

# WINCHESTER COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2022

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### IMPLEMENTATION

Winchester does not want a Comprehensive Plan which only gathers dust on a shelf. This chapter outlines how Winchester will make a reality of its positive vision of the future. It also describes the process for revising the plan to meet the changes of the future. By carefully setting priorities and monitoring progress towards them, city government will be accountable to citizens and responsible for improving the quality of life in Winchester.

The mission of Winchester's city government is, *"To provide a safe, vibrant, sustainable community while striving to constantly improve the quality of life for our citizens and business climate for our economic partners."* To that end, this Comprehensive Plan states twelve goals in Chapter 3 related to education, housing, land use, mobility, and other important fields. Some 75 specific objectives support the eleven goals. About 100 particular projects, programs, or policies advance the objectives.

Some projects meet the needs of particular neighborhoods, so Chapter Eleven matches many of these programs to specific areas or parcels in the city. But other efforts require broader efforts. This chapter only addresses those specific objectives not assigned to a geographic planning area in Chapter Eleven.

#### **Understanding Time and Cost**

The projects in this Plan vary in scale. Some can be completed by today's city employees quickly and with little cost, while others require new hiring or debt financing. This chapter's objectives can be sorted as:

*Policy:* These actions require a change to City codes or regulations, often by City Council. After this change, the action can be completed by existing staff and partners in the community. There are minimal new burdens to city finances. Policy changes involve prior study and public input, yet they can often be completed within a year.

*Program:* These actions may require a policy-type change, but they also involve starting a new set of routines, techniques, or practices. Hiring staff with new expertise, or training existing staff, incurs greater costs, and there may also be new equipment needs. Program-scale actions are medium term, often requiring a year to create and about five years to show conclusive results.

*Capital:* Building new infrastructure entails meticulous advance planning, cooperation with other governments and agencies, and the work of dozens of individuals. Where the city's annual budget can accommodate policy and program changes, capital-scale projects require a debt issuance. Planning and building such works often takes five to ten years, and the bonds financing them are repaid over twenty or thirty years.

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## Understanding Labels for Actions in this Chapter

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<i>Policy</i>	< 1 year	Minimal	Revise Zoning Ordinance; Telework training for city staff.
<i>Program</i>	1-5 years	Significant	Open a teen health clinic; Plant thousands of new trees.
<i>Capital</i>	5-10 years	Millions (debt)	Build new I-81 interchange; Realign city streets.

## Implementation Tools

Moving a city in a new direction takes teamwork. This section describes some of the groups and tools in Winchester that can help implement this plan.

### *Civic Participation*

Winchester's citizens have an important role in improving the city. By living, working, or shopping in the city, they comprise the economy and community. They volunteer and provide important services, often better than government can. Volunteerism and community spirit creates an environment which cannot be replicated through regulation. Volunteers also inform policy by sharing ideas at public meetings and serving on boards and commissions. Focus groups and local meetings, where citizens shares ideas and provide feedback, help city staff monitor the implementation of plans. Without vigorous community engagement, this plan will not become a reality. City staff should work to inform and involve residents every step of the way.

### *Intergovernmental Cooperation*

Many of the changes in this plan cannot be accomplished solely within Winchester. Regional planning occurs through the Northern Shenandoah Valley Regional Commission. Representatives from Winchester and the counties of Frederick, Clarke, Warren, Page, and Shenandoah work together on issues of air and water quality, land use and transit planning, and disaster response. Since 2003, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, detailed in Chapter Six, has provided a formal construct for transportation planning in the city and the county's more urban areas, including the Town of Stephens City. Formal cooperation between city and county also occurs on issues of public health, social services, judicial services, and public safety. Cooperative agreements or policies may be binding or nonbinding. Intergovernmental agreements have proved beneficial to Winchester and neighboring counties. The agreements encourage regional cooperation and it is likely that state legislation will continue to provide incentives for using such mechanisms. In solving certain problems, Winchester and Frederick County are best conceived as a single economic entity, sharing resources, risks, and rewards.

