

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

CHAPTER TEN

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND URBAN DESIGN

Winchester's history and architecture help make the city a unique place to live, work, and visit. Planning for economic, environmental, and social sustainability should embrace modern technology, but it should not forget Winchester's rich legacy of buildings and their stories. In moving towards a more vibrant urban form, Winchester's history is an asset: public and private efforts should recall the traditional design of its neighborhoods.

Citywide Historic and Design Goals

Chapter Three noted six citywide Historic Preservation and Urban Design objectives identified to address the citywide goal of: *Promote architecturally appealing and walkable urban form while also respecting significant historic identity, image, and integrity* This chapter provides an overview of what the City is already doing, and should do in the future, for each of the following objectives:

- 1) Employ New Urbanism principles in new development and redevelopment, including:
 - a. Pedestrian-friendly street design,
 - b. Interconnectivity of new local streets with existing local streets,
 - c. Connectivity of road and pedestrian networks,
 - d. Preservation of natural areas,
 - e. Satisfaction of requirements for stormwater management,
 - f. Mixed-use neighborhoods, including mixed housing types,
 - g. Reduction of front and side yard building setbacks, and
 - h. Reduction of street widths and turning radii at intersections.
- 2) Protect significant public and private architectural and historic resources in the City.
- 3) Guide the physical form of development along key tourist entry corridors leading in to the City's core historic district by utilizing a combination of standards and guidelines.
- 4) Ensure that all new development in the City is of a high quality regardless of use.
- 5) Pursue green building techniques (i.e. LEED certifiable) on major public construction projects and provide incentives for private development to do so as well.
- 6) Encourage the use of Universal Design building techniques to meet the needs of all residents.

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

1. Employ New Urbanism principles in new development and redevelopment.

New Urbanism and Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) are terms which planners use for practices that promote more compact, efficient, and sustainable cities. New Urbanism refers to a broader set of changes to infrastructure and land use, while TND refers to using the historical appearance and function of neighborhoods. The concepts combine the latest technology with commonsense, and sometimes ancient lessons for designing cities. This section briefly describes eight elements of good urban planning, notes where those elements already exist in Winchester, and explains the benefits if the city uses them more widely.

a. Pedestrian-friendly street design.

Chapter Six, on mobility, also addresses street design. The features of a street shape how residents and visitors use the urban space. Winchester's streets should enable safe and convenient movement by foot, bike, and bus, as well as by car. The upgrades to Braddock and Cameron Streets make them friendlier to pedestrians. Sidewalks, bump outs, crosswalks, shade trees, benches, bike racks, and bus shelters on the street make it easier for those without cars to get around, and they provide new choices for those who find using cars to be a hassle. The images below show how well-designed streets offer better choices to residents and visitors. The [design guide](#) for the city's historic district presents more detail on streetscape features and regulations.



Benches and public seating create a social space where pedestrians can rest and socialize. Benches should be shaded by a building or tree and be at least 6 feet long so two or three friends can have back and arm rests. A center arm rest discourages sleeping. To create a cohesive urban environment, seating can be integrated with other urban design elements, such as planters or low walls.

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022



Bus shelters are more effective than open stops. They should be integrated with sidewalks and not obstruct walking. Shelters should provide protection from the elements, and seating for at least two people. Ideal shelters integrate with other furnishings: in this image, a sturdy bike rack and a waste bin.



Trees provide shade and designate a pedestrian space. A vertical clear zone of a least 8 feet between the tree canopy and the sidewalk ensures clear visibility and security for pedestrians and motorists. Tree species with tap roots should be selected to prevent sidewalk breakage.



Parking structures save space for other uses. They should match the scale and character of nearby buildings. There are several redevelopment concepts in Chapter 11 that use structured parking to increase density. Parking structures on the interior of a block preserve pedestrian options and improve property values, for example in the North Cameron and North Loudoun Corridor concept.

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022



Wide sidewalks and textured crosswalks invite and protect pedestrians. Crosswalks like this one define a pedestrian space for safer crossing. Textured curb ramps directed towards crosswalks assist the visually impaired.

