

CHARTING A PATH TO 2030 AND BEYOND

REPORT OF THE WESTLAKE HALES FORD PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Prepared for the

FRANKLIN COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

and

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Rocky Mount, Virginia

March 2016

March 8, 2016

Franklin County Planning Commission
Franklin County Board of Supervisors

For the past 24 months, it has been our duty and our pleasure to serve as members of the Westlake Hales Ford Planning Advisory Committee. We've met monthly, had extensive discussions, considered many options, heard from our neighbors and other stakeholders. This report summarizes the results of our efforts. The findings and recommendations contained herein now enjoy widespread support within our community.

It is our hope that this report will guide the official planning process for Westlake Hales Ford and will be incorporated into the Franklin County Comprehensive Plan. Having a sound plan in place not only is valuable to county government efforts, it also is of great value for private sector efforts. We view this report as an enabler. Already there are five active organized public-private efforts underway in our community in furtherance of recommendations contained in this report:

- The Smith Mountain Lake Center, Inc.
- Parks and recreation
- Western Virginia Water Authority sewerage service
- Coordinated actions of the Booker T Washington National Monument, the SML Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the Franklin County Economic Development Dept.
- Signage working group

To a significant degree, the future of Westlake and the well-being of Franklin County are intertwined. Clearly, what is good for Westlake Hales Ford is also good for Franklin County.

County personnel from several departments have been helpful to our efforts and are participating with the ongoing actions cited above. Most especially helpful has been the staff of the Department of Planning and Community Development. This has been a collaborative effort. We express our appreciation to Franklin County for giving us the opportunity to contribute to the future of our community.

Kelvin Bowles

Wayne Burris

Ginny Moorman Gotlieb

Randy Hodges

Adam Lynch

Mary Lou McDonald

Bruce Shelton

Lorie Smith

Carla Whitfield

Ron Willard II

WESTLAKE – HALES FORD PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Adam Lynch – Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce and Real Estate

Bruce Shelton – Businessman

Carla Whitfield – Superintendent, Booker T. Washington National Monument

Ginny Moorman Gotlieb – Land Owner

Kelvin Bowles – Citizen

Lorie Smith – Citizen

Mary Lou McDonald – Real Estate

Randy Hodges – Contractor and Land Owner

Ron Willard II – Developer and Businessman

Wayne Burris – Real Estate and Land Owner

Support:

Neil Holthouser, Lisa Cooper, and Steve Sandy (County Planning Staff)

Jim Colby (Planning Commissioner)

Bob Camicia (Supervisor)

BACKGROUND

Introduction – How This Report Was Prepared

In January, 2014, County Supervisor Bob Camicia established an advisory committee to review the Westlake Hales Ford Area (WHFA) and to make recommendations for its future. This report is the culmination of their two years of monthly meetings and discussions, consultations with subject-matter professionals, close dialogue with the business community, numerous discussions with individuals and small groups, and three public meetings (one at the beginning, one at the middle, and one at the end). The process was designed to result in widely-supported expression of support for the future of WHFA. That result was achieved and this report can be accepted by the County with confidence that it has widespread support. This report truly is the community's story. To summarize, the process flowed as follows:

- Establish committee
- Identify scope of the plan and initial key concerns
- Conduct public meeting to advise community residents and stakeholders of effort and invite input
- Series of meetings with affected county department heads and others with relevant expertise or jurisdiction
- Clarification of concerns and needs
- Identification of goals
- Development of preliminary planning recommendations
- Conduct second public meeting with media preview

- Distillation of goals into themes for the plan
- Refine recommendations
- Meet with Chamber of Commerce and others
- Conduct third public meeting
- Complete report
- Presentations to the Franklin County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors

The recommendations contained in this report are intended to expand choices and opportunities for all current and prospective residents, land owners, and users of the Westlake/Hales Ford corridor and surrounding area. The advisory committee determined to use a 15-year planning time frame; therefore the report focuses on future changes from the present to 2030 and beyond. It is not an implementation plan, but rather a document that can assist in the development of a Community Plan that can guide future growth and development in the area as changes are proposed by developers and other interests (groups and individuals). It will help avoid the problems that arose in the 1998 – 2008 period when developers proposed ideas that were unacceptable by the community. Adoption of the recommendations in this report will provide a framework for maintaining and enhancing property values in the WHFA.