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### *City Code*

The Code of the City of Winchester Virginia sets forth the active laws of the City and serves as a reference for the day-to-day administration of City affairs. It includes provisions pertaining to the development of the City, including Chapter 16 dealing with Planning. The Code specifically establishes the Planning Commission and calls for the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan.

Some changes to city policy occur directly through the City Code. It includes sections on revenue, housing and building regulations (including property maintenance), parks and trees, erosion and sediment control, use of streets and sidewalks, and utilities. Many of the Plan's provisions may be quickly implemented by revising the City Code and changing the behaviors of city staff, residents, and business owners.

### *Engineering Standards and Specifications*

As an independent city, Winchester maintains its own streets and utilities. The Public Services Department, through its City Engineering and Public Works divisions sets standards for the construction and maintenance of streets. Standards generally follow those established by the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. Street and utility projects can be very expensive, but Winchester has the authority to implement the street designs of New Urbanism.

### *Zoning Ordinance & Zoning Map*

As a Dillion's Rule commonwealth, Virginia enables cities, towns, and counties to establish certain zoning powers in Chapter 22 of Title 15.2 of the Code of Virginia. The preparation and adoption of a Zoning Ordinance and a Zoning Map are specifically enabled in Section 15.2-2285 of State Code. Chapter 9 of this Plan describes the Winchester Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map in more detail. These documents guide land use by listing acceptable uses in certain areas. The Zoning Ordinance establishes categories of uses which do not interfere with each other. The map then applies those zones to the city's 9.3 square mile area. Changes to the ordinance and map affect patterns of life by changing what kinds of new housing and businesses can appear in a neighborhood –whether an area contains only single-family homes or a bustling mix of homes and businesses at different densities. City planning staff works with the appointed Planning Commission to study changes to the ordinance and map, on which the City Council then votes.

### *Land Subdivision Ordinance*

Another tool for governing land use, the Land Subdivision Ordinance regulates how larger parcels of land are split for multiple owners. Authority to adopt a Subdivision Ordinance is specifically enabled in Section 15.2-2240 of State Code. In the past, some of the fastest and most dramatic changes to the City's urban geography and demography have occurred through large subdivision projects. Today, there are many fewer large

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tracts of vacant land within the City that lend themselves to large single-family detached subdivisions, so it is important that redevelopment occur to the benefit of the city as a whole. The ordinance ensures flood control, mobility and access, and a proper mix of uses. New subdivision projects have great potential to advance the goals of this plan. Revisions to the ordinance, drafted by planners and approved by the Planning Commission and City Council, will be important.

### *Historic District Design Guidelines*

Special land use and design rules apply in the city's local historic district. Winchester's historic core contains many fine old buildings; it is a unique place to live and/or do business. Design guidelines for the district seek to preserve the area's best qualities without stifling improvements. There are additional regulations for the streetscape and for how to renovate or convert a home or business. The appointed Old Town Advancement Commission and Board of Architectural Review apply and interpret the design guidelines, with City Council ruling on appeals. Changes to the guidelines will play an important role in advancing the goals for downtown, with ripples affecting the entire city.

### *Corridor Enhancement District Design Guidelines*

Leading into the local historic district are a number of routes designated as corridors of significant tourist access where State Code allows a locality to establish overlay zoning to address the appearance of development above and beyond what the underlying zoning otherwise regulates. In Winchester, the gateway overlay zones are called Corridor Enhancement (CE) districts. City Council has adopted CE overlay zoning on nine entry corridors, mostly U.S. and State routes including U.S. Rtes 11, 17, 50, 522 and Va Rte 7.

### *Capital Improvement Program*

The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) links the adopted Comprehensive Plan—a long-range visionary document, and the adopted Annual Budget—a short-term revenue and expenditure document. The CIP plans for the creation of public infrastructure projects. Major improvements to roads, pipes, and buildings take years to complete, provides decades of benefits, and can appropriately be financed by bond issues.

