

Existing Land Use

Background

The current pattern of land use is a result of Franklin County's history and location. At its inception, the County was agrarian in nature, with small rural communities developing at crossroads of major travel routes. The Town of Rocky Mount, located in the geographic center of the County, was established in 1867. The Town of Boones Mill, located halfway between Rocky Mount and Roanoke, was incorporated in 1872. To the present day, Rocky Mount continues to function as the County Seat.

More recent decades have seen the growth of Ferrum College as an educational and cultural center. The development of Smith Mountain Lake as a vacation and regional recreational area and a residential center with the immigration of many newcomers and retirees attracted to the rural lifestyle and housing costs. As a result of this growth, the rural nature of the County is going through a transformation that can with wise decision-making on the part of private citizens and public officials, uplift the quality of life for all residents.

For the purpose of analysis, the existing land use of the County can be divided among seven categories: Farmland, Forestland, Residential, Commercial, Industrial, Public and Semi-Public, and Environmental areas. Each is described below.

Farmland

Franklin County has 172,539 acres of active agricultural land, representing 39 percent of the County. Agricultural activity is attributed to the generally gently rolling terrain, fertile soils, and an abundance of surface water held on farm ponds for irrigation.

Forestland

Commercial forests account for 266,733 acres of land, which represents 60 percent of the County's total land area of 442,931 acres. Much of the land in forests is in the northwest, western, and southeastern parts of the County along the slopes of mountains, where the land is too rugged for farming.

Residential

There are four identifiable patterns of residential development in Franklin County: rural residential; low density residential in rural areas; low density residential focused on Smith Mountain Lake; and medium density residential associated with Towns, Smith Mountain Lake planned developments, and community centers.

Rural residential development of one homesite on five acres or more are evenly dispersed throughout the County, except where constrained by severe physical terrain. This pattern of land use has a mixture of housing types, including single-family dwellings, single-family farm dwellings, and manufactured homes on large lots. Homes

on these lots are typically served by private roads, on-site sewage disposal systems, and individual wells. In the current regulations of the County's subdivision ordinance an A1 district subdivision is a use by right with a lot size of 35,000 square feet in area per lot. This type of development has been increasing at a rapid pace and the A1 district is the predominate type of zoning in the County.

Low density residential uses are on lots of 35,000 square feet to five acres including individual building lots fronting on state maintained roads and small lot subdivisions, often fronting on state roads. Small manufactured home parks, typically 20 units or less, and scattered apartments, typically garden apartments built in multiples of four or eight units, and single-family dwellings share the landscape with these small scale developments. Densities of land in this category are still constrained by the carrying capacity of the land to provide on-lot sewage disposal and potable water. Frequently, small clusters of low density residential land are found near existing rural community centers such as Callaway, Burnt Chimney, Glade Hill, Snow Creek, Henry, or Sontag to name a few.

Low density residential developments focused on Smith Mountain Lake are oriented to the lakefront. Typically, individual lots in these developments are one acre or less in size. In recent years developments of campgrounds, mobile home parks, seasonal cottages and modest retirement home developments have been superseded by increasingly more affluent single-family homes and multi-family condominium homes. Densities are still constrained by the capacity of the land to absorb sewer on site. These developments typically have formal Home Owners Associates for the maintenance of common areas and often are associated with amenities such as but not limited to golf courses or marinas.

Medium density residential development occurs in and around the towns and communities where public water and sewer allows development to exceed the on-site carrying capacity of the land for sewage disposal. Due to the presence of public utilities, medium density residential also has jobs, public services, retail shopping, and other higher density land uses nearby. The towns of Rocky Mount and Boones Mill, the community of Ferrum, and Smith Mountain Lake are areas where medium density residential developments occur.

Commercial/Business

Most commercial centers can also be sorted into a hierarchy based on scale. The largest commercial centers are associated with major towns or community centers. Rocky Mount is the commercial and business core of Franklin County. The original Central Business District includes uptown and downtown districts that are the location of prominent financial series, the County's hospital, the County Courthouse, and the County Administrative Complex. Commercial and office uses extend from downtown east and west along Route 40 in a series of auto-oriented shopping plazas. Less concentrated strip commercial development is gradually extending north and south along Route 220 Business.

Boones Mill and Ferrum have smaller but significant business and commercial centers serving the northern and western parts of the County respectively. Boones Mill includes the Town Hall and a number of professional offices and shopping opportunities.

Ferrum is the site of businesses oriented both to the surrounding rural community and to Ferrum College.

Westlake located on Routes 122 and 616 has become commercial nodes for the eastern part of Smith Mountain Lake area of the County. This area has retail businesses, professional offices, service uses, and proposed residential uses.

The Rural Commercial Centers comprised of clusters of stores and services in smaller communities such as Callaway, Glade Hill, Snow Creek, and Fork. These stores and services, together with the associated elementary schools and fire and rescue station, give focus and cultural identity for rural residents of the County.

On an even small scale are isolated general stores serving rural customers. Typically, these stores have frontage on collector roads, and provide needed goods and service to a localized rural neighborhood. These grocery outlets and rural businesses, sometimes associated with post offices, provide a convenient cultural crossroads that provides patrons with news of local happenings.