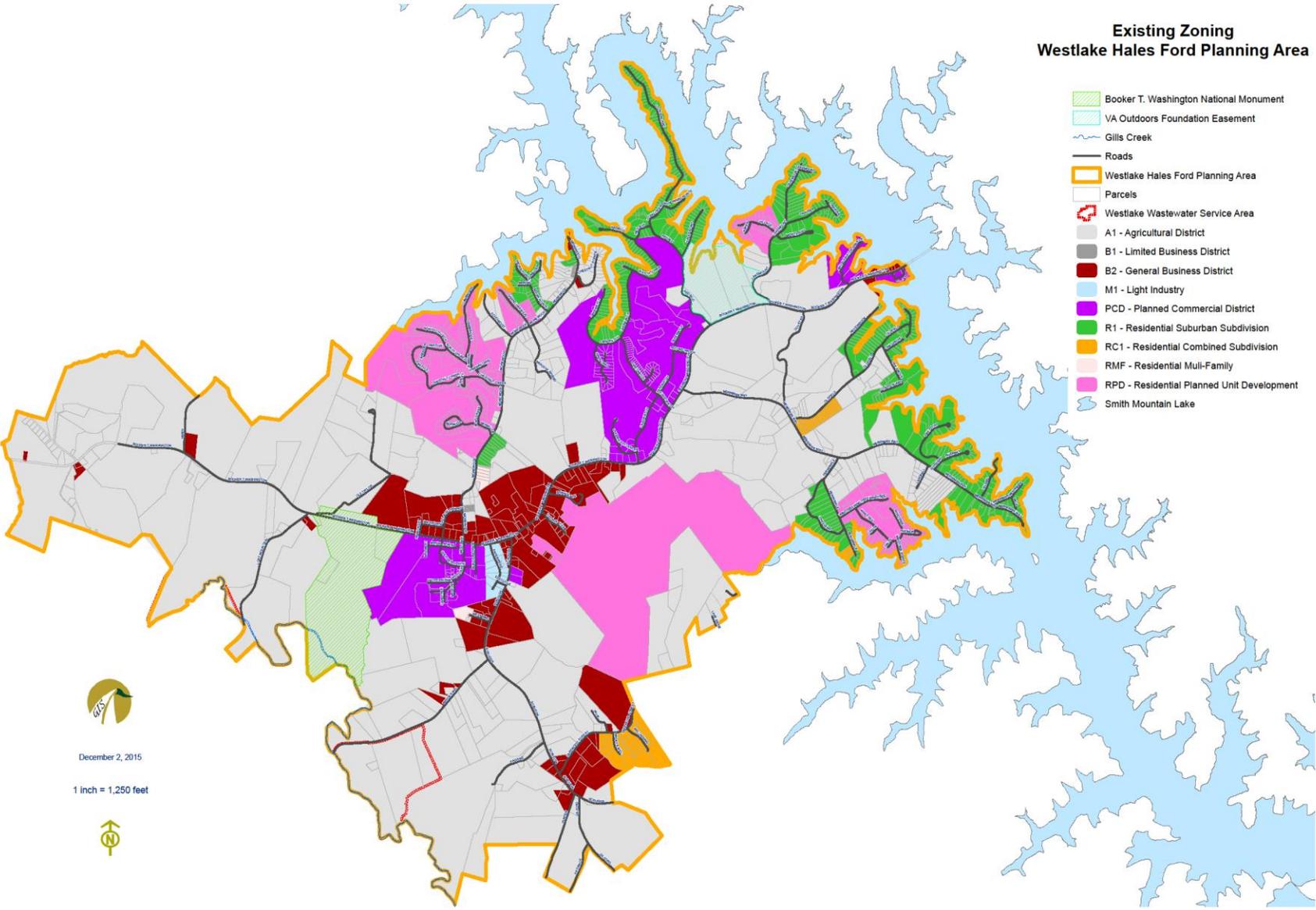
The Westlake Hales Ford Planning Area

The immediate catalyst for this effort is the Franklin County Comprehensive Plan (Plan). The Plan calls for areas identified as towns and villages to be subject of more detailed planning to be subsequently incorporated into the Plan. Westlake is identified as an unincorporated town and Hales Ford is identified as a village. Due to their close proximity and interconnections, it was determined to combine those into a single Westlake Hales Ford planning effort. The Westlake Hales Ford Planning Area extends from Harmony School Road to the county boundary at the Halesford Bridge and encompasses all developments on the Merriman and Moorman arms to the lake and the Scruggs arm to beyond the Gilford Road intersection.

