

Summary Memo

Suffolk 2035 Plan Implementation Evaluation Summary

April 14, 2023

At the start of the Suffolk 2045 planning process, City of Suffolk department leaders were asked to provide information on the extent to which actions in the Suffolk 2035 plan have or have not been completed since the plan was adopted. The following document provides a high-level summary of this evaluation.

The memo includes the following components, organized around the plan's topical focus areas:

1. Land Use and Growth Management
2. Transportation Plan
3. Municipal Facilities and Services
4. Housing
5. Natural and Cultural Resources

1. Land Use and Growth Management

In general the City has:

- **Implemented** actions pertaining to focusing development in designated Growth Areas. This has included supporting higher density development in the Growth Areas and generally not supporting rezonings to residential subdivision uses outside of them.
- **Not implemented** amending the City's land use regulations to add guidelines for the review of exceptional development opportunities outside the growth boundaries.
- **Partially implemented** actions pertaining to ensuring predictable and orderly development. This has included identifying locations where the City's current regulations do not reinforce the intent and spirit of the comprehensive plan on a case-by-case basis as zoning applications are considered and ensuring adequate water and sewer as development moves forward in Growth Areas. However, rezoning outside of application requests has not been pursued, nor have other specific strategies to promote traditional neighborhood designs or requiring open space in cluster developments.

- **Partially implemented** developing new and expanding existing incentives that promote and encourage mixed use development. Implementation includes mixed use areas at Obici, Point and Harbour View, and Godwin Park. However, the application of mixed use development overlays has not resulted in complete town centers or the full mix of uses desired.
- **Partially implemented** actions to promote a balance of residential and non-residential land uses. While the mixed use overlay has been an effective tool, some non-residentially zoned areas have been lost since the plan was adopted.
- **Implemented** protecting the viability of the Suffolk Executive Airport by avoiding encroachment of non-compatible land uses.
- **Not implemented** conducting additional studies of land use patterns and compatibility issues along gateway corridors in Suffolk.
- **Implemented** allowing higher density than otherwise proposed in the where transportation corridors and infrastructure are already established and where the proposed use is compatible with adjacent uses, such as at Godwin Park.
- **Implemented** revising the UDO to bring the densities in residential zoning districts in line with the density recommendations in the Comprehensive Plan. This included creating new zoning districts where necessary, such as the RU-12, 18, and 24 districts, as well as the MUC-40 district.

2. Transportation Plan

In general the City has:

- **Implemented** focusing development in Growth Areas that incorporated mixed use as a mechanism to reduce strain on existing transportation networks.
- **Partially implemented** providing opportunities for residents to adopt a less auto dependent lifestyle such as through encouraging a mix of uses and tying development approval to the adequacy and funding of public facilities, including roads. However, some types of development that are taxing on road infrastructure, such as strip malls have continued to be developed, and larger initiatives such as high-speed passenger rail have not advanced.
- **Implemented** interconnectivity of street, sidewalk, and trail systems was improved through the Seaboard Coastline Trail.
- **Partially implemented** actions pertaining to improving operational management and better utilizing existing and new roadways. To determine adequacy of the existing or planned roadway system, traffic volume projections from the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization show that some roadways will be able to maintain adequate LOS despite anticipated increases in daily traffic volumes, while others will need improvements (i.e., roadway widening or additional lanes) to accommodate expected increases in traffic and maintain adequate operational conditions.

- **Partially implemented** actions pertaining to improving safety and level of service on the surface transportation network. VDOT has created a statewide network screening process to determine locations for priority consideration for safety improvement projects, which provide a focus for the City. However, there are some areas of challenge. Between January 1, 2015 through March 31, 2022, the greatest number of crashes occurred on Route 58. Followed by Godwin Blvd, Route 13/Whaleyville Blvd, Route 17/Bridge Road and Nansemond Parkway. Pedestrian crashes are concentrated in the downtown area.

3. Municipal Facilities and Services

In general the City has:

- **Implemented** effective coordination of public infrastructure, particularly roads and schools, within focused Growth Areas.
- **Not implemented** a strategy to ensure that low-lying areas of the City located along the James and Nansemond Rivers and their associated tributaries are not adversely impacted by sea level rise, though the City did adopt a revised floodplain ordinance and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) for the City.
- **Not implemented** a plan to address the lack of broadband service in the City.
- **Partially implemented** an improved library system, such as by increasing the budget for library holdings and initiating Tech2Go as a reflection of technological advances. However, the downtown library replacement was postponed and is currently in design phase with a tentative completion date in 2024.
- **Implemented** providing a high-quality parks and recreation system for residents including the construction of the Suffolk Seaboard Coastline Trail, the renovation of Cypress Park pool, several park improvements, and the recent Broad Creek Recreation Center.
- **Implemented** the use of technology, education, and community engagement to enhance community policing, resolve neighborhood concerns, and address potential hazards and disasters. However, police office, meeting, storage, and training space may not be matching the rate of growth of the City.
- **Implemented** strategies and programs to enhance drinking water availability and maintained the quality of the wastewater collection system.
- **Partially implemented** smart growth in school planning principles, improving education opportunities, service, and ease of accessibility to facilities. The City, in conjunction with the school system, completed detailed studies for a Schools Condition Report summary to be used in future school project planning. This also included new student generation rates and school capacities to be used in adequate public facilities reviews per the UDO. However, there is need for maintenance renovation in school buildings and the School Department has adjusted plans to increase rather than decrease the size of new education facilities as enrollment

numbers grow.

4. Housing

In general the City has:

- **Partially implemented** regulations allowing for a variety of housing types. Guidance could be more specific to encourage the mix of housing types.
- **Implemented** the use of existing residential density bonus provisions.
- **Partially implemented** incentives for creating affordable housing in mixed use communities. Incentives are in place but are confusing and haven't been used. The planning department is making efforts to improve this.
- **Implemented** an increase of affordable housing and retirement housing through new construction and rehabilitation of existing homes, partnering with developers to build housing for low-income residents and citizens over 55.
- **Implemented** promoting awareness of affordable housing goals.
- **Implemented** the use of existing housing assistance programs to generate more homeowners, providing down payment assistance to residents.
- **Not implemented** encouraging affordable and market rate housing in rural villages through initiative plans because plans are 20 years old and because infill relies on private investment to extend utilities.

5. Natural and Cultural Resources

In general the City has:

- **Partially implemented** actions pertaining to preserving Suffolk's agricultural heritage. Growth Areas help to direct development away from agricultural land. However, low density residential is permitted and has moved forward outside of these areas as private companies build many small lots in agricultural areas through multiple minor subdivision applications.
- **Partially implemented** actions pertaining to protecting Suffolk's natural resources from impacts of development, although these protections did not involve marinas and more information is needed about the protection of spawning and nursery grounds impacted by runoff from construction.
- **Partially implemented** actions pertaining to ecotourism as a way to promote the City. This work, which has primarily been pursued by Parks & Recreation and Tourism Departments, has been addressed in the 2016 Parks and Recreation master plan and implemented through actions such as strategic expansion of pathways. Tourism organizes tours into the Great Dismal Swamp, and organizes many programs, such as the birding festival. In addition to this, Parks and Recreation constructed strategic kayak launches along the waterways within the City. However,

there is more opportunity for intra-departmental cooperation connections between economic development and eco-tourism.

- **Partially implemented** actions pertaining preserving historic resources. Specific actions where less progress has been made include educational initiatives, expanding funding opportunities, development of Historic District Design Guidelines, and rezoning to prevent development encroachment on historic villages and properties.