

**Item Title:** Approval of the Wake County Comprehensive Plan - PLANWake

**Specific Action Requested:**

**That the Board of Commissioners adopts the attached Resolution approving the Wake County Comprehensive Plan – PLANWake, and instructs staff to publish any public comments received after the March 22 regular meeting and before the comment period closed.**

**Item Summary:**

**Purpose:** State law requires the Board of Commissioners approve comprehensive land use plans that guide growth for local jurisdictions.

**Background:** The Wake County Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake, is Wake County's first comprehensive plan that embraces the many different community efforts and visions that will help guide growth and development over the next 10 years. It will update our current land use plan and development policies while incorporating various planning efforts by the County such as open space, greenways, affordable housing, and transit/transportation.

A key aspect in development of the plan was public engagement and stakeholder input. This feedback was critical in shaping the plan's growth framework and policies, which are important elements to how our community prefers to see growth occur in the coming decade.

Upon adoption of the plan, staff will continue collaboration with community stakeholders on development of tools and strategies that will engage the policies and goals of the plan.

**Board Goal:** The comprehensive plan supports the following goals:

1. Growth and Sustainability Goal 1: Preserve and enhance the County residents' quality of life through coordinated land use and transportation planning.
2. Growth and Sustainability Goal 2: Encourage the use of public transit.
3. Community Health and Vitality Goal 1: Improve residents' health and well-being by promoting healthy behaviors and lifestyles.

**Fiscal Impact:** This action has no fiscal impact

**Additional Information:**

In 1982, the Wake County Board of Commissioners adopted the General Development Plan as Wake County's first growth plan. Since that time, the County has continued to guide long term growth and land use through a series of plans and plan amendments.

These plans have provided a vision for the future, with long-range goals and objectives on how to make decisions related to growth and land development proposals.

PLANWake is an effort to review and update the County's current Land Use Plan. Today's plan is still relevant and useful, however, feedback through the PLANWake process exposed a desire from residents and community stakeholders that we need to take a different approach to managing growth and development.

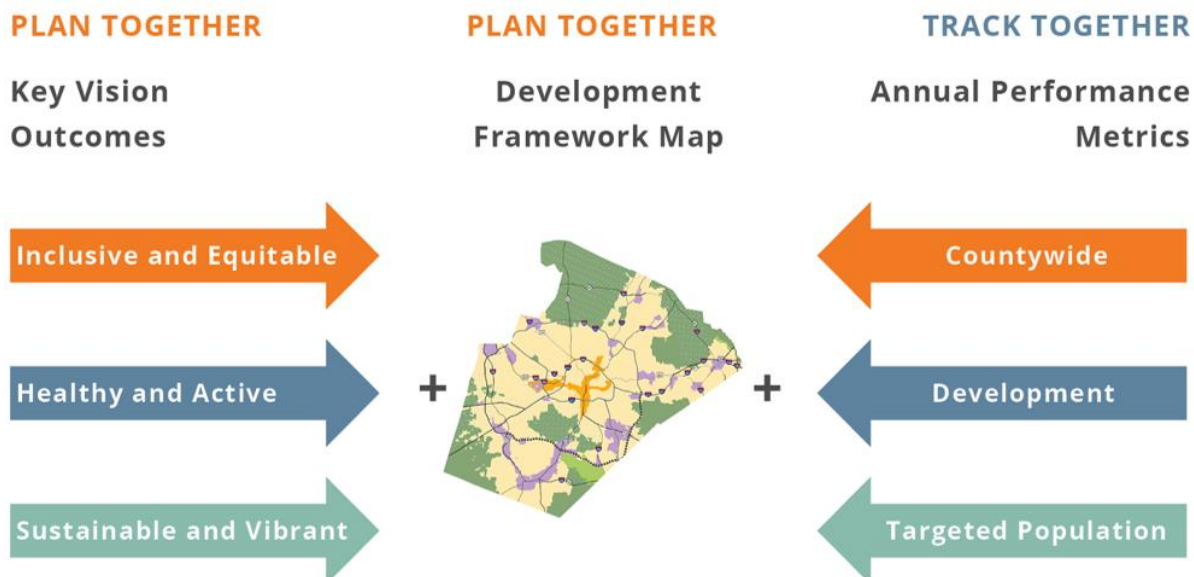
During the process, staff assessed the big community questions related to land use, transportation, and growth. The plan renews the community's vision and goals on a range of issues, while outlining a path to success for the coming decade.

