

Focus on North Carolina

Raleigh planners serve up higher-density solutions to challenges of growing population, limited land

Raleigh, N.C.—If you haven't been to North Carolina lately, you might not recognize it. New data from the 2010 U.S. Census shows that North Carolina's population swelled 18.5 percent over the last decade, making it the sixth fastest growing state. In contrast, the total population of the United States grew at only 9.7 percent during the same period. The state is home to 9.5 million people, putting it among the nation's ten most populous states.

To accommodate the growth, the state's cities and towns are carefully planning land use, zoning and public facilities investing. Even more noteworthy is the fact that they are coordinating their efforts through the newly created statewide Sustainable Communities Task Force.

Here in the state capital, a new comprehensive plan for the next 20 years was recently adopted with the hope of redirecting a growth pattern that had earned the city the nickname "sprawleigh." The city now has over 400,000 people, and expects to add 120,000 households or 250,000 people by that year.

"We realized sprawl was not sustainable," said Mitchell Silver, planning director. "We realized we needed a new way to deal with growth so we had a serious conversation with our residents."

For one thing, projected increases in vehicle traffic would be difficult to accommodate, and most roads would need to be widened if the previous patterns of development continued.

The city also had to look at demographics changes. The most fundamental trend is

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A shopper enjoys the pedestrian-friendly shopping on Lassiter Mill Road at North Hills.

the increase in single households.

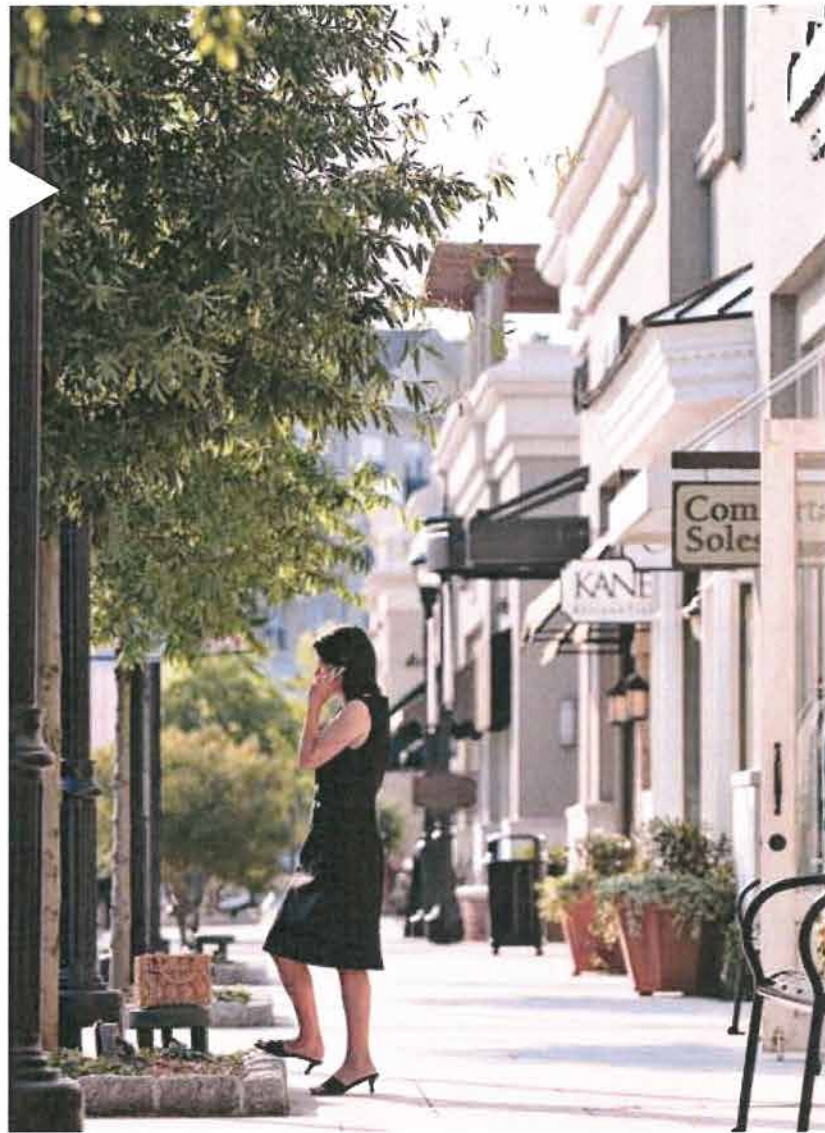
By 2020 singles will surpass families. By 2050, the overwhelming majority of households will be single. And that will lead to a substantial oversupply of single-family homes. Other factors include the rising price of gasoline and the potential for water shortages, Silver said.

The first step in writing the 2030 comprehensive plan was to analyze the city's land capacity. The city has about 20,000 acres of developable land, not counting redevelopment sites. To get the most out of that land, the plan calls for increased density. It identifies 8 growth centers and 12 growth corridors. The plan envisions 60% to 70% of all new growth is to be in designated centers, with only 30% in suburbs.

