



2023 Comprehensive Plan
Executive Summary



Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan Executive Summary

The Executive Summary includes a brief overview of the Laurens County Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of this summary is to provide a snapshot of the plan and provide guidance on where to look in the full plan for more detailed information and direction.

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 Laurens County Comprehensive Plan is a policy plan. The overall goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to add a county-level perspective and planning direction that complements and strengthens local planning efforts. It will also provide guidance to the towns, cities, unincorporated areas, and community partners within the County. All 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.

Mission Statement

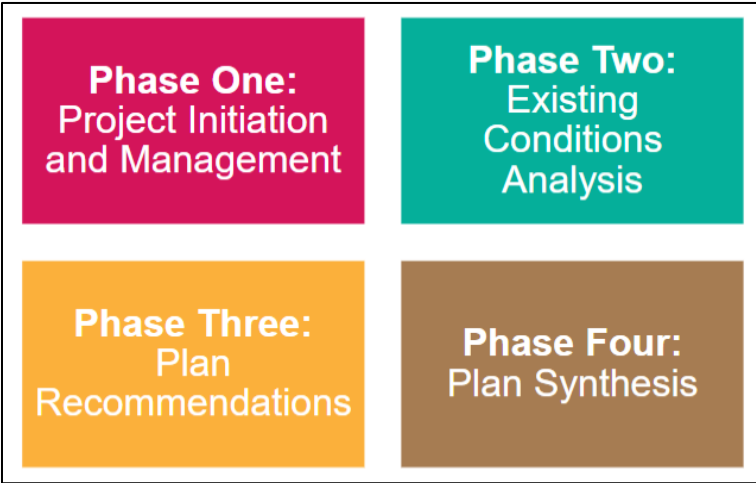
Laurens County government serves people by leading, coordinating, and providing county, regional, and statewide initiatives. It directly, or in cooperation with other public and private partners, provides services and creates opportunities that make Laurens County and the surrounding area a preferred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

Framework for the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan, an overarching planning document, is a culmination of the four-part planning process in Laurens County.



Background

Laurens County has historically not had a strong tradition of planning; however, numerous efforts have taken place since the last comprehensive planning process. The 2010-2020 plan was developed by the County and as a tool to guide the County as a whole.

This plan moves in a new direction, 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:



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.

Chapter One and Two provides an introduction and overview of the Comprehensive Planning Process and public input process. The next ten 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 chapters include 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

Economic Development

Goal

Encourage economic growth of commercial and industrial development relative to environmental and economic impacts along major (Interstate 385 and Interstate 26) and performance corridors.

Objectives

- Provide adequate services in place or planned for balanced future commercial and industrial development.
- Encourage the location of industry and commercial activities through the development of performance standards that ensure the activity would be compatible with the County's goals.
- Encourage industrial and commercial development that provides competitive wages and benefits.
- Encourage the establishment of research technology zones, as well as technology overlay districts to ensure harmonious development within these areas.
- Work with the Laurens County Development Corporation and with existing businesses and industries to evaluate and improve economic development strategies.
- Provide appropriate land areas suitable for future industrial and commercial growth within areas defined on the future land use map.
- Actively market the County's Industrial Parks.
- Support the establishment of one or more research and technology areas in the County to foster high quality job creation and investment by technology related businesses.
- Support businesses that provide services and employment opportunities for residents.
- Landscape the entrances to the Industrial Parks.
- Provide adequate facilities to provide educational programs which support the local industries.
- Help to centralize agriculture industry information for easy distribution to the public.

Land Use

Goal

To direct future development into an efficient and serviceable form that will preserve the County's predominately rural character.