The planning area boundary essentially coincides with the Western Virginia Water Authority Westlake Study Area of wastewater boundary established by the Franklin County Board of Supervisors. The principal road traversing the planning area is Booker T. Washington Highway (VA 122). The Plan designated the Westlake area as one of four towns for planning purposes. As noted on page 12-2 of the Plan, “Towns are intended to be the primary focus for commercial services and social activity. Business services include retail shopping opportunities, general business, industry, offices, and government services. These towns serve the daily needs of the population living within a 5-10 mile radius.” The Plan also recognized Hales Ford as one of seven villages in the future land use chapter. As described in the plan (page 12-6), “A village is the primary focus for local services, social activities, and community life as well as providing opportunities for employment.” Hales Ford is a primary visible access to the lake and houses primarily boater-related services. The Committee determined to combine these areas into one due to their proximity and interactions.

**Existing Zoning
Westlake Hales Ford Planning Area**

-  Booker T. Washington National Monument
-  VA Outdoors Foundation Easement
-  Gills Creek
-  Roads
-  Westlake Hales Ford Planning Area
-  Parcels
-  Westlake Wastewater Service Area
-  A1 - Agricultural District
-  B1 - Limited Business District
-  B2 - General Business District
-  M1 - Light Industry
-  PCD - Planned Commercial District
-  R1 - Residential Suburban Subdivision
-  RC1 - Residential Combined Subdivision
-  RMF - Residential Multi-Family
-  RPD - Residential Planned Unit Development
-  Smith Mountain Lake



December 2, 2015

1 inch = 1,250 feet



Farmland to Suburb – Transformation of Westlake

The WHFA is a youthful area. Most structures were built in the last 25 years. In 1988 when zoning was first put into place by the County Supervisors, the land area was used almost exclusively for smaller farms. Westlake did not yet exist. But the lake proved to be a strong attractant, enticing many to choose to make the area home and attracting many others to visit for tourism and marine recreation. The Booker T. Washington National Monument, created by Congress in 1956 and located within the planning area, has also been an attraction. Businesses and services followed to serve the new residents and visitors. In the space of less than 25 years, the WHFA was dramatically transformed from an agriculture area to an area more resembling a typical suburb.

Activities, too, resemble those to be found in a suburban setting. The following are some of the activities occurring in this planning area on a normal day. People are in the WHFA for one or more of these activities.

- Reside – live in the area
- Work - employment
- Fitness and Recreation – includes the Westlake Country Club, YMCA, water sports, and boating
- Shopping – wide range of specialty stores, retail, building supplies, and grocery
- Services – includes medical, repair, marine, dining, banking, movie theater, etc., to name a few
- Learning and Information – Westlake branch library and Booker T. Washington National Monument
- Worship -- churches
- Public Safety – police, fire and EMS
- Pass-through – driving through to a destination outside the planning area

These activities are also the major traffic generators. This report contains suggestions and recommendations for how these activities can take place in the future effectively, efficiently, safely, and with abundant choices. However, the outmoded zoning ordinance does not offer the protection that land and business owners now seek; and may actually deter future development due to the present risks.

Current Planning Policies and Zoning Provisions for Westlake

Current planning policies for Westlake contained in the Franklin County Comprehensive Plan adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 2007 are summarized as follows:

1. Encourage infill development

2. Encourage interconnected streets that are bicycle and pedestrian friendly
3. Encourage public sewer and alternative treatments systems rather than individual septic systems
4. Prepare and adopt town plan that includes architectural and site development guidelines
5. Preserve open space and viewsheds and rural character
6. Encourage mixed-use development with variety of housing types
7. Provide broad range of housing and services to citizens and visitors
8. Enhance entries to Westlake through guidelines for landscaping, setback, and coordination

Site development requirements specific to the Westlake Village Center Overlay District located in the Franklin County zoning ordinance include:

- Required landscape areas
- Minimum building setback requirements
- Minimum spacing requirements for street entrances
- Parking regulations
- Required landscaping and buffering
- Signs regulations
- Outdoor storage, mechanical/electrical equipment and solid waste disposal
- Curb and gutter
- Sidewalks
- Utilities

The Westlake Village Center Overlay district recognizes that the area will serve as a focal point for cultural and commercial activity of the Smith Mountain Lake area of the county. The village center overlay district promotes a development pattern that brings a sense of community to the surrounding rural area with an emphasis on facilitating the creation of a convenient, attractive and harmonious community center that provides essential goods and services to rural residents and may also include higher density housing and office and light industrial employment centers.

