

## Policy Area 10: Summerfield Road Focus Area



### Key Words and Phrases:

Citizen Comments from Town Meeting (literal, unedited):

#### DESIRED FUTURE

##### A Town Core

- Limit commercial develop of town core
- Install sidewalks in historical/town core area
- Create a town core
- Historical town center – place to go and reason to go there

#### UNWANTED FUTURE

##### Good Restaurants Not Available

- Lack of restaurant options
- To continue to have no restaurants in town core (lack of)

##### Vacant Commercial Buildings

- No vacant commercial buildings (Old Food Lion, etc)
- Dollar General & empty store fronts

##### An Ugly Extension of “220” Style Development

- No more business along 220 town core

Town Council/Zoning Board Comments From Joint Kick Off Meeting:**Provide for Sidewalks and Trails, Especially Leading to and Within the Town Core**

- Trails (walking & bicycle), paths that connect to greenways, leading into our town
- Trail system development and connectivity
- Design trail system to be used as transportation and recreation connecting people to town core
- Town core sidewalks – Summerfield too spread out

**Enhance the Town Core**

- Need downtown shopping area to reflect historic community
- Develop town core to provide services

The preceding *key words and phrases* were gleaned from (1) the Town Meeting for the Comprehensive Plan and (2) the Joint Kick-Off Meeting of the Town Council and Zoning Board. These key words and phrases were employed to generate the following **Common Objective** and related **Policies for the Summerfield Road Focus Area**.

**Common Objective for the Summerfield Road Focus Area**

The Summerfield Road Focus Area shall be supported as the historic and cultural center of the Summerfield community. The heart of this area should remain a varied, yet compatible, mix of residential and non-residential uses. A fire station, elementary school, community park, day care center, post office, eye doctor, feed mill, specialty auto dealership, and real estate office are representative of the non-residential uses that, together with a variety of single family homes, should continue to make up this important part of Summerfield. The Town shall also support preservation efforts associated with the National Register Historic District, and the desirability of a neighborhood level service area that includes Town Hall. Going forward, the Summerfield Road Focus Area should continue to be a natural location for community gatherings as well as basic services for local residents. Whatever uses go into this area, it is important that they be compatible, in both appearance and function, with uses on surrounding properties.

**Policies for the Summerfield Road Focus Area**

**Policy 10.1:** Various sections of Summerfield Road should be treated according to their **UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS**; policies and related ordinances should respect and reinforce the “natural leanings” of each road section. Specifically, the following areas and characteristics may be described:

- A. A MIXED USE NODE AT THE INTERSECTION OF NC 150 AND SUMMERFIELD ROAD (near Town Hall)—for local, neighborhood-oriented services convenient to town residents. With meaningful input and guidance from property owners, there also exists the potential to extend this node to the north and east toward US 220, thereby creating a gateway corridor to the heart of the community.**
- B. RECOGNITION OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICT on both sides of Summerfield Road south of Town Hall to Medaris Street, and a few lots west along Oak Ridge Road—respecting the architectural character and heritage of the buildings found there. (See *Policy Area 11: Historic Preservation* for detailed land use and design policies pertaining to this area.)**
- C. A CENTRAL MIXED USE AREA ALONG SUMMERFIELD ROAD extending from Centerfield Drive at the Elementary School south to Auburn Road—for low impact non-residential uses that are able to co-exist with nearby residences. (See *Policy 10.2 Below*)**
- D. The balance of the Summerfield Road Focus Area should be for residential uses.<sup>1</sup>**

**Policy 10.2: BUSINESSES LOCATED IN THE CENTRAL SECTION OF THE SUMMERFIELD ROAD FOCUS AREA should ...**

- be of a **RESIDENTIAL SCALE AND DESIGN** character.
- have a **MARKET AREA** serving primarily a local clientele.
- have no **OUTSIDE LIGHTING** beyond that associated with a residence.
- have understated **SIGNAGE** with low level lighting.
- have **OPERATING HOURS** compatible with a residential area.
- be of a type that generates low **TRAFFIC COUNTS**
- limit the **RATIO OF FLOOR AREA TO LOT AREA** to that of nearby residential uses.
- retain **TREES** and provide **LANDSCAPED BUFFER STRIPS** when adjoining a residential use or district and offer substantial buffering within one or two growing seasons.
- provide parking lot and site **LANDSCAPING** greater than that associated with a typical commercial use.
- provide **STORMWATER RETENTION** and release to match pre-development/redevelopment conditions.
- carefully control service and customer **VEHICULAR ACCESS** to minimize light and noise impacts.

**Policy 10.3: Summerfield's off-road TRAIL AND SIDEWALK NETWORK should lead to and from the Summerfield Road Focus Area as the hub of a community-wide pedestrian system. Sidewalks and bikeways should also be required for any future development or redevelopment within the area. (Also see *Policy Area 2*)**

*But even in districts, suburbs, parishes, and wards it is desirable that there should be some centre. There should be some place where the minor buildings of the district may be grouped and where a definite central effect on a minor scale may be produced.*

**Sir Raymond Unwin,**  
1909

<sup>1</sup> Those sections of Summerfield Road and US 220 south of Auburn Road are not included in the Summerfield Road Focus Area and are addressed under **Policy Area 1: Appropriate, Limited Commercial Development**.

