

# CHAPTER 4

## GOALS AND POLICIES



The County has identified community priorities as a set of **Vision Themes, Goals, Policies,** and **Actions** to act as guidelines for growth, development, and conservation for the next 25 years. These statements reflect the comments, feedback, and priorities of the community that were received during the planning process as described in [Chapter 2](#). The Plan identifies nine overarching Goals, which are introduced in this chapter. Each Goal is accompanied by Policies, objectives, and sub-policies that act as statements of values and priorities of the community. These policies are not legally-binding, but should serve as a foundation for budgeting decisions, unified development ordinance updates, infrastructure investments, and more. The nine Goals in this Plan are as follows:

1. Sustainable and Managed Growth
2. Planned Public Facilities and Services
3. Expanded Economic Opportunities
4. Attainable Housing Choices
5. Supported Agricultural and Working Lands
6. Safe and Efficient Transportation
7. Environmental Conservation and Resilience
8. Community Unity and Civic Engagement
9. Enhanced Quality of Life and Community Health

Each Goal, Policy, and Action in the next two chapters all relate back to one or more of the Vision Themes that were introduced in [Chapter 2](#). This chapter provides the Goals and Policies, while the Actions, which are more specific, direct tasks that help move towards plan implementation, and are discussed in [Chapter 5](#).



# SUSTAINABLE AND MANAGED GROWTH

*Pender County will guide the location and intensity of growth by aligning land use planning and utility expansion that is anticipated for the next 25 years. The County will encourage more intensive development in strategic growth areas, while preserving and protecting important natural assets, rural character, and agricultural lands. This approach is desired to reduce the burden on transportation, infrastructure, and stormwater systems due to growth.*

## **POLICY 1.1. Balanced Approach to Land Use**

**Objective 1.1: Pender County shall guide appropriate land use decisions related to growth and conservation using the Future Land Use Map and associated policy guidance in the Imagine Pender 2050 Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The County shall support development in growth areas where the necessary infrastructure – roads, water, sewer, broadband/wireless communication, electricity, and schools – is readily available, planned, or can be most cost effectively provided and extended to serve existing and future development.**

### **1.1.A. Growth Areas**

The County will support a growth pattern that focuses on accommodating and supporting future growth by encouraging strategically placed high and low-density residential development, mixed-use development, and commercial development. Lands most suitable for development that require centralized

infrastructure service (Coastal Neighborhood, Neighborhood Center, Residential Neighborhood, Regional Center, Industry & Commerce, Heavy Commercial) should be leveraged to maximize opportunities for meeting housing, economic development, and government fiscal sustainability objectives.

### **1.1.B. Conservation, Agricultural, and Working Lands**

Pender County will support low-density residential and compatible commercial development in rural areas to preserve agricultural and environmental lands and maintain rural character.

### **1.1.C. Regulations for New Development**

The County shall require all development to adhere to the land use regulations set forth in the County's Unified Development Ordinance. Accordingly, the County shall utilize any and all zoning and subdivision procedures, allowed per North Carolina General Statutes, to preserve the unique

characteristics of Pender County. This may include – but shall not be limited to – overlay districts, cluster development requirements, density incentives, open space allocation, tree preservation, school site reservation, reservation of sites for public and recreational facilities, conditional zoning, and other tools as may be necessary.

#### **1.1.D. Compatible Development**

The County supports new commercial and multifamily developments that blend with surrounding neighborhoods and limit traffic, noise, light, and other infrastructure impacts on existing residential uses, as well as sufficiently address stormwater runoff.

#### **1.1.E. Development Review**

The County supports an efficient, transparent, and predictable development review and approval process that includes consideration of hazards and infrastructure impacts.

## **POLICY 1.2. Infrastructure Carrying Capacity and Coordination**

**Objective 1.2: Pender County will ensure that the location, capacity, and provision of public infrastructure systems are consistent with the Future Land Use Map and the Sustainable and Managed Growth Goal. The intent of this policy is to support coordination with utility providers, capital improvement planning, and regional partners to meet housing, economic development, and preservation goals.**

#### **1.2.A. Coordination between Pender County Planning and Public Utilities**

The County shall develop a process for coordinating the provision of water and sewer infrastructure by Pender County Utilities in the strategic growth areas identified in the Future Land Use Map and Water and Wastewater Master Plans.

#### **1.2.B. Utility Master Planning**

The County should consider updating the Water Master Plan and the Wastewater Master Plan (2006). Also, consider formalizing a long-range strategy with Pender County Utilities to develop a tiered growth map, identifying current areas of water and wastewater service and areas that align with the Future Land Use Map and plans for infrastructure extension in the short-, medium-, and long-term horizon (i.e. 5, 15, and 25 years).

### **1.2.C. Coordination on Current Infrastructure Needs**

The County shall develop a process to identify and address current infrastructure gaps, in coordination with Pender County Planning and Community Development, Pender County Schools, Pender County Utilities, the Board of County Commissioners, and others, as necessary.

### **1.2.D. Capital Improvement Planning**

Following adoption of this Plan, the County shall develop a process for coordinating capital improvement planning with the implementation of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. When considering the locations of new public or community water or wastewater facilities the County will consult the Future Land Use Map, particularly the location for growth areas, to guide capital investment decisions and evaluate infrastructure and service needs (such as fire and emergency services).

### **1.2.E. Regional Coordination**

The County shall continue to seek opportunities for regional cooperation and coordination of land use and capital infrastructure planning with neighboring counties and municipalities to maximize service delivery, while minimizing duplication of infrastructure and services.

### **1.2.F. Support of Economic Development**

The County shall continue to consider expanding public water and wastewater

systems to serve priority nonresidential and economic development areas when fiscally sustainable and compatible with the Future Land Use Map. This may apply to all areas that serve existing commercial and industrial uses that have inadequate or degraded service levels or environmental concerns with onsite systems.

### **1.2.G. Package Treatment Plants**

The County discourages new private package wastewater treatment plants, unless it can be demonstrated that their use is consistent with the development pattern described on the Future Land Use Map and expansion of centralized sewer is unlikely in the near future.

### **1.2.H. Wastewater Treatment within Growth Areas**

The County, with coordination between the Planning & Community Development Department and Pender County Utilities, shall only allow the development of private **wastewater treatment facilities** within the growth areas identified on the Future Land Use Map and where the expansion of centralized public or private sewer services is not feasible at the time of development. The County will continue to require a consistency review with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Wastewater Master Plan for construction or expansion of private wastewater systems.

## **POLICY 1.3. Water Supply Coordination**

**Objective 1.3: Pender County will seek to provide adequate water supply to accommodate growth, support economic development, and protect natural assets. The intent of this policy is to manage the water supply through watershed regulations, water conservation programs, water supply expansion efforts, and adequate fire protection.**

### **1.3.A. Watershed Quality Protection**

The County will continue to seek ways to protect water quality, including through water supply watershed regulations and the Watershed Districts as identified in the Unified Development Ordinance.

### **1.3.B. Water Supply Expansion**

The County will evaluate ways to expand the water supply to improve drinking water quality. This could include:

- Modifying the water purchase agreement with the Lower Cape Fear Water and Sewer Authority to meet estimated growing demand.
- Maintaining the current Interbasin Transfer Certificates to allow for expansion of the potable water supply to additional areas of the County.
- Investing in capital projects that establish new water sources and

result in improved drinking water quality.

### **1.3.C. Maintaining Adequate Fire Protection**

The County will continue to ensure that adequate water pressure is available to meet fire suppression needs and to keep pace with the demands of the growing seasonal population where public water is provided. Adequate fire protection needs will be coordinated with efforts to align capital improvement planning and the implementation of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

## **POLICY 1.4. Consistency with NC General Statute**

**Objective 1.4: This Plan was written to consistently apply planning and zoning provisions of the North Carolina General Statutes (G.S. 160D). Any future updates to G.S. 160D should be reviewed and this Plan should be updated to comply with state law.**

### **1.4.A. Downzoning Limitations**

Per G.S. 160D-601(d), none of the policies or Future Land Use designations included in this Plan shall have the effect of downzoning a property in Pender County's planning and zoning jurisdiction without the consent of property owners. Residential densities for properties that are zoned Planned Development (PD) as of the date of the adoption of this Plan will retain the future land use category

previously adopted as part of the Pender 2.0 Comprehensive Land Use Plan. If the State of NC repeals or modifies 160D-601(d), this policy will be changed to comply with the revised statute.

#### **1.4.B. Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) Permitting Process**

No policies in this Plan nor future land use designations or descriptions are more restrictive than those contained in the North Carolina Administrative Code (NCAC) for the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA). Accordingly, permits should continue to be issued based solely on the requirements of the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management (NCDQM) and NCAC Title 15A, Chapter 07: Coastal Management.