The site development requirements are intended to:

1. Create a sense of place.
2. Create a unified architectural character where new development is harmonious, well-coordinated and compatible with the historical architecture of the area.
3. Create convenient, safe and comfortable pedestrian linkage between commercial and residential areas and between commercial sites.
4. Create a consistent approach to location, design and landscaping of parking areas for commercial use.
5. Create visual buffers between historic properties and commercial uses.
6. Create an approach to signs that reduces clutter.

7. Create lighting that does not pollute the night sky and does not impact adjacent uses, particularly historic sites.
8. Create new development that protects scenic views.

The advisory committee and citizens of the WHFA still value these policies and requirements for the area. The committee has identified some planning concerns and challenges facing the WHFA as well as recommended strategies to enhance or improve these policies and regulations in the following sections of this report.

PLANNING CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

The community has identified a set of concerns and challenges that are widely shared by residents and stakeholders of the WHFA. These are summarized below.

How to maintain and grow property values and remain competitive as a desirable place to work and live

- Desirability of area is dependent on comparison with alternative communities
- Applicable features and factors
- Requires care and conservation. Erosion of values occurs with neglect

How to promote the area's competitiveness for business and employment

- The WHFA offers high quality living opportunities in close proximity to many outdoor recreation opportunities in a highly desirable natural environment.
- High quality residential opportunities in the WHFA will complement the County's efforts at the Sink Farm business park.
- Abundant cadre of proficient, highly-accomplished retired professionals to assist with new businesses
- Regional connections can be improved and strengthened.

Land use threats

- Threats occur when property is used in such a manner that adjacent property values are diminished or that otherwise intrude on the owner's use and enjoyment.
- More than 50 percent of the WHFA is currently zoned for agriculture, A-1. According to section 25-177 of the county zoning ordinance, "This district is established for the purpose of facilitating existing and future farming operations, preserving farm and forests lands, conserving water and other natural resources, reducing soil erosion, preventing water pollution, and protecting watersheds and reducing hazards from flood and fire." The district provides for a wide variety of uses which, while suitable in a rural setting, can have harmful impacts on adjacent and vicinity properties in the suburbanized WHFA.
- Vulnerabilities within the WHFA are widespread and a deterrent to current and future developments.

- Local governments are vested with regulatory authorities intended to be used to reduce such negative externalities and thereby stabilize property values.
- Franklin County appears to be using a zoning ordinance that has obsolete provision more suitable to rural areas that existed in the 1980's than to the present suburbanized WHFA.

Need for community center

- Place for public assembly
- House public services such as library, emergency services, etc.

Critical need for safe movement for pedestrians as well as bicyclists and other non-motorized vehicles

- Must begin addressing this need as soon as possible.
- Existing situation is very serious.
- May be difficult to safely add to existing rights of way.
- Network of trails and pathways is possible.

Infrastructure improvements

- Expand utility services. Water and sewer. Fiber optic and other high-speed internet connectivity

Need for better, safer and more efficient roadways

- Maximize roadway connections. Identify potential opportunities and promote whenever possible.
- Seek to avoid foreclosing opportunities. Request understanding and support of developers and other landowners.

Protect, preserve and enjoy heritage resources

- Seek ways to ensure the community maximizes benefits presented by Booker T. Washington National Monument.
- Connect other cultural heritage features of the area and seek synergies

How to foster diversity of housing types and prices

- The WHFA is characterized by large, relatively high-cost single-family detached homes
- Many homeowners move from the area as they age due to inability to provide the required high maintenance. Need for low or no maintenance residences as market place choice to meet this need.
- Would be advantageous to have housing built for those of more modest means who choose to live in the area.

Signage

- Proliferation of low-cost signs tends to detract from civic pride
- Businesses and others emboldened due to operating on shoe-string in many cases

- How to manage is key question
- What standards will the community set for itself?

Better regional linkages, especially within Roanoke and Lynchburg metropolitan areas

- Many existing benefits can be preserved and expanded.

Threats to views

- Views are important natural assets that add quantifiable values to property and enjoyment.
- Need strategy to preserve wherever practical

Retain and support volunteerism and philanthropy

- The WHFA is characterized by high degree of active volunteerism and support of community needs.
- Would like to ensure this is sustained.

THEMES FOR THE FUTURE WHFA PLAN

Based on the concerns and challenges identified for the WHFA by the advisory committee and citizens of this area, the following themes have been identified for inclusion in the future WHFA Plan.

