

Policy Area 3: Community Character Preservation



As no two individuals should be alike, neither should any two places be alike. Yet, for the last 50 years there has been a steady homogenization of our communities, and a steady rise in dissatisfaction with our quality of life. What can we do to manage change so as to prevent our communities from becoming ANYPLACE!

"Avoiding the Anyplace Syndrome",
February 1992,
Boulder, CO

Key Words and Phrases:

Citizen Comments from Town Meeting (literal, unedited):

DESIRED FUTURE

Rural Character Preservation

- Maintain open spaces & rural atmosphere
- Rural character preservation
- Incentives for maintaining rural/agric
- Farmland preservation

Small Town Character

- Stay as is. Rural small community
- Small town character preserved
- Small town ambiance & character
- Retain rural character & small town atmosphere

Open Space Preservation

- Buying development rights by town-partnership-private
- Lots of parks & open space
- Open areas, woods, farms, meadows, etc

In 2000, there were 7 acres of land for every house in Summerfield, compared to just 2 acres per house in Guilford County as a whole.

Source:
U.S. Census

Webster's dictionary defines rural as "relating to or characteristic of the country." Other words such as pastoral or bucolic are often used to describe rural character. The problem lies in the fact that such a simple concept is enormously difficult to define.

Fred Hyer
1990

UNWANTED FUTURE

Pressure on Farm Activities and Farmland

- Unreasonable restriction of farm animals
- Housing developments in every field

Town Council/Zoning Board Comments From Joint Kick Off Meeting:

Agree on Community Identity and How Rural Character is Defined

- Keeping hometown character—controlled growth—preserve farmland
- Signage/billboard standards
- Define uniqueness of Summerfield (i.e. horse farms, park, rural vistas, etc)
- Growth balanced with rural charm
- Developing a sense of community
- Increasing population past small town look and feel
- Define who we are as a town. What does it mean to be "rural"?
- Figuring out our identity, community, ways to connect so we're not a bedroom community



Preserve Open Space

- Maintaining appropriate open space so SFD doesn't lose its rural character
- Preserving abundant open space
- How to keep open space for public use

Protect Natural Resources, Especially Water Resources and Trees

- Protect natural resources – ground water, creeks, streams, etc
- Save trees and don't deforest – have ordinance: protect habitat
- Encourage green building practices

The above *key words and phrases* were gleaned from (1) the Town Meeting for the Comprehensive Plan (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 Preserving Community Character**.

Common Objective for Preserving Community Character

The Town of Summerfield shall work to preserve a natural and built environment that honors the rural, small town heritage of the community. The Town shall set itself apart from other typical suburban bedroom communities by promoting diverse park and open space assets, “green” highway corridors, protected environmentally sensitive lands, and viable small family farms and equine facilities. New development shall preserve tree cover while avoiding “Anywhere USA” formulaic commercial architecture.



Policies for Preserving Community Character

Policy 3.1: EXISTING, DESIRABLE LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS, whether natural or man-made, should continue to be incorporated into the thematic design of new developments.

Policy 3.2: LARGE TREES, PONDS, CREEKS, OR OTHER NATURAL FEATURES of the landscape should be saved when locating new streets, buildings, parking lots, etc.

Policy 3.3: FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS, STEEP SLOPES, and OTHER LANDS that are typically not suitable for development, should be retained as permanent open space.

Policy 3.4: As some land is developed and other land is set aside in permanent open space, opportunities to **CONNECT OPEN SPACE AREAS AND CORRIDORS** shall be considered.

Policy 3.5: CLEARCUTTING OF TREES AND WOODLAND AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT shall be avoided. Rather, new development should incorporate significant clusters of trees into the functional layout of new residential and commercial areas.

Policy 3.6: .COMPATIBLE FARMLAND ACTIVITIES and the **KEEPING OF HORSES OR OTHER SUITABLE LIVESTOCK** shall generally be encouraged as part of the thematic and functional design of new residential areas.

Policy 3.7: TO HELP KEEP SMALL FAMILY FARMS VIABLE, agri-tourism, such as that associated with horseback riding, small produce stands (produce grown on site), corn mazes (no man-made amusements), hay-rides, farm-oriented children’s camps, and similar activities of an acceptable scale and intensity, shall generally be supported.

