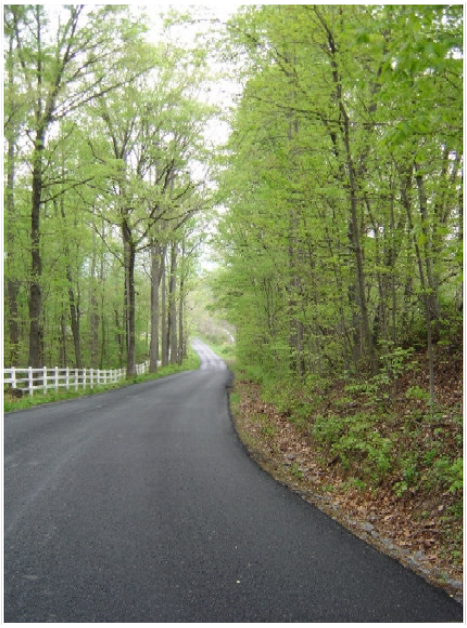
Protecting Albemarle County's Rural Spaces

ALBEMARLE COUNTY, VIRGINIA



A Closer Look at Albemarle's Approach to Managing Growth and Protecting and Preserving Our Rural Heritage

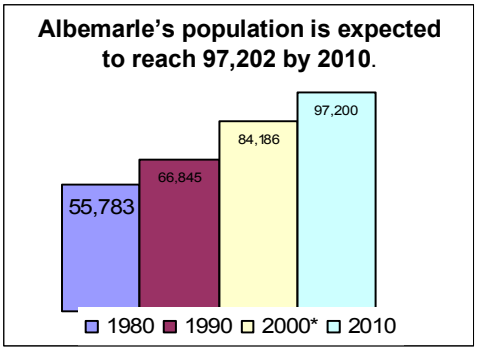
www.albemarle.org

We Face Continued Growth and Development Pressures

Albemarle's growth rate was a steady 1.8%, or 1600 additional residents, annually between 1990 and 2002

Albemarle County is an attractive, desirable place for people to live for many reasons. The county enjoys a strong economy, excellent services, an attractive setting, and convenience to numerous nearby attractions.

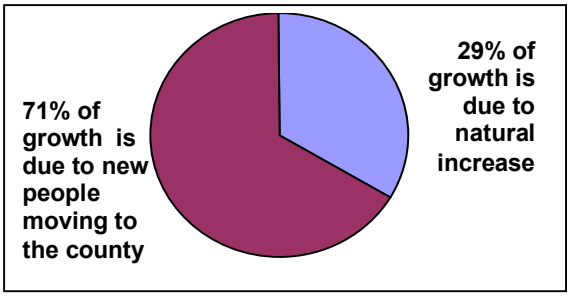
High profile rankings like the region's recent recognition as the *#1 Best Place to Live in the United States* keep our community very visible and in demand as we can see by Albemarle's continued growth rate of approximately 1.8%, or almost 1600 new residents, every year.



New people moving into the county account for almost three-quarters of our growth

A substantial portion of our growth is due to in-migration, or new people moving into the county. Considering current and anticipated market conditions and forecast household growth, a total of 4,825 new housing units are needed in our region (Charlottesville, Albemarle, Greene and Fluvanna) over the next three years to meet this housing demand.

These residents bring new energy and vitality to the county, but also create challenges in housing, traffic congestion and other growth impacts.



With this continuing arrival of new residents, we are striving to preserve and protect the essential character of Albemarle County that makes this such a special place for people to be. In survey after survey, citizens cite the scenic beauty, open spaces, agricultural traditions, and historic and natural resources as the defining elements of the county's appeal and heritage.

Protecting resources and promoting agricultural and forestal uses are major themes of our growth management strategies

Our Comprehensive Plan (Comp Plan) Outlines Specific Growth Management Goals

Over time, the county has developed a very specific and focused approach to growth management that aims to keep development pressure from destroying the rural areas that our residents value so dearly. These growth management strategies are outlined in Albemarle's Comprehensive Plan, which is the county's most important document regarding growth, development and change.

The Comp Plan guides public and private activities related to land use and resources and is the basis for land development regulations and decisions

(rezonings, special use permits), capital improvements (public projects such as schools, parks, libraries), transportation, environmental and historic resource protection initiatives, new county programs and decisions on the distribution of county budget dollars to a multitude of programs and agencies.

The plan outlines a clear vision of high quality urban areas accommodating most of the anticipated growth in the County and rural areas preserved for resource conservation and protection purposes. The specific growth-related goals are as follows:

- ***Promote*** *the efficient utilization of county resources through a combination of designated development/urban areas and rural areas*
- ***Direct*** *growth into the Designated Development/Urban Areas*
- ***Discourage*** *rural residential development other than dwellings related to a bona fide agricultural/forestal use*
- ***Strongly support*** *and effectively implement the County's growth management priorities in the planning and provision of transportation and public facilities and utilities*

The defined urban areas and rural areas have very distinct levels of service and development potential. Public services such as police, fire and rescue protection, public utilities such as water and sewer, and public facilities like roads and sidewalks, are provided at a much higher level in the urban areas.

