

TOWN OF UNIONVILLE



LAND USE PLAN

UNION COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

FEBRUARY 2006

Prepared by:



Town of Unionville

Land Use Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Unionville is located in the north central part of Union County, North Carolina. The area that encompasses Unionville, like much of northern Union County, has been primarily agricultural land for many years and is slowly converting to single-family residential use. The residents of the Unionville area incorporated to form the Town in 1998. The Town adopted its current Land Use Ordinance, which became effective on October 1, 2003, to guide its growth.

Location, Existing Land Use and Demographics

Unionville is located in Union County, with the northern two-thirds of the Town's corporate area in the Goose Creek Township and the southern third in the Monroe Township. The Town is located to the north of the City of Monroe, east of the Town of Indian Trail, and to the south of the Town of Fairview. Unionville lies about 4½ miles from the Mecklenburg County border and a little over 1 mile from U.S. 74. (see Map 1 at end of document). U.S. 601, an important highway that connects Union and Cabarrus Counties, runs through the middle of the Town. The future Monroe Bypass highway will pass along the southeastern boundary of the Town.

Existing land use in the Town is mostly agricultural and residential. Low-density, single family residential development is interspersed with agricultural and forest land. Various businesses and industrial uses are scattered throughout the Town: there are a couple convenience stores at key intersections in the Town, a few small businesses in the downtown and various light industrial uses located along major thoroughfares. There are non-residential institutional uses dispersed throughout the Town, consisting of churches, an elementary school, middle school, high school, a fire station, community center, and the Town Hall, which is connected to a County library branch.

In the 1990's Union County had the highest percentage population growth of any county in North Carolina, growing 46.78% between 1990 and 2000. During this time the population of Unionville grew approximately 58%, from 3,039 persons to 4,797 persons.¹ In 2003 the Town's population was estimated to be 5,992 persons.²

¹ US Census Data. 1990 Unionville population is an approximate figure that is based on census tract data contained in the future incorporated area of the Town.

² NC Office of Budget and Management estimate.

Land Use Planning Process

During the past year, the Town of Unionville conducted a planning process to draft a land use plan for the area within its corporate limits. In January and February, the Town Council and Planning Board held two joint meetings to discuss and reach consensus on major issues regarding future development in the Town. During March and April, the Planning Board discussed various minor issues in more detail. During the spring and summer, Centralina Council of Governments drafted the land use plan based on the consensus items from the joint meetings of the Town Council and Planning Board and the additional meetings of the Planning Board. On June 6, the Planning Board recommended that the Town Council schedule a public meeting to get comments from the general public on the draft land use plan. On August 1, the Planning Board held a public meeting to discuss the Land Use Plan. Comments received from the public and Town Council were considered by the Planning Board for inclusion in the document. Having made final revisions, the Planning Board recommended the Land Use Plan on February 6, 2006 to the Town Council for holding a formal public hearing and considering adoption.

OVERALL VISION

The Town of Unionville will continue to be an agricultural and low-density residential community with a well-defined downtown area. The Town will have a limited number of commercial and light industrial businesses that meet the day-to-day shopping needs of residents and also create some employment opportunities for them.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The following goals and policies serve to accomplish the overall vision for the Town of Unionville by guiding development within the corporate limits in the near future of 5-10 years. During this time, no major expansions of the public sewer system are expected within the Town, and, at the southern border of the Town, the Monroe Bypass and Connector Highway will not yet be completed. Thus, in the near future, it is anticipated that new development will continue at a moderate pace and at low densities similar to recent years.

Downtown Unionville

The historic community center of Unionville is the area around the intersection of Unionville-Indian Trail Rd. and Unionville Rd. It serves as the Downtown and extends west along Unionville-Indian Trail Rd. to the stream drainage just before Unionville-Brief Rd.; south along Unionville Rd. to the southern boundary of the Unionville Elementary School property; and north along Unionville Rd. to the Unionville Volunteer Fire Department station. It is characterized by a mixture of residential, commercial and

institutional uses in close proximity to each other. Houses, businesses, and community uses front the streets with short setbacks, creating a sense of place.

Goal:

To allow Downtown Unionville to continue to develop as it has thus far, allowing for new low intensity residential, commercial and institutional uses.

Policies:

1. Light industrial uses shall not be allowed within the Downtown area.
2. For proposed rezonings of property within the Downtown area, the Town encourages the use of conditional use district rezonings to ensure high-quality development that is low-intensity and compatible with surrounding uses.

Agriculture

Unionville has traditionally been an agricultural community. In recent decades, the economy and land use of the Town has been shifting towards a primarily low density residential area oriented towards employment centers in surrounding areas of Union and Mecklenburg Counties. However, agriculture and associated businesses continue to be important components of the Town.