Throughout this effort, Wake County residents were asked to identify and discuss the opportunities and challenges facing the county. With over 8,800 survey respondents and 150,000 input points, staff was able to capture helpful feedback that informed the policies and vision for the plan. The process was also informed by many stakeholder meetings and focus groups, centered around a diverse 50-person community advisory committee. A summary of this outreach can be found in the Reflect on Wake Report and Appendix, attached here.

PLANWake is focused on four guiding community preferences that emerged from public engagement.

1. Significant change is needed to plan for growth.
2. Protect open space and natural areas.
3. Direct growth to the towns.
4. Create walkable environments.

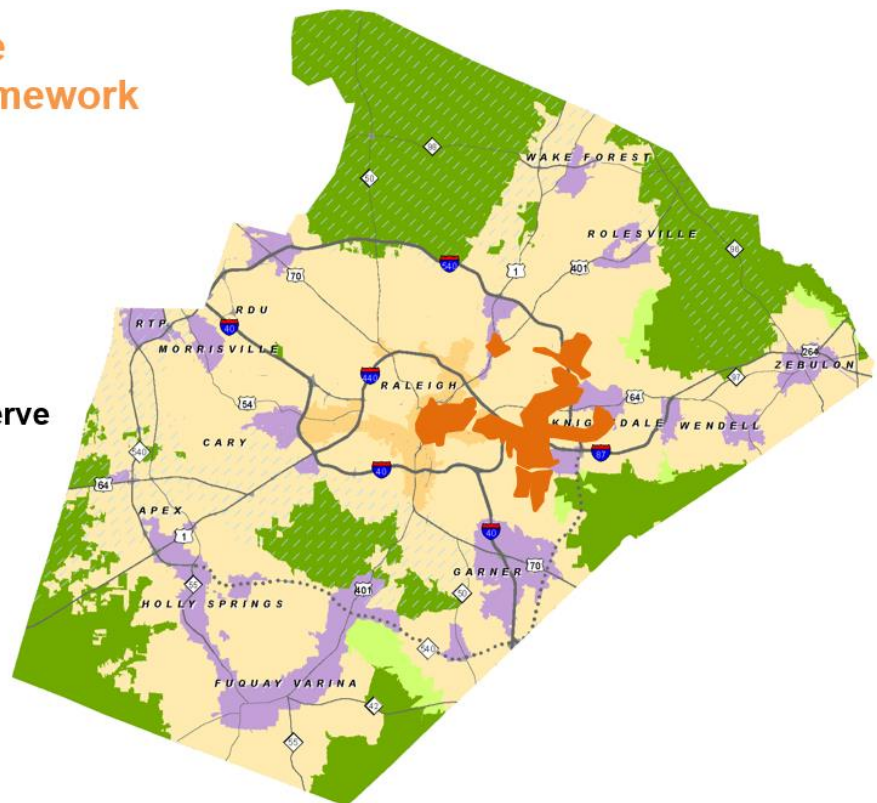
To accomplish these preferences, PLANWake is structured with the following components: Vision Outcomes; Development Framework Map; and Annual Performance Metrics.



The three PLANWake Vision Outcomes: Inclusive and Equitable; Healthy and Active; and Sustainable and Vibrant, articulate the intended future for Wake County. The Vision Outcomes are grounded in public input and achieving them is the priority of the plan. They also provide a measurable system that can be used to track progress toward their achievement through performance metrics.

The PLANWake Development Framework Map consists of five mapped classifications and a set of policy goals and expectations for each development framework classification. The map identifies the future land use and character vision for all of Wake County. This sets a cohesive county-wide framework for Wake County to guide decision-making in unincorporated areas. The intention of the Development Framework is to support municipal annexation and growth within the Transit Focus, Walkable Center, Community and Community Reserve areas. County staff worked closely with municipalities and public utility providers to ensure the map aligns with municipal plans and infrastructure investment. Rural and Water Supply Watershed areas are not intended for municipal scale growth during the next decade or beyond. The Development Framework Map will be used by the Wake County Board of Commissioners, Planning Board and staff to guide land use decision making.

## PLANWake Development Framework



The Development Framework Map is augmented by several Development Framework Policies. These policies provide more specific policy direction on extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) expansions, water supply watersheds, standards for areas that are intended to transition to municipal development, Urban Services Areas and guidance for enhancing Wake County development standards.