The CIP is a schedule by years of the amounts to be spent on improvements to the City's public facilities. This ensures that long-range plans will be compatible with the City's financial resources. Section 15.2-2239 of Virginia planning enabling legislation permits a local Planning Commission to prepare and revise annually a CIP based on the Comprehensive Plan and to do so either on its own initiative or at the direction of the governing body.

While preparation of the CIP and budget is usually the responsibility of the City Manager and the City Council, the Planning Commission is the agency charged with looking ahead and anticipating the needs of the City in the coming years and decades. In order to carry out the function of assisting the CIP, the Planning Commission must become acquainted

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with the plans and prospects of the City's finances. In Winchester, the Public Services Director is tasked with presenting the proposed CIP to the Planning Commission for a recommendation in advance of City Council adopting the CIP.

Forecasts more than five years in advance are generally not sufficiently reliable for planning. The City has formally included a CIP element in the approved budget document since 1989. A list of needed improvements is drawn up, and those which should be made during the next five years are arranged in order of urgency, and costs are estimated according to the best information available. As each year of the program is completed an additional year is added so that the program always looks five years to the future.

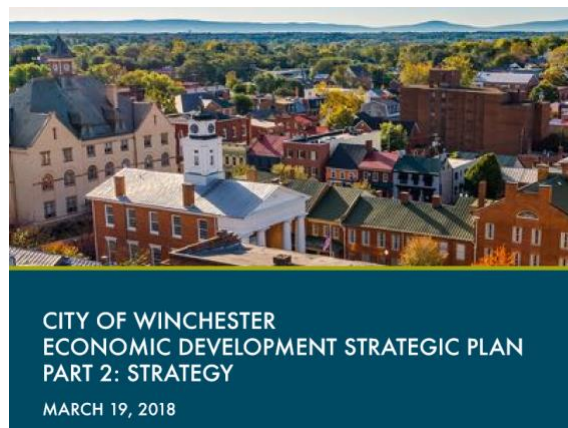
In addition to the official Comprehensive Plan, the City of Winchester has a number of other master plans that help guide future actions pertaining to development. This includes the following:

### *Citywide Strategic Plan*

The Citywide Strategic Plan outlines priorities, objectives, strategies, actions and target to accomplish over the next five years. The strategic plan help the City reach its vision to be a beautiful, vibrant city with a historic downtown, growing economy, great neighborhoods with a range of housing options and easy movement. City Council adopted the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan in December of 2015 and will adopt an updated plan in the fall of 2021 following extensive input from Council, City staff, and stakeholders earlier in 2021. The citizen engagement effort included a community survey that received over 460 responses that were summarized prior to a Council retreat with senior management staff in May of 2021. Major areas of focus for this Strategic Plan will be: encouraging economic opportunity through business support and workforce development; stimulating development of affordable housing and building smart infrastructure; fostering a safe healthy and diverse community; and, facilitating mobility via multiple modes including sidewalks, trails, and transit.