The Comp Plan guides decisions on land use and development activities in the county

The county is divided into rural areas and urban areas to concentrate growth and protect our rural resources

Public services, facilities and utilities are provided at a higher level in the urban areas where growth is directed

The success of our rural protection efforts depends on our ability to concentrate growth, including new homes and businesses, in our established urban areas where these services, utilities and facilities can serve the largest number of citizens.

About 95% of the county's total land area is in designated rural areas

What We Envision for our Rural Spaces

The rural areas comprise 95% of our land area, or almost 690 square miles.

About 47% of the population lives in the rural areas. Our goals for these areas:

- Preservation of agricultural and forestal lands and activities
- Protection of water supplies
- Conservation of natural, scenic and historic resources

The urban areas are planned to support the county's future growth, with an emphasis on infill development and higher densities

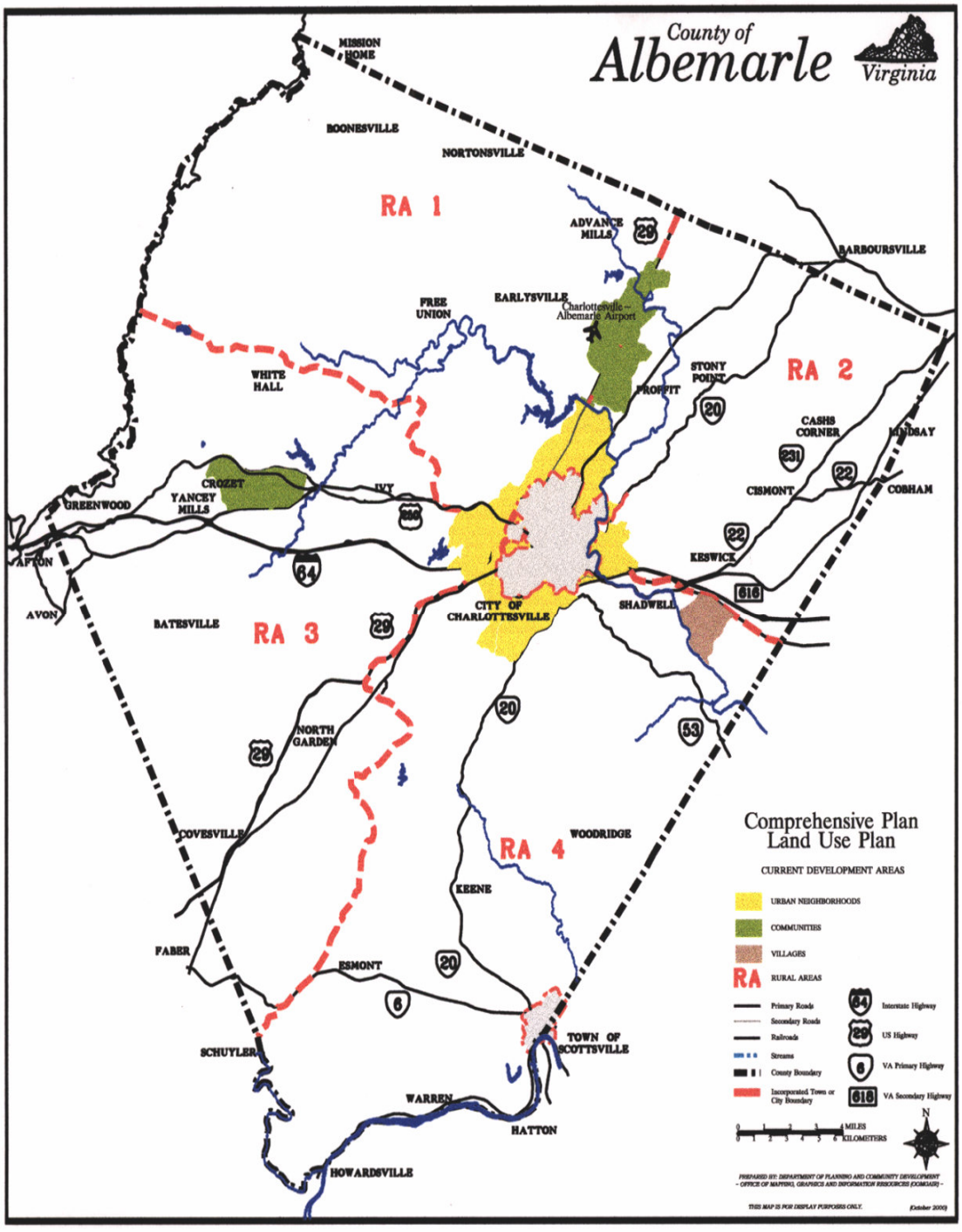
What We Envision for our Urban Places

The urban areas comprise 5% of our land area, or almost 35 square miles.