# SUSTAINABLE AND MANAGED GROWTH ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Annually Review the Future Land Use Map
- 2.** Update the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to Align with the Plan
- 3.** Consider Density Bonuses for Conserving Land
- 4.** Prepare Small Area Plans
- 5.** Consider Procedural Changes to Development Review
- 6.** Explore Urban Design Guidelines
- 7.** Allow Multifamily Developments in Certain Zoning Districts By-Right
- 8.** Establish a Committee of County Departments Involved in Growth and Development
- 9.** Evaluate Water Quality
- 10.** Study Additional Sources for Potable Drinking Water
- 11.** Establish a Wellhead Protection Plan
- 12.** Test Private Drinking Water Wells
- 13.** Prepare a Cost of Land Use Fiscal Impact Analysis
- 14.** Implement Water and Wastewater Management Actions

# PLANNED PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

*Support the development of adequate public facilities and services to meet community needs in alignment with land use planning. Improve public safety, health, and quality of life, by aligning long-term land use planning and capital investments to support schools, broadband service, and parks and recreation.*

## **POLICY 2.1. Public Waterway Access**

**Objective 2.1: Maximize public access to the public trust waters of the coastal region for residents and visitors.**

### **2.1.A. Collaboration to Enhance Public Waterway Access**

The County supports efforts to work with local groups and state and federal agencies to secure and maintain public waterway access points throughout the County for all residents and visitors. The County will consider any state or federal financial assistance that may be available to increase the inventory of public waterway access. The County also supports the preservation and maintenance of areas that have traditionally and historically been used for public access.

### **2.1.B. Public Waterway Access Amenities**

The County supports the facilitation of state and federal funding of piers or other amenities for crabbing, fishing, or public

estuarine access. In coordination with efforts to support conservation easements, utilize conservation easements with public access considerations to increase access to public trust waters.

#### Public Water Access & State Law

North Carolinians and visitors to the state have traditionally had “the right to navigate, swim, hunt, fish and enjoy all recreational activities in the watercourses of the State and the right to freely use and enjoy the State’s ocean and estuarine beaches and public access to the beaches” (NC Gen. Stat. § 1-45.1). The Coastal Resources Commission requires comprehensive plans to include policy guidance related



### **2.1.C. Waterfront Land Acquisition**

The County will encourage the State of North Carolina and area local governments to diligently pursue the acquisition and development of waterfront properties for public use, particularly regarding boating access and along the Intracoastal Waterway.

### **2.1.D. Boating Access**

The County will continue to work with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Boating Infrastructure Program or similar programs to identify and acquire land for public boat ramps and ancillary parking facilities for public trust waters.

### **2.1.E. Public Trust Waters Navigation**

The County opposes any land use which interferes with the public right to navigate or utilize existing access to any public trust waters.

### **2.1.F. ADA Accessibility**

The County supports the provision of public water access sites that are accessible to people with disabilities. The County may seek funding to enhance facilities to improve accessibility for public water access sites.

### **2.1.G. Dredging**

The County will continue to work with the Army Corps of Engineers and any other State and Federal agencies to ensure continued dredging and maintenance of

channels and rivers as needed to keep these facilities open to navigation while protecting the environmental integrity of the waterways in question.

## **POLICY 2.2. Parks and Recreation**

**Objective 2.2: Pender County will support community health and quality of life for residents and visitors through the provision of well-maintained, appropriately located parks, recreation, greenways, trails, and open spaces. The intent of this policy is to support parks and recreation through long-range planning efforts, the development of regional parks and community centers, continued maintenance and funding, and co-location of amenities.**

### **2.2.A. Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan**

The County shall coordinate the development of, and maintenance for, recreational amenities with the Pender County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This includes improving connectivity for bicycle and pedestrian facilities with schools, parks, and existing amenities within local municipalities.

### **2.2.B. Regional Parks and Community Centers**

The County shall support the expansion, development, and continued maintenance of community centers and

large regional parks as primary recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

### **2.2.C. Maintenance, Funding, and Resources for Parks and Recreation**

The County shall establish a maintenance division within the Parks and Recreation Department. The County shall allocate increased funding and resources for the enhancement and maintenance of existing and future parks and recreation facilities.

### **2.2.D. Co-Location of Parks and Recreation with Schools**

The County shall continue to support the shared use of school facilities for recreational opportunities and community activities. The County shall coordinate with the Pender County Board of Education and partner with civic groups to co-locate parks and recreation sites on or adjacent to school property, as appropriate.

### **2.2.E. Game Lands**

The County encourages the continued partnership with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission for appropriate usage of the state game lands for recreational opportunities.

### **2.2.F. Intergovernmental Coordination for Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements**

In coordination with the Safe and Connected Transportation Goal, evaluate ways to create more greenways and consider the development of a regional bicycle and pedestrian plan. Continue to use the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to apply for grants and projects that can foster more recreational opportunities through greenways and trails.

### **2.2.G. Recreational Lands**

The County encourages and supports expansion and preservation of recreational lands, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas along the coast, riparian areas, and within floodplains. Coordinate with regional partners (such as Wilmington Business Development, municipalities, tourism development authorities, local chambers of commerce, New Hanover County, and Jacksonville Onslow Economic Development) to include recreational opportunities in tourism and economic development efforts.

## **POLICY 2.3. Community Recreation and Open Space Benefits in New Development**

**Objective 2.3: Where possible, Pender County will require new developments to provide community recreation opportunities in the form of open space or parks and recreation facilities. The intent of this policy is to support regulations, development agreements, or other programs to create additional community recreational benefits in coordination with Pender County’s goals for growth.**

### **2.3.A. Development Agreements**

The County may consider development agreements as a means to meet community recreation and open space goals (in accordance with NCGS 160D).

### **2.3.B. Locating Open Space**

Where possible, the County shall require development plans to locate open space and amenities adjacent to other open space areas, County parks facilities, or state, federal, or other protected lands to maximize connectivity.

### **2.3.C. Recreation Facilities and Recreation Standards**

The County shall continue to enforce regulations requiring the construction of appropriate recreational amenities for applicable developments. The County shall continue to ensure that the Unified Development Ordinance regulations

clearly define recreation standards, which include reasonable and quantifiable areas for facilities or fees-in-lieu.

### **2.3.D. Passive Recreation**

Prioritize the proportion of open space dedicated to passive recreation to support resilience and preserve habitat and environmentally sensitive areas.

### **2.3.E. Upland Recreation Facilities**

The County shall ensure that required open spaces as part of new development will include usable upland areas that can support passive or active recreation opportunities.

## **POLICY 2.4. Planning for Schools**

**Objective 2.4: Pender County will strive to provide exceptional schooling and award-winning service to Pender County’s growing school-age population. The intent of this policy is to support Pender County Schools by fostering regional cooperation, long-range planning, co-location of facilities, and land acquisition for schools.**

### **2.4.A. Regional Cooperation**

The County supports regional cooperation for all local governments, including the Technical Review Committee, to advise public school officials of pending developments and population trends so that they may adequately plan for school capacity needs.

### **2.4.B. Long-Range Planning for Schools**

The County supports long-range planning for the school system to establish future enrollment figures, capital improvement needs, and funding constraints. This includes coordination between the Pender County Planning & Community Development Department and Pender County Schools facilities planners to adequately plan for future public school enrollment needs.

### **2.4.C. School Land Acquisition**

The County encourages local government collaboration in identifying and acquiring land for new schools and to support long-range planning for co-locating other public facilities, such as parks and libraries, on or near school sites.

### **2.4.D. School Site Coordination with Development**

The County will evaluate methods to support adequate school capacity in coordination with growth and development in Pender County. The County may consider conditional approvals and development agreements to allow for the dedication or reservation of land for school sites in the development approval process.

### **2.4.E. Support of State Legislation**

The County will consider supporting the enactment of new state legislation, such as allowing for impact fees or an

adequate public facilities provision, to ensure that the public infrastructure services and facilities, such as schools, keeps pace with new development.

## **POLICY 2.5. Broadband Internet**

**Objective 2.5: The County shall coordinate with internet service providers (ISPs) and other similar entities to enhance broadband internet coverage in areas that are currently underserved.**

### **2.5.A. Underserved Areas**

The County shall continue to support the expansion and enhancement of broadband internet coverage, including closing gaps in remaining underserved areas. This includes supporting funding efforts to expand broadband service from state, federal and private partners.