### *Economic Development Strategic Plan*

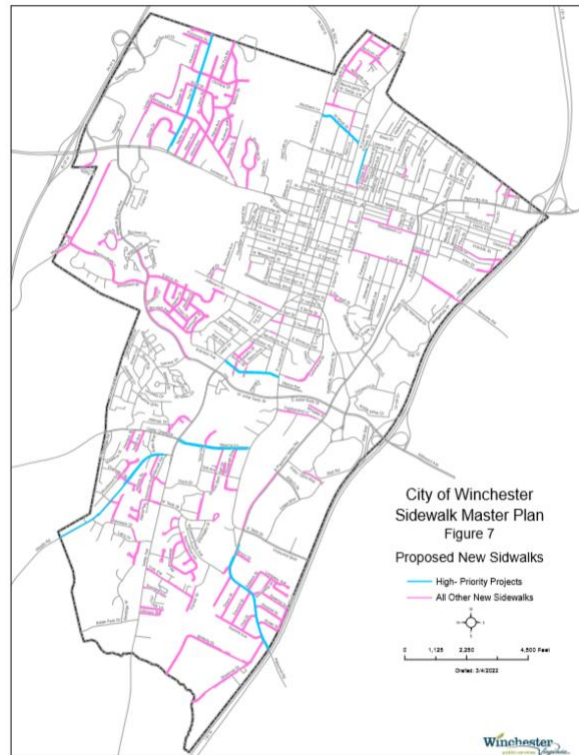
The [Economic Development Strategic Plan](#) was adopted in 2018. The objective was to establish a unified vision and direction for the city that results in greater economic vitality and prosperity for its residents. Crafting the strategy involved a disciplined process of analysis, stakeholder input, and community feedback to establish a shared foundation of information to develop a vision, targets, redevelopment priorities, and a tactical plan of action.



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## *Sidewalk Master Plan*

The [Sidewalk Master Plan](#) was first adopted by Council in August 2013 and was updated in 2017 and then again in early 2022. It prioritizes sidewalk replacements in areas with high pedestrian traffic and adds new sidewalks where needed. While the plan contains proposed projects over a five-year period, the projects require budgetary approval from City Council each fiscal year.



## *Street Maintenance Master Plan*

In many citizen satisfaction surveys including the most recent survey of City residents completed in 2017, the maintenance of City streets was selected by residents as the single City service that should receive the most emphasis within the next two years. City Council has responded to this strong desire for improved street maintenance by appropriating significant funding the past few years for street paving. In 2013, Council approved the City's [Street Maintenance Master Plan](#). An update was being prepared for adoption by Council in late 2021.

## *Parks Master Plan and Needs Assessment*

The Parks Master Plan guides improvements in the City parks and was last adopted in 2009. It is in the process of being revised. A consultant-led needs assessment was conducted in 2015 including a random survey distributed to 3,000 City households. The survey results from the needs assessment will help develop the new Park Master Plan.

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## Citywide Objectives

Listed below are the twelve objectives spelled out in Chapter Three of this Plan which were not assigned to at least one specific geographic planning area in Chapter Eleven.

### Communication

- 1) Provide an extensive array of communication services providing outreach to the community in an effective, timely and coordinated manner.
- 2) Ensure that underrepresented populations are provided with means to participate in local government.
- 3) Strengthen communications with local businesses to ensure that local, state and federal policies and regulations are understandable and do not unreasonably impact sustainable growth.

### Design

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

Policy Action: The ongoing activities of the Planning Department and the Planning Commission should emphasize the quality of development.

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

Policy Action: Commit to build future Capital Plan projects to LEED or other recognized green building program standards.

Policy Action: Study the LEED or other recognized green building program bonuses in the Zoning Ordinance, and expand them if necessary.

6. Encourage the use of Universal Design (UD) building techniques to meet the needs of all residents.

Policy Action: Commit to include UD features in public projects beyond ADA standards.

Policy Action: Present information on the benefits of UD features to local developers.

### Economic Development

1. Increase sales tax revenue accruing to the City and taxable land uses.

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Policy Action: This objective does not suggest an increase in the sales tax rate. Instead, urban development should increase the volume of local sales. City staff should involve the business community to solicit ideas for improving the business environment.

Policy Action: If City Council finds the structure of state code article 58.1, which concerns sales taxation, inefficient or unfair, Council should advocate reform in the General Assembly.

2. Increase Median Household Income of City residents and increase income levels of all employable citizens.

Policy Action: This statistic rises when households earning less than \$44,000 enjoy increased earnings. Economic development efforts should focus on creating new jobs, especially full-time and with wages above \$15/hour. Adult education efforts also tend to increase earnings.

3. Raise the average income of employees in Winchester.

Policy Action: Determine the average and median salary of jobs in Winchester.