Street designs that promote walking have several benefits. Many kinds of businesses benefit from greater foot traffic and window shopping. Regular walking and reduced car exhaust improves public health. Walkable neighborhoods attract key growth demographics noted in Chapter Two, including active seniors and young professionals; these residents gravitate to walkable neighborhoods and provide strong tax revenue to fund community services.

Efforts to continue relocating overhead utilities to underground should be coordinated with Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC) as the City and large-scale private developers undertake projects impacting the public rights of way. The City has included provisions for SVEC to work with the City as part of an updated franchise agreement.

b. Interconnectivity of new local streets with existing local streets.

New subdivisions should easily link to existing local streets. If well connected streets and trails are created then new residents can move around the city without a car and feel like a part of the community. Traditional layouts of streets in compact blocks promote strong connections and walking. A compact grid offers easy paths to walk without getting lost or tired. Rather than making islands of change, new projects should maintain or increase mobility to nearby neighborhoods. Strengthening and enforcing inter-parcel connectivity provisions in the subdivision and zoning ordinance can ensure good connections.

c. Connectivity of road and pedestrian networks.

Not only should streets connect well with each other, they should provide for easy transitions between modes of transportation. Chapter Six also discusses intermodal transit. The Green Circle Trail enables safe and scenic walking and biking around Winchester, and in several places the trail intersects bus stops or parking lots.

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

As Winchester expands its pedestrian-friendly features, care should be taken that they align with existing streets in useful ways to create a network that offers more choices.

d. Preservation of natural areas.

Natural areas include the privately owned fields and forests around Kernstown Battlefield and the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley as well as city-owned parks and stormwater management areas. They are part of Winchester's unique character. Even small natural areas such as landscaped medians and parking lot buffer strips improve the pedestrian experience by providing visual variety and scenery. Development should remain sensitive to the city's habitats and strive to preserve them for future generations of residents and visitors. Sensitivity to existing natural areas should be one factor in judging redevelopment and new construction projects. The Natural Resources Advisory Board provides official input to City Council when natural areas may be affected.

e. Satisfaction of requirements for stormwater management.

Chapter Five addresses stormwater runoff in greater detail. New Urbanism seeks to protect streams by limiting impact at the source point on individual property, reducing the need for complex and costly conveyance systems and treatment downstream. Low impact developments tend to:

- Maintain ample green space on a parcel, including many trees
- Include a rain garden or retention pond to catch and filter stormwater
- Build a "green roof" with soil and plants to slow runoff
- Use smaller parking lots made of permeable materials

Low impact designs create appealing scenery even as they reduce pollution and public costs of water treatment. New standards in the Zoning Ordinance could require better stormwater management on newly developed or redeveloped parcels.

f. Mixed-use neighborhoods, including mixed housing types.

Old Town never lost the traditional compact mixed-use development. Within a few blocks, there are single-family homes, townhouses, and upper-story apartments. Businesses range from convenience stores to boutique shopping and professional offices, with a wide array of dining. The downtown also includes core civic buildings. For 200 years, families lived, worked, and played in this small area mostly by walking. New Urbanism recalls those patterns. Chapter Two includes another discussion of mixed-use development. By planning the character of a neighborhood and permitting a wide range of uses, city officials can enhance quality of life, prosperity, and property rights.

Meeting daily needs close to home in a mixed-use neighborhood means less traffic congestion and air pollution for the whole community. The traditional urban lifestyle

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

attracts key growth demographics to the city. Winchester's Zoning Ordinance should permit mixed use development in more areas, and it should provide incentives for mixed use projects in priority areas. Chapter Nine outlines zoning ordinance reform, and Chapter 11 identifies important parcels or corridors for redevelopment in each planning area.

g. Reduction of front and side yard building setbacks.

The arrangement of buildings on a street affects how friendly it is to pedestrians. In traditional neighborhoods, buildings close to the sidewalk invite pedestrians in and create a more comfortably scaled space for walking. Such buildings may be served with parking, but it is to the back or side of a lot rather than out front. Porches and shop windows near the sidewalk invite visiting and can knit a community more closely. The three homes below show how a larger setback changes the pedestrian perspective and reliance on personal cars.