## **POLICY 2.6. Coordinating Natural Resource Conservation with Public Facilities and Services**

**Objective 2.6: The County seeks to maximize opportunities to benefit public safety, health, and well-being by encouraging green infrastructure, soils and septic tank suitability, and public infrastructure system coordination with Areas of Environmental Concern.**

### **2.6.A. Green Infrastructure Plan**

Consider developing and integrating a **green infrastructure** plan and coordinating the plan with open space requirements and capital improvement planning.

### **2.6.B. Soils and Septic Tank Suitability**

To promote community health and safety, and to protect the natural environment, the County will require that all septic tanks be in compliance with State Health regulations as administered by the Pender County Health Department.

### **2.6.C. Areas of Environmental Concern**

Ensure that public infrastructure systems are sized, located, and managed so the quality and productivity of Areas of Environmental Concern (AECs) and other fragile areas are protected or restored.

## PLANNED PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Update Active, Passive, and Recreational Open Space Regulations
- 2.** Pursue Funding for Beach and Waterfront Access
- 3.** Update the 1993 Waterfront Access Plan
- 4.** Create Incentives for Public Trust Waters Access
- 5.** Create a Fund for Waterfront Capital Investments
- 6.** Implement Waterfront Access and Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Capital Planning
- 7.** Develop Plan for Public Boat Ramps
- 8.** Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Planning
- 9.** Evaluate Parks and Recreation Capital Projects to Balance Revenue Generation
- 10.** Plan for Expanding Athletic Fields and Programming
- 11.** Create a Schedule and Process for Updating Required Recreational

Units

- 12.** Create a Parks and Recreation Maintenance Policy
- 13.** Evaluate Opportunities to Increase Parks and Recreation Funding and Revenue Generation
- 14.** Coordinate with the School System to Plan for School Capital Needs
- 15.** Create a Formal Process for Assessing Impacts of New Developments on School Capacity
- 16.** Establish School Capacity Thresholds
- 17.** Establish School Site Reservation Policy
- 18.** Address Gaps in Broadband Access
- 19.** Green Infrastructure Practices

# EXPANDED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

*Expand economic opportunities in industrial, commercial, and mixed-use development where transportation networks and utilities exist or are planned to support the creation of jobs and assist in balancing the tax base. Harness the potential of cultural and historic resources found across the County to support tourism.*

## **POLICY 3.1. Expand Economic Development Opportunities**

**Objective 3.1: Pender County will maximize economic development opportunities and balance the tax base by implementing the vision set out in the Future Land Use Map. The intent of this policy is to increase opportunities for industrial and commercial development, economic partnerships, and redevelopment.**

### **3.1.A. Primary Corridors and Nodes**

Convert residentially zoned land to industrial or commercial in primary corridors (e.g., US Hwy 421 and in Rocky Point) where market potential for employment development is strong and where infrastructure exists, including roads, or extension of water or sewer is planned. Future nodes of nonresidential development should concentrate around key intersections where access to services exists.

### **3.1.B. Economic Partnerships**

Continue to partner with Wilmington Business Development, municipalities, local chambers of commerce, and Jacksonville Onslow Economic Development to assist in marketing industrial projects.

### **3.1.C. Mixed-use Development**

The County encourages mixed-use development at varying intensities in accordance with the specified Future Land Use Categories.

### **3.1.D. Redevelopment**

Encourage the re-use or redevelopment of vacant buildings.

### **3.1.E. Brownfield Redevelopment**

Support the recruitment of clean industries to existing brownfield sites in Pender County. Explore grant opportunities to mitigate brownfield sites.

### **3.1.F. Expand Pender Commerce Park**

As limited spaces are available for new business development, the County will

explore opportunities to replicate the success of the Pender Commerce Park.

### **3.1.G. Regional Development Projects**

Encourage and support industrial and commercial economic development projects for job growth in Pender County.

### **3.1.H. Commercial Waterfront Development**

The County supports carefully developed commercial locations with waterfront access as a means to increase access to public trust areas and to support the tourism industry. Waterfront access should prioritize the preservation or addition of trees and limit impacts to the natural environment.

### **3.1.I. Office and Employment Centers**

The County supports and incentivizes the development of large-scale office and employment centers to increase the number of jobs located within the County. In coordination with the Expanded Economic Opportunities Goal, seek opportunities to encourage and support small business owners.

## **POLICY 3.2. Key Industries and Tourism**

**Objective 3.2: Pender County will support key industries and tourism to improve economic development opportunities and promote a balanced tax base. The intent of this policy is to support and enhance the local air service, maritime-related industries, tourism, regional development, and entrepreneurship.**

### **3.2.A. Air Service**

Support investment in Wallace-Pender Airport to increase air service.

### **3.2.B. Maritime Industries**

The County supports ongoing efforts to retain and enhance maritime-related industries. The County shall ensure land use regulations do not create barriers to commercial fishing, aquaculture, recreation, marine biotechnology, and coastal tourism.

### **3.2.C. Agriculture and Forestry**

The County supports ongoing efforts to support agriculture and forestry industries.

### **3.2.D. Extractive Uses**

Extractive uses, such as sand mines, are to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, depending on factors such as surrounding population density, groundwater concerns, and other environmental factors.

### **3.2.E. Tourism**

The County supports development that promotes Pender County as a tourist and recreational destination. The County intends for such development to protect and preserve the natural environment and support public waterway access. The County shall strive to protect and enhance natural habitats, agricultural heritage, tree preservation, and surface water quality as an effective method for continued expansion of tourism-related industries and jobs.

### **3.2.F. Regional Development Projects**

Encourage and support industrial and commercial economic development projects for job growth in Pender County.

### **3.2.G. Supporting Small Businesses and Entrepreneurship**

The County will seek opportunities to encourage local entrepreneurs and small business owners to grow the locally based commercial sector. The County will support community entrepreneurship or business incubator opportunities in partnership with Cape Fear Community College, the Small Business Development Technology Center (SBDTC), and other local economic development agencies or organizations.

### **3.2.H. Investing in the Workforce**

Partner with educational facilities to provide opportunities for training in targeted industries and promote

educational opportunities for workforce development.

### **3.2.I. Historical and Cultural Resources**

The County will support the preservation of unique historical and cultural resources with support from the NC State Historic Preservation Office and Historic Preservation Foundation of North Carolina. Develop partnerships with tourism industries to create historic districts or overlays, and to preserve historical and cultural resources as development occurs.

### **3.2.J. Agritourism**

The County shall continue to support agritourism opportunities as a means of promoting the rural and agricultural heritage of the County.

## EXPANDED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Identify Sites for North Carolina Department of Commerce Site Certification
- 2.** Support Economic Development Recruitment and Expansion
- 3.** Collaborate with Wallace to Support Economic Expansion Near Airport
- 4.** Identify Marine Biotech and Related Economic Development Opportunities
- 5.** Protect Historic Properties
- 6.** Implement Historic and Cultural Preservation Efforts
- 7.** Support Small Business Entrepreneurship
- 8.** Support Tourism Development Organizations

# ATTAINABLE HOUSING CHOICES

*Support the development of housing choices in strategic growth areas that provide new options for existing and future residents of Pender County.*

## **POLICY 4.1. Coordinate Housing Development with Infrastructure**

**Objective 4.1: Pender County will provide opportunities for a variety of neighborhood and housing types across the County as guided by the Future Land Use Map.**

### **4.1.A. Rural Housing**

The County shall support low-density, single-family housing development pattern that is prevalent throughout the County (Rural Agriculture and Rural Neighborhood). Use of private wells and septic systems is appropriate for these areas. The use of private **package treatment plants** or expansion of centralized sewer service outside of growth areas identified on the Future Land Use Map is discouraged.

### **4.1.B. Clustered Housing**

Conservation and the preservation of rural character in exchange for smaller lot sizes is appropriate within the rural areas of the County. Clustered housing options that support the permanent protection of natural lands and open space for habitat are encouraged. This option is preferred

particularly for sites with environmentally sensitive areas along rivers, creeks, and in floodplains. Private community systems are appropriate for delivering water and wastewater service to these developments if public utilities are not available.

### **4.1.C. Suburban Housing**

Focus conventional suburban scale housing neighborhoods (up to three units per acre in Coastal Neighborhood or up to six units per acre in Residential Neighborhood) in growth areas in the southern and eastern portions of the County. These areas should be supported by centralized water and sewer service.

### **4.1.D. Mixed-Use and Higher Density Housing**

The County encourages a development pattern of higher density housing mixed with commercial uses in areas supported by infrastructure and transportation systems. These areas are identified on the Future Land Use Map as the Neighborhood Center and Regional Center Categories.