Policy Action: Focus economic development efforts on attracting businesses paying above the average.

### Education

1. Ensure support of a rigorous and relevant education for all City public school students demonstrated by readiness for post secondary education or career entry.

Program Action: School Board and staff should study the curriculum and revise it to improve graduates' career prospects.

Program Action: Augment capacity in guidance, college preparation, and career and technical departments.

2. Maintain a world-class public school division which exceeds all State and Federal benchmarks relating to student achievement.

Program Action: Improve monitoring and evaluation of students and teachers.

Capital Action: Improve compensation and professional development of teachers.

3. Increase the percentage of citizens with a post-high school graduation education and participation in track-based education.



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Program Action: Bolster capacity to identify students at risk of dropping out and intervene.

Policy Action: Emphasize the place of community college for students who would not otherwise attend college.

### Environment

5. Work with surrounding jurisdictions as well as federal and state agencies to (a) monitor air and water quality, and (b) address regional environmental issues such as air quality, water quality, and solid waste management.

Policy Action: Maintain open communications with state and local environmental officers.

Policy Action: Involve faculty and students from SU, JMU, and LRCC in city environmental actions.

6. Reduce the City's carbon footprint and overall impact on air quality by examining how City business is conducted on a daily basis and also encouraging residents and the business community to do their part.

Policy Action: In the city budget, maintain an energy category apportioning spending on electricity, heating, and vehicle fuels for each department.

Program Action: Reduce real energy costs from year to year in each city department, leaving managers discretion to choose from an array of simple reforms.

7. Explore alternatives to continue viable recycling and reuse while decreasing the waste stream to the landfill.

Program Action: Study new markets for recycled resources and review best practices, including fee structures, to reduce overall waste and increase the proportion recycled.

9. Preserve, restore, and create wetlands, wildlife corridors, and other habitats.

Policy Action: Work with developers to preserve and otherwise limit impacts on mature trees.

Policy Action: Revise City Code Chapter 9 to promote Low Impact Design features including ponds, rain gardens, ditches, and pervious surfaces.

Program Action: Conduct a city-wide inventory of existing and restorable open space, environmentally sensitive areas and ecologically significant areas. Identify the potential environmental, recreational and economic values of each.

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Policy Action: Based on a city-wide inventory, identify priorities for environmental protection among sites with significant ecological value.

10. Preserve healthy, mature trees and promote an increase in the City's urban tree canopy.

Policy Action: Emphasize significant tree plantings, especially on parcels where canopy is less than 20% of area.

11. Pursue changes to development regulations to encourage the use of environmentally friendly site improvements such as pervious paving and 'Green' building techniques.

Policy Action: Expand use of LEED bonuses in the Zoning Ordinance.

Program Action: Support opportunities for City employees to attend LEED workshops and other training opportunities pertinent to sustainable development. Provide incentives for private developers who do business with the City to attend.

Policy Action: Require that LEED measures, and other techniques that reflect sustainable development, are evaluated for every major public construction and renovation project. Utilize criteria that adequately account for long-term benefits of sustainable development techniques as well as the immediate costs.

### Health and Human Services

1. Assist persons and families in overcoming poverty, abuse, and neglect.

Program Action: Improve capacity to identify families in need, inform them of available government and community services, and monitor progress.

2. Stem the growing rate of teen pregnancy in Winchester

Program Action: Open dedicated teen health clinic in convenient location and provided targeted mentoring, workforce, and health services to teens.

3. Ensure that the health and human needs of the local population are adequately served.

Policy Action: Maintain adequate funding of healthy family programs in local social services agencies.

Policy Action: Continue exploring the benefits of consolidated and/or co-located Winchester and Frederick County Social Services agencies.

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4. Facilitate aging in place among older populations while providing opportunities and places for civic engagement and social life.

Policy Action: Foster cooperation between the public, nonprofit, and private actors concerned with aging to plan for needed facilities and programs.