Objectives

- Develop performance corridor districts which includes landscaping regulations, protection of significant views and vistas, land development regulations, and controlled access points along these roads.
- Direct County development to areas contiguous with urbanized areas that are served or will be served with adequate public facilities such as roads, sewer, and water.
- Limit future suburban sprawl in rural or agricultural areas where adequate public facilities do not exist or where their provision would not be cost-efficient.
- Develop incentives to preserve farmland, forested areas, open space, and rural character. Explore the use of conservation easements, purchase and transfer of development rights, and other similar programs for the funding of open space preservation.
- Discourage growth in environmentally sensitive areas that have natural development constraints, such as wetlands, steep slopes, floodplains, etc.
- Require that developers pay a share of the associated costs for additional public facilities and services generated by the development. In addition, ensure that adequate public facilities are in place or proposed before development is approved.
- Develop a preservation plan that identifies and protects historically significant areas, sites, and properties.
- Coordinate development plans with all agencies (County, City, School District, etc.)
- Develop land use policies and implement land use decisions in such a manner as to limit average residential growth, measured in new residential building permits. Encourage developments to be phased in so as to not exceed the County's vision of maintaining an average annual growth rate.
- Develop performance standards applicable to new development activity.
- Encourage unnecessary reduction of tree cover and other natural vegetation while allowing for reasonable land use.
- Encourage incentives to developments for incorporating greenways and open space in their projects; thereby enhancing appearance, safety, and value.
- Encourage cluster development through density incentives. Incentives should increase as developers use smaller percentages of the site for construction, leaving the remainder as park, greenway, open space, or naturalized areas.
- Develop buffer zones to reduce potential conflicts between non-compatible uses such as farming and large commercial or industrial development.
- Utilize natural topographic features and/or planting screens to shield development from public roads and adjoining properties, thereby preserving scenic vistas and rural character.
- Discourage residential development in areas of environmentally sensitive lands and agricultural operations.

Housing

Goal

To provide, throughout the County, residential areas that offer quality, residential development that does not deplete County resources and protects rural character.

Objectives

- Provide assistance to local organizations (non-profit and for-profit) to upgrade the existing housing stock that is deficient.
- Discourage all types of residential building in areas that are environmentally sensitive. Develop land use regulations that are consistent with this purpose.
- Encourage current neighborhood stability by providing technical and support services where possible.
- Reduce and eliminate the incident of nuisance violations through property maintenance enforcement.
- Update the Land Development Regulations to promote clustering and other non-traditional development concepts while encouraging the preservation of open space and compatibility with existing neighborhoods.
- Encourage partnerships between the County and developers to master plan large tracts of land to accommodate housing for all price points and housing needs, especially workforce and affordable housing and housing for senior citizens.
- Work with property owners to encourage master planning of vacant and/or redevelopment tracts to encourage the provision of all price points and housing needs.

Community Facilities

Goal

To maintain the County historical, cultural, and community assets that preserve the County's character.

Objectives

- Request input from the heritage and historical groups on development proposals presented to the County Planning Commission.
- Maintain an inventory of historical sites and structures and incorporate a layer in the County GIS system.
- Provide opportunities for County residents and visitors to interact with historic and cultural influences that would enhance their appreciation of these County life qualities.
- Coordinate recreational facility development with the County Comprehensive Plan, thereby ensuring that facilities and residential development occur simultaneously.
- Provide for the preservation of open and wooded space, and selected floodplain areas, as greenways.
- Coordinate facilities with schools planning where feasible.
- Ensure that additional school facilities and services' costs resulting from new development are equitably borne by those benefiting.
- Maintain the volunteer system of the individual fire departments, encourage centralized coordination, communication, and supervision and to supplement with paid staff where necessary.
- Continue to evaluate and make recommendations concerning adequate and appropriate level of fire and rescue protection to improve Laurens County's existing fire and rescue services.
- Continue to implement standardization of equipment and to improve the level of training for public safety departments.
- Provide up-to-date technological equipment to meet current and future County residents' needs at all library locations.
- Review the conditions and performance of all existing community facilities in planning new or expanded facilities and services.
- Evaluate existing refuse/recycle collection sites for adequacy and replacement/expansion if necessary.
- Develop County facilities in locations that are actual or potential focal points for citizens' activities.

Transportation

Goal

To provide for the safe and efficient movement of people and goods throughout the County.

Objectives

- Plan roadway development to support and enhance the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Use Plan.
- Maintain and improve existing transportation facilities to meet increased demand.
- Examine the potential for protecting scenic beauty and improving safety without compromising safety.
- Require development to pay its fair share of the costs resulting from increased transportation facility demands.
- Encourage limited access management along County roads and discourage strip development.
- Decrease the need for automobile trips by providing opportunities for mixed use developments, pedestrian access, and shared-use facilities.
- Apply for SCDOT Transportation Alternative Program funds to improve the existing transportation system and to provide alternative transportation modes such as biking and hiking trails.
- Maintain transportation models of the Interstate 385 and Interstate 26 corridors.
- Request that the South Carolina Department of Transportation conduct a preliminary engineering study identifying specific improvements needed along Interstate 385 for additional on/off ramp improvements.
- Work with SCDOT to increase street sweeping on all state roads and increase enforcement of littering and dumping of trash in roadways.
- Continue to financially support the implementation of the Swamp Rabbit Trail and other shared-use path networks.
- Cooperate with FHWA, SCDOT, and others to evaluate the impact of the proposed high-speed rail.
- Conduct corridor master plans for performance corridors.
- Work with transportation engineers and public safety departments to design and implement methods to discourage cut-through traffic through neighborhoods while increasing connectivity.
- Support a *Safe Routes to School* Program with the help of the Laurens County School Districts.