## **POLICY 4.2. Strategic Housing Choices**

**Objective 4.2: Pender County supports development of new housing choices in strategic growth areas supported by public infrastructure. The intent of this policy is to support the development of housing options needed by the local workforce, particularly as housing prices continue to escalate. This policy supports economic development efforts by creating attainable housing choices for the workforce. It supports the development of new types of housing that are compatible with the existing character found in Pender County (rural, suburban, coastal, etc.).**

### **4.2.A. Middle Income Housing Options**

Support **“missing middle” housing** such as small lot single-family housing, patio homes, townhomes, cottage courts, and small scale multifamily (2-4 units) that are designed to blend in with the character of nearby neighborhoods. These choices are appropriate to consider in areas where supporting infrastructure exists.

### **4.2.B. Short Term Rentals**

The County will evaluate ways to balance owner-occupied housing with vacation or short-term rentals. Short-term rental properties reduce the stock of permanent, year-round housing available to residents of Pender County, leaving them with fewer housing choices.

### **4.2.C. Accessory Dwelling Units**

Continue to support and permit Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Explore ways to relax regulation of ADUs, as they can be an attainable housing option.

### **4.2.D. Manufactured Housing**

Continue to permit new manufactured housing, as it is an important contributor to affordable housing options in Pender County. If redevelopment of an existing manufactured home park is proposed, it should be replaced with new manufactured housing units. If replacement of units isn't feasible, these parks should be redeveloped into other affordable housing options, such as tiny home parks or duplexes. This option allows for the improvement and reinvestment in these parks, while still providing attainable housing choices.

### **4.2.E. Workforce Housing**

Explore opportunities to partner with public and non-profit entities to support workforce housing to provide more housing options for Pender County's critical workforce members (teachers, fire fighters, police officers, service industry workers, etc.). This may include partnering with external organizations to support workforce housing development projects in growth areas or modifying existing policies to encourage workforce housing, such as waiving development fees or providing housing density bonuses. Workforce housing should be prioritized in

communities near services, amenities, and employment opportunities.

#### **4.2.F. Opportunity Sites for Attainable Housing**

Support the use of tax credit funding to develop attainable housing in Pender County. To incentivize developers seeking opportunity sites for tax credit developments, Pender County will evaluate criteria for housing applications to the North Carolina Housing Finance Authority and align policies and regulations to support these developments.

facilities, and buildings that utilize water conservation systems.

#### **4.3.B. Low-Impact Development for Sustainable Housing**

The County encourages low-impact development principles that reduce the impact on the natural environment, adopt impervious coverage thresholds that reduce stormwater runoff, provide access to public trust lands along coastal areas, and preserve and enhance the tree canopy in residential development.

### **POLICY 4.3. Sustainable and Low-Impact Neighborhood Designs**

**Objective 4.3: New residential developments within growth areas should support sustainable and low-impact neighborhood design principles that leverage site conditions and provide desired neighborhood amenities.**

#### **4.3.A. Sustainable Growth**

The County encourages development of sustainable neighborhoods in targeted growth areas that provide sidewalks, neighborhood parks, connectivity to nearby commercial areas through walking paths or trails, **green infrastructure** stormwater management

# ATTAINABLE HOUSING CHOICES ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Develop an Updated Housing Needs Assessment and Recommendations
- 2.** Establish a New Coastal Residential Zoning District
- 3.** Remove Barriers to Housing Choices
- 4.** Encourage Use of Housing Choice Voucher Program
- 5.** Consider Zoning Changes to Support Housing Options Near Employment Centers
- 6.** Explore Incentives for Attainable Housing
- 7.** Coordinate with Non-governmental Partners on Housing Security
- 8.** Annually Evaluate Development Regulations to Ensure Alignment with Housing Goals

# SUPPORTED AGRICULTURAL AND WORKING LANDS

*In partnership with landowners, utilize land use planning tools to support the viability of farming and agricultural businesses, maintain rural character, and preserve farmland and open spaces.*

## **POLICY 5.1. Support Agricultural Land Uses**

**Objective 5.1: Pender County will guide growth and infrastructure to prioritize the preservation of prime agricultural lands. The intent of this policy is to identify ways to guide land use decisions and implement programs to support a viable agricultural economy.**

### **5.1.A. Farmland Preservation Plan**

The County shall continue to support the preservation of agricultural working lands by creating a Farmland Preservation Plan, which can include actions for public education and collaboration with the Cooperative Extension and the USDA.

### **5.1.B. Voluntary Agricultural Districts and Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts**

The County shall continue to support the Voluntary Agricultural District (VAD) program and explore an Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural District (EVAD) program to provide benefits to agricultural properties. This includes

active administration of these programs by the County.

### **5.1.C. Continue Existing Programs**

Maintain existing programs, such as the present use value program and the County's beaver management program, as a means to protect and preserve agriculture and forestry.

## **Voluntary Agricultural Districts**

**Voluntary Agricultural Districts** (VADs) and **Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts** (EVADs) were authorized by the North Carolina General Assembly in the 1985 Farmland Preservation Enabling Act. These districts help form partnerships between county commissioners, land use planners, and farmers to pass ordinances that encourage the voluntary preservation of farmland and protect land from urban development. VAD and EVAD members may be eligible for farmland preservation funds, present-use tax value assessments, waived water and sewer assessments, and increased protection from nuisance suits.

### **5.1.D. Cooperative Partnerships**

The County shall continue to support collaborative partnerships, such as efforts by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension, in the development of innovative farming methods. This could include the development of new and alternative crops and methods, improving the effective use of farmlands, and supporting the use of local crops in local businesses, such as restaurants.

## **POLICY 5.2. Support for the Rural Economy**

**Objective 5.2: Pender County will develop and implement strategies to maintain and strengthen the economic viability of agriculture and other components of the rural economy.**

### **5.2.A. Viable Businesses**

Pender County will support efforts to preserve existing farming operations and expand agri-business and agritourism opportunities.

### **5.2.B. Community Collaboration**

Promote local farming and its public benefits (such as scenic views, historic landscapes, rural character, and local food supply) through educational programs, local events, and agritourism programs.

### **5.2.C. Local Food System**

Supplement the local rural economy through a strong local food system by encouraging local store and restaurant associations to promote products grown locally in the County. This includes partnering with local institutions such as schools, hospitals, and government offices to ensure that their food options include local products, and through cooperation with regional efforts to promote a regional branded identity that includes agriculture.

# SUPPORTED AGRICULTURAL AND WORKING LANDS ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Develop a Farmland Preservation Plan
- 2.** Explore Agritourism Opportunities
- 3.** Support Alternative Farming Methods
- 4.** Expand and Support the Local Food System
- 5.** Invest in Beaver Management Programs
- 6.** Appropriately Regulate Solar Farms

# SAFE AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION

*Provide safe and efficient transportation modes, including vehicular, walking, cycling, and transit, as funding and resources allow.*

## **POLICY 6.1. Transportation Planning**

**Objective 6.1: Manage the timing, location, and intensity of growth by coordinating transportation improvements with development and ensuring safe and efficient modes of transportation are available to all residents and visitors.**

### **6.1.A. Transportation Safety**

The County encourages safety as the primary concern for all transportation-related projects, supporting **Vision Zero** efforts in particular.

### **6.1.B. Transportation Planning**

Provide support for the efficient flow of vehicular traffic through NCDOT roadway projects, connectivity requirements, and implementation of adopted transportation plans.

### **6.1.C. Hampstead Bypass**

The County shall continue to support the completion of the Hampstead Bypass.

### **6.1.D. Roadway Network**

The County should continue to promote a hierarchical, functional transportation

system that prioritizes needed improvements and promotes the traditional arrangement of land use patterns, such as gridded streets, alternative modes of transportation, and increased density to reduce any associated negative impacts to the transportation network.

### **6.1.E. Connectivity**

The County shall continue to enforce connectivity requirements that require new developments, subdivisions, and individual sites to provide vehicular and pedestrian interconnectivity to existing or planned adjacent sites and adjoining developments. Where possible, minimize the development of cul-de-sacs.

### **6.1.F. Transportation Coordination**

Ensure all proposed development is in coordination with existing or planned streets and highways as provided in the UDO, the Pender County Streets Plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, and the Comprehensive Transportation Plan.

### **6.1.G. Land Uses and Best Practices**

Evaluate ways to adequately address Pender County's transportation needs through land use and transportation

plans and coordination with regional partners.

#### **6.1.H. Collector Street Plan**

The County shall continue to support and implement the Pender County Collector Street Plan and, where practicable, encourage the development of a gridded street system when reviewing and approving new development proposals within growth areas.

