

Vision 2020: The Comprehensive Plan for Rock Hill, South Carolina



Vision 2020 Plan Summary

Over the past two years, our City has been involved in its most important planning initiative. The Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan provides the vision and policy framework to guide decisions that will affect the future of Rock Hill. This specific document, the Plan Summary, provides citizens with the highlights and major themes of the new Plan. It includes a summary of the Plan's purpose, a discussion of the City's planning history, current conditions and trends that help shape the Plan, our collective community vision, and key policy directions and actions.

ROCK HILL: PAST AND FUTURE

Someone returning to Rock Hill today who has not been in the City for the past 25 years would be amazed at the changes that have occurred. And those of us here today will be equally amazed at Rock Hill in another 25 years. As the southern anchor of the rapidly growing Charlotte Metropolitan Region, this is a community that is already transitioned to the 21st Century economy. To help make that transition, Rock Hill's leaders continue to plan for the future. The Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan continues a tradition of leadership and vision, charting a course that takes us from our history as one of South Carolina's economic engines grounded in the textile industry into a new era of sustainability. Today, our community is faced with challenges and opportunities – to overcome the first significant recession of the new millennium in a manner that lays the groundwork for a more sustainable development framework. This new framework will foster a healthy local economy and continue to enhance the quality of life our citizens deserve.



The Comprehensive Plan Purpose

The Rock Hill community has come together to develop a community vision that will guide a myriad of future decisions to ensure a more sustainable future for our City. The Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan is intended to ensure that in the future, Rock Hill develops and grows in ways that enhance the community's economic vitality and overall quality of life. It builds on existing conditions and trends, and charts a path for future development. Comprehensive in nature, this Plan addresses numerous facets and ambitions of the community, including redevelopment and revitalization of Old Town and surrounding neighborhoods; redevelopment of key corridors; improved transportation mobility and

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connections; growing our local economy; and the protection of natural resources and environmental assets.

The purpose of this Plan is to be a guide to community decision making regarding: future development proposals, future public facility investments, regulation of land uses, and economic development initiatives. Yet, it is more than a guide, it is also a vision for the future; a shared aspiration for what the community should be as a place to live, work, learn, shop, and play. The Rock Hill Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan serves to inform citizens and leaders alike, and recommend directions for the future.

Building on History and Tradition

Rock Hill had a strong economy built upon the textile industry, with a thriving downtown surrounded by diverse residential neighborhoods. However, the decline of textiles, residential development outside of the historic core, movement of retail businesses to malls and outlying locations, and robust job growth closer to Charlotte fundamentally changed these traditional land use and economic patterns. These trends created new challenges and opportunities. The City now reflects the complexity of an evolving community: the historic core which still defines the City; a series of commercial corridors in varying states of vitality and economic health; spread-out residential subdivisions; areas influenced by proximity to Interstate 77 and its interchanges; and once-rural land now being developed.

Rock Hill experienced significant growth in the 1980's and 1990's. This growth came primarily in the form of residential development focused to the north, drawn by proximity to Lake Wylie, and to the west, moving into farmland and vacant acreage. Easy access to Charlotte via Interstate 77 helped make Rock Hill an attractive place to live for those working elsewhere. Like most similar communities, the form of this new growth was suburban in nature, consisting primarily of single family homes on larger lots segregated from supporting services and businesses, resulting in dependency on the automobile to meet basic needs. Further, a combination of high residential growth and low levels of local employment growth began to shift Rock Hill's fiscal position into one increasingly reliant on residential uses to fund public services and facilities.

Aggressive growth management and economic development initiatives have been underway over the past decade in Rock Hill to address these issues. The 2010 Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2000 and established the concept of a Livable City, defining a sustainable, livable development pattern for the community based on the concepts and principles of "Smart Growth." That Plan called for a shifting away from fragmented land use patterns towards a more integrated mixtures of uses, a more pedestrian friendly environment, denser land use patterns that lend themselves better to other modes of transportation, stronger historic core neighborhoods, and more local employment opportunities.



This new approach turned a corner in growth management policy for the City, and suggested a shift back to the way that communities developed before the onset of suburban patterns.

