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SUMMARY

of the

WILMINGTON-
NEW HANOVER
LAND USE PLAN
1981 UPDATE

ADOPTED BY

WILMINGTON CITY COUNCIL (APRIL 13, 1982)
NEW HANOVER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS (MARCH 22, 1982)

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PLAN SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Need For Planning

The Wilmington-New Hanover planning area has grown rapidly during the last twenty years. Expanded economic development has produced more industries, more shopping facilities and more jobs. It has also attracted large numbers of new residents and curbed the flow of young people out of the County in search of jobs.

As the area becomes more densely settled, however, new problems must be faced, including: land use conflicts as different uses are forced closer together; large public expenditures for the services and facilities required by dense development; and environmental degradation.

The intent of a land use plan is to encourage and anticipate economic growth, while insuring that this growth does not damage the quality of life for area residents nor unreasonably increase their tax burdens. The North Carolina General Assembly recognized these issues when it passed the Coastal Area Management Act of 1974, which requires coastal local governments to develop land use plans and update them every five years.

DATE DUE

The first Wil[illegible] adopted in 1976; this 1981 updated doc[illegible] policies to reflect current conditions in [illegible]

B. Functions of [illegible]

The land use [illegible] local governing bodies and the general p[illegible] below.

1. **Source of** [illegible] provide information on a number [illegible] population, environmental features, h[illegible]

2. **Guidance** [illegible] body adopts a plan, it then has a blue[illegible] ordinances, and zoning and subdivisior[illegible]

3. **Preview of** [illegible] the public in general, and developers [illegible] he probable outcome of governmer[illegible] land use plan increases the predictabil[illegible] actions.

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4. **Public Participation in Managing Growth**—Public meetings and hearings held during the plan's preparation help to insure that the plan expresses the will of the area's citizens.

II. INGREDIENTS OF THE PLAN

Several major steps were involved in the preparation of the Wilmington-New Hanover Land Use Plan. First, a number of technical studies were made on the past and present conditions in the planning area. From these initial studies, forecasts for the future growth and development of the area were estimated. Finally, policies were devised to address present and future needs.

A. Technical Studies

A number of basic studies are required before sound policy decisions can be made. The first six of these "Technical Reports" were contained in the 1976 Land Use Plan; they are:

1. An Analysis of Human and Economic Resources
2. Existing Land Use Analysis, 1975
3. Environmental Analysis
4. Estimates of Future Land Needs
5. Analysis of Growth Alternatives

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The remaining studies were conducted during the 1981 update. These latter Reports are published separately.

7. Population and Economic Growth and Future Land Use Needs 1980-1990
8. Analysis of Existing Land Use, 1980
9. Classification of Soils for Septic Tank Suitability
10. Land Planning Map System and User's Guide

In addition, a summary document entitled Growth Issues and Future Alternatives was prepared to document the public participation program for the plan, to identify and discuss growth issues, and to present several growth alternatives for the Planning Area. Collectively, these studies summarize past and present conditions, while providing the essential yardsticks for estimating future conditions. Copies of all of these studies are on file at both the Wilmington and New Hanover County Planning Departments.

B. Highlights of the Technical Studies

1. **Population**—In 1980 there were 103,471 residents in the County, up from 82,996 in 1970. The total County population should reach 129,300 by 1990. The City of Wilmington lost over 2,000 residents during the 1970's, falling to 44,000 in 1980 from 46,169 a decade earlier. This decline should reverse during the 1980's.

2. **Economy**—Between 1968 and 1978, New Hanover County increased its work force from 34,390 to 48,190, a growth of some 13,800 jobs. By 1990 total employment should exceed 60,000 workers. The local trend toward a service-oriented economy is reflected in the latest statistics showing that fewer than one in four workers in the County are employed in manufacturing.

3. **Land Use Analysis**—During the latter half of the 1970's, development in the Wilmington urbanizing area continued to occur in a fanlike pattern extending from the urban core toward the sounds and ocean; roughly 60% of all subdivision lots platted were located in a three-mile wide band around the City.