#### **6.1.I. Road Design Standards**

The County shall continue to allow and encourage flexible road design standards and alternative streets, where consistent with minimum NCDOT safety standards, which incorporate low impact development, **Smart Growth** principles, and **Complete Streets**. The County shall continue to require that all private streets be constructed in accordance with the most current NCDOT Subdivision Minimum Construction Standards manual and the NCDOT Guidelines for Drainage Studies and Hydraulic Design.

#### **6.1.J. Enhancement of Entryway Corridors**

The County encourages the aesthetic enhancement of entryway corridors and recognizes the important economic, tourism, and community image benefits of attractive roadways that enter the County's planning area. Such entryway corridors should receive priority attention for improved appearance and

development standards, including landscaping, signage, building heights, façade requirements, and tree preservation.

#### **6.1.K. Complete Street Standards**

The County should encourage private streets to be constructed as complete streets with traffic calming measures to encourage safety and alternative transportation options.

#### **6.1.L. Regional Coordination**

Ensure that Pender County's transportation needs are adequately addressed through the Wilmington MPO and Cape Fear RPO Transportation Improvement Program requests.

## **POLICY 6.2. Connectivity and Multimodal Transportation Systems**

**Objective 6.2: Pender County will provide safe opportunities for walking and cycling, while supporting the need for paratransit service and other alternatives to provide viable transportation choices for residents and visitors.**

### **6.2.A. Pedestrian Accessibility**

The County shall enforce connectivity standards that require new developments and individual sites to provide vehicular and pedestrian interconnectivity to existing or planned adjacent sites and adjoining developments to increase walkability and encourage multimodal transportation.

### **6.2.B. Enhance Bicycle and Pedestrian Network**

Support strategies to secure the public right of way to enhance the bicycle and pedestrian network in the County, including recommendations from the current Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

### **6.2.C. Alternative Methods of Mobility**

Seek to provide alternative means of transportation to reduce traffic, enhance economic development, offer services to those without use of a vehicle, and provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

### **6.2.D. Rail and Transit**

The County shall coordinate with the NCDOT, WMPO, Cape Fear RPO, and local municipalities to encourage alternative forms of transportation including regional rail, paratransit, public transit, and transportation demand measures such as vanpooling and ride sharing to build an intermodal transportation system.

### **6.2.E. Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan**

The County shall support efforts to implement the recommendations contained in the Cape Fear Regional Bicycle Plan and the Pender County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

### **6.2.F. Share the Road**

Work with NCDOT to ensure rural highways include shoulders that provide sufficient space for bicyclists and have “share the road” signs to alert drivers.

### **6.2.G. Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities in New Development**

The County shall encourage all projects to consider pedestrian and bicycle facilities for inclusion in all road construction, reconstruction, or maintenance projects.

### **6.2.H. Pender Adult Services Transit**

The County shall continue to support paratransit service as a vital resource for the elderly, disabled, and those without access to a personal vehicle.

### **6.2.I. Public Transit**

The County shall support efforts to establish public transit opportunities such as park and ride facilities and on-demand micro transit services.

### **6.2.J. Commuter Transportation Options**

Consider targeted, specific commuter transportation options, such as on-demand micro-transit or commuter-oriented fixed route shuttles from population centers in the County to employment areas.

# SAFE AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Develop a Comprehensive Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
- 2.** Require Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure in New Development
- 3.** Research Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Opportunities
- 4.** Consider Increasing Development Intensity at Primary Rural Roadway Intersections
- 5.** Provide Updates on the Implementation of the Pender County Streets Plan
- 6.** Address Impacts of New Development on Transportation Systems
- 7.** Coordinate Updates to the Streets Plan with the Future Land Use Map
- 8.** Clarify Connectivity Requirements
- 9.** Consider Stub Street Requirements
- 10.** Update and Maintain the Right-of-Way and “Paper Street” Database
- 11.** Update Private Street Requirements
- 12.** Consider Requiring Public Access for Private Streets
- 13.** Examine Opportunities to Improve Rural Community Transportation
- 14.** Explore Expansion of Paratransit Infrastructure
- 15.** Establish Funding and Maintenance Responsibility for Non-Motorized Transportation Maintenance
- 16.** Consider Establishing a Greenway Facilities Plan
- 17.** Establish a Bicycle and Pedestrian Service Area Map
- 18.** Expand WAVE Micro On-Demand Service
- 19.** Implement the Principles of Vision Zero and Complete Streets

# ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND RESILIENCE

*Protect natural resources in environmentally sensitive areas by reducing stormwater, drainage, and floodplain impacts. Maintain and enhance the natural environment and water quality, including conserving barrier islands, wetlands, riparian buffers, habitat corridors, and other environmentally sensitive features for their natural storm protection and ecological value.*

## **POLICY 7.1. Conservation Tools**

**Objective 7.1: The County supports the preservation of existing conservation lands for educational opportunities, natural aesthetic qualities, wildlife habitat, and stormwater drainage. Development is not supported in these areas. Expansion of conservation lands by private property owners is supported by the County. The intent of this policy is to further enhance the amount of permanently protected and preserved lands in the County through conservation-oriented land use principles.**

### **7.1.A. Low-Impact Development for Conservation**

The County supports low-impact development (LID) practices. Such LID practices may include retaining or infiltrating most of the runoff on-site, maximizing the use of permeable surfaces, reducing the amount of impervious coverage, and clustering housing to allow a profitable development

density while maximizing open space and minimizing wildlife habitat fragmentation.

### **7.1.B. Open Space**

The County shall continue to require the designation of open space in accordance with the subdivision of land. In coordination with the Sustainable and Managed Growth and Planned Public Facilities and Services Goals, the County will encourage more open space in development.

### **7.1.C. Environmental Planning**

The County shall include an analysis of environmental conditions during the development review process.

### **7.1.D. Green Growth Toolbox**

Coordinate future development with the concepts of the Green Growth Toolbox. Amend development regulations and processes to incentivize conservation subdivisions, especially in environmentally sensitive areas (such as riverine, wetland, and coastal areas).

### **7.1.E. Conservation Easements**

Achieve preservation of important natural resources and environmental lands by encouraging conservation easements where practicable. Consider the establishment of a formal program to support conservation easements to be facilitated by Pender County.

## **POLICY 7.2. Sensitive Natural Resources and Water Quality**

**Objective 7.2: Pender County shall take actions designed to protect, enhance, and restore the surface water quality and sensitive natural resources located in and adjacent to the County’s planning jurisdiction. The intent of this policy is to protect and enhance current surface water quality classifications.**

### **7.2.A. Protect Surface Water Quality**

The County shall continue to protect and enhance the water quality of the estuarine and riverine systems.

### **7.2.B. Point and Nonpoint Source Pollution**

The County will evaluate ways to manage nonpoint source runoff associated with new development. Examples could include encouraging and incentivizing low impact development techniques, erosion control measures during development, implementing a tree preservation ordinance, or additional setbacks from sensitive habitat areas. The County will

also address water quality problems associated with point source discharges.

### **7.2.C. Outstanding Resource Waters**

The County shall continue to enforce the use standards outlined in 15A NCAC 07H .0209 (f) for Outstanding Resource Waters, with the intention of protecting unique and special waters of excellent water quality and ecological or recreational significance, as defined by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

### **7.2.D. Riparian Buffers**

The County supports the preservation or installation of vegetated buffers adjacent to all streams, rivers, marshes, and estuarine waters, with the intent of reducing the flow of nutrients and other contaminants into area surface waters.

## **POLICY 7.3. Stormwater Management**

**Objective 7.3: Pender County supports efforts to enhance stormwater protection for existing and planned developments. The intent of this policy is to reduce drainage issues for citizens while also supporting surface water quality throughout the County.**

### **7.3.A. Stormwater Runoff**

The County shall continue to enforce the stormwater management requirements contained in the UDO. The County will evaluate ways to improve the stormwater

management regulations to meet or exceed state guidelines.

### **7.3.B. Stormwater Discharge from County Sources**

Where practicable, the County shall eliminate stormwater discharges resulting from County activities. Where elimination is not possible, the County shall mitigate the sources of stormwater discharges to the maximum extent feasible.

### **7.3.C. Watershed Restoration**

Where possible, the County shall encourage protection and enhancement of surface water quality through implementation of Watershed Restoration Plans. High water quality is vital to aquaculture, resident's quality of life, natural character, and overall economic sustainability.

### **7.3.D. Parking Requirements**

The County will consider removing impervious parking minimum requirements, allowing more parking to be pervious or natural surfaces, and retaining parking maximums.