Program Action: Ensure that Parks & Recreation programs serve the diverse interests and capacities of seniors.

5. Promote a regional fair-share approach to meeting human service needs, including affordable housing.

Policy Action: Work with Frederick County, Clarke County and local non-profit organizations to expand opportunities to include affordable dwelling units in all new subdivisions and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).

### Housing

1. Increase the appreciation rate of City home values.

Policy Action: Collect economic data at the neighborhood level and attempt to distinguish the impact of City efforts from broader market changes.

Policy Action: Continue efforts to encourage owners of older housing stock in the City's historic areas to reinvest in their homes to extend the economic life of the structures. Expanded use of state and federal tax credits should be undertaken.

5. Increase homeownership opportunities for prospective first-time buyers.

Policy Action: Redevelopment activities should shift rental housing from detached single-family structures into denser forms, freeing existing homes for ownership. Discourage expansion of Short-Term Rentals in low- and medium-density residential areas which deprive first-time homebuyers from being able to compete on home purchasing.

Policy Action: Avoid residential property tax exemptions where clear positive externalities do not exist. Avoid exemptions that distort prices and create rigidity in the housing market. Study the city property tax's preferences to determine the effect on homeownership opportunities.

6. Promote decent affordable housing, particularly to serve targeted populations such as young professionals, college students, and empty nesters.

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Policy Action: Work with Frederick County, Clarke County and local non-profit organizations to expand opportunities to include affordable dwelling units in all new subdivisions and Planned Unit Developments (PUDs).

7. Ensure equal opportunity in housing.

Policy Action: Emphasize prompt investigation and response to claims of housing discrimination by tenants and homeowners.

8. Pursue means of recovering the costs of impacts associated with multi-family rental properties through alternative real estate tax assessments.

Policy Action: Study other revenue tools and real estate assessment methods such as income-based assessments that better align costs and benefits fairly.

### **Land Use**

3. Provide the citizens of the community with a healthy, attractive and safe physical environment which includes convenient access for all modes of transportation.

Program Action: Expand citizen outreach and engagement to include surveys and focus groups testing the impact of City efforts on quality of life. This would include conducting a 2022 update of the 2017 Citizen Satisfaction Survey to benchmark changes in perception regarding the importance of various city services and the satisfaction levels associated with them.

### **Mobility**

7. Investigate the needs for multimodal transfer facilities.

Program Action: Construct covered bus shelters and bike racks, especially at multimodal intersections near parking garages or the Green Circle Trail.

8. Work closely with Frederick County and Stephens City to extend public transportation between the City and destinations such as Laurel Ridge Community College, DMV, the Employment Commission/Job Training office, and the regional detention facilities as well as urbanizing areas of the County and Town.

Capital Action: Implement the operational changes and undertake the capital expenses identified in the MPO Transit Study needed to develop a truly regional

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transit service that allows City residents to access services currently situated beyond the limits of existing transit routes.

9. Promote Telecommuting as an alternative to commuting to work.

Program Action: Encourage private-sector and government employers to provide post-Pandemic incentives to workers commuting from Winchester to northern Virginia to instead telework from home or via a telecommunications center in Winchester for one or more days a week.

11. Expand and improve general aviation, air cargo, and air passenger operations at the Winchester Regional Airport;

Policy Action: Support MPO efforts to add hanger space, technology, and amenities.

### Recreation & Culture

4. Ensure that existing and new residential development has reasonable proximity to neighborhood parks as well as convenient bike and pedestrian access to trails in open space areas.

Program Action: Using national standards for outdoor recreation identify portions of the City that lack adequate resources for active recreation and passive recreation. Identify ways in which these needs can be addressed.

Policy Action: Identify and prioritize park and recreation facility needs in areas adjacent to identified redevelopment areas of the City and identify impacts on deficient facilities as proffers are evaluated in conjunction with rezoning requests for residential development.