Winchester's Zoning Ordinance should promote more pedestrian-friendly setbacks. While the existing Corridor Enhancement districts include maximum setback provisions, tighter provisions would better align with New Urbanism. Currently, underlying zones do not have maximum setback provisions, but almost all other than the Central Business and Residential Business (B-1 and RB-1) Districts have minimum setback requirements. Appropriate ordinances should consider the character of the city's different neighborhoods.

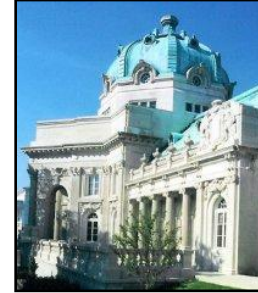
h. Reduction of street widths and turning radii at intersections.

Reduced street widths and tighter intersection radii are examples of traffic calming, which Chapter Six treats in more detail. Narrowing the part of the street used for car traffic tends to slow cars down, increasing safety for pedestrians. The space gained by narrowing traffic lanes may be used to expand sidewalks, plant trees, or serve as bike lanes, all of which improve mobility options. Curb extensions, or bump outs, at street intersections tend to slow cars as they make turns. Like other calming features, this improves safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

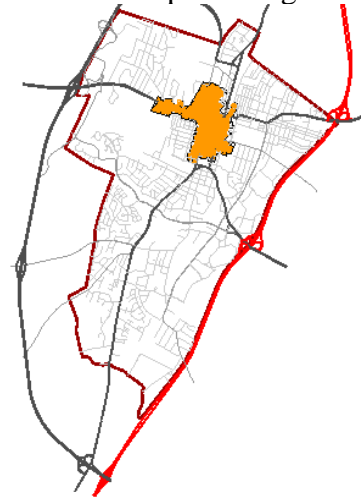
2. Protect significant public and private architectural and historic resources in the City.

Winchester has a wealth of historic buildings. The City partners with the local historical society to interpret Abram's Delight, George Washington's Office, and Stonewall Jackson's Headquarters to the public. Historic structures such as Glen Burnie and the Pritchard House, are privately owned museums. Others, such as the iconic Handley Library and Handley High School, still function as public facilities according to their original purpose. Many other privately owned structures not open to the public have long histories adding to the architectural and cultural richness of the City.



Historic resources attract new residents, bring visitors, and create job opportunities. As neighborhoods redevelop and grow, the city's unique architectural heritage should be preserved. The most important tool for preserving privately owned historic structures is the local Historic Winchester overlay district. The overlay ordinance provides special standards and guidelines within the district's boundaries, shown on the map in orange.

The boundaries include buildings of historical significance, traditional styling, and downtown character. The Board of Architectural Review considers exterior alterations including new construction, demolition, and renovation projects in the historic district. The review board ensures that changes are consistent with U.S. Department of Interior standards and that structures remain in character with the surrounding area. However, the local historic district only restricts the appearance of property, not its use. There is no barrier to mixed-use redevelopment.



The City should continue to maintain the historic character of the downtown area while guiding redevelopment efforts. Regular review of the historic district's boundaries should consider neighborhood needs and a specified Period of Significance. Some changes to the boundaries of the local or national historic districts may be justified following completion of an updated inventory of more than 1,200 structures currently situated within the historic district. A Historic District Design Guidelines Committee was established this past year to examine the review the manner in which certificates of appropriateness are processed and what, if any, changes should be considered to the boundaries of the local and national historic districts.

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

[Preservation of Historic Winchester](#) is a grass-roots organization which, since 1964, has purchased, restored, and resold houses of historic value. The houses have easements or covenants preserving their traditional design. Preservation of Historic Winchester has protected some 75 houses, mostly on Kent, Loudoun, and Cameron Streets. Free market efforts like this complement the work of government and should be encouraged.

Greater promotion and utilization of state and federal historic tax credits for contributing structures within the Winchester National Historic District should occur as noted in the Housing chapter. The tax credits are available for nonresidential structures as well. Together, the credits amount to a forty-five percent income tax credit. The state and federal credits can also be used in conjunction with the City's ten-year abatement of local real estate taxes for substantial rehabilitation.