### **7.3.E. Water Supply Watersheds**

The County shall continue to enforce the Water Supply Watershed Overlay Districts in southwest Pender County along the Black River.

## **POLICY 7.4. Tree Canopy and Wildlife Habitats**

**Objective 7.4: Support efforts to expand and protect tree canopy throughout the County. Encourage continued protection of wildlife habitats within designated conservation areas and support options for wildlife protection. The intent of this policy is to promote preservation of tree canopy and sensitive wildlife habitat.**

### **7.4.A. Prime Wildlife Habitats**

The County shall continue to protect its prime wildlife habitats, where possible, by enforcing the CAMA permitting program, enhanced open space requirements, and encouraging land conservation and cluster subdivisions.

### **7.4.B. Tree Preservation**

The County shall continue to require tree mitigation for significant trees. As part of this effort, the County will provide clear guidance in ordinance provisions on protecting, maintaining, and replacing trees. Best practice for tree protection, such as NC Cooperative Extension's "Protecting and Retaining Trees: A Guide for Municipalities and Counties in North Carolina," should be considered.

### **7.4.C. Forestry**

The County shall continue to support forestry as a means to maintain prime wildlife habitat areas.

#### **7.4.D. Firewise Landscaping Practices**

Consider establishing an overlay district within Smoke Awareness Areas or the Wildland-Urban Interface Zone to require Firewise Landscaping practices.

### **POLICY 7.5. Wetlands**

**Objective 7.5: The County shall continue to protect wetlands as guided by state and federal regulations. The intent of this policy is to support natural drainage storage and surface water quality.**

#### **7.5.A. Protection of Wetlands**

The County shall continue to protect freshwater wetlands, marshes, and 404 wetlands within its planning jurisdiction in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

#### **7.5.B. Shellfishing Waters**

The County supports and promotes the activities of the State's Shellfish Management Program. The County promotes estuarine water quality through its soil erosion and sedimentation provisions and by supporting the CAMA permitting regulations.

#### **7.5.C. Marsh Damage from Bulkhead Installation**

The County strives to minimize damage to existing marshes by maintaining the natural living shoreline instead of bulkhead installation or seawalls, where possible.

#### **7.5.D. Wetland Preservation Incentives**

Encourage the preservation of wetland areas by incentivizing conservation easements and conservation subdivisions.

### **POLICY 7.6. Planning for Resilience**

**Objective 7.6: The County supports efforts to reduce storm damage and flooding for existing and planned development by enhancing stormwater protection and flood mitigation measures. The intent of this policy is to reduce future losses from flooding and storm damage.**

#### **7.6.A. Hazard Mitigation Planning**

The County supports proactive hazard mitigation planning and consistency between the Imagine Pender 2050 Plan and the Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. Pender County will support the eight Goals from the Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, listed below:

- **7.6.A.1. Mitigation Goal #1:** Work to improve existing local government policies and codes to reduce impacts of natural hazards.
- **7.6.A.2. Mitigation Goal #2:** Design and implement specific mitigation measures to protect vulnerable public and private properties.
- **7.6.A.3. Mitigation Goal #3:** Increase the protection of critical facilities and infrastructure from hazard threats through retrofit projects for existing

facilities and innovative design standards for new facilities.

- **7.6.A.4. Mitigation Goal #4:** Enhance public education programs to promote community awareness of natural hazards and the hazard mitigation techniques available to reduce their impact.
- **7.6.A.5. Mitigation Goal #5:** Improve stormwater management through enhanced local government programs, policies, and practices.
- **7.6.A.6. Mitigation Goal #6:** Enhance each county's storm evacuation procedures through increased intergovernmental coordination between the counties, the participating municipalities, and the State of North Carolina.
- **7.6.A.7. Mitigation Goal #7:** Increase the County's emergency management capabilities through sustained system and technology improvements.
- **7.6.A.8. Mitigation Goal #8:** Promote volunteer involvement in emergency preparedness and response through increased citizen awareness and training activities.

### **7.6.B. Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan**

The County shall be proactive in its efforts to minimize damage and threats to public health and safety associated with hurricanes, severe weather, and other hazards and work to implement the Southeastern NC Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan.

### **7.6.C. Flood Prone Areas**

The County shall permit development in the 100-year flood zones, provided that all new construction and substantial improvements comply strictly with the County's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance, which has been adopted in conjunction with the County's participation in the National Flood Insurance Program.

### **7.6.D. Flood Insurance**

The County shall take actions necessary to reduce the cost of flood insurance to property owners by maintaining or improving the current rating within the Community Rating System (CRS).

### **7.6.E. Enhanced Regulations for Flood Prone Areas**

The County will consider increasing regulation of flood prone areas to discourage development in the floodway, and the County will consider enforcing floodplain development requirements in additional flood zones (such as the 500-year flood zone). Evaluate data on recent flooding history for these determinations. These efforts will be coordinated with the Future Land Use Map and related policy guidance to discourage sewer infrastructure in non-growth areas.

### **7.6.F. Land Acquisition**

The County supports grant-funded acquisition of property that is unsuitable for development due to flooding hazards

when such acquisition serves a useful public purpose such as for land preservation, access to public trust areas, or as a community resource.

## **POLICY 7.7. Hazards**

**Objective 7.7: Pender County supports efforts to mitigate the impacts of hazards, including high winds, airport hazards, and fire. The County will work to promote public education around hazards.**

### **7.7.A. High Winds**

The County supports enforcement of the North Carolina Building Code. The County shall continue to require construction design standards to meet the minimum required wind loads.

### **7.7.B. Airport Hazards**

Pender County strives to reduce the hazards of the Wallace-Pender Airport through implementation of its airport minimum standards ordinance which restricts land uses and building heights in the surrounding vicinity.

### **7.7.C. Minimize Potential Fire Damage**

The County supports controlled burn operations to reduce the risk of damage from wildfire. Firewise Landscaping practices should be required within Smoke Awareness Areas and the **Wildland-Urban Interface Zone**.

### **7.7.D. Public Education**

The County supports provisions to ensure that the public is aware of the risks of different types of natural hazards in order to reduce their personal exposure to those hazards.

# ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND RESILIENCE ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Consider Establishing a Conservation Easement Program
- 2.** Develop a Tree Preservation Plan
- 3.** Establish a Formalized Procedure to Evaluate Potential Public Land Acquisition
- 4.** Establish an Overlay for Outstanding Resource Waters
- 5.** Enhance Riparian Buffers
- 6.** Consider Establishing an Engineering Department
- 7.** Enhance Stormwater Management
- 8.** Consider Stormwater Control Requirements Beyond State Minimums
- 9.** Establish a Stormwater and Ditch Maintenance Program
- 10.** Develop Stormwater Master Plans
- 11.** Reduce Stormwater Discharge
- 12.** Develop a Watershed Restoration Plan
- 13.** Explore Water Conservation Programs and Education Efforts
- 14.** Expand Incentives for Low-Impact Development
- 15.** Consider Wildlife Habitat Conservation in Legislative Decisions
- 16.** Consider Expanding the Definition of Environmental Features in the UDO
- 17.** Consider Revising Density Calculations in the UDO
- 18.** Explore Standards to Provide Wildlife Corridors
- 19.** Consider Establishing a Resource Conservation Incentive District
- 20.** Expand Tree Preservation and Mitigation Requirements
- 21.** Remove Tree Survey Exemptions
- 22.** Provide Bulkhead Education
- 23.** Establish a Drainage Improvement Plan
- 24.** Strengthen Floodplain Development Regulations
- 25.** Designate Vulnerable Lands as Environmental Conservation
- 26.** Gather and Share Resilience Data

# COMMUNITY UNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

*Continue to engage all members of the community in land use decision-making.*

## **POLICY 8.1. Public Input**

**Objective 8.1: Pender County will strive to create opportunities for all residents of the County to participate in the planning process.**

### ***8.1.A. Public Engagement***

#### ***Opportunities***

The County shall continue to utilize standing committees and boards to involve the public in planning, land use, and community development decisions whenever practicable, and explore new opportunities for public engagement, such as community forums or other planning events.

### ***8.1.B. Communication***

The County shall continue to utilize its website, social media, and other methods to keep residents informed of planning and land use decisions.

### ***8.1.C. Required Notice***

Continue to exceed minimum statutory requirements for public notice of hearings and land use applications.

