



Planning, Development & Inspections

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To: Wake County Planning Board
From: Terry Nolan, Planner III
Subject: Comprehensive Plan Amendment 02-22
Date: July 20, 2022

Request

Amend the Wake County Comprehensive Plan (PLANWake) to update section related to Activity Centers (proposed new name is Multi-Use Districts or MUDs).

Applicant

Wake County Planning, Development & Inspections

Location

n/a

Background

In county land use plans, Activity Centers identify the most appropriate location for commercial development to help serve the daily needs of the surrounding area. The current Activity Centers are identified in various planning documents associated with the Wake County Land Use Plan adopted and amended during the period spanning 1997 – 2020. Activity Centers are used by the county to guide decisions on rezoning requests and development permits. Some uses are allowed in Activity Centers by right (if it's in compliance with the underlying zoning), while certain uses are only allowed through rezoning or special use permit.

The Planning Board and staff discussed the purpose and effectiveness of Activity Centers during the process to develop the Comprehensive Plan (PLANWake). The Planning Board desired to keep them as a planning tool to identify areas where non-residential development should occur. The adopted 2021 Comprehensive Plan includes a brief description of how Activity Centers would function within the Development Framework. The plan also acknowledged at the time that more analysis was needed to refine policies and guidelines.

After PLANWake was adopted, staff developed a PLANWake Work Plan for implementing the recommendations. The Work Plan lists Activity Center policy guidance as a work item to be completed by July 2022, explaining, "Consider changes after an inventory and analysis of intended purpose versus use". At their May 2022 meeting, the Planning Board's Land Use Committee suggested renaming Activity Centers to Multi-Use Districts (MUDs). Staff concurs with this decision and are proposing to make this change as part of this Comprehensive Plan amendment.

Analysis

Staff began by developing a complete inventory and analysis of multi-use district land uses, development potential, proximity to public utilities and municipal limits, and adherence to design guidelines.

There are 40 MUDs within Wake County's jurisdiction. The parcel-based districts range in size, with the smallest a single two-acre parcel and the largest a 227-acre regional district made up of 17 parcels. The predominant zoning in MUDs is residential, although General Business, Highway District, and Heavy Commercial District are also common zoning classifications. Common non-residential land uses include fire stations, storage units, office, convenience store (some with gas), and religious institutions.

Future Municipal MUDs

Of the 40 MUDs, 20 are partially or completely in areas classified as Walkable Center or Community on the Development Framework Map. PLANWake describes the Walkable Center as dense, walkable transit-supportive centers predominately comprised of mixed-use projects. The Community classification in PLANWake, which makes up roughly 55% of the county's total land area, is described as a range of municipal uses and densities. PLANWake's goal is for these MUDs to develop in the municipality.

A review of municipal plans shows county MUDs and municipal plans for non-residential development generally align in terms of location of the district, desired uses, and intensity. This can be attributed to a history of collaborative planning between the county and the municipalities. Many of the MUDs are close to municipal corporate limits and/or have public utilities close by and are well positioned to develop at a municipal scale within the 5–10-year timeframe established in PLANWake.

The inventory and analysis of MUDs in the Community and Walkable Center areas led to discussions about how the county could best prepare the areas for future municipal development. Staff developed new text describing a collaborative process between the county and the municipalities to encourage municipal design standards in areas soon to become urbanized. County staff held a virtual meeting with municipal planning staff on June 24th to present the proposed amendment. Municipal staff made positive comments about the approach.

Rural MUDs

The other 20 MUDs are in areas classified as Community Reserve or Rural on the Development Framework Map, and 16 of them are wholly or partially in a current or future water supply watershed.

MUDs in these areas are small scale in nature, with neighborhood serving commercial uses. Several are located at historic crossroads or have older buildings, many of them have vacant parcels. The MUD located at Creedmoor Road and Hwy 98, with a grocery store, is the only commercial node that serves a more regional population.

The former land use plan contained design guidelines that applied uniformly to all Activity Centers/MUDs throughout Wake County's jurisdiction. The design concepts and visuals were more urban in nature, with higher density, mixed use buildings, and sidewalks. Because development in the county's jurisdiction is constrained by lack of public utilities and NCDOT road

design standards, county nonresidential development does not look like the design concepts contained in the former land use plan. Staff developed design standard text that encourages green stormwater infrastructure and quality design in a way that is achievable in the county's jurisdiction.

Summary of Proposed Changes

1. Change the name of Activity Centers to Multi-Use Districts.
2. Developed a new two-tiered approach wherein MUDs follow different protocols based on classification on the PLANWake Development Framework Map. MUDs in Rural and Community Reserve areas follow county design standards. MUDs in Walkable Center and Community areas follow a municipal/county collaborative process.
3. Made changes to the rural guidelines to better align design standards with goals of PLANWake, i.e. small scale and neighborhood serving uses, watershed protection, etc. Eliminated guidelines for mid-sized and regional MUDs and the more "urban" type design expectations that are not feasible in rural jurisdiction.
4. Developed process for collaboration between the county and municipality to set design priorities for development in areas expected to become municipal within the timeframe set by PLANWake.
5. Developed guidance for evaluating proposed amendments to MUDs. Emphasized area plan updates are the most appropriate time to make major changes to MUDs.
6. Carried over the Activity Center objectives and general policies from the guidelines in the former land use plan because they remain valid. Edits to these sections are minor, such as updating the naming conventions. One objective was added: "Foster uses that support rural lands and the rural economy..."
7. Updated the Development Framework Map on Page 45 of the Comprehensive Plan to reflect the new naming convention. **No changes to MUD boundaries are proposed.**

Findings

1. **The proposed amendment is consistent with the policies set forth within the Comprehensive Plan, PLANWake.**
2. **The proposed amendment aligns the development of non-residential uses with the land use types and intensities desired in the Development Framework Map.**
3. **The proposed amendment does not create any non-conforming situations.**
4. **The proposed amendment has been reviewed by municipal planning staff. Municipal staff had no edits on the amendment.**
5. **The boundaries of existing Multi-Use Districts are not changed.**

Recommendation

Planning staff recommends the Wake County Comprehensive Plan (PLANWake) be amended to replace pages 45-47 as presented.

Attachments:

- Proposed text amendment
- Proposed map amendment