Natural Resources

Goal

To preserve and improve the environmental quality of Laurens County through measures which protect natural resources and environmentally sensitive air, lands, and waters.

Objectives

- Institute measures to protect the quality of surface waters within the County.
- Protect County wetland resources, including springs, from contamination.
- Protect and conserve public and private forest resources to prevent soil erosion and damage to views, vistas, and watershed areas.
- Protect the important natural function of rivers, streams, and floodplains by encouraging appropriate use and preservation of natural vegetation.
- Minimize runoff and sedimentation associated with agricultural and development activities (including industrial, residential, and commercial activities) particularly in steep slope areas.
- Identify and protect important plant and wildlife habitats, including aquatic life.
- Improve environmental quality on a site-by-site basis through the establishment of performance standards for environmentally sensitive areas, including encouraging the use of best management practices.
- Educate Laurens County residents about the relationship between our land use decisions and our local ecology.
- Preserve Laurens County's natural beauty, while making natural features accessible to County residents.

Priority Investments

The South Carolina Priority Investment Act (PIA) was signed into law in May 2007. The PIA amends Title 6, Chapter 29 of the South Carolina Code of Laws – the South Carolina Local Government Comprehensive Planning Enabling Act of 1994. The legislation introduced two new elements to the comprehensive planning process for South Carolina local governments – a Transportation Element and a Priority Investment Element. The Priority Investment Element facilitates the coordination of major capital improvements and provides direction for implementing recommended strategies of the other elements of the Comprehensive Plan that call for capital improvements. The Priority Investment Element encourages local governments to examine future capital improvement needs, as well as identify possible funding for these improvements in the coming decade.

In addition to encouraging local governments to plan for long-term capital improvement needs and financing, the Priority Investment Element encourages stronger intergovernmental planning and coordination. Specifically, the legislation calls for comprehensive plans to include: “a priority investment element that analyzes the likely federal, state, and local funds available for public infrastructure and facilities during the next ten years and recommends the projects for expenditure of those funds during the next ten years for needed public infrastructure and facilities such as water, sewer, roads, and schools. The recommendation of those projects for public expenditure must be done through coordination with adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies.”

While many of the public facilities in Laurens County are owned and maintained by the County, others are owned and maintained by entities such as local municipalities and the Laurens County School Districts. Many improvements to capital facilities throughout the County have been and will continue to be accomplished through coordination and cooperation with a number of public and private entities.

The South Carolina Priority Investment Act requires that the recommendation of capital improvement projects that require public expenditure be done through “coordination with adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies.” The Act defines adjacent and relevant jurisdictions and agencies as “those counties, municipalities, public service districts, school districts, public and private utilities, transportation agencies, and other public entities that are affected by or have planning authority over the public project.”

Future Capital Improvement Needs and Funding Sources

A number of public infrastructure and facilities needs have been identified for Laurens County for the coming decade through both the required elements of the Comprehensive Plan and through additional planning processes and studies conducted by service and infrastructure providers. These capital improvements include those that will be funded and accomplished by the County, as well as projects that will be funded and accomplished by other entities. Laurens County must continue to explore new partnerships and funding sources to meet capital needs, while ensuring that the most critical needs are met. The top public infrastructure and facilities investment priorities for Laurens County for the coming five years include:

1. Provision and maintenance of and improvements to public facilities to accommodate the needs of residents and businesses and meet applicable local, federal and state requirements.
2. Support for the provision of quality water and sewer services for existing and future customers through the continued maintenance of and necessary upgrades.
3. Improvement and maintenance of police, fire, and emergency services to increase public safety, protect properties, and lower ISO ratings.

4. Support for the expansion, improvement, and maintenance of transportation facilities and services to meet the needs of County residents and promote economic development and growth.
5. Promotion of economic growth and development to create jobs, increase sustainability and strengthen the tax base.