About 53% of the population lives in the urban areas. Our goals for these five designated development/ urban areas – the urban ring around Charlottesville, the village area of Rivanna, and the communities of Crozet, Piney Mountain and Hollymead— are:

The county's five designated development/ urban areas total about 35 square miles

- Infill rather than sprawl
- New construction that respects its surroundings
- Redevelopment of underutilized spaces
- Full range of jobs, incomes and housing
- Opportunities for self-sufficiency within neighborhoods – residences, employment, shopping, recreation
- Places where people want to congregate, recreate, and enjoy pockets of natural beauty



This map shows the boundaries of the county's five urban areas as they currently exist and the four rural areas indicated as RA 1, RA 2, RA 3 and RA 4.

Yellow indicates the urban area around the City of Charlottesville

Green indicates the communities of Hollymead, Piney Mountain and Crozet

Brown indicates the village of Rivanna

The Comprehensive Plan has a specific chapter dedicated to the protection and preservation of the County's rural spaces. The chapter defines the critical resources and desired uses for the rural areas. Such uses play an important and long-standing role in the environment, heritage, and economy of the County.

Rural areas play a critical role in the County's heritage and economy

The following principles have been defined as the most important components of the Rural Area and should guide planning and future policy decisions:

- **Agriculture** - Protect Albemarle County's agricultural lands as a resource base for its agricultural industries and for related benefits they contribute towards the County's rural character, scenic quality, natural environment, and fiscal health.
- **Forestry resources** - Protect Albemarle County's forests as a resource base for its forestry industries and watershed protection.
- **Land Preservation** – Permanently preserve and protect Albemarle County's rural land as an essential and finite resource through public ownership or through conservation easements.
- **Land Conservation** – Protect Albemarle County's rural land through planned management of open spaces to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect.
- **Water supply resources** - Protect the quality and supply of surface water and groundwater resources.

Protecting the quality and supply of surface water and groundwater resources is a priority

The loss of rural resources to development is irreversible, making good stewardship essential

- **Natural resources** - Preserve and manage the Rural Areas' natural resources in order to protect the environment and conserve resources for future use.
- **Scenic resources** - Preserve the County's rural scenic resources as being essential to the County's character, economic vitality, and quality of life.
- **Historical, archeological and cultural resources** - Protect the Rural Areas' historic, archeological and cultural resources.

The loss of these rural resources to subdivision and residential construction is irreversible. Stewardship of these resources is essential if we are to conserve and efficiently manage our natural and cultural resources.

Citizens have overwhelmingly supported this growth management approach and continually rank rural area and resource protection in the very top tier of county priorities. In our most recent survey, 70% of Citizens favor efforts to concentrate growth in designated areas while restricting development in rural areas. The numbers below reflect the percentage of citizens who think these are important issues for the County:

▲ Protecting Water Quality	. . . 99%
▲ Preserving Natural Resources and Open Space	. . . 95%
▲ Preserving Farmland & Forest	. . . 93%
▲ More Parks/Recreational Space	. . . 91%

Citizens continue to strongly support rural area preservation in surveys from the last 20 years

Programs like voluntary ag-forestal districts and acquisition of conservation easements provide some protection to rural areas

Rural protection and quality urban places are critical priorities in Albemarle's Strategic Plan

The Rural Areas of the County need our careful attention if we are to meet the goals outlined in the County's Comprehensive Plan, maintaining our:

▲ Intact agricultural and forestal lands

▲ Clean, bountiful community water supply

▲ Diverse, healthy plant and animal communities and natural areas

▲ Rich historic, cultural, and scenic resources

The County over time has made significant efforts to protect rural areas and maintain these benefits:

- Use-value taxation program that reduces tax rates for lands in agricultural, forestall, horticultural and open space uses
- Voluntary agricultural and forestal districts program that helped prevent intensification of use on nearly 65,000 acres of land
- ACE program to help ensure that owners can afford to keep their land while benefiting the community through long-term protection of agricultural, forestal and open space lands

In spite of these efforts, continued fragmentation of Rural Areas land hurts critical community resources. Development in the Rural Areas:

▲ *reduces forest cover*

▲ *endangers community water supply*

▲ *threatens the diversity of indigenous plant and animal communities*

▲ *compromises cultural and historic resources*

The County is considering additional strategies to keep our rural areas healthy and protected. For more information on rural area initiatives, please visit the County website at **www.albemarle.org** or contact the Community Development Department at (434)296-5832.