

## **1. Abstract of Program**

*Moving Forward...The Comprehensive Plan for Chesterfield County* is the county's new long-term growth and development guide. The plan functions as the county's comprehensive policy manual on a variety of topics including: economic development, housing, revitalization, historical and cultural resources, environment, land use, special area plans, water and wastewater, transportation, and public facilities; and explores the relationships between these varied, but connected themes. The plan explores these topics through a chapter structure outlining current issues and providing guidelines to address them in an easily understood, reader-friendly format. A critical component of this plan for the county is the Implementation chapter that identifies projects such as regulatory, policy and plan amendments, strategies and studies that will be carried out to bring life to the plan's recommendations. These projects are divided into Phase I and Phase II steps – with Phase I projects having an identified completion schedule adopted within the plan that provides accountability. The process used to develop the plan is the result of successful close and interactive collaboration between county staff, citizens/stakeholders, and elected/appointed officials. It will be used to guide nearly all future county programs, policies and regulations concerning growth and development.

## **2. Need for Program**

*Moving Forward...The Comprehensive Plan for Chesterfield County* is the first countywide comprehensive plan for Chesterfield since 1977. Years of small area planning had left the county's comprehensive plan in a fragmented and outdated state lacking a unifying vision for guiding how the county should grow and develop. In addition, the national recession had slowed growth in the county to unprecedented levels that provided an opportunity for citizens, staff and officials to focus on what the effects of past rapid growth have had on the county and to identify better growth management tools for directing future growth.

Under Virginia State law, every jurisdiction is required to 1) have a comprehensive plan; and 2) review the comprehensive plan every five years. However, as previously stated, the county already had a comprehensive plan in place, so the adoption of this new project was visionary and displays the commitment by the county's elected and appointed officials to provide a quality plan that will meet the needs of the future.

### **3. Description of Program**

*Moving Forward...The Comprehensive Plan for Chesterfield County* is the county's new guide for addressing growth and development decisions. Therefore the plan meets the following program categories:

- **Community/Economic Development**: the Plan guides growth and development, seeking to achieve and maintain a high quality of life for residents and businesses.
- **Information Technology**: the development of the Plan used innovative web-based stakeholder input during each chapter's creation. The Plan's land use recommendations were created in GIS and have been deployed on the county's new CitizenGIS initiative, providing detailed information access to the general public.
- **Parks & Recreation**: the Plan's *Public Facilities Plan* chapter includes the county's first linear park and trails framework.
- **Transportation**: the Plan ties land use and transportation planning efforts together to promote an efficient, safe and cost effective system that can support the planned land uses put forward in the Plan.
- **Environmental**: the Plan includes an entire chapter dedicated to the environment, an analysis of existing conditions and guidelines for future development, including incorporation of Chesapeake Bay Act requirements and VA Stormwater Management permitting.

The plan's objectives are:

- Guide and accomplish a coordinated, adjusted and harmonious development pattern
- Promote the health, safety, convenience and general welfare of the county's inhabitants
- Show the long-range recommendations for the general development of the county
- Designate areas for various types of public and private development and use
- Designate a system of community service facilities needed to serve the current and future population
- Recognize and build from the county's current suburban development pattern
- Coordinate infrastructure needs with anticipated growth and development
- Protect and enhance a high quality of life through attractive, orderly, fiscally-responsible, well-planned and well-designed developments
- Be easy to read and understood by citizens, staff and officials

The plan was developed between 2009 and 2012 and is the culmination of the work of several groups, including county citizens, business representatives, property developers, county and state staff, private consultants and county elected and appointed officials. The process began in spring of 2009 when the county's Board of Supervisors signed a contract with a consultant group to develop a new countywide comprehensive plan for the county. This consultant group, supported by county staff, proceeded to develop the new plan. A steering committee was formed that consisted of 34 members from neighborhoods, developers, attorneys, business representatives, churches, non-profits and other organizations. This steering committee was given information on current issues facing the county and tasked with developing and reviewing recommendations to address these concerns. In addition to the steering committee, staff met with over 100 citizen/neighborhood/business groups during the development of the plan. The consultant/staff team used this extensive public input to develop the vision and major concepts of the initial draft document.

However in early 2011, as the initial draft plan was completed and forwarded to the county's Planning Commission and out in the general public, many concepts put forward by the plan became controversial. The Planning Commission, staff and the consultant attempted to work through the issues contained within these controversies, and recommended numerous changes, but ultimately they proved too complex. Despite many reservations, the Planning Commission recommended to the Board of Supervisors that the now-revised initial plan be approved. The Board of Supervisors held additional public meetings in late 2011 and early 2012 in response to the many issues being identified in the plan. Mounting concerns from citizens, businesses and the development community prompted the Board to remand the plan back to the Planning Commission, and directed staff and the Planning Commission to undertake a complete rewrite of the plan within eight months. The Board also provided key information as to what was expected in the new plan – and in doing so eliminated many of the more controversial aspects that had plagued the previous version.