3. Guide the physical form of development along key tourist entry corridors leading into the City's core historic district by utilizing a combination of standards and guidelines.

First impressions matter, so the streets along which visitors enter Winchester should feel welcoming. To create inviting gateways, the Zoning Ordinance includes [Corridor Enhancement \(CE\) overlay districts](#) along parts of nine important tourist entryways that were defined by City Council in 2005. Like the Historic District, the CE regulations have two parts: Zoning Ordinance text to define rules for the district, and Zoning Map overlay district boundary lines to apply those rules in specific areas of the city. The blue sections of the map below show current CE Districts. The green section shows an area where the district is authorized, but where the precise overlay boundaries have not yet been fixed and thus, no provisions yet apply to properties. Further implementation of the CE overlay zoning was deferred until after adoption of this Plan update. If found to be consistent with this plan, the City should finish mapping this final CE District and proceed with the overlay rezoning action.

The districts contain different rules that are context sensitive and appropriate to each of Winchester's distinct gateways. In addition to guiding the form and location of new or altered structures, the CE overlay provisions guide the appearance and placement of signage.

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

Some CE provisions are firm standards, while others are in the form of guidelines offering suggestions as to what should or should not be done. The Planning Commission serves as the review board and reviews major construction in the districts requiring site plan approval. Most reviews not requiring site plan approval are delegated to the Planning Director. The Zoning Administrator enforces the standards. In certain cases where builders meet the guidelines, however, the Commission may reward the project by allowing extra housing units or by requiring less parking thus making a project more profitable.

Corridor Enhancement district rules should continue to guide development along the city's gateways. New construction in the tourist entry corridors should create a distinctive welcome. Combining traditional and modern features can create a strong first impression.

However, all of Winchester's entry arterials continue into the county, so there should be smooth transitions from rural and suburban areas (or transect zones) to the city. Corridor enhancements require partnership with Frederick County planners. The Metropolitan Planning Organization has undertaken a number of corridor studies and offers an ideal multijurisdictional forum to encourage cooperation on corridor enhancements.

4. Ensure that all new development in the City is of a high quality regardless of use.

Low quality development poses at least three risks to Winchester's sustainability. There may be safety hazards which endanger the public's health. Low quality buildings may depress surrounding property values. Low quality development may also harm the character and vitality of a neighborhood.

Quality and price are not the same thing. For example, it is possible to build high quality, compact housing for low-income tenants. By reviewing development plans carefully and enforcing property maintenance codes, city staff should continue to identify blighted and dangerous properties. Improving low quality buildings protects both public health and property value. Ensuring good construction in the first place works better for everyone and reduces the chances of accelerated economic obsolescence.

Corridor
Enhancement
Districts
— Current
— Potential

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

5. Pursue green building techniques (i.e. LEED certifiable) on major public construction projects and provide incentives for private development to do so as well.

Chapter Five describes green buildings in more detail. In addition to reducing local and global pollution, environmentally sustainable construction reduces building owners' operating costs. A commitment to green building principles may also help attract key growth demographics and green collar employment. Winchester currently exempts solar energy systems from property tax, but other options include:

- Advising developers as to the long-term cost savings of sustainable construction.
- Assisting with financing and securing tax credits or other incentives.
- Exempting property tax for other sustainable improvements.
- Expediting the permitting and approval process.
- Using local contractors and local materials for sustainable public-sector construction.
- Publicizing green projects and commending their developers.

Using sustainable techniques for highly visible public projects like school renovations may help generate enthusiasm in the community for greener private-sector construction. A density bonus was recently offered to allow benefits for multifamily projects that implement features that are environmentally sustainable, energy efficient, and/or use alternative energy.

6. Encourage the use of Universal Design building techniques to meet the needs of all residents, especially the elderly.

Some mobility enhancement noted in this chapter –bike lanes, running trails, and long stretches of sidewalk –disproportionately benefit the physically fit. Winchester's streets and buildings should welcome everyone. Universal Design refers to some common sense techniques to make buildings and streets more accessible to all segments of the population. Such features should be easy to understand and be usable with little physical effort. They include:

- Ramps with flat rest areas in addition to or in place of steps.
- Lever handles in the place of doorknobs, or motion-activated doors.
- Electric lights with motion sensors or panel switches rather than small toggles.
- Meaningful icons in addition to text labels.
- Bright lighting and high contrast images.
- Audible output at pedestrian crosswalks.
- Ramps that slope towards crosswalks (shown).