1. Protect Smith Mountain Lake and Maintain High Quality Environmental Conditions.
2. Need a Vibrant and Well Planned Business and Residence to Compete
3. Encourage Civic Engagement
4. Identify Potential Public – Private Partnerships
5. Identify Interconnectivity Needs and Opportunities in the Area
6. Encourage Housing Choices for All Stages of Life
7. Retain and Support Volunteerism and Philanthropy
8. Keep Options Open on Large Tracts of Land and Encourage Master Planned Developments

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

To address the identified concerns and themes, the advisory committee has developed the following list of strategies, activities, objectives and policies to help guide the future of the WHFA.

Future Land Use Map be officially adopted, and appropriate “Suburban-Like” zoning be implemented ASAP

- Must protect area's competitiveness and land values
- Need to implement recommended future land use plan in order to have a tool to guide future suburban-like development
- Insure that large tracks of 50 acres or more require a master plan

Finalize proposed zoning categories

- Focus initial efforts on zoning needed to implement the recommendations of the Westlake Advisory Committee
- Proposed zoning categories have been developed with representative community input
- Apply the new zoning districts, looking at Westlake for now
- Expand Westlake Overlay District with Future Land Use Map

Improve safe transportation and internal circulation

- Work closely with VDOT
- Improve Rt. 122 at dangerous intersections on priority basis
- Four Lane Rt. 122 in sections as funding allows
- Insure that interconnectivity is accomplished whenever possible to have more options for traffic movement other than all exiting onto Rt. 122
- Encourage increased local public transportation options such as taxi, bus and on-water public transportation