While the 2010 Plan articulated a wholesale approach to good planning principles, it did not take into consideration the reality that much of the land use pattern is already set. Rather than assuming sweeping changes to land development, the Plan supports an incremental approach to planning that focuses on building upon or enhancing the quality of development already established and strategically implementing smart growth principles. The new Plan describes character areas in the City, and focuses on incremental improvements for each of the defined character areas identified on our new Vision 2020 Land Use Map. This approach will allow the City to move forward with our community vision in a manner that offers choices while responding to existing conditions.

Setting the Stage

Growth and Development

Rock Hill is fortunate to be a part of the dynamic and expanding Charlotte Metro Area. Reflecting the metro influence, Rock Hill has grown at an increasing rate since the 1970s. The City's 2010 population is projected to be over 67,000 and will grow to over 82,000 by 2020. However, recent years have shown an increase in housing vacancies, due to the recession's impact on employment and home foreclosures. We hope that this trend will improve as the recession subsides, but we must be prepared for uncertainties and a slower rate of growth.

Rock Hill's population is younger than most cities in the region. As seen across the nation, younger generations are seeking to locate in cities with more amenities and with diverse housing opportunities. To maintain this younger population, Rock Hill will need to serve these changing desires by providing more places and opportunities for young professionals and families to live, work, and play within close proximity.



A closer look at the way Rock Hill has developed shows that there are ample opportunities to meet the challenges of the future. Rock Hill has areas with strong historic character that can meet changing demographics; it has areas for those who prefer a suburban setting; it has areas for economically productive uses that depend on interstate access; and it has other ample areas for all types of new growth. These diverse types of places are the character areas of our new framework for future sustainable growth.

Public Facilities

Recent improvements to the City's water and wastewater systems have expanded capacity that can service future development, but more is needed. The City is considering options for expanding its wastewater treatment facility to meet the projected needs of future growth. Success of future development areas, including the I-77 corridor and the Dave Lyle Corridor East, are contingent upon expansion of public services, including electricity. As the City moves forward with planning for and constructing infrastructure improvements, it is important that these efforts reflect the desired inward focused growth pattern while also providing services to new priority development areas.

Local Economy

Economic statistics show that the vast majority (94 percent) of job growth over the last decade in York County and Rock Hill has been in the finance, insurance, real estate, and service sectors. Meanwhile, the largest decrease in jobs has been in the manufacturing sector. The loss of manufacturing jobs to cheaper labor sources is a common trend experienced by communities around the nation. As the City repositions itself from a former textile manufacturing economy, it is important to build upon the traditions of the past, but retool the workforce to meet the demands of the new economy.

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One of our more exciting economic achievements is the City's new identity as a sports tourism center. The City has invested in a variety of sports facilities that support this new focus, and have been instrumental in attracting regional tournaments and other special events, while providing first class competition venues for area residents. The latest endeavor, an outdoor cycling center supported by a public-private partnership, positions the City to host world-class cycling events. Continued quality and growth of hospitality services and cultural and recreational offerings are needed to grow this new industry and capitalize on its economic potential.



Intergovernmental Coordination

Rock Hill's future is not solely defined by actions taken by the City. Coordination with York County, educational institutions, and neighboring jurisdictions is necessary to achieve community goals. As examples, planning for development of the Dave Lyle Boulevard extension and land management of rural areas surrounding the City require collaboration with our neighbors. While intergovernmental coordination has been undertaken in the past, it is necessary to accelerate these efforts to ensure that more coordinated planning occurs in areas of joint interest.

Focus on Sustainability

Our world is becoming ever more conscious of the need to be more "green", and Rock Hill is no exception. The vision for the community includes a focus on changing policies in our community to foster a more sustainable way to live and work. Our community has already begun to implement programs to this end, including development of a local system of trails and greenways, continued preservation of our environmentally sensitive lands to protect natural functions, and increasing use of alternative transportation modes, such as public transportation and the burgeoning bicycle movement. Achieving a more compact development form that is connected through multiple transportation options will help reduce local commutes. A series of new initiatives can help Rock Hill achieve lower energy use, reducing our community's carbon footprint. Such initiatives both help preserve the natural environment, and also serve to stimulate the local economy. New technologies are continuing to emerge that offer opportunities to promote energy efficiency and conservation, and consideration of these new opportunities will be an important component of implementing the Plan.