Policy 3.8: An **OPEN SPACE AQUISITION PROGRAM** shall be employed to acquire open spaces for the enjoyment of the public and for the long term quality of the community. A variety of mechanisms for open space acquisition (e.g. land dedication, conservation easements, etc.) shall be considered, in addition to fee simple purchases.

What makes a city special—gives it a feel that is different from any other place? In lucky cities, the answer to that question involves trees. Like other enduring features such as rivers, hills and massive building centers, trees are in place for the long haul.

Sara Ebenreck
1989

Policy 3.9: GREEN SPACE BUFFER STRIPS, preserved along of edges of primary and secondary roadways in Summerfield, shall be a distinguishing feature and hallmark of the community. Clusters of trees shall be preserved or planted in informal, randomly spaced intervals as opposed to the uniformly spaced patterns often found in a more urban area. Walled off communities are not desired.

Policy 3.10: WATER QUALITY AND OPEN SPACE BUFFER STRIPS shall be preserved adjoining all perennial streams.

Policy 3.11: BUILDING ARCHITECTURE, BUILDING MATERIALS, SIGNAGE, AND SITE DESIGN that are compatible with Summerfield's rural heritage (rather than a suburban, "Anywhere USA" formula), shall be encouraged. (In particular, see Policy Area 1: Commercial Development and Policy Area 6: Housing and Residential Development)

Policy 3.12: BILLBOARDS shall be prohibited throughout the Town of Summerfield.

Notes and Commentary:

Descriptors of Community Character

Preserving community character in a rural area that is undergoing pressures for change can mean different things to different people. Here are a few *descriptors* of community character:



Farming Preserved: This perspective acknowledges the authentic nature of the rural landscape characterized largely by mainstream farming. Non-farm residents must be willing to accept both the desirable and less desirable aspects of farming. Less desirable aspects can include, for example, farm equipment and trucks parked in yards or impeding traffic on area roadways. It might also include the odor of manure on area farm fields, the dust kicked up from row crops in a windstorm, or the drifting of airborne herbicides and pesticides beyond the farm's borders.

Open Space Preserved: This is often the perspective of new residents who have moved to a rural area to escape the congestion of the city and who would like to see the open spaces around them remain undeveloped. These individuals would prefer to see land stay in farms and fields, despite the march of development into the area, of which they are a part.

Woodlands Preserved: Similar in nature to preserving open space, this perspective holds that existing woodlands should be preserved. This can occur at two levels: (1) total preservation, where whole areas of woodlands remain untouched and (2) partial preservation where development is allowed to occur in and among existing tree cover. Under the second option, buffers of trees may also be preserved between developments and along roadways to create the illusion of a wooded landscape.

History Preserved: Historic preservation most often involves the preservation of historic buildings, neighborhoods, and commercial areas, but it can also include important sites and place names. Frequently, new development may be required to emulate or at least be compatible with the architecture and design of a community's historic assets. For the Summerfield Comprehensive Plan, a separate policy area has been set aside for historic preservation.

Culture Preserved: This type of preservation involves people and activities more so than land and buildings. Included, for example, might be an annual festival, parade or other community event. It may entail a community organization, or any number of social service organizations. It may acknowledge yard displays or small businesses unique only to the community.



The Economics of Community Character Preservation

The preservation of community character brings significant benefits to an area. Foremost among them is the uniqueness that can differentiate a town like Summerfield from other similarly situated suburban areas. This uniqueness can draw new residents to the area who value the community's heritage and the quality of the natural, built and cultural environment. Preserving the character of a community can also be a source of pride for both existing residents and newcomers. It can be a unifying force that brings people from different backgrounds together for a common cause.

At the same, preserving a community's character does not come without cost. Farmers and other landowners who forego opportunities to develop their pastures and woodlands oftentimes must be provided with fair compensation. Owners of historic buildings must oftentimes be given tax incentives to restore their buildings rather than tearing them down to build anew. Developers must be able to satisfy the community's design standards while still making a reasonable return on their investment and risk.



Summerfield must therefore chart a careful course that respects private property rights while creating a community of quality and character that will stand the test of time for many generations to come.