County staff and the Planning Commission immediately set to work on the new plan using the Board's direction as guiding principles. Much of the information gathered as part of the previous plan process was used to reformulate strategies and concepts in a manner that was tailored specifically to the county. Much was learned through the original process of developing the consultant-driven plan – and this knowledge allowed staff and the Planning Commission to redraft a new countywide plan in the short timeframe allowed by the Board. A new process was quickly implemented whereby staff would draft initial plan chapters for review by the Planning Commission for 'red flags'. These initial chapters were then posted on the county's website for review and comment by the general public through web-based comment submittal and email notification. Public comments were analyzed and carefully considered by staff for inclusion into each chapter. Through this process, staff received nearly 300 comments from the public and addressed 78 percent of these concerns in the plan. The Planning Commission reviewed the revised plan chapters along with the public comments and made additional changes as they thought

necessary with staff's advice. The end result of this process was a new plan document that was created through the close cooperation of citizens/stakeholders, the Planning Commission and staff. This new plan was then forwarded – nearly controversy-free – to the Board of Supervisors with a recommendation of approval. The Board was able to quickly review and accept this document by October 2012 as nearly all issues had been resolved through the creation process.

*Moving Forward...The Comprehensive Plan for Chesterfield County* now serves citizens, businesses, developers, staff and officials as a land development guide. It is the end result of the work of county citizens, staff, consultants, stakeholders, and local officials. It has been reviewed and commented on by several state agencies such as the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Virginia Department of Transportation. The success of the plan lies in the broad support from many diverse groups across the county. One of its most important chapters is Implementation, which identifies steps for immediate (Phase I) and long-term (Phase II) changes to existing regulations and policies that will help ensure the county, through its new plan, continues to offer the highest quality of life to its inhabitants.

## **5. Use of Technology**

*Moving Forward...The Comprehensive Plan for Chesterfield County* utilized technology in a variety of ways during and after its development.

- **Internet:** extensively used to communicate and request input from citizens and other community stakeholders in commenting on the new plan chapters. Specifically, a dedicated web page was crafted for reviewers to post comments on plan chapters up for review – these comments were submitted through a web-based form that was accessed by staff. Stakeholders were notified of

these comment opportunities, as well as other public input opportunities such as public hearings, through an email notification list that was sent out when the chapters were posted to the website.

Upon its adoption, a new plan web page was created that provides links to each chapter of the plan as well as an interactive mapping system that allows users to zoom in and out of different areas and turn on different data layers to view plan recommendations in a mapping format known as CitizenGIS.

- **Geographic Information System (GIS):** the new plan's transportation and land use recommendations are based upon GIS analysis capabilities. The new plan uses geodatabases for land use, special area notes and thoroughfare plan recommendations. This capability will also allow for easier updates to the plan in the future. GIS extensions were used to analyze and provide recommendations for the future provision of public facilities and services. GIS was also used to create a CitizenGIS system that can be accessed by the general public via the internet that allows users to view plan recommendations for any area of the county they are interested in (see internet above). GIS was also used to create databases and layers for conserved lands, housing types and current and future population projections by area.

## **6. The Cost of the Program**

Aside from the consultant contract for \$869,920, the overwhelming majority of the cost to develop the new plan consisted of staff salaries. However, the plan creation was a complicated process. The initial (non-adopted) plan was completed by a staff/consultant team over 21 months consuming nearly 30,000 hours of staff-time (across all county departments). The final adopted plan did not utilize consultants and was accomplished entirely in-house with existing staff resources (though reassignments were made) over

an eight month period consuming an additional 7,000 hours of staff-time. Final plan printing costs amounted to \$16,000 (full color, bound, 220 pages).

Post-plan implementation projects were designed to use existing staff.

## **7. The Results/Success of the Program**

*Moving Forward...The Comprehensive Plan for Chesterfield County* will provide guidance to land use and growth decisions for many years to come. The new plan has brought forward much-needed updates to the county's Land Use Plan, Thoroughfare Plan and Public Facilities Plan. These documents are already being extensively utilized by departments across the county in providing recommendations on land development activities. Of even greater importance, the county's elected and appointed leaders, including the Planning Commission, School Board and Board of Supervisors, are using the plan to transform the way growth and development decisions are made.

The document has been praised by citizens, staff and officials as being easy to read and understand, while fully exploring the many growth and development issues facing the county in the present and future. Phase I projects identified in the Implementation chapter of the new plan are already underway as outlined in the plan. The new plan will bring many changes to existing policies and regulations throughout the county that will make it easier for businesses and developers to operate within Chesterfield. The plan itself is a growth management tool that will assist in directing growth into infill and revitalization areas where extensive public infrastructure and services already exist, providing capital and operating savings to the county budget. The county's Capital Improvement Program is already referencing the plan in identifying new public facilities to serve development. Longer term, the plan recognizes its own need to be flexible, responding and adapting to ever changing market demands. It is repeatedly stated within the plan that the document should be updated every five years to stay current

with changing circumstances internal and external to the county. The plan also seeks to align other county department master and strategic plans, policies and processes to its unifying vision.