Goal:

To allow agricultural uses to continue in the Town by not restricting them through additional land use regulations or high Town property taxes; and, to also allow agricultural property owners the option of shifting the use of their properties to low density residential or other uses in accordance with the Land Use Plan.

Policies:

1. Land use regulations shall continue to allow agricultural uses in most areas of town.
2. Land use regulations shall continue to allow agricultural property to be converted to low-density residential uses.
3. The Town will encourage farmers to enroll in voluntary agricultural preservation programs.

Residential Development

Residential development in Unionville is characterized by low densities. Many houses are located on tracts of land over one acre and most subdivisions have densities of approximately one house per acre. Residential development relies on on-site septic systems for wastewater disposal due to the lack of sewer in most areas of Town. It is expected that there will be no new public sewer availability in the near future (5-7 years).

Goal:

To allow single-family residential development throughout the Town at low densities. Ensure that improvements and common areas in residential development are properly designed and maintained.

Policies:

1. The Town shall restrict residential densities throughout its corporate limits to maximum net densities (includes streets and common areas within subdivisions) of approximately 1 house per acre.
2. The Town will strengthen its Land Use Ordinance to ensure that new subdivisions are designed and constructed in a quality manner and that common areas and amenities are maintained properly.
3. For new major subdivisions, the Town will require landscaped buffers along thoroughfares. The minimum required width of the buffer should vary based on the size of the subdivision, so that small subdivisions would not be burdened with reserving significant areas of land for buffers. Regulations should be crafted to create simple landscaped buffers that do not require any special maintenance beyond that normally provided by individual homeowners for their properties.

Commercial and Industrial Development

Currently there is limited commercial development within the Town. Existing commercial development is small-scale and spread out at different locations. The Town anticipates demand for some larger scale commercial development in the near future and would like to plan for its arrival. Existing industrial development consists mostly of small light industrial uses located along major thoroughfares. The Town recognizes the value of these businesses in serving agricultural and other activities and in providing employment within the Town.

Goal:

To prevent strip development from occurring by focusing new commercial development in designated strategic locations. To consider new light industrial uses along major thoroughfares within the Town at sites where they will be compatible with surrounding uses.

Policies:

1. New commercial development will locate at strategic nodes centered around the following major intersections within the Town:
 - “Five Points” – intersection of Sikes Mill Rd., Lawyers Rd., Love Mill Rd., and Tom Helms Rd.
 - Highway U.S. 601 and Lawyers Rd.
 - Highway U.S. 601 and Unionville-Indian Trail Rd.

- Highway U.S. 601 and Ridge Rd./Baucom-Deese Rd.
2. Downtown Unionville is also envisioned as a desirable area for commercial development. However, commercial uses in this area shall be limited in size and number to maintain the mixed use character of downtown. Furthermore such uses shall be designed to be compatible with surrounding land uses and streetscapes.
 3. The Town would consider a limited number of new light industrial uses along major thoroughfares, provided that they are compatible with the surrounding area and do not negatively impact adjacent and nearby properties. New industrial uses shall be prohibited in Downtown Unionville.
 4. Conditional Use District rezonings would be considered more favorably than General District rezonings as a means to ensure compatibility of new commercial and light industrial uses with surrounding areas. New light industrial uses should have suitable site and building designs to minimize undesirable impacts on adjacent properties.
 5. Existing nonconforming commercial uses should be allowed to continue in operation and/or be converted to residential uses or to other commercial uses with similar or lesser impacts on adjoining or nearby properties. The Town would consider Conditional Use District rezoning of such properties to allow the use to expand or convert into a different use provided that negative impacts on adjoining or nearby properties would be sufficiently mitigated.
 6. Existing nonconforming industrial uses should be allowed to continue in operation and/or be converted to residential uses or to other industrial uses with similar or lesser impacts on adjoining or nearby properties. The Town would consider Conditional Use District rezoning of such properties to allow the use to expand or convert into a different use provided that negative impacts on adjoining or nearby properties would be sufficiently mitigated.
 7. Properties zoned for commercial or industrial uses and that are currently vacant or residential should continue to have the option of being developed according to their zoning classifications. These properties will also be allowed to be rezoned to low density residential use (approximately one house per acre).
 8. New commercial and industrial should be developed attractively by incorporating landscaping along external streets, property lines and within the site. Dumpsters and loading areas shall be placed to the side or rear of buildings and sufficiently screened from public right-of-ways and adjoining properties. Commercial buildings should incorporate architectural details and avoid large blank walls on all building elevations visible by the general public from outside and within the site. Industrial buildings, at a minimum, should avoid metal building facades visible from public right-of-ways and incorporate architectural details on building fronts.