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022



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Respecting diverse needs and capacities is an important matter of justice and dignity, which directly relate to social sustainability. Universal Design techniques will be in greater demand in the years to come as the average age increases and a higher percentage of the retired population ages in place rather than retiring to warmer climates. Winchester's public facilities should be made more accessible, using federal or foundation grant funds where possible, and private sector developers should be encouraged to go beyond the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Implementation

Taken together, these design objectives preserve Winchester's heritage and character where it is strong while opening weaker areas to quality redevelopment. Looking to designs from local history invites a more context-sensitive, sustainable urban form which increases density, promotes prosperity, looks attractive, and enhances safety. Attention to urban design is suggested by way of incorporation of Traditional Neighborhood Design (TND) and helps Winchester become a 'Community of Choice.'

A variety of tools exist to implement these principles of New Urbanism. Zoning and Subdivision ordinances have long been the most important tools for shaping land use and urban form, but others should not be ignored. Form-based codes should be considered as an alternative to conventional Euclidean Zoning provisions, at least within designated Redevelopment Areas, particularly as it applies to focusing more on quality of design and less on segregating land uses.

The City is using a state grant for consultant services to help craft a new Zoning Ordinance. Winchester recently had its entire jurisdiction re-designated as an Urban Development Area (UDA) which has made the City eligible for state Smart Scale grants. Increasing density fosters walkable communities, increases the viability of public transit use, and causes property values to rise. Incentives to building in the UDA could be matched by mild barriers to building in other areas to ensure that disruptive change does not come to today's stable neighborhoods or environmentally sensitive areas. The UDA might use a zoning overlay to apply different standards, or it might replace some existing underlying zoning districts.

More work should be done to analyze future growth patterns. The trends in Chapters Two and Four, based primarily on trends represented from the 2010 Census and 2018 ACS do not provide enough relevant trend data about future population and business growth. This is particularly true in urban settings which stand to grow in lieu of perpetuated suburban

WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

sprawl. The at-present ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has greatly slowed economic development throughout the world, Winchester included. Consequently, the City's financial forecast for the coming years has been negatively affected, with many of the City's planned redevelopments having to be put on hold. City planners should expand their capacity to project different growth scenarios and develop revised responses to changed economic circumstances.

The City of Winchester's efforts to implement New Urbanist principles have born much of their intended fruit, though there are still more opportunities worth pursuing. In April of 2020, the City Council amended sections 13-1-5 and 13-1-13 of Winchester's zoning ordinance. The changes implemented have reduced the maximum dwelling units per gross acre from 18 to 16, while simultaneously implementing a new "density bonus" system that encourages and allows developers to exceed said limit if given criteria are met. These incentives include achieving LEED certification for green design, the provision of above and below ground parking structures, and the construction of affordable housing, to name a few. The length and complexity of today's ordinance, and the number of deviations from traditional neighborhood design, suggests that a complete rewrite may work better than mere amendments.

The Land Subdivision Ordinance also needs special attention. While subdivisions utilizing Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning permit flexible use of land, the current approach does not do enough to encourage traditional neighborhood design in all subdivisions. It is possible to build in a way that is profitable for the developer while enhancing the safety and sustainability of the community. Sections of the new zoning and subdivision ordinances should encourage sustainable development.

Beyond zoning, many other city actions and policies impact neighborhoods. From sidewalk repair and garbage collection to tree trimming and building code inspection, implementing change and sustainability is a team effort. Chapter Twelve, on implementation, describes the City's comprehensive commitment.

But City Hall is not the only source of good ideas: government should do more to involve citizens in the planning and the implementation of New Urbanism. The new zoning ordinance should reflect public input on whether certain areas should stay the same or change, and if change is desired, what ways that changes should occur. The changes in this plan will be more legitimate and more effective if they include Winchester's more diverse, more educated, and engaged public at every step of the way.