*All community building that retains staying power after its novelty has gone, and that preserves the freedom of the streets and upholds citizens' self management... requires a myriad of gradual constant close-grained changes.*

**Jane Jacobs**  
1961

## Notes and Commentary:

Introducing new development into a community is always a challenge because it presents change to existing residents, and change is often unwanted or even threatening. A new development or subdivision just down the road promises heavier traffic and changes in the landscape, loss of open space and tree cover, and other impacts. Those impacts are threatening enough--but when new development is proposed not for a single, raw land tract "down the road" but rather for potentially dozens of infill developments to be placed among existing homes and businesses, the perceived threat level from such change becomes far more personal and therefore much greater. Such is the case with the history of planning attempts for what has become known as Summerfield's "Town Core".

Beginning in 1998 with the Guilford County Northwest Area Plan, numerous plans and studies have explored the idea of creating a "Town Core" for Summerfield. All studies have focused primarily on Summerfield Road, as it extends between its southern and northern intersections with US 220, and including the land area between the two parallel roadways. Summerfield Town Council has gone so far as to adopt a formal resolution limiting commercial zoning and development actions along Summerfield Road and US 220 between its intersections with NC 150 east and NC 150 west.



As recently as 2005, a council appointed "Town Core Committee", made up of a capable group of citizen volunteers, met for over a year to develop and propose a number of detailed recommendations, all with the objective of establishing a workable Town Core for Summerfield.

In addition, it should be noted that at the special *town meeting* held for this Comprehensive Plan, a *Town Core* was among the top twelve issues identified by many citizens as an element of Summerfield's "Desired Future". Those in support of the Town Core idea often cite the need for a community gathering place. Others note the desirability of having more local businesses, particularly one or more quality restaurants. Even so, interest in the Town Core is not uniform throughout the community, and there are some residents who are vehemently opposed to the whole idea. Opposition to the Town Core concept has not been formally surveyed but likely stems from the fear of commercial

encroachment near existing homes, from the prospect of higher density single and multi-family housing, and even from the notion of “quaint, (but unwanted) boutique type shopping”. These perspectives are summarized in the following excerpt from a Town memorandum dated September 15, 2005:

*“Reaction from the public at two major public meetings we held in January, along with our display at Founder’s Day and anecdotal comments I have received over the past several months, has generally been the same—enthusiastic support from a certain segment of the Town (primarily those who live outside the Town Core or those with financial interests or other investments in the town core), but skepticism from those who actually live in the Town Core, especially older residents. A third group of citizens seems to generally support the idea of a Town Core, but has more or less adopted a “take it or leave it” attitude.”* (Memorandum from Town Planner Bill Bruce to Town Council, 9-15-05 re: Planning Department Discussion)

Opposition to the Town Core concept has not been formally surveyed but likely stems from the fear of commercial encroachment near existing homes, from the prospect of higher density single and multi-family housing, and even from the notion of “quaint, (but unwanted) boutique type shopping”.

Thus, after many years of study, and despite good efforts to develop and communicate a non-threatening plan, the prospect of a Town Core for Summerfield is no closer to reality than it was in 1998. Further, the term “Town Core” appears to have become value laden to the degree that the mere mention of the name brings forth opposition from some residents of the Summerfield Road Focus Area. Further, opposition to the Town Core concept is not just to the name but also to several substantive ideas that have been put forth. Therefore, this Comprehensive Plan suggests a new direction for the “Town Core”, suggesting substantive changes to some of the previous recommendations and a name change that reflects this new direction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Note: Because of the special nature of the Summerfield Road Focus Area, and the history of planning for this area, this “Notes and Commentary” takes on a different format than the Notes and Commentary for other plan sections. Recommendations are offered in some detail that can then be translated into policies and actions elsewhere in this section.*

### **Recommendation 1: Change the name of the study area from “Town Core” to the “Summerfield Road Focus Area”.**

Changing the name from the “Town Core” to the “Summerfield Road Focus Area” isn’t going to alter the substance of the arguments for and against previous plans and studies. Substantive changes will still have to be made. Regardless, a name change has merit for several reasons. The term Town Core, as it has come to be known over the past decade, now carries baggage (whether true or simply perceived) associated with the fear of higher development density, commercial encroachment, and other issues of land use compatibility. The term “Summerfield Road Focus Area”, on the other hand, is not value laden--Summerfield Road is what it is and what it will continue to be, regardless of what direction it takes. While Summerfield Road is clearly at the *heart* of the community, it does not need to be labeled as such. Thus, when making recommendations for the future of the *Summerfield Road Focus Area*, concepts and ideas can be presented without the coloration or influence of a pre-destined, new image that some may associate with the term “Town Core”.