4. **Housing Trends**—Owing largely to changes in socio-economic conditions during the 1970's, local demand for owner-occupied multi-family housing is expected to escalate during the 1980's, with associated declines in new rental housing. The total housing stock of the County should increase from roughly 43,000 to 56,000 units during the 1980's (including beach communities).

5. **Ground Water**—The majority of families and a significant number of industries in the County are presently dependent upon ground water. In addition, the most recent plans for a County water system recommend the use of ground water as the supply source. Citizen interest in protecting this resource from declines in quality and quantity was highly evident during early discussions of the plan.

6. **Soils Suitability for Septic Tanks**—In 1980 there were roughly 16,000 acres of undeveloped land in the County with soils "suitable" for septic tank use (i.e., little or no modification necessary). Only about one-fourth of these lands, however, lie within the rapidly urbanizing three-mile-belt around the City of Wilmington.

C. Policies for Growth and Development

The Technical Reports described above were all geared to gathering and summarizing information related to the growth of the planning area. Building upon this information, a series of policies were prepared for consideration by the Wilmington City Council and the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners.

The policies which are presented on this document are the results of this process; they have been adopted by both the City of Wilmington and New Hanover County. As officially adopted policies, they will serve as the basis for future decisions on capital improvements, ordinances, rezoning requests, special use permits, subdivision approvals and other similar matters.

D. Land Classification Map

Some of the policies make reference to specially mapped areas; the land classification map on the reverse side of this document illustrates these areas. The five broad land classification categories (Developed, Transition, Community, Rural and Conservation) were adapted from the Coastal Area Management Act's land use planning guidelines. By assigning the land classes to specific parts of the County, the map shows visually where and at what density growth should occur, and where significant natural resources are to be conserved. The classes are as follows:

2. **Transition** provides for future intensive urban development within the ensuing ten years on lands that are most suitable and that will be scheduled for provision of necessary public utilities and services.
3. **Community** provides for "crossroads" type land development to help meet housing, shopping, employment and public service needs within the rural areas of the County.
4. **Conservation** provides for effective long-term management of significant limited or irreplaceable areas. Generally, all marshes and adjacent lands within the 100-year floodplain, and the County's critical aquifer recharge area have been classified as "Conservation". Exceptions to the 100-year floodplain criterion are limited to water-dependent uses (i.e., uses that cannot function elsewhere), shared industrial access corridors, and *exceptionally* designed development proposals on relatively high ground where adverse impacts to the estuarine system can be shown to be negligible, if any.
5. **Rural**—The purpose of the Rural class is to provide for agriculture, forest management, mineral extraction and other low intensity uses. Two sub-classifications of this category are established.

    1. **Rural-Services** provides for low density rural residential land use with the provision of public water and sewer. This subclassification is made to preserve and protect a unique or sensitive environment where natural, historical, aesthetic, scenic, wildlife and recreational resources are valued. Urban density or other incompatible development that would damage the rural lifestyle and environment are discouraged.

    2. **General Rural** provides for low density residential land use not requiring urban services. Additionally, compatible business and industry, with or without urban services, may be located within General Rural areas provided that natural resources will not be permanently impaired. The General Rural subclass includes all lands not in the Developed, Transition, Community, Rural-services and Conservation class.

The land classification map also shows the extent of the "Urban Services Area," comprised of all "Developed" and "Transition" lands. This is the area beyond which local governments will not provide public water, sewer and other services within the next ten years.

A fuller discussion of the policies and accompanying implementation actions can be found in the *Policies for Growth and Development* (1981).

III. MAJOR CHANGES FROM THE 1976 TO THE 1981 UPDATED POLICIES

A. Urban Services Area Modified

The service area has been modified to reflect the most recently proposed plans for County water and sewer systems. Included among the changes is the deletion from the Service Area of some land north and east of Monkey Junction, and certain other lands immediately west of Military Cutoff. In addition, certain lands west, north and east of the County Airport have been removed from the Services Area so as not to encourage higher density residential development in those areas.

