

# Woodstock Kick-Off: the Comprehensive Planning Process

Welcome to the Woodstock Comprehensive Planning process! This document is meant to be a resource to guide the Town through the Comprehensive Planning process and answer frequently-asked questions.

## What is a Comprehensive Plan and why do we need one?

A Comprehensive Plan is a guiding document that envisions what the future of a community looks like and outlines the steps it takes to get there. Comprehensive plans address land use, transportation, economic development, the environment, public facilities and infrastructure, housing, the character of the built environment, parks and open space, and more.

A Comprehensive Plan is important because it outlines the vision for the Town, and what it will take to get there, so that the Town can guide future development to be in line with the Plan. It helps the Town prioritize the allocation of limited resources, inform where new uses should go, which areas of town should change and how, and which should stay the same. It's also an opportunity for many different stakeholders to come together and plan for the future.

## Is a Comprehensive Plan a law?

The plan is a guiding document. Section 15.2-2232 of the Code of Virginia states that the plan shall guide the "location, character, and extent of each feature shown on the plan." Additionally, an adopted plan should lead to changes in the Official Zoning Map and Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, which have the force of law and will guide future development to meet the desired character outlined in the Plan. The plan will also make recommendations for projects to be included in the Town's budget documents, help guide decision-making and funding prioritization for years to come.

## When was Woodstock's last Comprehensive Plan adopted?

Woodstock's last Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2007. The Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2012. This plan will supersede the previous plan.

## Why is it important to update a Comprehensive Plan?

So much has changed since the last planning process started! The Town and stakeholders have changed, State Code has changed, building codes have changed, and so much more.

It's important to have an updated plan so that:

- It can be a relevant and contemporary guiding document
- Current leadership and current residents can give input
- It's grounded in current reality, begins with actual population and demographic information
- It can use best planning practices to navigate to an ideal future

### The key purposes of a Comprehensive Plan include:

- Providing a guide for the public to see the decisions that will form the future Woodstock.
- Promoting the interests of the town as a collective whole.
- Comparing and contrasting short-term action against long-term goals.
- Promoting, describing, and enhancing the environment of the Town.
- Creating a well-planned system of public services.
- Noting the natural resources, historical, and architectural significance of Woodstock and the surrounding area so that they can be preserved, protected, and integrated for future generations in an orderly development pattern.

## What are the roles of Town Council, the Planning Commission, staff, and the consultant?

Section 15.2 – 2223 et seq. of the Code of Virginia outlines requirements for the Comprehensive Plan and gives responsibility for its preparation to the local Planning Commission.

In reality, the Planning Commission rarely actually creates or writes the document. In most cases the plan document, the research, and public participation processes that go into it are completed by local government staff and/or a consultant. In this case, Woodstock has hired Summit Design and Engineering to conduct the comprehensive planning process, in concert with Woodstock staff.

While State Code gives responsibility of the creation of the plan to the local Planning Commission, the plan is ultimately adopted by Town Council, so it's important that the plan is a document that everyone can get behind.

The planning team will use an iterative process to create each component of the plan and receive feedback from Town Council and the Planning Commission.

## Why is public participation important and how do we get it?

Plans are made to promote the health, safety, and welfare of residents. The people who know best about Woodstock are the people who live here and care about the Town. We collect public input by creating an interactive website, through a survey, public meetings, and public comment on draft documents. Soliciting vision statements from residents is also an important way to get input into the plan.

## What are the steps we take to make the plan?

The schedule at the end of this document details each task that is involved in the Comprehensive Plan. The stars are for optional and necessary times for Town Council and Planning Commission to give feedback. The order of items on the list is strategic and does not vary much from each comprehensive planning process.

For the Comprehensive Plan, we have initial meetings and talk about expectations, then we review all necessary plans and previous documents. We also review Census data and other sources. We initiate the public participation process by creating a public participation plan, a website, and publish a survey.

## How does the planning team use your input?

It is the planning team's responsibility to use their knowledge of planning, local government processes, best practices and systemic thinking to interpret input (comments, survey questions, vision statements) and translate that into plan recommendations.

