000 feet
Maximum Depth that Non-residential Uses Should Extend Back from Roadways	500 feet
Minimum Separation from other Neighborhood Multi-use districts	1 mile
Minimum Separation from Community or Regional Multi-use districts	1.5 miles

Municipal Multi-Use Districts

Collaboration with municipalities is key to achieving the goals of the multi-use districts in areas designated as Community and Walkable Center. There are three types or intensities of multi-use district: Neighborhood, Community, and Regional.

Neighborhood Guidelines	
Size	Up to 35 acres
Maximum Lineal Distance that Non-residential uses may extend along a roadway	2,000 feet
Maximum Depth that Non-residential Uses Should Extend Back from Roadways	500 feet
Minimum Separation from other Neighborhood Multi-Use districts	1 mile
Minimum Separation from Community or Regional Multi-Use districts	1.5 miles
Community Guidelines	
Size	Up to 120 acres
Maximum Lineal Distance that Non-residential uses may extend along a roadway	3,200 feet
Maximum Depth that Non-residential Uses Should Extend Back from Roadways	800 feet
Minimum Separation from other Community or Regional Multi-use Districts	3 miles
Minimum Separation from Neighborhood Multi-use Districts	1.5 miles
Regional Guidelines	
Size	Up to 375 acres
Maximum Lineal Distance that Non-residential uses may extend along a roadway	4,000 feet
Maximum Depth that Non-residential Uses Should Extend Back from Roadways	2,000 feet
Minimum Separation from Community Districts	3 miles

Minimum Separation from Neighborhood	1.5 miles
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Municipal/County Multi-Use District Design Collaboration

Collaboration with municipalities is key to achieving the goals of the Municipal Multi-Use District in areas designated as Community and Walkable Center on the Comprehensive Plan’s (PLANWake) Development Framework Map. The following provides guidance regarding design strategies if the county waives the requirement for a development to connect to public utilities. The purpose of this guidance is to provide a consistent evaluation method for applying municipal design standards in county jurisdiction.

Municipal and County Plans

Municipal and joint plans developed with the county will guide the design standards of the development. PLANWake Development Framework Map designation provides guidance related to timing and character of the intended development. When municipal plans show a multi-use district as a future regional center or similar in land use and intensity, priorities for the proposed development should be future mass transit, pedestrian connectivity, building mass and setbacks. The county should require more municipal standards when the multi-use district has potential to build out as an urban multi-use center.

If the municipality anticipates a multi-use district to be a neighborhood level use or lower intensity development (more like the type of development in the unincorporated areas), design should seek to match the aesthetics of the municipality with landscaping, buffer yards, and municipal branding as appropriate.

If the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) of a municipality demonstrates a commitment to infrastructure investments in the area, the developer should construct as much of the needed municipal infrastructure as possible including but not limited to sidewalks, road improvements, bus stops, and onsite water/sewer infrastructure that will serve future municipal service. If the municipality does not have committed investment in the proposed area, the development at minimum should include easements for future utilities consistent with the Wake County Unified Development Ordinance. The agreement must also include dedication of road right-of-way as required by the municipality.

Development Demand

Recent growth and activity should be looked at to measure demand for municipal type infrastructure and urban land use intensity. Annexations, building permits, requests for higher density rezoning, new school construction, new roadways, etc., indicate a demand for municipal development. Municipal staff can offer insight about demand for municipal services to areas based on conversations with developers interested in utility extension. When there is a reasonable expectation the proposed development will be surrounded by higher intensity or more urban type development, the proposed development should adhere closely to the design standards of the municipality.

Municipal Developability

Municipal developability refers to the ability or likelihood of a multi-use district building out as a municipal multi-use center. While plans and developer interest may indicate a demand for municipal development, there may be other factors that could hinder municipal annexation and service delivery. Constraints to municipal service extension may include environmentally sensitive areas or existing county development that is not likely to be annexed. A multi-use district in the county might have too few vacant parcels or insufficient vacant land in the vicinity of the multi-use district to make municipal extension of public utilities a feasible investment. In such a case where factors hinder municipal extension, the proposed development would follow county standards and would appear more like a rural multi-use district.

Public Involvement in Multi-Use Districts

Uses designated as Special Use in a multi-use district go through the Special Use Permit (SUP) process. The applicant requesting a SUP is required to make application to the county to be reviewed and presented to the Board of Adjustment for action. Adjacent property owners are notified of the public hearing and given an opportunity to comment on the proposed request. The BOA can set any condition that is reasonable based on concerns from the public and adjacent property owners.

Amendments

Major changes to multi-use districts, including adding or deleting districts, are considered during Area Land Use Plan updates when plan development processes include robust community engagement and provide an opportunity for meaningful discussion and in-depth analysis. Proposed changes to a multi-use district not related to a plan update require a plan amendment. County administration or a private party may request a plan amendment. Planning Board will consider the following when evaluating an amendment request:

Plan Goals

Plan amendments should align with the intent of county and municipal plans and policies. Plan amendments should seek to advance the County's vision of a community that is inclusive and equitable, healthy and active, and sustainable and vibrant. PLANWake sets out a strategy for growing intentionally to meet its vision. The county provides internal guidance to assist applicants in addressing plan goals in the application to request a plan amendment.

Need

Area plan maps identify the areas most suitable to serve the present and future needs of residents. The Planning Board will consider whether the applicant has demonstrated there is a demand for goods and services that is not sufficiently provided in existing districts, nearby

districts or other commercially zoned areas. Determination of need may include analysis of changes in land use patterns and population growth or changes to real estate markets since the adoption of the plan.

Impact

The Planning Board will consider how the land use changes might impact traffic volume, traffic safety, noise, and other impacts to the area. The county has traffic impact analysis requirements and internal guidance for how impacts should be measured.

Size and spacing guidelines

The size and spacing guidelines are intended to be flexible. The purpose of identifying distinctive nodes is to avoid strip-like commercial development and discourage single, standalone commercial uses. Any proposed amendment should be compatible with the use of adjoining properties and align with the goals of the multi-use district classification.