B. Critical Aquifer Recharge Area Recognized

During the public participation effort conducted for the plan update, protection of the County's ground water resources was a primary concern of area residents. The County's critical aquifer recharge area (located generally northeast of the Urban Services Area) has been added to the Conservation lands.

C. Certain Development Allowed in Conservation Areas

As noted in the updated definition of "Conservation" areas under II. E. above, certain developments that can be shown to be compatible with these environmentally sensitive areas may be allowed in lands designated "Conservation".

D. Economic Development Emphasis

In light of emerging trends over the past five years, greater emphasis has been placed on local government policies and action designed to: improve the economic choice of area residents; retain and attract desirable industries; and encourage the conservation and rehabilitation of existing commercial and residential areas. (See pages 11 to 14 in the 1981 *Policies* document.)

POLICIES FOR GROWT

1. ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

1.1 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

1.1(1) ENCOURAGE THE LOCATION OF INDUSTRIES and establishments which have the effect of diversifying the local economy, which require a more highly skilled labor force, and which have the overall effect of increasing the area residents' incomes.

1.1(2) ENCOURAGE BUSINESS EXPANSION and new development that will relieve existing unemployment and underemployment problems.

1.1(3) Encourage the development and coordination of EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING PROGRAMS so that unemployed and underemployed local residents can take advantage of business expansion and new development.

1.1(4) Encourage and protect the continued growth of the area's TOURISM industry.

1.1(5) Local governments, through their actions, shall help discourage the growth in costs of BASIC LIVING EXPENSES, particularly housing, transportation and energy costs.

1.1(6) Encourage and STIMULATE PRIVATE INVESTMENT in desirably located existing commercial and residential areas.

1.1(7) Encourage the location and establishment of industries and businesses requiring proximity to WILMINGTON HARBOR and the Cape Fear River; provided that uses threatening the planning area's environmental quality or the harbor's efficient use shall be discouraged.

1.1(8) Encourage and foster the development of an efficient system of highway, rail, air and water TRANSPORTATION.

1.1(9) The encouragement of economic development as outlined above should be balanced against the possible detrimental effects such expansion and development may have on the quality of life enjoyed by area residents.

1.2 ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY/ENERGY CONSERVATION

1.2(1) PUBLICLY FINANCED URBAN SERVICES shall be concentrated within the geographic limits of a defined urban services area. The boundary of the urban services area should only be expanded when there is a demonstrated public need.

1.2(2) FUTURE URBAN DEVELOPMENT shall be encouraged to locate in geographic areas where urban services are already in place or, secondarily, where urban services can be readily provided.

1.2(3) EXISTING URBAN DEVELOPMENT not provided with urban services shall receive priority in the development of new services and the expansion of existing services.

1.2(4) AREAS OUTSIDE THE DEFINED URBAN SERVICES AREA should not contain urban development.

1.2(5) The timing and location of CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS EXPENDITURES and construction within the urban services area shall be targeted to priority areas as determined by local government.

1.2(6) MULTI-USE CENTERS AND MULTI-USE BUILDINGS shall be encouraged when appropriate. Opportunities should be provided for some population subgroups (e.g., elderly) to locate adjacent to community and regional commercial centers and compatible light industries.

1.2(7) Local governments shall educate the public and advise that ENERGY CONSERVING FEATURES be used in new and existing structures and developments.

1.2(8) Local governments shall not absorb costs stemming from inefficient or environmen-

appropriate with those of adjacent counties and municipalities, and with those of other government levels.

1.3 LAND USE

1.31 RESIDENTIAL LAND USE

1.31(1) HOUSING needs of all area residents shall be met in a manner which provides the maximum range of choice in type, density and location while preventing adverse impacts to the environment and the quality of life.

1.31(2) Protection and rehabilitation of viable NEIGHBORHOODS shall be encouraged to ensure their continued existence as a major housing resource.