## COMMUNITY UNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Consider Web-Based Tools to Notify the Public of Development Projects
- 2.** Establish a Public Education Program for Natural Hazards
- 3.** Consider Programs such as a Community Planning Academy

# ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

*Promote a high quality of life for Pender County residents by providing access to key amenities and important public services.*

## **POLICY 9.1. Health in All Policies**

**Objective 9.1: Pender County will promote a “Health in All Policies” approach and prioritize decision-making in land use planning that improves public health, community well-being, and overall quality of life for community members. Positive health outcomes are interconnected with, and rely on, the other Plan Goals, such as Attainable Housing, Safe and Efficient Transportation, and Sustainable and Managed Growth. The intent of this policy is to improve access to essential services and amenities, improve the natural and built environment, and enhance recreational opportunities.**

### **9.1.A. Health and Human Services**

The Pender County Planning & Community Development Department will coordinate with the Health and Human Services Department for ongoing ways to address health priorities, including but not limited to what was identified in the 2022 Community Health Assessment.

### **9.1.B. Aging in Place**

Enhance health services to support the aging population to ensure resident well-being. Identify ways to improve aging-in-place options to ensure that the needs of seniors are met in the community. This could be accomplished through partnerships with non-profit organizations to support housing rehabilitation, home repairs, or modifications for seniors; encouraging more housing options for older adults; or reducing land use regulation barriers for assisted living facilities.

### **9.1.C. Underserved Communities**

Develop an understanding of geographic needs in the community for places that have been underserved in terms of health services, healthy lifestyle choices, and access to recreation. Take steps to improve the built and natural environment in these communities.

## **POLICY 9.2. Access to Healthcare and Health Resources**

**Objective 9.2:** Pender County will support efforts to improve access to health services and healthy lifestyle choices for community members. The County will seek to improve the built environment to address **social determinants of health**.

### **9.2.A. Access to Healthcare and Essential Services**

Collaborate with local stakeholders and Pender County Health and Human Services to encourage the development of rural health clinics, emergency response facilities and infrastructure, and mobile medical units to ensure access to healthcare in underserved areas. Evaluate the Unified Development Ordinance for any land use regulation barriers to these healthcare facilities.

### **9.2.B. Access to Telehealth Services**

Seek grant funding to boost rural telehealth capacity and access. Coordinate efforts with Policy 2.5 (Broadband Services) with the aim of improving access to telehealth services.

## **POLICY 9.3. Local Food System and Sustainable Agriculture**

**Objective 9.3:** Promote public health through improving access to healthy, local food options. Strengthen the local food system by promoting agricultural sustainability, enhancing local food access, and supporting local farmers and food producers.

### **9.3.A. Local Farmers and Food Producers**

Support the local food system through agricultural businesses, including small- and mid-scale farms. Coordinate these efforts with the Supported Agricultural and Working Lands Goal and a future Farmland Preservation Plan.

### **9.3.B. Farmers Market**

Create local and regional partnerships to support the establishment of a farmers market program in Pender County, such as with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension.

### **9.3.C. Local Food Markets**

Facilitate the establishment of local food markets, food hubs, and farm-to-table initiatives. Support and prioritize areas that would meet the needs of underserved or low-income communities, including the acceptance of food assistance programs (such as SNAP, WIC, and senior nutrition programs). Prioritize underserved areas where markets could be supported by the local community or

support low-income residents and reduce driving time to grocery stores.

## **POLICY 9.4. Align Recreation Opportunities and Transportation Investments**

**Objective 9.4: Provide access to safe and enjoyable activities that improve mental and physical health. Enhance the expansion of the transportation system to include infrastructure for walking, biking, and other forms of non-motorized transportation to align goals between recreation and transportation planning efforts.**

### **9.4.A. Nature-Based Recreation**

In coordination with the Environmental Conservation and Resilience Policies, seek to create nature-based recreation opportunities (parks, trails, greenways, blueways, etc.) to advance public health and support physical activity. Nature-based recreation opportunities create co-benefits for public health, environmental protection, and land conservation efforts simultaneously.

### **9.4.B. Conservation and Recreation**

Engage private conservation organizations, such as land trusts, to partner on nature and recreation-based projects to leverage private funding for land conservation in the form of monetary donations and foundation grants.

### **9.4.C. Public Health Education**

In coordination with the Community Unity and Civic Engagement Policies, expand education programs about nature-based recreation.

### **9.4.D. Greenways and Linear Parks**

Advance the expansion and connectivity of greenways and trails throughout the County. Leverage County resources by merging planning efforts between departments for projects that can provide both transportation and active recreation options, such as the construction of connected greenways. Coordinate with other regional or state agencies to connect greenways and trails, including the implementation of the Cape Fear Regional Bicycle Plan.

### **9.4.E. Underserved Parks and Recreation Areas**

Identify underserved areas and work with local and regional partners to provide parks and recreational opportunities in those areas.

### **9.4.F. Safety in Transportation Systems**

Prioritize public health through improving safety outcomes in transportation systems through alignment with the Safe and Efficient Transportation Policies, including **Vision Zero** and **Complete Streets** efforts.

# ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE AND COMMUNITY HEALTH ACTIONS

The following Actions, summarized below, identify specific implementation tasks that the County and its partners will take in the future to realize the Vision Themes, Goals, and Policies. For more information on these Actions, please see [Chapter 5: Implementation](#).

- 1.** Build Community Capacity
- 2.** Identify Grant Funding for Program Support
- 3.** Establish a Farmers Market
- 4.** Create a Local Food Directory
- 5.** Create a Local Food Council
- 6.** Develop Regional Partnerships
- 7.** Develop an Aging Plan
- 8.** Achieve Recreation Goals within Conservation Easements
- 9.** Promote Large County Parks as Community Hubs
- 10.** Increase Accessibility of Food Resources
- 11.** Review and Update the UDO to Strengthen Local Food Systems

# FARMLAND CONSERVATION TOOLKIT

**Tools for conserving farmland and the agricultural economy are described in this section.** This list includes tools that could be utilized in Pender County. Implementing the right tool or collection of tools is an exercise in reviewing effectiveness and balancing resources. It may be the case that additional tools that are not listed here, or that have not yet been created, are a part of a successful program. Tools are organized by how the program operates.

Regulatory tools confer a benefit to the landowner or a restriction on the land that includes formal rules about what can occur on the land, based on County ordinance or State or Federal law. Financial tools convey a specific lessening of tax burden or payment for conserving land. Market-based and economic incentive tools include different business and investment structures that make farmland and agriculture more economically competitive with other alternative land uses.



# REGULATORY TOOLS

## Farmland Protection Plan

Farmland protection plans are important policy documents that help local governments inventory important farmland, set goals for its protection, and identify strategies for implementation. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services requires a farmland protection plan to include certain elements, such as:

- Existing agricultural activity in the County
- Challenges to continued family farming
- Opportunities for maintaining or enhancing family-owned farms and the local agricultural economy
- Schedule for implementation and the identification of possible funding sources for the long-term support of the plan

## Voluntary and Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD & EVAD)

The Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VAD) and Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVAD) programs provide access to regulatory benefits and programs in exchange for a conservation agreement

to protect the land for active agricultural purposes. Pender County currently has a VAD program.

Both tools must include an agreement to protect the land for at least 10 years. While the VAD designation could be revoked by the landowner during that time and result in the loss of regulatory benefits and programs, farmland placed in an EVAD has an agreement that is irrevocable for

### CASE STUDY: IREDELL COUNTY, NC

Iredell County is one of 64 counties in North Carolina with a Farmland Protection Plan approved by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS). The plan is organized around four goals: strengthening farm viability and the agricultural economy, supporting farm operations and the right-to-farm, protecting farmland as a valuable natural resource, and fostering greater recognition and public support for agriculture. The Farmland Protection Plan remains a valuable roadmap to reevaluating conditions in Iredell County.



10 years, with an additional three-year renewal if no notice is given by the landowner to the County. VAD and EVAD designations provide stability and make clear the intent to preserve farmland.

### **Farmland Preservation Boards**

Farmland Preservation Boards administer VAD and EVAD programs. In alignment with state practices for VAD programs, Pender County has a Voluntary Agricultural District Board that reviews and approves applications for Voluntary Agricultural Districts. The board also advises the Board of Commissioners on projects, programs, or issues affecting the agricultural economy or activities within the County that will affect the agricultural districts.

### **Conservation Subdivisions**

Sometimes described as “conservation neighborhoods,” “cluster subdivisions,” or “agrihoods” (a combination of the words “agriculture” and “neighborhood”), conservation subdivisions are a type of development or neighborhood that includes working farmland as an essential part of the design. The specifics of

conservation subdivision development vary. In general, the concept includes clear access to preserved natural habitats or farmland within the community, a prominent working farm or farms on the property, community events and education around the farm areas, and elements of environmental sustainability.

The residential portions of conservation subdivisions are usually designed to have smaller lots than in other developments to allow walking to common, shared neighborhood amenities. Clustering homes allows for the protection of larger swaths of open space.