Institutional Uses, Public Facilities, and Special Uses

There are churches, schools, fire stations and other community uses spread out within the Town. These uses are generally allowed by-right throughout the Town due to their importance to the community welfare and/or safety. Within residential and commercial

zoning districts there are other special uses that are allowed subject to meeting specific conditions due to their potential impacts on adjoining properties. The Town recognizes the value of these special uses in providing services and employment within the community. However, the Town wants to ensure that special uses are located in appropriate sites and do not negatively impact surrounding properties.

Goal:

To allow institutional, public and special uses in various areas of the Town depending on their appropriateness, relationship to the public safety, and impacts on surrounding uses.

Policies:

1. Public safety stations, churches and schools will continue to be allowed throughout Unionville provided they meet applicable land use regulations.
2. Public and private sanitary landfills shall not be allowed within the Town.
3. The Town of Unionville encourages the reservation of land for parks and open space, and will seek the dedication of parkland or fees-in-lieu through the subdivision process.
4. Special uses allowed in residential areas may not be appropriate for all sites. In evaluating the appropriateness of proposals, the Town will give special consideration to the size of the property on which the use is proposed, distance from the proposed special use to existing uses on neighboring properties, and the type of proposed special use.

General Policies for All Uses

1. The Town will seek to protect floodplains and minimize the negative impacts of stormwater runoff and flooding on residential and non-residential development. The Town should periodically evaluate the effectiveness of its ordinances with respect to development in floodplains and control of stormwater runoff.
2. The Town will respect the private property rights of all residents and will not employ the Town's eminent domain power for any purpose related to the private development of land.

THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The Town's Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is included at the end of this document as Map 2. The map projects desired future land use patterns in the Town's corporate limits over the near future (5-10 years). When reviewing the FLUM, consideration should be given to the following:

- **Future land uses depicted on the FLUM are not zoning designations** -- they are intended to guide the Town's Planning Board and Town Council as they make recommendations and decisions on zoning, subdivision and other land use matters.
- **Future land uses may reflect a future condition** -- uses designated on the map may be appropriate in 5-10 years, but currently may not be feasible due to the pace of residential growth, availability of public water or sewer, or market demand for retail, office and other non-residential uses.
- **The FLUM is dynamic** -- when justified by changing conditions in the community, the future land use map can and should be amended by the Town Council. While map amendments should not be made frequently, periodic adjustments may help the community to better achieve its planning goals.
- **The FLUM is generalized in nature** and is intended to give the reader an understanding of projected generalized land use patterns in a particular portion of the Town.
- **The FLUM and the Plan text are to be used together** -- the text in this Plan guides interpretation of the FLUM.

The FLUM contains several land use categories for areas inside the corporate limits of the Town. These categories are described as follows:

Agricultural/Low Density Residential

This category applies to most of Unionville. It aims to maintain the low-density, rural atmosphere of the Town, which is characterized by single-family residential and agricultural uses. Minimum lot sizes of forty-thousand (40,000) square feet are envisioned. The location of low impact public facilities and institutional uses will be considered in this area provided that they are compatible with surrounding residential

areas. Some light industrial uses will be considered along major thoroughfares provided that they are compatible with the surrounding area and do not negatively impact adjacent and nearby properties according to the Town's Goals and Policies for industrial development.

Downtown

This category is characterized by a mixture of residential, commercial and institutional uses in close proximity to each other. It allows for new low intensity residential, commercial and institutional uses consistent with the existing character of Downtown Unionville. New industrial uses are prohibited.

Future Commercial

This planning classification allows for new commercial development but also accommodates existing and new low-density residential development. New commercial uses must be developed attractively with landscaping and architectural details according to the Town's Goals and Policies for commercial development. Note that the Future Commercial areas shown on the FLUM are approximate and designed to give general locations for this type of development.

Existing Commercial/Industrial

This category includes existing businesses and properties previously zoned for commercial and industrial uses by Union County that now lie within the Town. It allows nonconforming businesses to continue their operations and allows the development/expansion of businesses on land currently zoned for commercial or industrial uses. Note that some properties in this category may be currently vacant, but are zoned for commercial or industrial uses and would be allowed to develop according to applicable zoning regulations. Expansion of nonconforming businesses shall be considered on a case-by-case basis through the rezoning process and shall conform to the Town's Goals and Policies regarding aesthetics, minimization of negative impacts on neighboring properties, etc. Conversion to low-density residential uses (approximately one dwelling unit per acre) is allowed as an option on all land within this category.

Existing Institutional

This category identifies existing institutional uses such as churches, schools, public safety stations and other governmental and community uses. These uses shall be allowed to continue and/or expand in accordance with underlying zoning regulations and the Town's Goals and Policies for Institutional Uses, Public Facilities, and Special Uses.