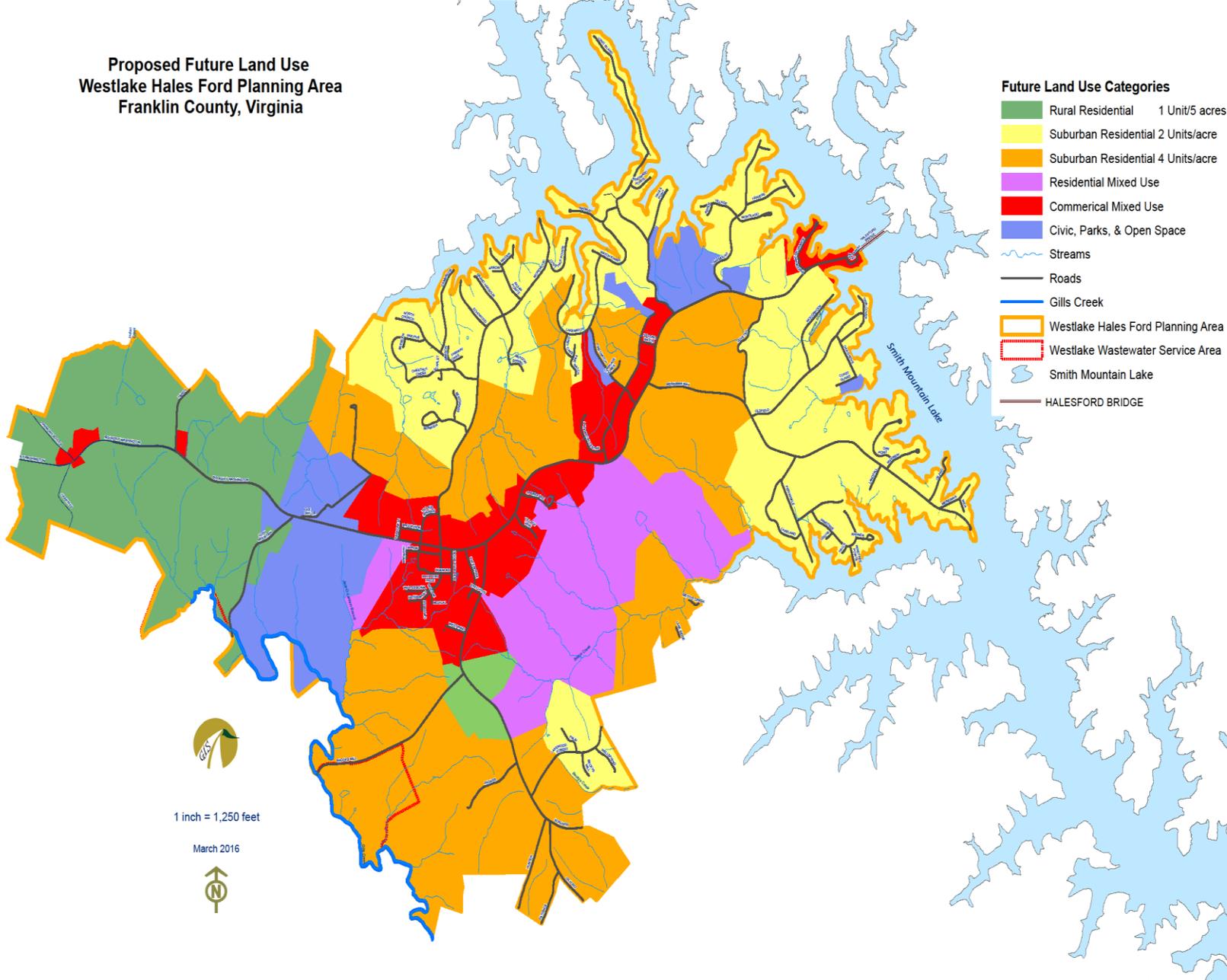
Expand Recreational Opportunities

- Establish a public- private partnership to research, design and implement a system of trails throughout the planning area
- Review existing plans for a park and other recreation opportunities in LakeWatch Plantation and propose what should be developed in the area
- Identify other suitable sites for parklands
- Develop sites for adult oriented sports and games such as pickleball

Work with the Chamber of Commerce and community to have a public-private partnership develop and operate a community center

- Usage focus on the center will be for citizen meetings, group meetings and shows, tourism and education
- Support The Smith Mountain Lake Center, Inc.

**Proposed Future Land Use
Westlake Hales Ford Planning Area
Franklin County, Virginia**



Future Land Use Categories

- Rural Residential 1 Unit/5 acres
- Suburban Residential 2 Units/acre
- Suburban Residential 4 Units/acre
- Residential Mixed Use
- Commercial Mixed Use
- Civic, Parks, & Open Space
- Streams
- Roads
- Gills Creek
- Westlake Hales Ford Planning Area
- Westlake Wastewater Service Area
- Smith Mountain Lake
- HALESFORD BRIDGE


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 March 2016


Develop a comprehensive strategy to jointly protect and market WHFA’s cultural and historic resources along with current arts initiatives, with the Smith Mountain Lake Regional Chamber of Commerce, Booker T. Washington National Monument and County tourism and economic development departments

- Target visitors, retirees and new residents that the County's economic development efforts can bring to our area
- Continue to support and participate in ongoing Bedford-Franklin efforts to establish organized interest in heritage corridor.

Help develop and support a vibrant business and residential community;

- Need to encourage retiree inflow, but also non-retirees for economic development and balance
- Establish a joint Chamber of Commerce and Franklin County Task Force to review and make recommendations on operational interactions that can make a difference in costs, timing and relationships
- Consider establishing a fund in the county economic development department to contribute to reviewed and approved area advertising efforts for future residents and tourists. Model a tourism micro-grant program.

Work with Western Virginia Water Authority to develop;

- A plan to serve the WHFA now and as it grows with sewage services
- A plan to broaden the availability of public water throughout the planning area
- Make the WHFA competitive with other areas’ infrastructure

Develop Housing Policies for Planning Area

- Develop plan to encourage a mixture of housing for younger workers, self-sufficient retirees and older retirees needing different housing
- Ensure an active and proficient medical care, EMS and firefighting service and police capability. Volunteerism should be the primary basis for Public Safety fire units with some full-time EMS units.

Update Westlake signage regulations to apply to the WHFA

- Maintain a non-cluttered area look from highway
- Continue to provide leadership and support to signage working group
- Revise and reduce frontage requirements for large signs
- For larger multiple-retail complexes, allow an extra signage site for short term events.
- Consider banning small “yard signs”
- Discourage signs placed on other’s property without permission through legal penalties.
- Address requirements for placement of electronic signs

NEXT STEPS

It is the vision of the advisory committee that the Franklin County Board of Supervisors and Planning Commission will review and recognize the many hours of effort that the advisory committee and citizens have invested in the development of this report and use this information to prepare the Westlake Hales Ford Community Plan (WHCP) that will guide future planning decisions in the WHFA for many years to come. In addition, the advisory committee envisions that Franklin County will further develop needed amendments to the County's Comprehensive Plan, Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, Parks and Recreation and Tourism plans to assist in the implementation of the new WHCP and the strategies recommended within. The advisory committee envisions that the County will use the adopted WHCP to guide future public infrastructure investments related to public safety, recreation, transportation, tourism and economic development.