Our Choices

An analysis of the capacity for future development within the 2020 Planning Area shows that there is land capacity for five times the projected residential development and 20-30 times the commercial development projected for the next 20 years. The key issue is how to best manage growth to maximize efficiency of City services and prevent undesirable sprawl development patterns.



So, we have choices for our future. Where will new development go? What form and design will it take? Will land use patterns be continued into undeveloped areas or will we focus on redevelopment of existing areas? This Comprehensive Plan responds to these choices and provides a framework for future action to achieve our community vision.

OUR VISION

Community Values

Rock Hill's community vision is founded upon the aspirations of its citizens. During development of the Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan, the public provided input on key planning issues that culminated in ten guiding land use principles that are incorporated into the Land Use Element of the Plan. These principles can be consolidated into three core ideas:

- **Grow Inside First** – Rock Hill will grow with an inward focus, carefully infilling and redeveloping existing areas with good community design and active public spaces, while protecting land for environmental preservation, open space acquisition, and appropriately timed future development.
- **Well-Designed, Sustainable Neighborhoods** – Our City's neighborhoods will be enhanced through quality design to become more sustainable, promoting greater convenience to shopping, work and leisure activities.
- **Better Connections** – Neighborhoods, businesses, institutions, and open spaces will be better connected through a strategically designed transportation network that supports a range of transportation modes, including walking, cycling, and transit in addition to the automobile.



Future Land Use

Rock Hill's Vision 2020 Land Use Plan is a visual depiction of how these principles can be implemented through a set of "character areas," which build on historic patterns.

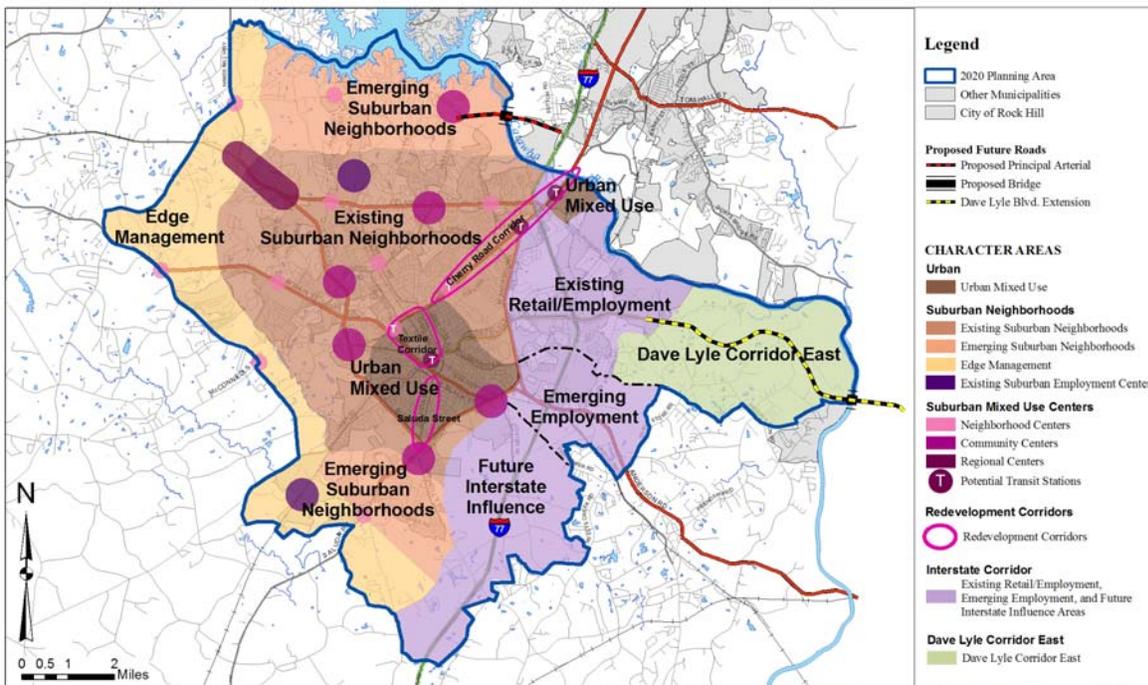
The character areas are:

- **Urban Mixed Use Areas** - These are the areas where vibrant mixes of mutually supportive, higher intensity uses can occur in a walkable context. Specifically, there are two areas where urban mixed uses are promoted. The first is the historic urban core of the City, reinforcing the long held commitment to a real and symbolic heart of the community. The second is the area proposed for the urban portion of the new Riverwalk development.
- **Suburban Neighborhoods** - These are the largest areas of the City, and reflect the pattern of suburban development that has occurred mainly to the north and west of the urban core, along with some to the south. The **Suburban Neighborhoods** are further divided into *Existing Suburban Neighborhoods*, *Emerging Suburban Neighborhoods*, *Edge Management*, and *Existing Suburban Employment Centers*, reflecting issues of timing and coordination as growth continues to move outward. This Plan calls for the enhancement of these areas with the gradual introduction of better connections, increased walkability, mixed-use centers, increased housing diversity, and more cohesive and coordinated design.
 - **Edge Management** - Development around the edges of Rock Hill's 2020 Planning Area needs close attention and careful management. Intergovernmental cooperation is critical because this area is mostly outside the City's jurisdiction. Timing development form and related utility extensions should be carefully considered to provide the best transition to York County's intended suburban development patterns for this area.

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- Suburban Mixed Use Centers** - Within the Suburban Neighborhoods there are several geographic locations identified as mixed-use centers at differing scales: Neighborhood Centers, Community Centers, and Regional Centers. These centers are designed to promote the clustering of compatible land uses, providing a more walkable environment of appropriate mixed uses while respecting the suburban context.
- Interstate Corridor** - This includes the area around the I-77 interchanges, and reflects the continued importance of capitalizing on interstate access. Land around interstate interchanges is a valuable and finite economic development asset, and this area serves to strengthen the local economy.
- Dave Lyle Corridor East** - Development of this area is largely dependent on the future construction of the Dave Lyle Boulevard extension, an important link to US 521 and Lancaster County. The area provides an opportunity for a complete and balanced mix of mutually supportive land uses in concert with economic development opportunities. The Plan makes it clear, however, that success in this area will depend on joint planning and coordination with the County.
- Redevelopment Corridors** - The Saluda Street, Cherry Road, and Textile Corridors continue to be important to the image and economic vitality of the City, and are priority areas for City investment.

Map 1: Vision 2020 Land Use Map



Vision 2020 Land Use Map

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2020 PRIORITY POLICY DIRECTIONS

In order for this vision to be realized, it must be translated into policies and actions. This Plan is careful to match the vision of the Plan with the steps that will need to be taken over time to implement the Plan, focusing on the following seven priority policy directions.

1. Focus on Redevelopment and Infill

A fundamental policy of this Plan is redeveloping targeted older areas of the City and filling-in vacant parcels in a manner that promotes a compact development pattern, utilizes existing infrastructure, and promotes revitalization of established neighborhoods and community centers.



Priority action steps are:

- **Prioritize Infrastructure Investment to Focus on Infill/Redevelopment Opportunities** – Make public infrastructure investment supportive of the Urban Mixed Use Areas and Redevelopment Corridors, such as resolving electric reliability issues in Downtown. Prepare engineering studies of infrastructure needs for potential infill development sites to provide information and incentives to potential investors.
- **Provide Incentives for Redevelopment/Infill** – Provide incentives to encourage residential mixed-use and infill development in targeted areas to achieve growth in the locations called for in the Plan. Consider incentives such as donating City owned property or waiving fees for infill and redevelopment projects.
- **Refine Infill/Redevelopment Standards** – Adjust the Zoning Ordinance and Map to align with redevelopment objectives for established neighborhoods and to protect neighborhood character.

2. Achieve Sustainability

The City will continue to be a steward of its resources, and encourage development forms and practices that contribute to, rather than erode, the City's fiscal health, especially in the context of new economic realities. The City will foster energy conservation and wise use of natural resources through public and private sustainability initiatives.



Priority action steps are:

- **Sustainable Planning** – Focus and coordinate the City's various departmental planning efforts to promote sustainable compact development that efficiently uses land and infrastructure, promotes the conservation of water and energy and reduces waste, and fosters non-vehicular modes of travel.
- **Energy Efficient Public Facilities** – Use energy-efficient technologies in the construction, design, and operation of public facilities, such as water reclamation, high efficiency water fixtures, and energy reduction strategies.
- **Refine Regulatory Framework and Provide Incentives to Promote Sustainable Design in Private Sector Developments** – Focus on incentives such as the removal of regulatory barriers, to promote sustainable design of private developments, the use and production of renewable energy sources, advanced storm water management techniques, water reuse and conservation, and waste reduction.