Density is a key method for keeping the tax base stable, Silver said. It would take 600 homes on 150 acres to equal the tax value of one high rise downtown, Silver said. A downtown high rise on 3 acres generates enough taxes to pay off the required infrastructure in 3 years, for an annual return on investment of 33%. "If you don't support downtown development, you are really saying 'raise my taxes,'" he said.

The 2030 plan was adopted in 2009. The zoning and design code changes to implement the plan are under discussion this year. City leaders are trying to put a half-cent referendum before voters for development of mass transit.

Silver acknowledges that there is sometimes resistance to high-density development. To win support, he advises focusing on how a proposed project will look and how it will fit into a neighborhood. His strategy is to mitigate density by careful handling of building frontages, heights and transi-



tions to lower-density areas. "Height is the key, along with the transition to neighborhood, so the surrounding blocks are not overwhelmed," he said.

Raleigh has a hybrid zoning code, which combines elements of form-based code with traditional zones for various uses.

By frontage, Silver means how the first 100 feet of a parcel will be treated, as well as parking minimums and maximums.

In corridors with higher density, the city wants more public transit, more pedestrians and fewer huge parking lots in front of big boxes. One idea is to allow retailers to take corners of their large parking lots and use them for separate retail or mixed-use structures closer to the street frontage.

Along with the comprehensive plan, the city is also committed to sustainability. It defines that as including three fundamental principles: economic strength, environmental stewardship, and social equity. According to the city, "a sustainable community is a thriving community; one that provides opportunity for all residents, cares for the environment, and has long-term vision for a prosperous future."

Sustainable Raleigh was created to provide guidance

FACTS AT A GLANCE: Raleigh, N.C.

Raleigh is the capital of North Carolina, and the largest city in the state's **Research Triangle**, also known as **Raleigh-Durham** and commonly referred to as simply "**The Triangle**." The region is home to North Carolina State University, Duke University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported Raleigh's 2010 population at 403,892. This reflects 46.3 percent population growth over the past decade.

Raleigh remains the second largest city in North Carolina. Charlotte is the largest city.

<http://www.raleighnc.gov/>

for policy development and goal setting for the City of Raleigh based on these principles. The organization partners with local businesses, universities, civic, and non-profit organizations to build relationships, and work collaboratively with all departments within the City of Raleigh in its mission to become a leader in sustainability.

North Hills - A Walkable Mixed-Use Community

North Hills is a successful infill redevelopment project that exemplifies many of the goals for Raleigh's 2030 plan. In the first phase, a deteriorating enclosed shopping mall was transformed into a bustling mixed-use center. The site was a brownfield, and remediation is nearly complete, according to Kane Realty Corporation, the developer.

North Hills now features 100 acres of thriving mixed-use development. Retail, dining, apartments, condos, townhomes and single-family residences are anchored by a luxury hotel, class A office space, continuing care retirement community and a 14-screen movie complex.



▲ North Hills area in Raleigh offers a mix of uses in a walkable urban setting, just the kind of development the city wants to see more of.

The development has 900,000 sq. ft. of retail, 700 residential units (all rental), 229 hotel rooms and 450,000 feet of office space.

The most recently completed phase was Park & Market, which opened in 2010. Park & Market is luxury apartments above storefront shopping and restaurants with a Harris Teeter grocery store. Also completed in 2010 is the Captrust Tower at North Hills, class A office space with amenities and fine dining on the ground floor. This was a joint project with Kane Realty Corporation and Duke Realty Corporation. ☛

New task force encourages regional cooperation

A key part of the movement toward more sustainable communities is regional cooperation and collaboration. This means overcoming the tendency of local governments to compete with each other to attract employers and residents.

The North Carolina General Assembly chose to encourage cooperation by establishing a Sustainable Communities Task Force within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

North Carolina is now "the latest state to recognize the connections between cross-agency governance at the state level, coordination with stakeholders at the local level, and sustainable communities on the ground."

The task force's design makes the connection between land use patterns and a range of sustainability challenges. Members include appointees from the North Carolina Departments of Commerce, Environment and Natural Resources, Transportation, Administration, Health and Human Services and the Housing Finance Agency, as well as representatives from the North Carolina American Planning Association, county government,

city government, a regional collaborative organization, a sustainability nonprofit, the building industry and the banking industry.

With \$250,000 in state funding, the 13-member task force is charged with:

- Promoting regional sustainability partnerships
- Providing technical assistance to state agencies, local government, regional collaborations, and nonprofits
- Identifying and pursuing sustainable development funding
- Making recommendations for sustainable development policies and program appropriations to Governor Bev Perdue, members of her cabinet, and the General Assembly
- Distributing task force grants to regional sustainable development partnerships
- Developing a common local government sustainable practices scoring system
- Pursuing opportunities for coordination among state agencies and reduced overlap in the responsibilities of regional entities