The farm portion of the conservation subdivision can vary in size. The farmland may be interspersed throughout the community or in a central location. In general, the farm is often garden agriculture or small herds of livestock. The farms can be large enough to provide food to local restaurants or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs within the conservation subdivision but are not operating on the scale of producing commodities for larger markets.



Conservation subdivisions described by promoters as agrihoods are usually marketed as luxury planned communities – agrihoods are a stronger response to preserving land and a rural aesthetic than they are to affordability or the overall retention of agricultural industry in an area. They can be preferable to conventional suburban residential subdivisions where maintaining an agricultural presence and rural character is desirable, and their agricultural and open space component can be positioned as a buffer that reduces conflicts between other farmland and residences.

### **Cluster Development**

Cluster subdivisions differ from conventional suburban residential development by allowing smaller lot sizes in residential areas of development than would be otherwise available in exchange for protecting a larger percentage of open space within the project. Like all conservation subdivisions, both the smaller lot areas and the preservation area are together a part of the cluster development.

Reducing the development areas via smaller lot sizes allows a developer to use less roadway area and requires less extension of infrastructure than required for a conventional subdivision, allowing for more land to be preserved. Cluster subdivisions can include open space preservation requirements. The open space can include working lands and farming operations.

### **Best Practices**

North Carolina State University published a Conservation Subdivision Handbook with best practices and ideas for implementation. It describes how, in addition to preserving agricultural land, conservation subdivisions can lead to higher home values, reduced infrastructure cost, benefits to wildlife, and stormwater management improvements. Over half of North Carolina counties have ordinances that support this tool in some form.

# FINANCIAL TOOLS

## Present-Use Value Taxation Program

The Present-Use Value program is a voluntary state program that has allowed protection of certain agricultural land, horticultural land, and forestland since 1974 by allowing it to be appraised at its present use value, rather than the market value. Present-use value measures the ability to produce income on the land. Market value measures the estimated sales price of a property if it were voluntarily sold. The tool maintains the viability of working lands (agricultural land, horticultural land, and forestland) by protecting them from being taxed at the value they might hold if subdivided for a residential neighborhood or other use.

For the purposes of the Present-Use Value Program:

- **Agricultural land** is actively engaged in the commercial production or growing of crops, plants, or animals (e.g., soybeans, grains, tobacco, cotton, peanuts, corn, horses, and cattle).
- **Horticultural land** is actively engaged in commercial production or growing fruits, vegetables,

nursery products, or floral products. (e.g., apples, peaches, strawberries, pecans, sod, shrubs, greenhouse plants, and evergreens intended for use as Christmas trees).

- **Forestland** is actively engaged in the commercial growing of trees.

Generally, land must satisfy four requirements to be eligible for the program:

- **Ownership type**, defined by the General Assembly but generally owned by an individual, trust, or farm-related business.
- **Size**, including at least one tract that is in active production (10 acres for agriculture, 5 acres for horticulture, or 20 acres for forestland).
- **Income**, with at least one minimum size tract producing an average of at least \$1,000 gross yearly income from agriculture and horticulture over the past three years. Forestland is not subject to this requirement as income is only



generated at harvest after many years.

- **Sound management**, with several options available to satisfy the requirement.

Changes to eligibility are controlled by the state, but the program has remained consistent over time.

### **Conservation Easements**

In general, a conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement applying to a specific parcel of land between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits the uses allowed on the land in order to protect natural areas from development disturbance. Though some easements are designed to keep the land in a natural state for the benefit of ecosystems or wildlife, they can also be tailored to preserve farmland, protecting against building and subdivision. The basic tradeoff is through tax adjustments. In exchange for conserving the land so that it cannot be developed in the future (for example, as a residential subdivision), federal and state tax assessments take

into account the land's appraised value and the reduced development potential. An existing conservation easement is more permanent than use-value taxation. Though, in general, conservation easements are designed to be permanent, the conservation agreements used in VAD and EVAD programs are a form of conservation easement and are revokable over time.

Paid for through the state's Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation (ADFP) Trust Fund, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) facilitates a program for the purchase of conservation easements to permanently protect farmland and ranchland from non-farm development through property acquisition. The conservation easements in this program are maintained by non-profit land conservancy organizations.

There are specific requirements for the conservancy organization required by the state, and there are well-established organizations with a history of meeting those requirements. For example, Three Rivers Land Trust holds conservation



easements in 15 counties in central North Carolina.

### **Purchase of Development Rights Program**

A Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program aims to preserve large tracts of land for the protection of agriculture and open space. Additionally, the program can safeguard lands in watershed districts and environmentally sensitive areas. For an agricultural PDR, the program can conserve and protect agricultural lands, maintain sustainable agriculture operations, and promote agricultural heritage and culture.

Other North Carolina counties have active programs, such as:

- Wake County's open space land acquisition and conservation easement program that has protected nearly 2,700 acres.
- Buncombe County's Farmland Preservation program has preserved more than 8,000 acres since 1995.
- These programs are funded through a variety of sources including General

Obligation bonds. Iredell County has designated a PDR program but to date has not secured funding for preservation efforts.

# MARKET-BASED & ECONOMIC INCENTIVE

## **Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)**

Real estate investment trusts (REITs) allow individual or institutional investors to invest in large-scale land holdings that produce income and are managed by a trust. Though these exist for many different kinds of real estate, some REITs specialize in agriculture and farmland. They do so through owning and managing the property, which can include hiring the actual farmers that will work the land or leasing the land to farmers. Investors in a REIT expect to earn a return on their investment. As an investment tool there is an incentive to select quality agricultural land, keep it in profitable production, and protect it. While the business model is based on a knowledge of sound farming practice, there is no legal guarantee that land will be maintained within the REIT. For example, REIT land could be leased for wind or solar energy production. Without some other form of legal agreement or guarantee, the property could be sold outright to a willing buyer for another use, such as commercial or residential development.

REITs are a strategy to preserve agricultural land, at least in the short term. While landowners, farmers, or County advocates could recruit a REIT to purchase land in Pender County, there is no feasible way for the County to require one or create one. Agricultural REITs do have a presence in North Carolina. For example, Farmland Partners, which manages nearly 200,000 acres nationwide includes holdings in eastern North Carolina with over 15,000 acres in Beaufort, Currituck, Pamlico, and Pasquotank Counties.

## **Additional Private Partnerships and Trusts**

Additional organizations exist with a primary mission of protecting farmland or securing food systems. The services of these organizations can be critical in keeping productive agricultural land as a viable economic activity. This is a diverse category. It includes entities that provide consulting services to farmers, extend



credit to assist farmers, or that assemble or otherwise make farmland available to new farmers. For example, The Conservation Fund, an organization with a nationwide presence, includes a “Working Farms Fund” that specifically targets at-risk farmland. This fund generates opportunities for the next generation of farmers looking to start work on their own land or for them to purchase the land needed to scale up operations. They target mid-sized farms of 20 to 500 acres, farmers who have leased land, or farmers who have worked in farming operations but have not owned the business themselves. The fund secures land, places appropriate easements, and helps farmers develop business plans. Though this particular program focused on at-risk farmland near Atlanta and Chicago, in 2022, Charlotte became an additional target.

Farm Credit is another private organization with a different model, supporting rural communities and agricultural businesses with consistent credit and financial services. They help a nationwide network of financial institutions that partner with the farmers

or the business directly.

### **Agritourism**

Agritourism is a newer concept, though many aspects of it have existed formally or informally in the past. It consists of commercial activities on traditional farms that invite the public. This includes activities such as pick-your-own (or U-Pick) fields, seasonal corn-mazes and pumpkin patches, and farm tours. It also includes activities that use the rural land as a backdrop, including hosting events or meetings in a barn or open space surrounded by the farm and fields. Agritourism activities are open to creativity, as farms have opened their doors to everything from summer camps and field trips to exercise classes alongside the livestock. Cooking classes or farm dinners can showcase local ingredients from the farm. Agritourism activities can be confined to an individual farm, connected to a trail of sites for visitors in the areas, or associated with an event week or weekend (similar to the farm tour weekends organized by the Carolina Sustainable Farm Association in the Piedmont region).



There are two critical benefits to agritourism. First, it can provide additional income to farms, making farming more profitable and delaying or avoiding the financial pressure to sell the property for development. Second, it invites the broader community to experience the agricultural parts of the County and to

take part in its continued survival. Agritourism helps bridge the disconnect between food production, the grocery store, and the dinner table. Agritourism can also be an attraction to the County as it contributes to the broader range of tourism opportunities.