3. Plan for Dave Lyle Corridor East

A policy of focused planning around the extension of Dave Lyle Boulevard pulls together multiple threads: establishing a new connection to the east with a potential new crossing of the Catawba River; protecting environmentally sensitive areas within the future corridor and near the Catawba River; and providing the foundation for development of new economic and mixed use opportunities. The proposed new road corridor with supporting transportation improvements will increase development pressure in this area. There is an opportunity for advance planning to help achieve smart patterns of growth.

Priority action steps are:

- **Plan for Dave Lyle Corridor East** – Develop a joint master plan with York County based on a market feasibility study, that promotes economic and community development opportunities as part of an eastern corridor growth strategy oriented around the proposed Dave Lyle Boulevard extension. Along with identifying economic opportunities, the master plan should address the need for a secondary road system to serve newly developing areas, opportunities for biking and walking facilities, and environmental protection of critical areas.
- **Intergovernmental Coordination** – Develop an intergovernmental agreement with York County that defines the responsibilities and commitments of each jurisdiction regarding land use, development standards, annexations, and public services. Encourage Lancaster County to develop a comparable land use plan along the Dave Lyle Boulevard extension on the east side of the Catawba River in coordination with the City and York County.
- **Funding and Support for Road Development** – Working with York County and other relevant governmental agencies, secure funding for planning and construction of the proposed Dale Lyle Boulevard extension.

4. Enhance Mobility and Connectivity

The City's quality of life will greatly improve by connecting the community through a network of roads, transit corridors, sidewalks, bike paths, and greenway trails. Our reliance on the automobile will be reduced and our quality of life will be improved by retrofitting existing roadways to provide multiple travel options within the public right-of-way, such as sidewalks and bike lanes, and requiring development of new facilities that incorporate more than one mode of travel.



Priority action steps are:

- **Coordinate Land Use and Transportation Planning** – Coordinate with partner agencies and municipalities to facilitate joint planning for land use and transportation to ensure that planning objectives in areas of joint interest to multiple jurisdictions are consistent.
- **Develop Transportation Facilities That Support Multiple Travel Options** – Require construction of “complete streets” (i.e., streets that include bike lanes, and sidewalks, and possibly dedicated transit lanes, where appropriate) facilities for new roadways. Implement complete streets design and development connectivity standards for new developments to ensure walkability at the neighborhood level.
- **Plan for Future Transit** – Coordinate transportation goals with land use planning within potential future transit corridors, such as Cherry Road. Planning efforts should lay the foundation for future transit use and reinforce this goal by promoting development patterns that are transit-friendly. Short-term attention needs to focus on ways to increase local bus service while exploring future opportunities for regional Bus Rapid Transit.

- **Implement the Trails and Greenways Master Plan** – Seek opportunities to work with private developers to plan for and construct trails identified in the Trails and Greenways Master Plan.

5. Promote Redevelopment and Infill Development Along Key Corridors

A special emphasis is placed on the revitalization of three very different corridors in the City. The first two of these, Saluda Street and the Textile Corridor, have been the subject of past detailed planning. Two have also benefited from major road improvements: Saluda Street and Cherry Road. However, all three corridors are in need of renewed strategic planning to focus and advance the vision for these community links.

- The **Saluda Street Corridor** is the southern gateway into Old Town and is lined with small scale businesses adjacent to neighborhoods that can support a pedestrian friendly environment. Roadway improvements are complete, and strategies to support neighborhood improvement and further economic investment should be a primary focus.
- The **Textile Corridor** forms the key link between Winthrop University and Downtown, and provides a unique opportunity to develop higher density mixed-use to support both of these key areas. Current work on the College Town Action Plan and a proposed streetcar line provide more focused efforts to help realize this potential.
- The **Cherry Road Corridor** represents the community's original highway commercial strip along a key north-south entrance to the City. It exhibits many of the characteristics of areas in need of revitalization, including large blocks of vacant or high-turnover obsolescent retail structures, high traffic volumes that can inhibit pedestrian activity, and aging adjacent housing. Buildings tend to be set back from the street with large parking lots and minimal landscaping further reducing the areas walkability. There are multiple opportunities for infill development that will help achieve the goals of the Plan. More intense residential and mixed-use development should be encouraged, particularly within areas identified for transit stations.