### Public Safety

1. Provide the highest quality of police, emergency preparedness, communications, and fire and rescue services available, with properly trained personnel who are prepared for a wide variety of emergencies, and who serve the community in an effective and coordinated manner.

Program Action: Upgrade Fire & Rescue equipment to fully comply with NFIP standards and encourage further integration of paid City staff into the four private volunteer fire stations.

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3. Continually improve emergency preparedness and hazard mitigation efforts to ensure restoration of City services and normal enjoyment of life following a natural or manmade disaster.

Policy Action: Continue planning, training, and coordination per Homeland Security doctrines.

### Public Utilities

1. Ensure that the environmental quality of the drinking water produced and wastewater treated is in full accordance with the rigorous standards established by the Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency to assure safety to the consumer and the environment.

Program Action: Improve water quality monitoring through technology investment and staff training.

Policy Action: Emphasize Low Impact Design in new construction and renovations to reduce load on the wastewater infrastructure.

2. Identify and fund necessary infrastructure improvements that increase water capacity and reduce water system loss on a system wide basis in order to support current and future needs associated with economic expansion and increased residential density.

Capital Action: Continue replacing water pipe infrastructure in conjunction with street improvements around the city.

3. Work with Frederick County to address water capacity and supply issues.

Policy Action: Improve contingency planning and cooperative frameworks for drought response.

### Monitoring the Comprehensive Plan

Chapter Eleven and the previous pages of this chapter assign specific actions to each of the Plan's goals and objectives, and they describe the rough scale of each action. Making the plan a reality requires careful monitoring of progress to build on success, identify problems a find solution, and keep citizens both informed and involved. Monitoring efforts should involve city planning staff, the Planning Commission, and citizens.

City Council should receive an annual report from the Planning Commission detailing the status of Comprehensive Plan implementation. This report should sort the plan's many specific actions, identifying those city personnel, businesses, and community groups

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responsible for each. It should also set priorities in consideration of the local economy and contingent workflow –which actions must occur before others can begin.

In creating this plan, city staff involved a diverse group of citizens. Such involvement should continue. As Winchester continues to implement New Urbanism and restores the traditional designs of its neighborhoods, there should be opportunities for citizen engagement and feedback. Many of the actions in this chapter and Chapter Eleven include public hearings, but there should also be special forums. Extra meetings at neighborhood hubs would be advisable before major redevelopment projects or zoning changes. Focus groups of citizens might inform design plans for the public space. Citywide surveys or polls could also inform the setting to priorities.

The Planning Commission’s annual report should convey considerable detail to the City Council. There should also be status updates for the public in a more accessible form. Highlights and summaries of this Plan should be readily available as pamphlets and interactive digital content. Citizens should be able to quickly understand the changes in store for specific neighborhoods. They should have simple means to provide feedback. The results of each annual report should be readily available in a similarly accessible form. The Comprehensive Plan will be easier to implement if a broad array of citizens understand and support it.

### **Updating the Comprehensive Plan**

Changes in the local economy, demographics, technology, or other unforeseen factors may force Winchester to alter course. Detailed data from the 2020 Census became available in late 2021 and early 2022, too late for analyzing before the adoption of this plan update. Even if all goes smoothly, state law requires that city comprehensive plans be reviewed at least every five years. So in either 2025 or 2026 the planning department will assemble new focus groups of citizens and committees of city staff to update this Plan. Results from the four annual reports then published will provide an evaluation of policy changes, new programs, and major projects. Changes will be apparent in the city’s annual budget, capital improvement plan, zoning ordinance, and other major documents.

This Plan update does not represent a significant shift in the direction of Winchester’s development. New Urbanism will not be finished in 2027. The process of updating the comprehensive plan will involve important decisions about what projects to continue, what to accelerate, and what to cancel. There are bold ideas and real risks in this plan, and not all of them will produce the desired result. The process of monitoring and updating the plan should be fluid enough to focus on what works.