For example, we often hear conflicting desires; the same person may give feedback about wanting to preserve walkable small-town charm but also wants more big box shopping options. It's the planning team's responsibility to parse out input and figure out how those conflicting things can co-exist. For example, permitting big box stores that have a more urban form, or permitting big box stores only in certain appropriate locations.

Another example is that new or taller apartment buildings might concern existing residents, while young professionals or those looking to downsize are having a difficult time finding a place to live in Town. It's the planning team's responsibility to interpret public engagement and input, alongside the best practices in planning, to determine what policies or actions the Town should take in the future.

*In a nutshell, comprehensive planning is very simple. You establish a baseline of where you are, you determine where you want to go, and outline the steps it takes to get there.*

*The reality is a bit more complex, but it's important to keep those basics in mind through the process.*

## What are the pitfalls and how do we avoid them?

- We have too much input from the same voices – cast a wide net with public participation, and right-size voices.
- We don't have agreement between Planning Commission and Town Council. The result of this pitfall would be failing the community of Woodstock by deferring to the plan that hasn't been updated since 2012. We use public participation, data, our experience, and your input to create recommendations.

## What else does State Code say about the Comprehensive Plan?

State Code has a lot to say about Comprehensive Plans. According to Section 15.2-2223, the Comprehensive Plan SHALL include:

- Transportation Section/Plan (must be included and approved by VDOT (Sec 15.2-2223 (B) 1-7))
- Long-range recommendations for development
- Affordable housing (Sec 15.2-223(D))
- Broadband (Sec 15.2-2223 (E))
- Manufactured housing as a source of affordable housing (Sec 15.2-2223.5)
- Various surveys and studies (Sec 15.2-2224)

Before consideration by the Planning Commission, the Comprehensive Plan must be made publicly available by posting on a website, and a public hearing with proper notice must be held. (Sec 15.2-2225)

After recommendation or approval by the Planning Commission, and after hearing and public notice the governing body must act within 90 days. (Sec 15.2-2226)

If the governing body disapproves the plan, then it shall be returned to the Planning Commission for its reconsideration, with a written statement of the reasons for its disapproval. The commission shall have sixty days in which to reconsider the plan and submit it, with any changes, to the governing body. (Sec 15.2-2227)

§ 15.2-2223. Comprehensive plan to be prepared and adopted; scope and purpose.

A. The local Planning Commission shall prepare and recommend a Comprehensive Plan for the physical development of the territory within its jurisdiction and every governing body shall adopt a Comprehensive Plan for the territory under its jurisdiction.



## The importance of systemic thinking, or taking a bird's eye view, in the planning process



A Comprehensive Plan is a document that guides the town as a whole on a 20-year time horizon. That means that the plan needs to consider the needs and the perspectives of many different people, and should carefully consider the effects of decisions over time. Sometimes in the present there are conflicting viewpoints, so it helps to consider that:

- When we plan for the future, we are planning for the next generation
- When it comes down to it there are many things we do agree on, like having a safe, vibrant town full of happy healthy people
- If we stick to thinking about the future and we know it's okay for different viewpoints to live in one town, we'll be ok

Sometimes there are conflicts even within our own heads! For example, as humans getting around town, we want wide empty roads and parking right in front of every place we go, because we're in a hurry and we're focused on what we need at this moment, of course. And we also want a charming downtown with plenty of stores and restaurants to walk around and patronize. But with our bird's eye view, we quickly see that those two things are in conflict, and creating more and more parking takes away from the Town's ability to create a safe, walkable shopping district.



## Key milestones for Town Council and Planning Commission input/ approvals in the comprehensive planning process:



Kick Off – October 23, 2023

Public Participation - November - March (Dates + Events TBD)

Public Participation Survey - October - January

Review and comment on Existing Conditions report – February

Review and comment on Future Land Use Map – June

Final review and adoption of Comprehensive Plan - September/October