Priority action steps are:

- **Develop a Business Development and Redevelopment Strategy for the Saluda Street Corridor** – Develop an updated strategy to foster business development and investment and encourage neighborhood preservation in the Saluda Street Corridor.
- **Incorporate College Town Action Plan into City's Plans and Programs** – Incorporate the College Town Action Plan into the City's Strategic Plan and Capital Improvement Program.
- **Plan for Redevelopment in the Cherry Road Corridor** – Develop formal plans for redevelopment and infill of Cherry Road to support transit oriented development.

6. Create Livable Places

This Plan embraces the creation of livable places and meaningful spaces that best represent the community they serve. Livable places integrate employment centers, shopping areas, and housing through mixed-use development. They consist of high-quality and distinctive neighborhoods within sustainable, connected living environments offering multiple housing choices, pedestrian and biking amenities, and accessibility to public services.

Priority action steps are:

- **Prepare Targeted Small Area Plans to Enhance Existing Suburban Mixed-Use Centers** – Create small area/retrofit plans for new and existing suburban centers to implement the Vision 2020 Land Use Plan and Map and guide future development in these areas.
- **Promote Housing Development in Key Corridors and Mixed-Use Suburban Centers** – Encourage the development of housing in proximity to select mixed-use suburban centers, employment centers, and key corridors, through incentives and revised development regulations.
- **Amend the Zoning Ordinance** – Review and revise the Zoning Ordinance to encourage and provide standards that foster mixed-use development in strategic locations shown on the Vision 2020 Land Use Map.
- **Plan for Park Facilities and Pedestrian Amenities in Suburban Neighborhoods** – Prepare a parks and recreation master plan that identifies where new parks and recreation facilities are needed, specifically within suburban areas. Explore funding alternatives to secure adequate parks and open space as recommended in the future master plan and enhance pedestrian amenities in accordance with the adopted Trails and Greenways Master Plan.

7. Leverage Resources through Partnerships and Coordination

The concept of partnerships is critical to the success of most of the ideas contained in this Plan. Multi-jurisdictional coordination is needed to manage areas of joint interest, to facilitate planning of the Dave Lyle Corridor East, and to encourage public facility planning and use. Public-private sector partnerships are needed to help plan for and fund infrastructure needed to support new development, to build the local economy and create jobs, and to promote the identity of Rock Hill as a progressive, innovative community.



Priority action steps are:

- **York County Partnership** – Develop an Intergovernmental Agreement between York County and Rock Hill to establish a process for coordinated planning and development in targeted areas outside the City limits. The agreement should address proposed and future annexation efforts regarding land uses, zoning, and utility service provision. Convene a City-County staff working group to discuss land use planning issues in the unincorporated areas of the Planning Area and to align Planning Area boundaries.
- **Rock Hill Schools Partnership** – Initiate ongoing communications and increased coordination efforts with Rock Hill Schools and York County on the future siting of public educational facilities and the public use of school recreational facilities when not in use by schools.
- **Private Sector Economic Development Partnerships** – Develop mechanisms to share roles, responsibilities, coordination, and accountability among various public sector economic development organizations, including York County Economic Development Board, Rock Hill Economic Development Corporation, and York County Convention and Visitors Bureau.



- **Partnerships with Higher Education Institutions** – Develop staff working groups with Winthrop University, York Technical College, and Clinton Junior College for regular interaction to identify common issues and opportunities for collaborative land use planning.

GUIDING OUR 2020 VISION

Our City's 2020 vision is founded in the principles of inward focused growth, well-designed sustainable neighborhoods, and a better connected transportation system. The details of this vision and our new land use policy framework are outlined in our Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the Plan is to articulate this vision, and serve as a guide to decision-making for our community. The Plan describes our shared aspirations for enhancing Rock Hill as a premier place to live, work, learn, shop, and play today and in the future.



The Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a living document that is continually referenced, monitored, and updated to achieve the City's 2020 vision.

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