

Preface

Scope of the Land Plan

Although the culmination of months of work, adoption of the Davidson Land Plan does not represent an end. This work is the beginning of an effort to ensure sustainable growth in Davidson. The unending process of building a city or town requires that there be a blueprint to guide all interested parties.

There is a tangible physical dimension to the unique quality of Davidson, and the Land Plan is a description of the town's desired future physical form. Davidson's landscape encompasses a compact center of urban activity focused on Main Street and Davidson College, and a largely rural edge which has recently started to develop with more urban uses. The Land Plan presents policies which relate to this entire urban-rural setting. It is within the context of this comprehensive town view that we can address the many problems and opportunities which affect the community's physical form.

Land Plan Committee

In October, 1994 the Davidson Board of Commissioners appointed an eighteen member committee to oversee the drafting of the Land Plan. This action followed the imposition of a one year moratorium on new subdivisions. This moratorium was enacted specifically to allow time for the completion of a land plan and for the town to investigate concerns regarding school overcrowding and the provision of public sanitary sewer service. The committee spent twelve months reviewing and discussing a wide variety of topics related to growth and development.

Options for Growth

Three general policy options for the town were considered: *no-growth, status quo, and sustainable growth*. Given the rapid growth of the entire Charlotte and North Mecklenburg region, the inability of town government to counteract regional pressures, and the infringement on property rights that halting growth would require, the committee rejected the no-growth option as simply not feasible. The status quo option prescribed by current zoning regulations and described as suburban sprawl was seen as incompatible with the much valued qualities of Davidson. Each of these two policy options would be inconsistent with the Davidson General Plan. As a result, the committee focused on defining a sustainable model of growth consistent with the traditional physical qualities of Davidson and a sensible environmental future.

Context of Growth

During this process, the committee learned that the Charlotte Mecklenburg Utility Department (CMUD) has plans to provide additional treatment capacity and new sewer lines in the Davidson area within approximately five years. CMUD's capital improvement program includes several new sewer lines east of Davidson. These lines will relieve pressure in the older sections of Davidson and provide service east of town.

The committee also learned during this process that alleviation of school overcrowding is a complex issue. The entire Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system is crowded and needs are widespread. A recently passed school bond includes

additions to Davidson and Cornelius Elementary Schools. However, given the growth which is occurring throughout North Mecklenburg, a long-term effort to generate revenue for building schools is needed. The problem will not go away even with the new bond package. A Land Plan recommendation to appoint a local Schools Committee has already occurred; the Committee was appointed in August, 1995. There is very little that Davidson can do on its own to remedy the school situation. Much work needs to be done in cooperation with neighboring municipalities and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board.

The Next Step

One of the keys to sustainable growth is the ability for the community to provide necessary infrastructure and public services. The plan recommends the town establish an ordinance to ensure the provision of adequate public facilities. The town has begun preparation of a capital improvements program (CIP) which will identify needed capital projects, such as streets and parks, and also sources of revenue to fund these projects. The CIP should be directly related to an adequate public facilities ordinance.

Communities often attempt to tackle specific issues without the benefit of an overall community vision. With the adoption of the Land Plan, Davidson will take the necessary first step toward ensuring a sustainable future for the town.

Introduction

Municipal town planning in the United States is a difficult and important endeavor. Governments typically do not build towns and cities; private developers do. Developers lay miles of local streets and are responsible for creating neighborhoods. But government is asked to manage development for the purpose of protecting the public health, safety and welfare. Government thus prescribes in much detail the physical form of our environment through land development regulations. This is reasonable because all citizens have a vested interest in the physical future of a town. The community provides services to both existing and new residents and businesses. New building and development can either add to the town's quality of life, or merely expand the developed area.

Much recent planning by local government has been flawed because it has not attempted to make a town or city into a specific setting that nurtures human habitation. Most zoning is a tool for separating uses, establishing land values, and protecting legal rights. Local government can set a higher standard.

Developers and landowners invest money and land to create new places. Developers can go to great lengths in pursuit of building a superior neighborhood, but their interest is typically confined to a particular site. As a result, if this neighborhood is not part of any larger community plan, its potential has been limited. In this uncoordinated scenario, the landowner or developer next door may perceive something different and out of character with the surroundings. The

town plan, however, should be able to bring these interests together to see how, working cooperatively, everyone can benefit from a common vision.

Davidson is a delightful small town in a rapidly suburbanizing region. History suggests that small towns in this setting can become little more than suburbs to a central city. Main Streets become multi-lane highways and farmland becomes single income subdivisions, shopping malls, and office parks. What the Davidson Land Plan offers is an alternative to this future - Davidson as a model for managed growth. It would be difficult to improve upon the physical arrangement of the traditional American small town, so rather than try, the Land Plan seeks to adapt the *best of this tradition to the conditions of the late 20th and early 21st Century.*

Prior to World War II, the dominant model for town planning was the formal neighborhood of mixed building types organized by public streets and other public spaces. Davidson has no specific historic plan, but it is clear that Davidson grew according to the pre-World War II model. The Land Plan describes this model as the "traditional town or neighborhood" (*illus. 1b*). Much of this development occurred prior to zoning.

While the suburban form has been a dominant pattern of growth in the United States for several generations, it was only after 1945 that the suburban model became primarily focused on separating land uses and on automobile-dependent design. This model has promoted sprawling devel-

opment and widespread loss of open space. The Land Plan refers to this model as "suburban sprawl" (*illus. 1a*). Zoning practices, such as one acre or larger lot zoning, very large building setbacks, and excessive off-street parking requirements have helped to maintain this model as the dominant form.

Those who drafted this plan are committed to a central belief that the quality of life long enjoyed by Davidson residents should be sustained and improved. The principles underlying this plan are straightforward: the town environment must be diverse in use and population, scaled for the pedestrian, and yet capable of accommodating the automobile and mass transit. It must have well-defined public space and a landscape which reflects the history, ecology, and culture of the town.¹

The Land Plan does not provide strategies to pursue growth. It does, however, acknowledge Davidson's place within a rapidly growing suburban region. It seeks to manage the inevitable growth which comes when citizens exercise their rights to sell and develop their land.

The Land Plan is comprised of three parts: *Part I, the Policy Guide; Part II, the Regulating Plan; and Part III, the Land Plan Code. The Policy Guide* section contains background information as well as descriptive policies for guiding growth and development. *The Regulating Plan* consists of a map of the Davidson area setting out the intended pattern of buildings, roads, and open spaces. The Land Plan Code provides detailed regulations by which the goals of the Plan will be implemented. The code provides preferred

¹ Tom Low, Office for the New Urbanism

alternatives to the existing zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations. These previous codes, however, remain available to landowners and developers. The new regulations are thus adopted as parallel codes.

General Plan Recommendations

In its entirety, the Land Plan draws directly from the Davidson General Plan adopted by the Town in 1993. The plan will be supplemented by a wide range of initiatives affecting the physical, social, and economic health of the community.

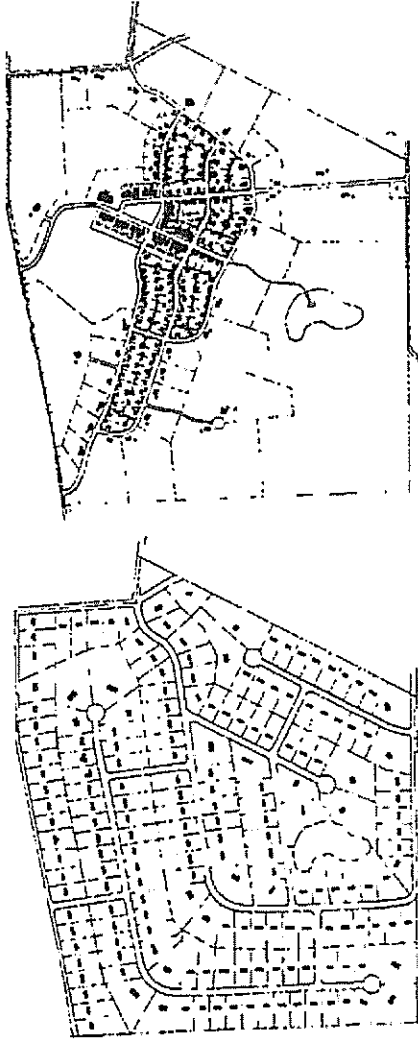
The following excerpt comes from the Davidson General Plan adopted by the Davidson Board of Commissioners on October 12, 1993 :

"Davidson has attained an established character that is valued by its residents. Davidson citizens are concerned that new development will jeopardize this character. While it is generally agreed that additional development will occur, the question remains - How can new development blend in and maintain the unique quality and visual character that typifies Davidson?"

The General Plan represents a community statement about the future. Through this document Davidson residents have expressed long-term goals for the town, many of which relate to the accommodation of new development. General Plan Priorities, as outlined by the General Plan Committee, are reflected in the Land Plan.

Many of the land and development-related goals of the General Plan recommend preservation of

(illus. 1)



a. Suburban Sprawl Model

One Acre Zoning
Single Building Type
All Land Converted to House Lots
and Streets

b. Traditional Neighborhood in Rural Setting

Compact Urban Area
Variety of Building Types
Open Space Preserved

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traditional Davidson qualities (Table 1). These qualities of town form and open landscape should always be reflected in new development.

Achieving such goals today is a difficult task. Davidson's early pattern was established gradually during economic periods which favored small towns with compact, pedestrian scaled places and a comfortable mixture of uses. Over the past half century, however, big developments of single uses, connected by long and wide roads, have become the pattern codified in municipal ordinances everywhere.

It is in this context that the Land Plan seeks to apply the recommendations of the General Plan and preserve the qualities which define Davidson. This will only be possible by substantial modification to current development policies and practices.

Davidson General Plan Selected Issues

(Table 1)

Land Use and Zoning

- The small town character of the community needs to be preserved.
- Any new growth needs to be carefully controlled.
- Densities of new development should relate to the surrounding developed areas and to the town's overall development vision.
- Parkland needs to be preserved. Existing park assets need to be maintained and additional parkland needs to be provided as new development occurs.
- Appropriate industrial development should be encouraged. The town needs to be selective in the type of industrial development it attracts.
- The rural character of the areas surrounding town should be preserved.
- Infill development needs to be compatible with the use and character of adjacent development.
- The I-77 interchange (Exit 30) needs to be examined closely to ensure that development of this area is accomplished in the town's best interest.
- Watershed regulations must be carefully considered for new development.

Transportation

- The needs of automobiles and pedestrians must be balanced.
- The town should have a pedestrian emphasis. Safe pedestrian access to and from all parts of the community is needed, with control of vehicle speed strictly monitored.
- Planning efforts should consider all modes of transportation.
- The existing transportation system (such as roads and walkways) should tie the community's neighborhoods together.
- Industrial traffic needs to be limited.
- Traffic congestion in the downtown area should not delay through-traffic.
- Public transportation should be made available for those in need of transportation assistance.
- Transportation system improvements need to be implemented through development of transportation plan and subsequent revision of the subdivision regulations.

Defining Small Town

The General Plan describes what is called the "overriding principle" of the plan: "A recurring theme in the public planning sessions and Task Force working sessions was that the ultimate goal of this planning process was to preserve Davidson's small town character." Given the imprecise nature of "small town character", the Land Plan Committee adopted a more tangible description of this condition (*Table 2*).

A small town cannot be defined by its population. Suburbanization tends to destroy small town qualities regardless of population size. An area of single-income subdivisions, shopping malls, and office parks, regardless of population size, should not be confused with a small town. In a region like Charlotte-Mecklenburg, a commitment to traditional American town form over suburban sprawl is essential to preserve the character described in the General Plan.

Merely maintaining a small population in a rapidly suburbanizing region, with no attention to town form, is fruitless. Small town populations are engulfed by suburban growth. Pineville is a local example. Its 1992 population was only 3,160, but this bears little relationship to the actual experience of Pineville. It has become part of Charlotte's southern suburban sprawl.

The Land Plan is clear about the following principle: Davidson can only maintain and enhance its quality of life by requiring growth that complements the town's existing form and image.

Davidson Land Plan Sustainable Growth

(Table 2)

CENTRAL ISSUE:

Sustainable Development: how to accommodate growth while maintaining the much valued and ecologically sound small town character.

DEFINITION OF SMALL TOWN CHARACTER:

- a) A compact and pedestrian-scaled urban form set in predominantly open landscape.
- b) Clearly defined boundaries where the town stops and the countryside begins, with an absence of sprawling suburban style development.

PLANNING AND DESIGN OBJECTIVES:

- a) To enhance the existing older town and create new developments that are compatible with the scales and layouts of existing buildings and spaces.
- b) To create extensions to the town by means of subdivisions that enhance connections within the community, maintain open communal landscape, promote land and energy conservation, and minimize extensions of the town's infrastructure.
- c) To create urban layouts that allow personal transportation options, and minimize dependence on the automobile.
- d) To protect active farmland and open space.
- e) To protect fair market property values for individual landowners.
- f) To ensure long-term economic sustainability of the town through the promotion of a diverse tax base and efficient town layout.