Regarding ETJ, the plan proposes several changes to the County's existing evaluation criteria. These changes were prompted by recent experiences in municipal ETJ requests and changes to the State's annexation law several years ago. Generally, the new criteria will encourage smaller more focused request areas and continue to put an emphasis on the municipality's ability to provide service to the area. The municipality must also demonstrate a track record of working with the County to achieve county-wide comprehensive goals as it relates to affordable housing, walkability, transit use, vulnerable communities, storm water and green infrastructure. Finally, requests for ETJ expansion should occur where joint planning has taken place between the county and the municipality, and in areas that are prime for investment.

Also reflected in PLANWake is the County's continued support for our water supply watershed policies. Wake County has a long history of working with the State of North Carolina and municipal partners to protect and preserve its usable water supply. One of the key components of the County's water supply policies are specific development regulations that are applied to its drinking water supply watersheds. It was intentional that these policies be maintained and recognized throughout development of the plan.

As the plan gets implemented, it's progress and success will be tracked over time through a strategic set of performance metrics. These metrics will be reported to the community and decision-makers on an annual basis for the purpose of celebrating achievements and identifying challenges to achieving desired outcomes. The metrics provided in PLANWake are a starting point for generating more formal targets. The performance metrics define the directional aspiration based on the vision outcomes. Further benchmarking, target setting and sub-metrics for performance metrics will be developed as part of PLANWake implementation.

In the year(s) following adoption of PLANWake, staff will focus on several critical actions as identified in the plan.

1. Develop the tools and strategies to implement the land use policies of PLANWake. This will require updating certain development regulations within the Wake County Unified Development Ordinance in partnership with the development community.
2. Work in partnership with municipalities and utility providers to plan and encourage growth in the municipal urban services areas and ETJ. Alternatively, discourage or limit development in the County's jurisdiction that does not meet the objectives of this plan.
3. Prioritize the protection of open space and rural land by working with preservation groups and other partners. This could include tools like Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts and use of conservation subdivisions in rural areas.
4. Prioritize and prepare small area plans that focus on current conditions and issues that provides more localized guidance for land use decision-making. The area plans currently in the Land Use Plan will remain in effect and continue to provide detailed policy direction. Over time, these area plans will be replaced through new public engagement processes and updated plans.
5. Develop a formal system for tracking and reporting performance metrics of PLANWake. This includes establishing benchmarks, developing a process and template for annual reports, and consideration of a tracking dashboard.

This past November, staff presented a final draft of the plan at a Board work session. Since that time staff has worked to gather final input from each municipality. Much of the feedback received was helpful in fine tuning the geographic boundaries between the County's Rural designation and the town's Community areas. The goal here was to make our plan consistent with their comprehensive plans for growth and municipal services. However, there was some interest to extend municipal services into our water supply watersheds. Instead, staff is advising to maintain our current water supply watershed protection policies that prohibit municipal expansion into the watershed.

Additionally, several municipalities expressed an interest in PLANWake's revised evaluation criteria for ETJ expansion. Given the new criteria's emphasis on smaller, more focused ETJ requests, there is an expectation that future requests will be less challenging and more routine.

The Homebuilders Association of Raleigh-Wake County also provided feedback on the plan. Understandably, they want to make sure the plan preserves the varying housing options across Wake County, which it does. But they also expressed concern over new development regulations in the County's jurisdiction that may decrease the number of lots per development, while increasing the cost from new requirements like offsite road improvements and open space set-asides. As a reminder, PLANWake is a high-level policy document and does not initiate any new development requirements upon adoption. After adopting PLANWake, staff will commence a collaborative process with the development community to establish the tools and strategies to implement the land use policies of PLANWake. This will require updating certain development regulations within the Wake County Unified Development Ordinance.

All feedback submitted by the municipalities, the Homebuilders Association, and others is attached here, including staff's detailed written response.

PLANWake represents a long-term vision for the future. It is meant to guide policy decisions for Wake County over the next ten years. The Wake County community will likely undergo growth and change throughout this time period. In order for the plan to remain a relevant, living document, it will be reviewed and updated as new conditions arise.

### **Planning Staff Recommendation**

The planning staff recommends approval of the Wake County Comprehensive Plan (PLANWake) as presented.

### **Planning Board Recommendation**

The Planning Board, at their March 3, 2021 meeting, recommended by a vote of 8 to 1, that the Board of Commissioners approve the Wake County Comprehensive Plan (PLANWake) as presented and advances the public health, safety, and welfare.

### **Attachments:**

1. Presentation
2. Wake County Comprehensive Plan – PLANWake
3. Reflect on Wake Report

4. Reflect on Wake Appendix
5. Stakeholder Input/County Response
6. Summary of PLANWake Map Changes
7. Resolution