1.31(3) Land uses considered harmful to the health, safety and welfare of area residents shall be prohibited from infringing upon the livability of RESIDENTIAL AREAS.

1.31(4) Proposed residential development which would expose residents to harmful effects of INCOMPATIBLE DEVELOPMENT or to environmental hazards shall be prohibited.

1.32 OFFICE & INSTITUTIONAL LAND USE

1.32(1) The transitional use and supporting service functions of OFFICE AND INSTITUTIONAL areas shall be primary considerations in the designation of those areas.

1.33 COMMERCIAL LAND USE

1.33(1) Encroachment into non-commercial areas and uncontrolled STRIP DEVELOPMENT by commercial uses shall be prohibited.

1.33(2) COMMERCIAL SITES shall be located and expressly designed to meet the needs of one of the following market levels: regional, community or neighborhood.

1.33(3) Buffer areas shall be provided where commercial sites adjoin residential neighborhoods.

1.34 INDUSTRIAL LAND USE

1.34(1) INDUSTRIAL SITES shall be located on land which is environmentally suitable and has unique locational advantages for industry. Clustering of light industries in industrial parks will be encouraged.

1.34(2) INDUSTRIAL USES having excessive noise, odor or other harmful pollution shall not be located in a manner which adversely impacts existing or planned non-industrial uses. Conversely, industrial areas, whether existing or planned, shall be protected from encroachment by incompatible nonindustrial uses.

1.34(3) Local Government shall encourage public involvement in the siting of industry by making the public aware of proposed developments at the earliest opportunity, as well as fostering communications between developers and public interest groups.

1.35 TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATION AND UTILITIES LAND USE

1.35(1) Potentially hazardous TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATION OR UTILITY facilities shall not be located in a manner which poses a threat to the safety and environmental integrity of surrounding properties.

1.35(2) Proposed development resulting from HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS shall be considered in terms of consistency with the updated land use plan and policies as well as impacts on surrounding areas.

1.35(3) BIKEWAY FACILITIES AND RIDESHARING programs shall be supported by local governments as an energy efficient alternative to the automobile.

1.35(4) Continued development of the WILMINGTON HARBOR and the State Ports Authority facilities shall be supported by local government.

1.35(5) The ATLANTIC INTRACOASTAL WATERWAY and its right-of-way shall continue to be designated conservation on the land use plan and encroachment shall not be permitted.

1.35(6) COORDINATED PLANS for land, water and air transportation shall continue to be supported by local governing bodies.

1.36 RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

1.36(1) UNIQUE NATURAL AREAS shall be preserved to provide visual relief and passive recreational opportunities for area residents.

1.36(2) ADEQUATE PUBLIC RECREATION facilities will be provided for and maintained at a level proportional to area needs.

1.36(3) PUBLIC ACCESS to the area's natural recreational amenities such as the ocean and river and sound shall be insured.

1.36(4) PROVISION OF OPEN SPACE and recreation facilities in private developments should be encouraged to lessen the demand for publicly financed facilities.

2. **RESOURCE PROTECTION POLICIES**

2.1 ESTUARINE SYSTEM AREAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

2.1(1) COASTAL WETLANDS, ESTUARINE WATERS, ESTUARINE SHORELINES AND PUBLIC TRUST WATERS shall be prohibited from use by any development activity which would result in damage or alteration to the natural functions of these areas.

2.1(2) RUNOFF AND DRAINAGE from development and agricultural activities shall be of a quality and quantity as near to natural conditions as possible.

2.1(3) POLLUTION FROM SEPTIC SYSTEMS AND SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANTS into estuarine waters shall be minimized through enforcement and support of improved state and local government regulations.

2.1(4) PUBLIC SEWAGE COLLECTION AND TREATMENT facilities shall be supported, with priority given to servicing those densely developed areas where a higher volume of septic waste is currently produced and concentrated, and where economic efficiencies are realized.