**Recommendation 2: Take the best ideas from previous plans and carry them forward. Leave behind those recommendations that create unnecessary controversy and opposition.**

Previous planning efforts, particularly the 2004/2005 Summerfield Town Core Committee effort, have much to offer. That study made especially good progress in analyzing and identifying the various sections of Summerfield Road according to their unique characteristics. Thus, the following areas and summary descriptions are offered as foundational elements of a Small Area Plan for the Summerfield Road Focus Area:<sup>2</sup>



- A mixed use “node” of modest size at the intersection of NC 150 and Summerfield Road (near Town Hall)—a location appropriate for local, neighborhood-oriented services convenient to nearby residential areas
- Recognition of the National Register Historic District on both sides of Summerfield Road south of Town Hall to Medaris Street, and a few lots west along Oak Ridge Road—an area where special care should be taken to preserve the architectural character of the buildings found there
- A second mixed use area along Summerfield Road extending from Centerfield Drive at the Elementary School south to Auburn Road—an area of special concern where only certain types of low impact non-residential uses ought to be permitted, so as to co-exist with nearby residences.
- The balance of the Summerfield Road Focus Area to be designated for residential use only. (For the time being, it would be wise to leave unanswered the questions regarding townhouses and duplexes in this area until these housing concepts can be fully examined during a small area planning process—see Recommendation 4 following.)

<sup>2</sup> The following areas, previously included in the Town Core planning initiative, are now suggested to be addressed under Policy Area 1--**Appropriate, Limited Commercial Development**:

- An area of general commercial use along Summerfield Road and US 220 extending about 1500 feet south of Auburn Road. This area, which includes the old Dollar General Shopping Center, is ripe for a better quality of general commercial use.
- A second area of general commercial use starting at the south intersection of Summerfield Road and US 220 and extending north about 1000 feet along Summerfield Road and about 2000 feet along US 220—again appropriate for a high quality of non-strip commercial uses.

**Recommendation 3: For the mixed use area from the elementary school south, develop performance standards in the zoning ordinance that allow only those non-residential uses that are wholly compatible with nearby residences.**

Examples of performance standards for land uses in this section of Summerfield Road could include, for example:

- No outside lights beyond that associated with a residence.
- Strict limits on the total area of a business sign, as well as how it is lit.
- Permitted uses which do not have evening or nighttime hours.
- Permitted uses which generate only low traffic volumes (Employ trip generation numbers from the Institute for Transportation Engineers Manual to screen out traffic generators.)
- Architecture, (whether of new construction or of rehabilitation) that is of a scale and design sympathetic to a residential area.
- New or rehabilitated uses shall not increase in the ratio of floor area to lot area (floor area ratio), beyond that allowed for residential use.
- Retention of trees and provision of mandatory landscaped buffer strips when adjoining a residential use or district. Such landscape plantings would have to be of sufficient size at planting to offer substantial buffering within one or two growing seasons.
- Heavily landscaped parking areas.
- Stormwater retention and release to match pre-development/redevelopment conditions.
- Carefully controlled vehicular access.

Note: The above performance standards, when fully fleshed out, could also apply to land uses fronting on US 220 where the proximity of existing homes to the widened highway may make a compatible non-residential option a necessity.

**Recommendation 4: Follow through on the 2005 Town Core Committee recommendation that a Small Area Planning process be initiated for the Summerfield Road Focus Area.**

While the preceding recommendations have been set forth to suggest some ways that the current impasse might be broken, they too will go nowhere without the support of the residents and business owners within the Summerfield Road Focus Area. While this Comprehensive Plan can set forth some broad policies and a new direction for the area, it is not the appropriate vehicle to resolve the issues and garner support for their resolution. It is important that no detailed recommendations (e.g. creation of a new zoning district) be brought forward to Town Council from this plan or any other plan without the active involvement and support from the residents and businesses located within the study area. In that regard, the 2005 Town Core Committee Report offered an appropriate next step. The applicable excerpt from the Committee report is repeated here for emphasis:

It is important that no detailed recommendations (e.g. creation of a new zoning district) be brought forward to Town Council from this plan or any other plan without the active involvement and support from the residents and businesses located within the Summerfield Road Focus Area.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

*“...Start a new approach to the Town Core Plan by creating a larger committee that can initiate a Small Area Plan for the district. The Small Area Plan process is a “people up” method of planning, that includes public meetings and charrettes and makes citizens of the town part of the process.*

*The ultimate goal of the Town Core Small Area Plan is to thoroughly document a grassroots Town Core vision, to identify goals and objectives toward making that vision a reality, to identify challenges in implementation (i.e. water, sewer, stormwater, traffic, etc.) and then recommendations on how to address these challenges.” (Summerfield Town Core Committee, Findings and Recommendations to the Summerfield Town Council, January 2005.)*

From a planning standpoint, the Summerfield Road Focus Area presents an example of the type of planning problem that is tailor made for a small area planning process. The issues: (1) are largely localized to the area under study, (2) are perceived by existing residents to be clearly “in my back yard”, (3) will require active, meaningful citizen participation for their resolution, (4) are unlikely to garner action from town leaders without citizen support from within the area.