

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The South Carolina Local Government Comprehensive Planning Act of 1994 requires all South Carolina Counties and incorporated municipalities to have an adopted Comprehensive Plan and update it every ten years. These plans ensure that all jurisdictions with zoning and land development regulations are addressing the full range of community issues in their decision-making processes. These plans are updated every 10 years to ensure that they remain relevant and reflect the values of the community. This 2023 Comprehensive Plan (the Plan) is not intended to be a regulatory document but should guide land use development, community projects, and capital improvement decisions in Laurens County over the next decade.

Required Plan Elements

Although Laurens County has historically not had a strong tradition of land use planning; numerous discussions and efforts regarding land use planning have taken place since the last comprehensive planning process. The 2010-2020 plan was developed by the Upper Savannah Council of Governments as a tool to guide land use planning and capital investment in the County as a whole.

The 2023 Comprehensive Plan represents a new approach to land use planning in Laurens County, while still addressing the requirements outlined in the Planning Enabling Act of 1994 and subsequent amendments. These laws require that at minimum these elements or issues be discussed:

- Land Use
- Population
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Community Facilities
- Transportation
- Cultural Resources
- Natural Resources
- Resiliency
- Priority Investment



Land Use



Housing



Economic Development



Community Facilities



Transportation



Natural Resources



Population



Priority Investments



Cultural Resources



Resiliency

How to Use the Plan

The comprehensive plan is used to help guide capital improvement planning and local government programming as well as land use decision-making. This includes decisions about how land is used, preserved, or developed. This also includes public facility investments related to those planned land uses or developments to support a desired quality of life or level of services of public services.

The comprehensive plan is the sum of many parts. Frequently, the focus is on the land use component of the Plan, but this is only a portion of the document. A public engagement effort went into forming the Plan vision, goals, recommendations, and action items. These are perhaps more important in guiding the future development of the County, as these can address qualitative issues beyond the scope of individual land use. It has been clearly spoken throughout this process that the citizens of Laurens County are greatly concerned about the qualitative aspects of development, and about the need for the County to be proactive in protecting local quality of life.

It is important that land use, capital decisions and programming utilize all parts of the comprehensive plan to help in the prioritizing, designing, and evaluation of projects of all types. Any given project may meet some of the Plan goals and recommendations but not others. In such cases, it will be up to County Council and the Planning Commission to decide whether a project on the balance meets the intent of the comprehensive plan.

Overview

The Comprehensive Plan 2023 for Laurens County is a long-range, strategic document that outlines the community's vision for the future of the County. It includes an evaluation of trends and existing conditions, defines community strengths, and challenges, and provides goals and implementation strategies to address those challenges. Decision-makers should consider the plan when developing department-specific goals and tasks and when finalizing the annual budget. The Planning Commission should evaluate the consistency of all public and private investment and development proposals against the plan.

In Fall 2022, Laurens County began a review of its previous planning documents and developed a scope of work and process for developing this Plan. The main goal for this plan was to create a document that is easy to digest and understand that will be a valuable resource for decision-makers. This document will serve as the working comprehensive plan moving forward.

The Plan begins with a list of Governing Strategies and an explanation of these strategies. These Governing Strategies should serve as the guiding philosophy for planning, development, and public and private investment for the County. The Plan includes a chapter dedicated to each of the plan elements and organized around key facts and figures.

The plan then includes goals and implementation strategies to address each challenge. Recommendations tend to be "general" and "big picture" statements and are meant to provide a framework for future efforts. Implementation Strategies are strategic actions that can be taken to achieve the goals and intent of the Plan. County decision makers and staff are best equipped to study the issues, engage the community, and decide how to see these recommendations through to implementation.