2.2 OCEAN HAZARD AREAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

2.2(1) Development activities in OCEAN ERODIBLE AREAS, HIGH HAZARD FLOOD AREAS AND INLET HAZARD AREAS shall be carefully controlled. If development must occur in these areas, the proper location and design of shoreline structures, and the preservation of natural protective features shall be required.

2.2(2) BEACH EROSION CONTROL AND CHANNEL MAINTENANCE projects shall be supported only when shown to have no future adverse impacts on barrier island natural beach dynamics, and when shown to be of significant economic or recreational benefit to planning area residents.

2.3 OTHER NATURAL AND MAN-MADE HAZARDS/DEVELOPMENT LIMITATIONS

2.3(1) Development activities within the 100-YEAR FLOODPLAIN shall be carefully controlled. If development must occur, low-intensive uses such as open space, recreation and agricultural activities shall be preferred.

2.3(2) Development on Class IV soils (as defined in Technical Report No. 9) shall be discouraged.

2.3(3) Plans for the transportation of hazardous materials, for the prevention and cleanup of spills of toxic materials and for the evacuation of area residents in response to NATURAL OR MAN-MADE HAZARDOUS EVENTS, shall be supported.

2.3(4) The siting of ENERGY FACILITIES and developments shall be carefully reviewed for the protection of area residents and renewable natural resources and the natural ecology of the area.

2.3(5) The planning area's future requirements for SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL facilities shall be anticipated through advance planning; facilities shall be located and designed so as not to adversely impact natural or man-made resources.

2.4(1) The County's GROUND WATER resources shall be recognized as an invaluable source of public and private potable water and shall receive the highest level of protection available.

2.4(2) Activities which could threaten the QUALITY OR QUANTITY OF RECHARGE entering the County's ground water system shall be restricted.

2.5 HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

2.5(1) Restoration of STRUCTURES AND NEIGHBORHOODS OF HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE should be encouraged.

2.5(2) Destruction of significant HISTORIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES identified in the planning area shall be discouraged.

2.5(3) Full development of the TOURISM POTENTIAL of the area's historic resources will be encouraged.

2.5(4) Multiple and adaptive REUSE OF THE CITY'S HISTORIC RESOURCES shall be allowed and encouraged.

2.5(5) WILMINGTON'S HISTORIC RIVERFRONT from the Cotton Exchange to the State Ports shall be considered a top priority area for urban redevelopment activities.

2.5(6) Pre-application conferences between developers and staff shall include an analysis of significant historic and archaeological resources in the area proposed for development.

3. RESOURCE PRODUCTION POLICIES

3.1 AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

3.1(1) The continued agricultural use of the County's remaining FARMLANDS AND WOODLANDS shall be encouraged.

3.2 MINERAL RESOURCES

3.2(1) Full development of the County's MINERAL RESOURCES shall be encouraged, tempered by a concern for the planning area's unique natural and man-made environment.

3.3 FISHERIES RESOURCES

3.3(1) The continued productivity of commercial and recreational FISHERIES shall be fostered through restoration and protection of the unique coastal ecosystems upon which they depend.

3.4 OFF-ROAD VEHICLES

3.4(1) Efforts to control OFF-ROAD VEHICLE use in the ecologically sensitive, biologically critical ocean beach and estuarine shoreline areas shall continue to receive support from County government.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION POLICIES

4.1 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1(1) A variety of PUBLIC EDUCATION techniques shall be employed to encourage public participation on all local land use issues.

4.1(2) Opportunities for PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT with land use issues shall be provided on a continuing basis to all residents and will be scheduled for evening meetings to encourage the greatest possible participation.

THE PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT WAS FINANCED, IN PART, THROUGH A COASTAL AREA MANAGEMENT ACT GRANT PROVIDED BY THE NORTH CAROLINA COASTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM, THROUGH FUNDS PROVIDED BY THE COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT ACT OF 1972, AS AMENDED, WHICH IS ADMINISTERED BY THE OFFICE OF COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT, NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRA-