

Chapter 12. Intergovernmental Coordination

12.1 Opportunities for Coordination on Infrastructure, Schools and Other Government Services

Intergovernmental coordination is at the core of many aspects of the County's Comprehensive Plan. As the County plans for a successful future, with the hopes of continuing to be a place where people will want to live and plan to stay, intergovernmental coordination and collaboration play an important role. The various initiatives underway at this time that are exploring collaborations and related roles and responsibilities need to be continued and completed as appropriate. The County, towns, school system and colleges are working together to address economic development, workforce, transportation and other needs. This work should be both commended and expanded in the future.

Land Use/Growth Management Planning

Hot Springs and Marshall have recently completed land use plans or comprehensive plans – Hot Springs in 2008 and Marshall in 2009. Mars Hill has recently gone through a community visioning process and is working on plans to realize the vision. These plans and related documents have been reviewed as part of this comprehensive planning process. While there are similarities, especially in the goals for maintaining rural character and for strengthening the downtowns and the towns' economic and residential bases, there are potential areas of conflict or difference in some aspects that will need to be addressed.

One of the issues that will need to be discussed with each town is about how new development will be accommodated around the town's current limits of jurisdiction. This plan recommends accommodating most future growth adjacent to the towns and on portions of the main corridors. It also recommends developing at higher densities than current zoning allows in some areas. Related to this issue are issues of planning and providing for transportation improvements and other infrastructure improvements, including water, sewer and communications infrastructure.

Transportation Plans and Projects

The County has recently begun a countywide transportation planning process, working with the Land-of-Sky Rural Planning Organization (RPO) and NC Department of Transportation (NC DOT). The towns and other stakeholders are involved on the steering committee for the transportation plan. The future land use map and plans as well as other related recommendations from this Comprehensive Plan will need to be incorporated into the transportation plan and its recommendations. The County and the towns will need to stay involved in the planning process to ensure that this occurs.

Water and Wastewater Plans and Facilities

Each town provides water and wastewater service for residents and businesses in and near its town limits. Currently the County does not have a role in the provision of this infrastructure. The County Manager has initiated intergovernmental dialogue on this issue through regular town and county manager meetings that often include some elected officials and other staff. There appears to be interest between the county and towns to coordinate services as it makes sense financially and logistically. The area along NC 213 that runs between Mars Hill and Marshall offers an opportunity for these towns and potentially the County to coordinate and share costs and benefits of these improvements.

Due to Hot Springs' location, far from the other two towns and separated by mountains and National Forest lands, there are minimal opportunities for coordination of water or wastewater services. As the town grows, it will need to expand its current services and this expansion is a high priority in the town's recently completed comprehensive plan.

Schools and Education

The **Madison County School System** has approximately 2,600 students enrolled in four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. The middle and high schools are in the central part of the county – in Walnut and Marshall. The elementary schools are spread around the county – in Hot Springs, Brushy Creek (Walnut), Laurel, and Mars Hill. Some students have to travel far distances for middle and high school, due to the consolidated location. Due to the mountainous terrain and settlement patterns across the county, some students also have long distances to and from the elementary schools.

The county school system and **Asheville-Buncombe Technical College** (A-B Tech) have been partnering in recent years to offer college-level courses to high school students and to coordinate course offerings. These efforts should continue and should be coordinated with the county's economic development efforts and local employment needs.

Mars Hill College gets their students involved in the greater community through service learning opportunities, in its Lifeworks Learning Partnership program. In August, the college hosted a meeting of about 35 community leaders, representing the faculty and staff of Mars Hill College as well as service organizations from Madison and Buncombe counties. The purpose of the event was to brainstorm about better collaboration between the college and numerous community groups which provide a range of services to individuals in the community.

Mars Hill College is also planning to begin a program that will attempt to connect visitors to the college and to the agricultural, cultural and historical resources and amenities/businesses in the county. This new program is envisioned to offer a week's stay at the campus and include educational sessions and field trips, with opportunities for self-exploration. This program will give visitors more awareness of the variety of things the county has to offer and hopefully encourage them to stay longer and visit again.

Other Governmental Services

The County provides building inspection and floodplain administration services for the entire county. It also provides watershed administration services for the county and the Town of Mars Hill. Each town does their own zoning administration and enforcement.

Various public services are provided by the County for the entire county population and area: parks and recreation; social services; public transportation; senior services; and emergency management. There may be opportunities for efficiencies and collaboration in these and other services, some of which are outside the scope of this plan.

12.2 Recommendations

12.2.1 Coordinate with the towns on plans to accommodate future growth and plans for annexation and extra-territorial jurisdiction (ETJ).

Coordinate with the towns in the development of annexation plans that define future annexation boundaries, future land uses, providers of and enhancements to public facilities/services, and other infra-structure. The plans should be consistent with this Comprehensive Plan and assess financial feasibility and availability/capacity of service providers to serve the areas proposed for annexation.

12.2.2 Work with the School Board to identify sites for new schools and on plans to consolidate schools.

Assist the School Board in identifying sites for new schools and in school consolidation plans to ensure that the decisions made are consistent with the County's Comprehensive Plan and the concerns raised by residents regarding the long distances many students must travel to and from schools. Proposed school locations should be reviewed for opportunities to integrate/collocate schools and other public facilities including, but not limited to, libraries, parks, community centers and public safety or fire station facilities.

12.2.3 Regularly share information with the School Board and the colleges to identify issues of mutual concern and to review capital and expansion plans.

Annually share information and assess future needs with the School Board and to identify areas of mutual concern and financial savings concerning the construction of public facilities. Annually share information and assess future needs with Mars Hill College and Asheville-Buncombe Technical College to identify areas of mutual concern and benefit, and to ensure their plans are consistent with the goals and objectives in this Comprehensive Plan.

Review the School Board's Strategic Plan and related work programs and provide input on updates to this plan to ensure that it is consistent with the County's Comprehensive Plan.

12.2.4 Continue to be active in the Land-of-Sky RPO and work with the towns to develop countywide transportation priorities.

Continue to be active in the Land-of-Sky Rural Planning Organization (RPO) and advocate for the County's transportation infrastructure needs.

The County and towns should communicate regularly about transportation issues and concerns and try to agree on countywide priorities. The County and the towns can then collectively advocate for these priorities, which will be more effective in making them regional priorities and attracting funding.

12.2.5 Continue to be active on the Land-of-Sky Regional Council board and with regional projects.

Continue to be active on the Land-of-Sky Regional Council board and with regional projects, especially those efforts that will result in greater coordination, efficiency, and effectiveness of local governments.

12.2.6 Consider conducting a feasibility study to look at consolidation and coordination possibilities for water and sewer facilities and services.

With the interest in the future development along NC 213, the County and the towns of Mars Hill and Marshall should consider conducting a feasibility study to look at costs and benefits of various scenarios of providing water, sewer and other utilities along this corridor. Other future growth areas near the towns could also be included. Potential study elements could include:

- Evaluation of Existing Resources (Infrastructure and Facilities)
- Operating Costs
- Growth Projections
- Present and Future Needs
- Opportunities for Synergy within Systems
- Capital Improvements Program
- Financial Analysis and Rate Information
- Legal Analysis
- Consolidation Feasibility Analysis
- Other Issues Affecting Consolidation (e.g., loss of control, risk and liabilities, implementation issues, etc.)

12.3 Examples of Successful Models from Other Places

Water and Sewer Consolidation Examples:

The City of Wilmington and New Hanover County consolidated their water and sewer services and assets in 2008, under the umbrella of the **Cape Fear Public Utility Authority** (see www.cfpua.org). The Cape Fear Public Utility Authority is a consolidated and independent public body.

Onslow Water and Sewer Authority (ONWASA) is a regional water and sewer authority which provides service to the City of Jacksonville, Town of Swansboro, Town of Richlands, Town of North Topsail Beach and the Town of Holly Ridge. The authority was formed in 2000. For more information, see www.onwasa.com.

Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA) is a community-owned, non-profit agency which provides public drinking water and sanitary sewer or “wastewater” services to the Carrboro-Chapel Hill community. OWASA has served the community since February, 1977, when the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Towns of Carrboro and Chapel Hill transferred their water and wastewater facilities to OWASA. In 2009, OWASA will begin operating a “reclaimed water” system funded by the University that will provide highly treated wastewater for certain non-drinking uses on the campus. For more information, see www.owasa.org.

Salisbury-Rowan Utilities (SRU) consolidated water and sewer systems with some surrounding jurisdictions in the 1990’s. Salisbury-Rowan Utilities currently serves residential and business customers in the cities of Rockwell, Salisbury, Spencer, East Spencer, and Granite Quarry. It recently received the Platinum Peak Performance Award for the 2008 calendar year. Peak Performance Awards are presented on behalf of the National Association of Clean Water Agencies (NACWA) to recognize public wastewater treatment facilities for their outstanding compliance records. For more information, see www.salisburync.gov/utilities.