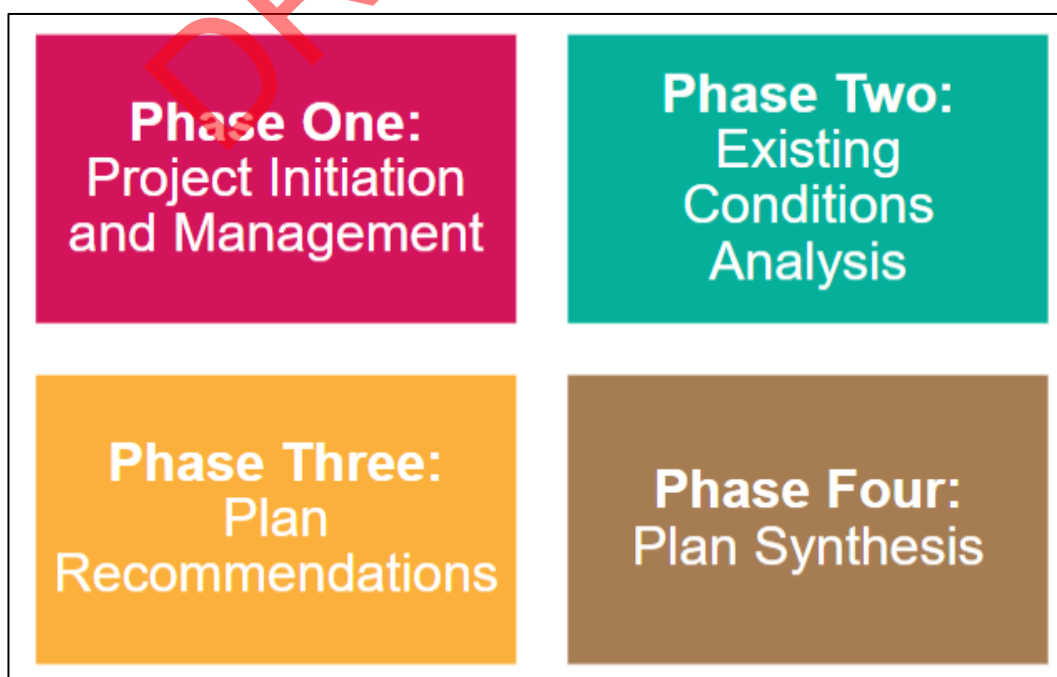


The Laurens County Comprehensive Plan will help guide County decision makers on a wide array of issues over the next ten years in creating a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business. The Plan is a policy plan that outlines a county-level perspective and planning direction that will complement and strengthen local planning efforts. It should provide guidance to the towns, cities, unincorporated areas, and community partners within the County. All of these partners, working together, make Laurens County a special place.

Currently, the 67,000 plus County residents enjoy economic opportunity, quality schools, and strong communities, along with access to a wide variety of recreational options offered throughout the Cities.

Framework for the Comprehensive Plan

The Plan is an overarching planning document that represents the culmination of the four-part planning process in Laurens County.



Structure of the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan includes eleven (11) chapters along with numerous tables, charts, maps, and public input summary. The various chapters cover many issues impacting Laurens County today and in the future. The element chapters focus on topics as required by the Planning Enabling Act. Each of the chapters are generally laid out covering these basic sections: introduction, previous plans and studies, inventory of current conditions, issues, goals, and objectives. To indicate priorities and to tie all plan elements back to public input, “Guiding Strategies” are identified below that will keep the vision on track.

The final chapter is an Implementation Action Plan, which identifies strategies or actions to move forward the various goals and objectives from each of the previous chapters. Future Strategic Planning efforts will focus and further prioritize the Comprehensive Plan.



GUIDING STRATEGIES

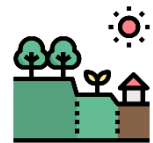
At the center of every great vision, are the guideposts that keep that vision on track. Derived from community conversations, planning themes, and what already makes Laurens County great - these Guiding Strategies shape the comprehensive plan framework.



COMMUNICATE WITH TRANSPARENCY



OPEN FOR BUSINESS



GROW WITH STRATEGY



GENERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Mission Statement

Laurens County government serves people by leading, coordinating, and providing county, regional, and statewide initiatives. It directly, or in cooperation with other public and private partners, provides services and creates opportunities that make Laurens County and the surrounding area a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business.

Vision Statement

Laurens County government leads by providing high quality and integrated services and by developing trusting, collaborative relationships among diverse partners. It is proactive in enhancing health and safety, protecting the environment, and providing cultural, recreational, and economic opportunities which make Laurens County a preferred place to live, work, visit and do business.