A more intense commercial pattern is strip commercial highway development. This development is evolving along Route 220 North and also along Rout 40 east of Rock Mount in area of Redwood, Union Hall, and Penhook. Business associated with this land use pattern have frontage on a high volume highway, and are oriented to service the convenience needs of travelers and residences living in the area.

Industrial

The Industry map shows the location of manufacturing plants, and also existing industrial parks. As the map reveals, most of the County's manufacturing plants are in Rocky Mount. Due to the need years ago for industries to be near rail lines and within walking distance of a labor force, most of the industries are located near the center of Town. In recent years, with the improved road system and the affordable cost of the automobile, a large portion of the workforce has moved away from Town. However, the Town and County continue to develop industrial sites in Town. Typical modern industrial sites are in planned industrial parks with paved roads, public water and sewer, and with controls on the siting of buildings, such as setbacks from roads and required on-street parking.

The development of Franklin County Commerce Center located on Route 220 has boost industry in Franklin County. This industrial park houses industries such as Southern Heritage Home, Roanoke Electric Steel and the newest member McAiraid's that will be under construction in the near future to name a few.

Outside of Rocky Mount, a number of industrial site have evolved over the years from small owner operated industries into full scale manufacturing plants, Cooper Wood Products and Uttermost Corporation, located on Route 919 north of Rocky Mount, are examples of this kind of industrial development. Bassett Walker, located on Route 40 outside of Ferrum, North American Housing Corporation's plant outside Boones Mill, Doyle Enterprises on Route 646 near Snow Creek, and Blue Ridge Talc on Route 605 near Fork are other large County industries.

Smaller industrial operations include scattered saw mill operations, welding shops, truck repair facilities, and similar operations located throughout the County.

Public and Semi-Public Uses

Franklin County's major public and semi-public land uses are found in and around large population concentrations. The Franklin County Courthouse, Administrative Offices, Library, Public Health Center, High School, Middle School, and Sheriff's Department, are all located in Rocky Mount. Other uses in Boones Mill include a Town Hall, Fire and Rescue Station, Post Office, and a nearby elementary school, as well as a number of churches and public assembly halls.

The community of Ferrum, in addition to Ferrum College, is the location of fire and rescue facilities, a post office, and elementary school, as well as a number of church sites and cemeteries.

Smaller communities and cultural centers such as Callaway, Burnt Chimney, Glade Hill, Snow Creek, Sontag, Henry, Union Hall, and Penhook include one or more public uses as a focus to community activity. In all, eight elementary schools, thirteen fire and rescue sites, and eleven post offices are dispersed throughout the County. The elementary school facilities include a full complement of playground facilities and ball fields, as well as indoor space for community events. The rural fire and rescue sites provide a focus for the public service activities and a source of security for nearby residents. The Sheriff's Department established a substation located at Westlake Towne Center on Route 122, near Smith Mountain Lake.

Critical Environmental and Cultural Resources

This category of land includes a variety of lands that, because of their nature, play an indispensable role in the environmental health of the entire community. These sensitive lands typically require special protection in the form of regulations of development to very low intensities of use. Land in this category includes floodplains, steep slopes (over 25 percent slopes), wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, and lands that provide special scenic vistas.

The federal flood insurance maps identify lands along the Roanoke, Pigg, and Blackwater Rivers, as well as land along Chestnut, Maggodee, Gills, and Story Creeks that are within the 100 year floodplain. Due to the potential of flood damage, and to ensure the flood carrying capacity of these streams, development in floodplains is regulated to prevent any resulting rise in the vertical elevation of the 100 year flood. As a result, these lands are part of the permanent open space system of the County.

The difficult construction problems created by excessively steeply sloping lands also curtail the development potential of this category of land. Like land in floodplains, this land will in the future be developed only at very low densities, and the highest and best use of the land will for the most part be for timber production and wildlife management. In all, approximately 106 square miles, or over 15 percent of the County land area, is in slopes over 25 percent.

The shoreline of Smith Mountain Lake is also unique area that requires special planning emphasis. Currently the County has in place Smith Mountain Lake Overlay Zone that controls the placement and construction of new docks on the shoreline. These regulations coordinate the length and height of docks provide a means to ensure that each property owner will access to the lake has an equitable opportunity to build a boat dock and have navigable access through the coves of the lake.

As a result of a regional land use initiative, a concerted effort is underway to provide special planning emphasis to land along the banks of the Roanoke River and its tributaries. These lands are considered to have an intrinsic value to the community in a natural state as a source of water quality protection due to the ecological and biological processes they support. Acting as biological filter of point and non-point pollution, preservation of these lands will help ensure the water quality of not only the Roanoke River, but also Smith Mountain Lake.

Another area that has received special planning attention is the lands along the Blue Ridge Parkway. In order to preserve the visual quality of the Parkway, special setback and access regulations control the extent and location of new construction.

A final category of land meriting special attention is places that because of their visual quality or place in the history of the County have special significance to local residents. The County in the past has inventoried historic structures and places. Other places provided unsurpassed views of the County that make them special. At present the County does not have a registry of historic places. However outstanding historic, scenic, and natural areas should be mapped, and guidance should be provided for new development in the vicinity of these resources to ensure that existing and new development complement and enhance one another.